Diagnosis of Quality Management in the Call Center Industry

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Abstract

The purpose of this study is to carry out a diagnostic analysis of the quality management system (QMS) in the Romanian call center industry

In order to achieve this goal, the method of selective research was used, carrying out an investigation in the relevant companies. The sample was made up in such a way that the condition of representativeness in relation to the general community of the call-center industry is fulfilled.

The questionnaire contained questions regarding the elements (processes) from which is compose quality management system, because the diagnosis must be made by analyzing the elements that from which the QMS is compose. In the second chapter, the QMS diagnosis was presented, analyzing the four elements that, according to the specialized literature, make the quality management system

The third chapter analyzes the current status of quality management system implementation in the call center industry.

Through the diagnostic analysis, the QMS dysfunctions most frequently faced by the call center industry were identified. Knowing the causes that determine nonquality, remedial and quality improvement solutions presented in the conclusions section were formulated.

Keywords: quality management, diagnostic analysis, call-center, consumer satisfaction.

JEL classification: H 23, L21, L22, L53, L81, M14, M21. **DOI:** 10.24818/RMCI.2023.3.430

1. Introduction

Quality management is a theory of the modern world, which appeared in the USA. in the 20s of the last century, it found in Japan a favorable ground to develop since the 1950s. Through the contributions made to the development of quality management, the names of Shewhart, Deming, Juran, Feigenbaum, Crosby and Ishikawa remain at the top of the list of great qualitologists of the world. Among them is Josef M. Juran, an American of Romanian origin (Paraschivescu, A.O., 2008. pp. 13-14).

William Edward Deming, the creator of Total Quality Management (TQM), is considered the "father" of the modern quality movement, due to the work he carried out in the field of quality in Japanese industry. Eduard Deming is the author of the graphic representation entitled Deming's Cycle (Plan-Do-Check-

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Act Cycle) which includes four sequential processes, which are chained endlessly in order to continuously improve quality (Olaru, M., 1999. pp. 38-39).

In 1943, Kaoru Ishikawa publishes the Cause-Effect Diagram, (Burduş, E., 2006, pp. 197-198) modern companies are currently using this analysis of cause-effect relationships for quality assessment.

Joseph M. Juran, defines quality management by its functions in terms of the "quality trilogy" (Juran, J.M., 1986, pp. 19-24). In his opinion, quality management includes three main management processes: quality planning; quality control; quality improvement.

At the end of the 20th century, a new concept of quality was defined, total quality. (Nicolescu, O. et al., 2003, pp. 500-506) This concept imposed quality management tools that allowed the reorientation of quality control, from the sorting of finished products to the analysis of the causes that determine the variation of the parameters of a product, process, service, etc., negatively influencing the quality of the final product. By knowing the causes, correction can be made from the beginning of the process. The realization of this approach requires the mobilization of all the elements of an organization, the total quality indicating the direction in which the action must be oriented Evans, J.R. & Lindsay, W.M., 2020, p. 15). At the same time, the concept of total quality requires continuous activities to prevent deficiencies, without forgetting the control of processes and results and including the action of continuous improvement as something fundamental. Deming and Juran illustrated this management process in a similar form. Deming explains this process through the cycle (Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle). While Juran's Trilogy practically exposes the same through three processes: quality planning, quality control, quality improvement (Moldoveanu, G., Dobrin, C. 2003, pp. 10-19).

Call center services have become an integral part of everyday life. By their very nature, call center services take over the activity of public relations, outsourced by many sectors of activity. In this way it comes in contact with many people. A low quality of call center services, shortcomings in the way of interaction with the customers of the companies for which the call centers work, affect the level of customer satisfaction in relation to the sectors, companies, whose customers they are. Those, customers complaints are not reflected on, or only on, the call-center company with which they communicated, but mainly on the company whose customers they are. Under these conditions, a permanent effort from the call-center companies is necessary to improve the level of customer satisfaction, implicitly the level of quality of call-center services. A stage in the quality improvement process, according to the principles developed by J. M. Juran (Juran, J.M., 1986, pp. 21-22), is "diagnosing the causes of the occurrence of defects". The appearance of defects presupposes the existence of some gaps in the quality management practiced within the companies. Preventing the occurrence of defects, inadequate call center services, or their remedy, requires the diagnosis of quality management. This is the premise from which the idea of this study started, which aims to carry out a diagnostic analysis, a management method with pragmatic analysis meanings (Verboncu, I., Popa, I., 2020, p. 11) of the quality management system in the call center industry in Romania.

