EXAMINATION OF THE SATISFACTION OF RUNNING EVENTS' PARTICIPANTS

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Introduction

The growing popularity of running events amounts to an incentive to analyze this phenomenon, as we may observe a constant growth of a few percent in the number of both events and participants on a yearly basis. Statistics shows the adequacy of observation in relation to Poland, Europe as well as other parts of the world. The emotional character of the runs along with the awareness of the necessity to treat the events as a product, or an undertaking, which requires relevant regulations, and also entails some organizational, business and other objectives. Hence, the legitimate attitude to the abovementioned problem is the one that involves proper consideration of the quality of service – a running event – as well as measurement of clients' satisfaction.

In the present article relevant methods of the quality of service measurement are presented along with commentary related to their utility in reference to running events. The paper depicts the results of a preliminary research linked with the cycle of popular events during which the participants' satisfaction factors have been identified. The topic appears to be valid, in particular for a very insignificant number of publications related to this matter. mostly of non-scientific character. Numerous measurements of satisfaction fail to be grounded in research methodologies related to the necessity of defining the research problem, putting forward hypotheses, defining the sample and population, selecting the research method and finally to conducting the research in a way that aims at verifying the proposed hypotheses. The only source of knowledge of running events are Internet portals which present results of biased surveys. Under no circumstances may it become the basis for conclusions or shaping the quality of this type of products in the frames of future events and other undertakings. This source may be seen merely as a subjective evaluation of perceiving selected aspects of a given event.

The preliminary research has been carried out which supported the identification of runners' satisfaction factors. At further stages an international research into running events is planned. The research will embrace three products (running events) of varied level of development.

Attitude towards measuring clients' (running events' participants) satisfaction

By observing the market in Poland and many other countries we may take notice of an extremely dynamic growth of the number of participants. The reasons for this phenomenon are among others: a more significant, in comparison with the past, tendency among Poles to pursue a healthy and active lifestyle, popularity of running in western countries, and the growing availability of high quality footwear, clothes and accessories for runner, and the growing number of sizable running events, and relatively low costs of training, and the lack of strictly established requirements related to arenas. In the last several years the number of running events in Poland has increased every year even by 20-25% (Waśkowski 2014).

Table 1. Number of Participants in the Biggest Runs over 10km in Poland

Name of the run	2011		2012		2013	
	Number of participant s	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year
Biegnij Warszawo	8479	20.59%	9773	15.26%	11710	19.82%
Bieg Niepodległości (Warszawa)	6135	6.58%	7209	17.51%	10157	40.89%
Orlen Warsaw Marathen	-	-	- ,	-	7735*	-
Bieg Niepodległości (Gdynia)	1858	43.36%	2885	55.27%	5594	93.90%
Nocny Bieg Świętojański	1077	31,18%	1950	81.06%	4363	123.74%
Bieg Powstania Warszawskiego	2196	4.67%	2785	26.82%	4055	45.60%
Bieg Europejski	661	1.23%	1589	140.39%	3184	100.38%
Bieg Westerplatte	1175	71.28%	940	-20.00%	2817	199.68%
Mariacka Dziesiątka	1433	10.57%	1936	35.10%	2284	17.98%
Bieg Urodzinowy	200	-47.92%	1485	642.50%	2240	50.84%
Razem:	8600	X	13570	Х	54139	X

^{*}Orlen Warsaw Marathon in 2013 was held for the first time.
Source: Polish Association of Running.

Table 2. Number of Participants in the Biggest Halfmarathons in Poland

Name of the run	2011		2012		2013	
	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year
Półmaraton Warszawski	4700	33.22%	7174	53.64%	10074	40.42%
Półmaraton Poznań	3517	42.33%	4409	25.36%	5743	30.26%
Półmaraton Ślężański	1200	24,22%	2953	146.08%	2659	-9.96%
Półmaraton Słowaka	1699	89.41%	2060	21,25%	2035	-1.21%
Półmaraton Philips Piła	2114	22.84%	1933	-8.56%	2431	25.76%
Półroaraton Jurajski	1398	13.47%	1585	13.38%	1420	-10,41%
Półmaraton Marzanny	513	10.80%	1175	129.04%	1702	44.85%
Półmaraton Kościański	914	26.42%	1099	16.79%	1321	20.20%
Półmaraton Gryfa	754	34,64%	831	10.21%	1291	55.35%
Półmaraton Bytomski	832	116.17%	907	9.01%	1198	32.08%
Razem	17461	X	24126	X	29874	Х

Source: Polish Association of Running.

Table 3. Number of Participants in the Biggest Marathons in Poland

Name of the	2011		2012		2013	
	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparison with the previous year	Number of participants	Change in comparisor with the previous year
Maraton Warszawski	4061	22.25%	6797	67.37%	8506	25.14%
Maraton Poznań	4629	19.52%	5426	17.22%	5678	4.64%
Maraton Wrocław	2773	37.47%	3900	40.64%	3501	-10.23%
Maraton Kraków	3201	32.44%	3014	-5.84%	4415	46.48%
Maraton Dębno	806	-17.42%	1091	35.36%	1340	22,82%
Maraton Łódź	494		1011	104.66%	1016	0.49%
Maraton Katowice	695	26.36%	729	4.89%	829	13.72%
Maraton Gdańsk	587	26.24%	630	7.33%	739	17.30%
Koral Maraton	439	44,41%	485	10.48%	514	5.98%
Maraton Toruński	585	12,93%	450	-23.08%	663	47.33%
Razem	18270	Х	23533	X	27201	Х

Source: Polish Association of Running.

The measurement of clients' satisfaction is inextricably connected to the standard of services. Therefore, it is necessary to take notice of the quality of a service – in this case organization of a running event - and to define its clients. It may be seen as an oversimplification to assume that participants satisfaction evaluation is one of the objectives, however, in a broader perspective we may include sponsors, VIPs, invited guests, family of participants and viewers in the group of clients or stakeholders. Defining these problems is related to establishing the research objectives, as we do not conduct the research for its own sake. In all cases the objective amounts to the basis for shaping a running event's quality.

The organizer, in order to meet clients' expectations, at the initial stage of preparation is obliged to identify potential recipients (possibly buyers, users and beneficiaries). At the next stage, it is necessary to define the recipients' needs and requirements. The gathered data is utilized in order to create a product (service) for the fully knowledgeable client. With the view to verify if the actions undertaken are effective, the clients' satisfaction measurement ought to be conducted. The course of the present considerations as well as the actions taken may be understood as a part of comprehensive philosophy related to quality management and process approach. Furthermore, Deming cycle, the icon of TQM, is definitely worth a proper consideration, as it encourages a system approach to organizing running events — in a broader perspective: consecutive editions.

Planning entails development of a running event's conception with its full specification. Accomplishment is the realization in accordance with the initial assumptions, which is followed by verification of its compliance with the model as well as by a proper analysis, in particular of the weakest elements. Moreover, it is significant to plan the next edition of the run. It is also important, at each of the aforementioned stages, to put emphasis on the client.

In general terms an external client is a person who is influenced by a product (service) created by an organization. An external client is not a member of the organization responsible for providing services (manufacturing the product). It also must be indicated that it is necessary to satisfy external clients, i.e. organizers and volunteers, possibly long with contractors (time measurement, photographic services).

An internal client, on the other hand, is an employee or organizational cell participating in the process of providing given services. An internal client takes over the effect of the work done by a different organizational cell and enriches the product (or a service) in order to hand it over to the next client. These actions lead to creation of a value chain at the end of which the recipient is located. Thus, an internal client is simultaneously a supplier for another internal client.