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2. Diagnostic analysis of quality management in the call center industry

The diagnostic analysis of quality management in the call center industry in Romania was carried out on the basis of the data obtained from the survey carried out in the relevant companies.

2.1 Research on quality management in call center companies

In order to investigate the quality management in the call center industry in Romania, (Balaure, V. Et al., 2002, pp. 150-157) the method of selective research of the collectives that have the information necessary for the study was used, carrying out an investigation in the relevant companies. The questionnaire used was addressed to quality departments and/or managers responsible for quality. The survey used the method of direct research through telephone and e-mail survey, or through personal interviews as ways to collect data.

The companies that make up the sample were selected in such a way as to fulfill the condition of representativeness in relation to the general collectivity of the call-center industry. First of all, a proportional representation in the sample of domains that outsource their customer relations service, transferring this activity to call center firms, called partner firms, was sought. The most important partner field for the call center industry is e-commerce, followed by telecommunications, banking, IT, medical services, health, road, housing insurance, etc.

Another criterion taken into account when establishing the sample was the size of the companies, taking into account the number of employees, the volume of activity, the diversity and complexity of the services provided.

The method of communication with the interviewed subjects had a partially structured form based on predetermined questions, but which could be reformulated or presented in a different order from one subject to another. In some situations, due to the great diversity of call center companies, an unstructured form of communication was resorted to, leaving it up to the company representative to freely present his opinions regarding the status of the implementation of the quality management system in the respective companies, this create an open dialogue with the representatives of the companies, a situation that led to the obtaining of additional information, very useful for the research, information that managed to create a picture of the state of implementation of the quality management system (QMS) in the analyzed companies.

The processing and interpretation of the information obtained from the survey in the call center companies, constituted the support for the elaboration of the diagnostic analysis of the quality management in the analyzed industry.

2.2 Diagnosis of quality management in the call center industry

The diagnosis of the quality management system (Nicolescu, O. & Verboncu, I., 2006, pp. 149-153) is carried out by analyzing the elements (processes) of which it is composed:

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- 1. Organizational structure of responsibilities. The existence of a department or a manager responsible for the quality and the activities carried out by these structures for the organization and maintenance of the QMS;
- 2. The processes that compose the quality management system;
- 3. QMS documents: work procedures, records and reports (evidence of results);
- 4. The resources needed to carry out QMS activities.

The interdependence between the activities carried out in an organization leads, in the event of a disturbance within an activity, function, to the premise of the appearance of disruptions and to the other functions, degradation appearing in the chain (Burduş, E., & Popa, I., 2018, pp. 211-213). For these reasons, the QMS diagnosis must cover all activities and functions of the organization.

The questionnaire addressed to the quality departments was structured in such a way as to include these elements of quality management. The data on the basis of which this analysis was carried out, were obtained through the interview carried out as part of the research.

The first element of QMS (Juran, J.M. & Blanton Godfrey, A., 1999, pp. 4.6-4.20) is the existence in the organizational structure of a department and a manager responsible for the quality and activities carried out by it. In the case of the call center industry, the survey found that all companies have a quality department or, in the case of smaller firms, at least one employee is responsible for managing the quality activity. This situation is consistent with the general idea circulated in the specialized literature, according to which service industries consider quality a differentiating factor more than manufacturing companies (Evans, J.R. & Lindsay, W.M., 2020, p. 29).