The questions related to research in measuring satisfaction of both clients' and employees' (internal clients) have been of interest of theoreticians and practitioners for many years. The role of a client's satisfaction is strongly emphasized by ISO 9000 standards, TQM philosophy, Six Sigma and the criteria of the European Quality Award as well as its American equivalent -The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award. As far as profit-oriented enterprises are concerned, the role of clients' satisfaction is obvious; however. in the public sector (or other non-profit enterprises) clients' satisfaction ought to be a value itself and amount to the main objective of the organization. It is obvious that research in clients' satisfaction should serve as a way of constant self-improvement of the organization (as a means to achieve the assumed objectives) (Kozielski 2011). Increasing the quality of services by improving various areas frequently does not bring expected results. It is so, because enterprises often are not able to identify factors which are significant for clients. The modification of the factors entails the increase in their satisfaction. The dilemma is linked with the running events frequently organized by administrative units, sometimes by commercial organizations in cooperation with administrative structures. It is of no importance who organizes the event, as we deal with a product on the market. It amounts to a serious problem for the administration, because of the specificity of its functioning as well as due to insufficient preparation for providing commercial services. On the other hand, we should remember that, in contrast with the dominating private sector, public sector institutions do not have the comfort to choose or focus on their "favorite" clients (treating them as the target group), both of which bring the most sizable profits. Public administration must take proper care of the whole society, which causes its readiness for providing services for undiversified clients not divided into the better and worse ones.

The public sector is now under significant pressure to meet increasing standards of the private sector. In reference to public administration the information from clients ought to amount to the starting point of defining the directions of improving the services provided.

Research in clients' satisfaction should lead to gaining customer as well as it ought to introduce new adequate solutions taking into account clients' needs and expectations. Consequently, it will result in shaping intemproving the administration's image. The research itself appears to extremely difficult, though. The most significant roadblock is the fact that satisfaction is not a static phenomenon, but evolves in time. Furthermore, satisfaction is frequently the result of both clients' experiences and subjective impressions before, during and after the satisfaction is measured (Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów 2008). The research problem in this aspect must be focused not only on the results, but, which is more important, on understanding the quality of the service provided by the organizer,

comprehending the differences between people observing the quality as well as it must concentrate on the adequacy of research methodologies.

Research conception

The aim of the research in this case is obvious, but, in compliance with the professional research repertoire, it is necessary to develop the research conception. In the frames of the conception the following issues must be defined: the research problem, objectives, proposed theses, assumed hypotheses, the research methodology and tools, the research scenario along with the ways of realizing it.

In the analyzed case the stress may be put on evaluating clients' satisfaction in reference to a single running event or the whole cycle of such events. It is important to define the client – first and foremost we are interested in researching the satisfaction of a running event's participant. Nevertheless, it is crucial to consider whether we may treat all the participants as one body, assuming that their expectations are identical or at least similar. This is obviously a big oversimplification, because it simply does not reflect the reality. Runners' motivations differ. This fact was presented among others in a documentary entitled *The Spirit of the Marathon* from 2007. In the movie each of the six runners – the main protagonists – presents a different motivation for their participation in the run. In a sense, the very location of the run allows us to assume common expectations of participants, but not utterly and not in relation to all events (e.g. local events vs. international renowned marathons). Within this scope, it necessary to be aware of variables as well as of essential solutions at the stage of research planning.

Therefore, it is crucial to put forward research objectives, theses and hypotheses. If this condition is not fulfilled, we are not able to select the proper methodology, which will allow us to verify the three elements.

Moreover, it is also important to be aware of the fact that selecting only one research method may be insufficient in the face of the research objectives, if treated in a broad and serious manner. In the following parts of the present paper research methodologies which may be applied to a research in a runner's satisfaction at various stages of a given event's organization.

Research methods applied to evaluation of clients' satisfaction

The problem of employees' satisfaction has been a part of scientific research in organization and management for many years. There is no single method which may be seen as the most appropriate in order to measure clients' satisfaction, though. The selection of a method is not independent of the reserch problem, the type of the proffered product and the recipient. The most

significant methods of examing clients' satisfaction are as follows (Kancelaria Prezesa Rady Ministrów 2008):

Gaining knowledge of the client from the first contact staff – the people who come into contact with the client on a daily basis, they usually know very well what is important for the customer, what they would like to change. They also frequently have the knowledge of the source of customers' dissatisfaction. Therefore, it is justifiable to gather opinions from volunteers, service employees (who provide the runners with explanation of some organizational aspects) and security workers. All of the aforementioned options ask for cautiousness when formulating judgments and making decisions, but they are also a significant signal to carry out in-depth analyses. The method is crucial as it may be used before, during and after the running event. Moreover, its needs a system approach realized on the basis of the research scenario. Not only do we receive information about runners' opinions and suggestions at various stages of the event but also we get personnel's commentary on the suggestions which point at their source.

Survey research – is the most popular method of gathering data related to clients' satisfaction. In a questionnaire questions are arranged in a systematic manner. The questions may be open-ended (giving the freedom of formulating answers) or closed-ended (limiting the answer to one of the options provided in the questionnaire). Survey research allows us to acquire both qualitative and quantitative data. The classical questionnaire is a tool which in practice causes difficulty in application, because of the specificity of a running event. Conducting the survey just after the run allows merely short interviews. Moreover, the participant's result significantly determines the answers. Survey amounts to a basis for many other methods. The preparation of a questionnaire should be preceded by the in-depth analysis of research objectives. Finally, a questionnaire may be used before and after the run all well as it can be applied to various target groups.

Utility tests and Internet resources analysis – are applied in the process of designing new services, in particular the ones provided online. It is the way of measuring the extent to which people can use something (e.g. a website, a computer interface, a document, an appliance) in order to achieve the planned objective. Utility tests aim at observing people who use a given product under realistic circumstances. Despite the fact that this method offers limited possibilities of implementation, it may be used to evaluate the computer application supporting the registration process as well as to asses the website providing the public with information about the event (especially useful in the case of a big running event in which people from different countries are expected to participate). Technical support is then an extremely significant element of a running event.

Ethnography – describes scientific methods of all kinds used in order to comprehend human behavior and culture. It is a research technique which allows a better understanding of clients. It should be taken into account in the case of organizing events with numerous editions and room for progress.

Consultation – a method based on consulting people responsible for providing a service as well as a representative sample of the people who may avail of long-term effects of a given service. Consultation includes various techniques, e.g. direct consultation with the main stakeholders and clients, traditional types of consultation in the written from. Consultation is closely related to benchmarking as the evaluation of opinions and taking into account the most relevant ones amount to its essence. The characteristics presented above allow conscious planning of a running event in its various aspects at the levels the organizers found the most appropriate in reference to the particular run. The level will occasionally be higher than characteristics of other aspects, sometimes identical or purposely lower.

Analysis of complaints and suggestions – complaints and suggestions are a valuable source of information about the elements of both the running event conception and its realization that may be improved. The complaints and suggestions provide information about the clients' varied tastes. Moreover, the research has shown that organization open to receiving and analyzing complaints are able to keep 10% more clients than similar organizations which do not make this type of contact easily accessible (Otto 1999). Ignoring complaints and warranties puts the company at risk of losing the dissatisfied customer as well as of popularizing the negative opinion abut the organizer.

Focus groups – they are used to gather qualitative data. Discussion groups include from 5 to 12 people. One session lasts approximately 2 hours and takes place at a neutral location in order to assure friendly, relaxed atmosphere. A moderator leads the discussion with invited respondents who have been selected according to the criteria embraced within the project objectives. The discussion is led in compliance with the scenario, which has been created earlier to describe the objectives of each stage. The interviews may be supported with some presenting methods (verbal or visual). Such interviews may be held at various phases of the organization of a running event, e.g. at the stage of creating its conception, when we are willing to use the opinions and ideas related to previous editions or linked with other running events. Interviews in focus groups may also be carried out several days after the event (with participants and organizers alike).