Both within large companies and smaller ones, the activities regarding the quality of the services they provide are approximately the same, and can be grouped as follows:

- making the description of the operating mode for each call center service offered by the company and the control methods and criteria for each;
- ensuring the resources for the operation of the control of the provision of services;
- creating the system of quality parameters that must be monitored for all services provided;
- establishing the recording method, the reporting system for the company's management and partner companies for each service in the company's portfolio;
- identifying the possibilities for improving each call center service.

The actions listed above are carried out for each call center service provided separately.

In addition to these actions, carried out at the level of the services provided, in all companies there are also activities related to quality, aimed at the

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organizational level of the company (Badea. F., 2005, pp. 197-200) among which are distinguished:

- determining the succession and interaction of activities and processes in the company and monitoring their operation, according to the planning and operating documents;
- identifying activities and processes in the company that require quality improvements.

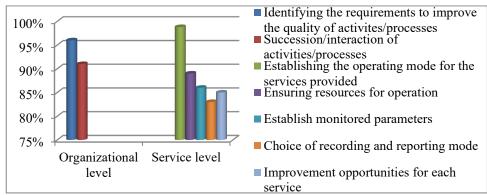
Table 1 shows the activities of the quality departments, structured on the two levels of action, as well as the extent to which they are carried out in the call center companies.

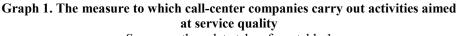
Table 1. Activities almed at service quality			
Activities aimed at the quality of services	Organizational level	Service level	
Identifying the requirements			
to improve the quality of activities/processes	96%	-	
Succession/interaction of activities/processes	91%	-	
Establishing the operating mode for the services provided	-	98,8%	
Ensuring resources for operation	-	89%	
Establish monitored parameters	-	86%	
Choice of recording and reporting mode	-	83%	
Improvement opportunities for each service	-	85%	

Table 1. Activities aimed at service q
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Source: information obtained through the survey carried out in call center companies

A suggestive image of the measurement to which call-center companies carry out the activities aimed at the quality of services is shown in graph 1. The data presented in table 1 were the basis for the creation of graph 1.





Source: author, data taken from table 1

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The image of the diagram and the table highlight the following aspects:

> The action that is practically found in the activity of the quality departments of all companies is the establishment of the mode of operation for each service, followed by the two activities carried out at the level of the organization, the identification of activities and processes that require quality improvements in the organization, respectively the determination of the succession and the interaction of these activities and processes. That means that with regard to these actions no remedial efforts are required, only the maintenance and continuous improvement of these activities.

 \succ At the level of the services provided, there are activities specific to the quality system that, especially at the level of small companies, are not carried out or are not permanently under the attention of the management that manages the quality activity, such as:

- establishing the registration method, the reporting system for the management of the company and for the partner companies. In 17% of cases they do not act according to quality management policies;
- identifying opportunities to improve each service. 15% of companies do not comply with the rules for frequent analysis of this activity;
- the composition of the system of quality parameters that must be monitored for all services provided. Almost on a par with the previous activity, in 14% of situations the rules of the quality principles are not respected;
- ensuring the resources for the operation of the control of the provision of services, is the activity that in 11% of cases, the call-center companies do not perform according to the necessary parameters.

These are considered to be nerve points of the quality management system in the call center industry. Many organizations focus only on one of these quality dimensions (Evans, J.R. & Lindsay, W.M., 2020, p. 28). It should be emphasized that these deficiencies were found only in the case of small or newly established companies. Within the large companies, there were no such deviations from the principles of quality management, most of these companies have foreign capital, being branches of large western companies, the quality management system being fully taken over from the parent company and implemented in the subsidiary on the territory of Romania since its opening.

The second element of the quality management system is represented by the processes that compose the QMS. According to the survey carried out in callcenter companies, within these companies it is possible to identify basic processes of the QMS as well as support processes that support the basic processes.