Mystery shopping – is a special example of research in clients' satisfaction. Its specific character stems from the fact that we do not gather information from real clients, but we examine the quality of the service and its accordance with given marketing assumptions. The method consists in

hiring people who will be acting as customers. These people will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the company, its products/services, personnel competence, interior design, uniforms and even the possibility of commuting, cleanness of toilets, and supply.

Citizen/client panels – are occasionally called beneficiary groups. In order to gather the data from the panels various methods may be applied, e.g. panels may be used as the basis for taking samples for the research or as the source of people selected to become members of focus groups (or other qualitative approaches). Panels must be constantly monitored and their members changed so as to maintain the required level of representativeness.

Analysis of employees' absences — one of the ways of reacting to increasing dissatisfaction is an escape. A plausible way of withdrawal is sick leave. The absence is depicted with the help of the absence rate, i.e. the number of an employee's absences since the beginning of their contract. Thus, the absence of regular participants of the run in the next edition is a signal which has to be analyzed.

Client cards – ought to be made public. The client must know what he might expect or demand. Credible information about the client's expectations towards the service contributes to achieving satisfaction related to the service. Hence, it is recommended that clients should be informed in a simple and clear manner about the issues relevant for them.

Personal and telephone interviews – mutual communication allows a better explanation, understanding of the client and more profound research in perception. Personal interviews enable the respondents to describe their experiences linked with the product or the service in detail. Personal interviews may be supported by visual means and provide the researcher with the opportunity to pose more complex questions. Telephone interviews are the usual response to a client's complaint.

Critical case technique – is mostly applied in service-oriented organizations. The commonest form of this technique are report cards in the frames of which clients are asked to write down some positive and negative experiences linked with the organization (experiences that have been etched in their minds). With the use of the method we take notice of the most important elements of the service. Critical cases are occurrences that should be dealt with without delay, because they are crucial for the perception of the quality of provided services.

Customer Satisfaction Research (CSR) – is conducted in two phases: exploratory and diagnostic. During the exploratory phase factors generating satisfaction/dissatisfaction of a given product/service are searched for. The aim of the exploratory stage is identification of the criteria which are taken into account by consumers when they assess their satisfaction. This action allows us to determine the extent to which the objective features of the

product/service are favorable in terms of generating satisfaction. During the exploratory phase two types of research are conducted: qualitative and semi-quantitative. The diagnostic phase aims at determining the level of clients' satisfaction. Comparing the level of satisfaction related to our company with the levels achieved by other companies allows us to identify the aspects we are better and poorer at. Consequently, it enables us to shape the organization's image on the market. At this stage personal and telephone surveys are conducted, more rarely by post.

Penalty-Reward Factors – is an interesting method of measurement and evaluation of quality of services, including running events. The key assumption within this research conception is that we may single out quality factors of critical importance. If the factors remain unfulfilled, they cause the dissatisfaction of a runner (Penalty Factors). During the process we should also single out the factors which cause additional satisfaction of the client as well as a higher and more complete perception of quality (Reward Factors). The aim of the research is to identify the "penalty" factors.

Applying the method presented above entails the necessity to divide the clients' requirements into three categories:

- · basic requirements.
- reliability requirements,
- · special requirements (Stoma 2012).

CIT – Critical Incident Technique – is one of the most interesting methods of identifying the reasons for clients' dissatisfaction/satisfaction of proffered services. This technique is related to reconstruction and analysis of key interactions occurring between a running event's participant and a representative of the organizer. All interactions of this type can be evaluated by the customer in a positive or negative manner. From the supplier's point of view some factors may critically influence a success or failure of the people who realize their tasks, i.e. the factors may influence positively or negatively clients' satisfaction of acquiring or using an organization's services.

During a CIT session participants in the run give the direct open interview. They have to describe the critical incidents which occurred during the running event on so-called report cards. Critical incidents are situations which have been etched in a runner's memory. For the runners they play a significant role, sometimes being shocking or admirable. The critical factors may be positive or negative, but runners will first point at the critical factors from their point of view, because of human nature.

A client's evaluation of these situations supports the process of determining typical situations for negative and positive impression of clients. In addition, this method allows us to establish the frequency of their occurrence (Stoma 2012).