- The main processes of QMS:
- the processes of management activities;

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- processes related to the relationship with the beneficiaries, more specifically with the partner companies that transfer them to the call center companies, customer relations;
- service delivery and realization processes:
- resource management processes: human resources, purchase of new technological equipments;

Support processes that support the main processes:

- measurement, analysis and improvement processes;
- staff training processes;
- staff recruitment;
- maintenance of technological equipment;
- control of systems for measuring and monitoring customer interactions;

Within the call center companies, these processes of the QMS are analyzed and evaluated at different hierarchical levels. Management processes, the most important category of work processes carried out by an organization, are executed sequentially by managers, each sequence being their function or attribution (Verboncu, I., & Popa, I., 2020, p. 13). So, the processes of management activities and the processes related to the relationship with beneficiaries, are analyzed only at the top level of management. The other core processes are reviewed by top management on a monthly basis or when special issues arise.

In general, call center companies organize in the executive departments (Nicolescu, O. & Verboncu, I., 2006, pp. 149-153) daily meetings with operative staff, to analyze the processes of realization and delivery of services, including the qualitative aspects. Weekly, these processes, as well as the support ones, are evaluated, in almost all the companies analyzed, at the level of the managers of the operative departments. The results of the analyzes are presented to the higher hierarchical level.

The evaluation of support processes, measurement, analysis and improvement of services, are the task of the executive departments, which analyze them in the weekly meetings of the departments and subsequently communicated to the superior hierarchical manager and the quality department. The evaluation of the other support processes of staff training, training, staff recruitment, maintenance of technological equipment, are the responsibility of the relevant departments, the results also being communicated to the superior hierarchical manager and the quality department.

The evaluation of the supporting process of measurement, analysis and improvement of all activities in the companies is carried out in all departments of the companies, the results being communicated to the quality department.

The third element of the QMS includes the system documents: work procedures, records and reports (evidence of results).

From the interviews conducted with representatives of the call center companies, information was obtained regarding the documentation of the quality management system of the relevant companies. So, it was found that the majority of call-center companies use complete quality management documentation.

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The documents used by the contact centers correspond to the usual known norms. The most important documents in call center activity are:

- Book of quality;
- Work procedures;
- Quality Records;
- Reporting.

The quality manual was developed by the companies that implemented the quality system, instead the quality procedures, records and reports are used in all contact centers.

The procedure is the basic element of the call-center activity, where every detail sent by the operator to the client must be in accordance with the provisions of the procedures to ensure the correctness of the service. At the same time, the procedure is the foundation of the quality management system. The work procedures specify the steps to be followed by the call-center operator to perform the service, also describing the responsibilities and decision-making powers of operators and managers.

Records are used in the process of controlling the correct execution of services by call-center operators and provide evidence of the compliance of the activity with the requirements of the quality management system. Call centers record calls to monitor agent performance and compliance with quality standards. Call recording systems deal with the process of capturing calls, archiving and storing them.

The analyzes of the processes of realization and delivery of services, including quality parameters, are carried out by the managers of the operative departments, constituting the basis of the periodic reports sent to the upper management and to the partner companies. On the basis of these reports, company managers and the quality department evaluate the parameters' inclusion in the objectives set for the quality of services and establish the measures required to maintain or improve the quality of services.

The fourth element of the QMS is the resources required to implement, maintain and continuously improve it. In the call center industry, due to the specificity of the activity, the allocation of resources for QMS includes:

- 1. Human resources;
- 2. infrastructure;
- 3. work climate and environmental environment.

1. Human resources. The investigation highlighted an important problem faced by call center companies, namely the high turnover rate of human resources, due to which even the professional level of the employees cannot be permanently corresponding to the requirements. So, a vicious circle is created: staff turnover - low productivity - non-quality (Moldoveanu, G., & Dobrin, C., 2023, p. 84). In the call center industry, human resources have a great importance, because the quality of the final product of these companies depends to the greatest extent on the performance of the operators. Customer satisfaction depends primarily on the kindness and empathy shown by the operators. The improvement of the situation

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requires a policy oriented towards staff retention, which is a direction in which financial resources must be directed.

2. The infrastructure specific to the call center industry

Hardware equipment. It forms the basis of call-center companies' equipment, they are of a high-quality level in most companies, based on advanced technology and data security, both in the communication process and in the data storage.