TRI:M - the name TRI:M stems from three words: Management -Monitoring - Measurement. The TRI:M method consists of two components. The first one is the Client Satisfaction Index, the other one is a threedimensional approach which embraces: customer's declared evaluation of importance of a given product's features, real importance of a product's given features, and propensity to remain loyal towards a product (Instytut Badań Rynku i Opinii Publicznej 1998). With the use of this tool we can single out four types of features: motivators - features perceived by the client as important which motivate them to buy the product (these features are worth investing in), hygienic features - important characteristics, but they do not motivate a client to buy the product strongly (necessary, but insufficient; they should be maintained at the appropriate level as we should not forget that focusing investments on them may not increase the sales or even may not stop the decrease), money-savers - we can invest in them, they are perceived by clients as unimportant and not motivating to buy the product, hidden possibilities - features of the product seen by the client as characteristics of low or medium importance, but in reality they greatly influence the buyer's decision (investing in them may cause some leverage over rival companies).

SERVQUAL – consists in measuring the difference between the quality of service perceived by the client and the quality they expect. As a result of numerous researches the authors of SERVQUAL have defined five lacunae related to the quality of services. "Lacunae are caused by differences between the service that the run's organizer thinks they assure and the service provided for runners" (Alexander, Hill 2003).

- First lacuna presents the contrast between the runner's expectations and the organizer's idea of clients' needs.
- Second lacuna presents the contrast between the organizer's idea of runners' expectations and the specification linked with creating the quality of the event.
- Third lacuna presents the contrast between the provided service and the specification linked with creating the quality of services.
- Fourth lacuna presents the contrast between the promised service and the one provided by the organizers.
- Fifth lacuna the difference between the service that clients expect and the provided one (Łuczak, Matuszak-Flejszman 2007).

Clients while evaluating the quality of services take into account a variety of factors. As the result of the research conducted with the use of focus groups Parasurman, Zeithaml and Berry singled out ten criteria which determine the quality. The criteria embrace the whole process of providing services (Berry, Parasurman, Zeithaml 1985). These characteristics exert the most significant influence over achieving full satisfaction of the client: financial reconstruction of the service, reliability, responsibility, competence, trust, politeness,

security, availability, communicativeness, understanding the client (Trawnicka 1997). The questionnaire consists of three parts. The first one researches clients' expectations and comprises 22 questions. Each question is followed by a seven-digit scale which allows the respondents to define their level of expectations towards the services. The second part aims at the measurement of importance of five dimensions of the services. The third part embraces clients' perception of the service provided by the supplier. It consists of 22 questions analogous to the ones included in the first part. The quality of the service is defined as the difference between the third and first parts. Hence, it is understood as the difference between the perceived and expected quality.

Summary

We may observe a significant rise in popularity of running events in the last several years, which has entailed the necessity to organize them at the highest level possible, because of their competitiveness. Simultaneously there are a few runs held (marathons, half marathons and others); hence, the participant increasingly often must choose on the basis of broadly understood quality of these undertakings which is directly related to other participants' satisfaction. Quality is connected to compliance with the given criteria. Before establishing the scope of runners' satisfaction, though, it is necessary to define model quality criteria for an event. These criteria will be diverse and dependent of the specified event as well as runners' profile. The verification of participants' satisfaction requires selecting the research method/methods. The review of a broad spectrum of methods aims at depicting various configurations in reference to different groups of runners at different stages of organizing the event.

A survey with the use of a questionnaire, which is frequently used, tends to oversimplify the research. Hence, the organizer should in a systematic way make effort to define requirements towards the run as well as they ought to measure the participants' satisfaction in order to be able to make decisions related to the next editions of a given event. Client satisfaction measurement is connected with defining who the client is, i.e. mostly a runner, but it should not be forgotten that other participants (supporters, relatives, sponsors) also shape the event. The second group of clients amounts to so-called internal clients, i.e. organizers and volunteers.

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