The software solutions used in the contact centers are purchased from prestigious companies, which guarantees the rapid implementation of projects and a reporting system that allows company specialists to track and optimize customer interaction processes.

The support services most used by the call center industry are communications, traditional and online telephone services. In the opinion of the representatives of the call centers, the mobile phone networks offer satisfactory services, and with regard to the Internet networks, they declared that Romania has a very good Internet infrastructure, and especially high-speed Internet, a determining condition for companies of call center.

In conclusion, in the contact centers there is no need to allocate financial resources for the infrastructure, being sufficient, at this moment, the permanent maintenance of the existing one. But in this field technologies advance rapidly and it is necessary for call center firms to permanently integrate the latest artificial intelligence innovations into the quality management system (Stoica, L.C., 2020, pp. 205-220).

3. The working climate and the ambient environment, refers to the association of physical and human elements that influence the motivation of the staff to apply the company's quality standards and to contribute to increasing the quality of services (Cernătescu. E.C., et al. 2021. pp. 194-200). Physical elements in call center firms can include: ambient and headset noise, work spaces, heat, lighting, hygiene, etc. In most of the analyzed companies the situation is characterized by the employees as acceptable, but there are opportunities for improvement that refer to the physical factors, the most important of them are the ambient noise from the headphones and from the work spaces. Opinion surveys carried out by companies to measure the level of customer satisfaction show that, next to the communication skills of consultants, many customers believe that the second most important element for quality communication is sound clarity, intelligible voice and noise cancellation background. Time wasted repeating words or phrases due to poor quality communication can cost time, money, and lower customer satisfaction.

3. The stage of implementation of the quality management system in the call center industry

The integration of the quality management system into the managerial system of a company requires the completion of some stages (Ilieş, L. & Crişan, E.,

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2011. pp. 175-178). These stages, adapted to the specifics of the call center activity, are the following:

Stage I - Choosing the appropriate model, taking into account the specifics of the activity;

Stage II - Diagnostic analysis of the organization with the goal of identifying the necessary measures to adapt the organizational structure to the requirements of the operation of the QMS;

Stage III - Creating an organizational structure of responsibilities, a department or appointing a manager responsible for quality;

Stage IV - Training of employees;

Stage V - Preparation of QMS documents: quality manual, work procedures, records and reports (evidence of results);

Stage VI - Implementation of QMS;

Stage VII - Maintenance, continuous improvement and development of the QMS;

Stage VIII - Certification of the quality management system, by organizations accredited by the National Accreditation Association.

The results of the survey of call center companies, regarding the current status of implementation of the QMS, are presented in Table 2.

Stages	Stages name	QMS stage -% companies -
stage I	Choosing the right QMS model	8,5%
stage II	Diagnostic analysis of the organization	8 %
stage III	Creating the organizational structure	9,5%
stage IV	Training of employees	7,5 %
stage V	Preparation of QMS documents	7 %
stage VI	Implementation of QMS	12%
stage VII	Maintenance, continuous improvement and	26%
_	development of the QMS	
stage VIII	QMS certification	21,5%

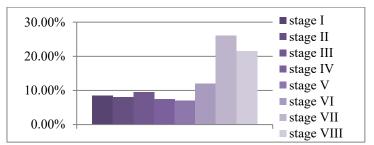
 Table 2. Status of quality management implementation in call center companies

Source: information obtained through the survey carried out in call center companies

The graphic representation of the implementation stage of the quality management system highlights the level of integration of the quality principles in the managerial practice of the call center industry in Romania. The information obtained through the survey carried out in the call-center companies was the basis for creating graph 2.

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Graph 2. Stage of implementation of the quality management system in call center companies Source: author, data taken from table 2

As can be seen, in almost 60% of the companies analyzed, the implementation of the QMS is in the final stages, in stages VI, VII and VIII, a fact that proves the concern of call-center companies for the permanent increase in the quality of services and implicitly in the degree of satisfaction of customers.

In advanced stages of implementation of QMS, stage VI - in progress QMS implementation and stage VII - Maintenance, continuous improvement and development of the QMS, 48% of call center companies are found. While 21.5% of the companies have obtained the quality management system certification or are in the certification process. The vast majority of companies in this category are large multinational companies, which since the establishment of the branch in Romania, implement the quality management system, the investors coming with the packages of procedures of the company of origin and only adapting them to the socio-economic environment of the country where they invest Many of the multinational call-center companies are certified to implement quality standards issued by certification bodies in their home countries.

A smaller proportion, 40.5% of firms stated that the introduction of QMS is in the early stages of implementation. Most of the companies which are in this situation are either small organizations or are newly established.

In conclusion, for the most of the call center companies, the process of implementing the QMS is a priority policy, which demonstrates the awareness of the importance of increasing quality for decreasing non-quality costs, increasing the profitability of companies and implicitly customers satisfaction.

Conclusions

The diagnostic analysis highlighted the QMS dysfunctions most frequently faced by the call center industry. Knowing the causes that determine the nonquality, solutions were formulated to remedy the quality of call-center services, which constitute action directions for improving the QMS and implicitly increasing customer satisfaction. These conclusions and recommendations are addressed to managers of call center companies and are structured in the following categories:

- Fixing processes related to human resources;
- Improvement of equipment and technological solutions;

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- Correction of organizational processes.
- 1. Recommendations for remedial processes related to human resources:
- In order to remedy absenteeism, flexible work schedules can be introduced, which can be folded into the school schedules of employees following university studies;
- Greater attention to staff motivation, job satisfaction, individual employee development, attractive salaries and bonuses, health insurance;
- Adequate working environment, reduction of ambient and headphone noise;
- Communication skills carefully analyzed criterion when recruiting staff;
- Specialized trainings for the development of effective communication skills.
- **2.** Recommendations regarding the improvement of equipment and technological solutions.

Hardware equipment:

- High-performance hardware equipment for information storage and security, assisted by IT personnel specialized in security, or calling on specialized companies;
- Communication platforms dedicated to call-center services, which direct calls depending on the volume of calls on hold and the priority of the caller;
- High-performance call recording and monitoring tools to ensure an effective quality control process for partner companies and the call center team;
- Technological structures that allow the development of multi-channel solutions, for example customer service for eCommerce.

Software solutions:

- CRM systems (Customer Relationship Management) are software that provide operators the history of the relationship with customers, information on their concerns and preferences;
- The electronic archive offers the possibility of checking the call recording;
- Text mining that performs text extraction, is the process of obtaining information, evaluating and interpreting the information obtained;
- Natural language processing (NLP), computational linguistics, dealing with interactions between computers and human (natural) languages.
- 3. Proposed directions for correcting organizational processes.

Departmental level

Executive departments:

verification of the procedures followed, especially those that generated the reported deficiencies. If the procedures are wrong or have

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ambiguous content, they are corrected or new procedures are developed;

- checking the criteria and the monitoring process;
- control of the correct application of the procedures;
- the development of additional procedures to identify and prevent the occurrence of other non-conformities in the future;
- keeping under control the services and activities that generate nonquality;
- verification of records with the results of corrective and preventive actions.

In conclusion, in the executive departments it is necessary to monitor the activities that contributed to obtaining negative quality values. Procurement support departments have an important role in increasing the quality of services, purchasing equipment and software solutions, which correspond to the characteristics detailed previously, to improving equipment and technological solutions.

HR departments:

- Adequate personnel recruitment policies;
- Investments in training and continuous improvement of staff;
- Labor force retention policies.

Sales, marketing, relations with beneficiaries departments:

 Negotiating with partner companies to expand access to partners' data platforms, so that call-center operators can access information about the product or customer history, necessary in the interaction with consumers.

At the level of company management:

- Expanding the activity to smaller cities (reduced employee turnover);
- Quality assurance according to international ISO standards. QMS certification by organizations accredited by the National Accreditation Body;
- Outsourcing customers opinion polling services. Calling on specialized survey firms to accurately determine customer satisfaction levels and quality remedial issues. of data of the partner companies, so that the call-center operators can access.

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