



Service excellence models: a critical discussion and comparison

Service
excellence
models

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Abstract

Purpose – As customer expectations expand and as product offerings hardly differ from each other, service excellence has gained in importance as a means of enhancing customer loyalty. The aim of this paper is to focus on expanding and extending what companies can do to achieve service excellence by comparing and evaluating three popular approaches to excellence.

Design/methodology/approach – The authors compare three of the most commonly used excellence models, Johnston's conceptualisation of service excellence, the EFQM Model as a representative of national quality award models and the Kano model, and their respective applicability and specific perspective on service excellence. The evaluation is based on theoretical arguments, criteria and on a qualitative expert study.

Findings – Combining the selected models provides a comprehensive approach to service excellence. Since all models are compatible and complementary with each other, the analysis provides an enhanced understanding of service excellence and also explains in which context it is most feasible to apply any of the respective approaches. Furthermore, the requirement for a genuine service excellence model becomes evident.

Research limitations/implications – By focusing on three specific excellence models, others such as the Canadian Quality Award and the Australian Quality Award are not considered. Furthermore, a study across industries could reveal how service excellence is achieved in each industry to then transfer this knowledge into other sectors.

Practical implications – By comparing the selected models, benefits of merging the individual approaches are identified. The resulting combined perspectives offered by the individual models present a more detailed insight into what management can undertake to ensure service excellence.

Originality/value – As no prior research has examined the relationship between the selected excellence models and their implications for providing service excellence, this present research offers an innovative approach and thus yields new insights into the conceptualisation of service excellence.

Keywords Service excellence, Customer delight, Excellence models, Service quality, Customer services quality, Quality

Paper type General review

Introduction

The unceasing globalisation of services has prompted corporations in various service industries to concentrate on achieving customer delight through service excellence, which should enable them to secure their competitive position and establish long-term customer relationships. Horwitz and Neville (1996) assert that service excellence occurs when customers perceive that a service exceeds their previous expectations;

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Oliver *et al.* (1997) elucidate that such a surprising experience initiates arousal, which results in pleasure and ultimately customer delight. Delight as an emotional response can strengthen a customer's commitment to a service provider, possibly leading to increased and persistent levels of loyalty and repurchase intentions (Oliver *et al.*, 1997; Schneider and Bowen, 1999).

Although the concept of customer delight has been around for some time (Heskett *et al.*, 1997), most companies (with some notable exceptions like Singapore Airlines, McKinsey & Co, The Walt Disney Company, Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts, The Ritz-Carlton) only recently seem to have listed the achievement of customer delight or service excellence as marketing goals (e.g. AUDI AG, 2011; Deutsche Telekom, 2011; Otis Elevator Company, 2012). In such a setting, service excellence can become a critical success factor for firms. Service excellence refers to the provision of excellent service quality through a management system, exceeding a customer's previous expectations, to result in not only customer satisfaction but also customer delight and therefore greater customer loyalty (see also Dobni, 2002; Edvardsson and Enquist, 2011; Khan and Matlay, 2009).

Despite extensive research into some benefits of service excellence, the best tactics for achieving such status remain uncertain for both service companies and researchers (Crofts *et al.*, 2005; Johnston, 2004). Existing models of excellence that focus on services tend to be applied in isolation, without recourse to the potential synergies of combined approaches, according to the more than 1,000 managers who have participated in executive education programmes and workshops related to the present research. In response, and noting the significance of excellent services in modern competitive business environments, this paper attempts to close the service excellence research gap by offering a better understanding of service excellence approaches available to organisations. The goal is not to specify which individual criteria are central for service excellence but rather to illustrate which approaches and complementary perspectives offered in distinct models might improve understanding of service excellence. Furthermore, the different criteria necessitate the application of a specific excellence model, which is a fundamental step for this relatively new, scarce research stream.

Therefore, this study begins with an explanation and conceptual comparison of three commonly used excellence models and their applicability, as well as their descriptions of service excellence. Discussions with the aforementioned practitioners, from diverse executive education programmes and workshops, revealed that the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) (2000, 2010, 2011) model is the most well-known business excellence model in Europe. Managers also acknowledged Kano's (1984) model for understanding customer requirements and their impact on customer satisfaction. Johnston's (2004, 2007) conceptualisation of service excellence appears in the model comparison as well, because it is the most famous approach from service research. Specifically, the EFQM model gives researchers and practitioners a method for evaluating a company's competitive position (Conti, 2007), whereas Kano's model introduces customer satisfaction and customer delight to the company-level discussion (Matzler *et al.*, 1996), and the Johnston analyses take a customer perspective on service excellence. Accordingly, this study broadens the overall concept by considering both sides of service excellence, from practice and academia; no prior research has examined the relationships among these three models or their implications for a firm's ability to provide service excellence. In this sense, this study offers an innovative approach that yields new insights into the conceptualisation of service excellence.

Methodology

To achieve the research objectives, this study adopted a two-tiered approach. To ensure a holistic understanding of service excellence, the first comparison involved Johnston's (2004, 2007) broadened conceptualisation of service excellence against the EFQM (2000, 2010) model and Kano's (1984) model to reveal the customer requirements and their impact on customer satisfaction from a theoretical/conceptual viewpoint. The structure for this analytical process relied on specific criteria for comparing and contrasting the models, using individually compiled lists of criteria. After combining the three lists, it was possible to sort and group the items logically, then name each grouping. In an analysis of the three models according to the selected criteria, only those items that illustrated significant differences were retained.

For an expert's view on service excellence, a qualitative survey involved 60 high-ranking company representatives and government officials. They possessed profound knowledge of the service sector, service quality approaches, and business excellence models and their respective customer requirements, because they had professional experience applying the models and corporate authority to determine customer service strategies or shape customer service guidelines (see also Deming, 2000). The survey was conducted during a "service excellence" workshop at a conference focused on the standardisation of services. The individual interviews asked all the respondents a series of open-ended questions about their understanding of service excellence. Of the 60 gathered responses, 31 were appropriate for further analysis, for a response rate of 51.7 per cent.

The experts' responses entered verbatim into the NVivo 9 software, which then followed the guidelines for thematic analyses of textual data collected in primary research (Dean and Sharp, 2006; Hutchinson *et al.*, 2010). The aim of this analysis was to compare the consumer's definition of service excellence, according to Johnston (2004), against experts' comprehension of the term. Each author individually examined each statement and assigned the codes, allocating the comments to Johnston's (2004) four service excellence categories: delivering the promise, providing a personal touch, going the extra mile, and dealing well with problems and queries. (The discussion of Johnston's categories appears subsequently.) Following this categorisation, three objective reviewers independently repeated the allocation process to minimise any subjectivity bias. In the rare case of disagreements, the majority opinion tipped the scales.

Most interviewed experts not only demanded that companies keep their service promises to the customers but also indicated the need for something more: more than 61 per cent of the participating experts emphasised that a company had to exceed its promises and provide a benefit the customer has not expected if it is to demonstrate true service excellence. Only 23 per cent of the respondents defined service excellence as the fulfilment of obligations that the service provider promised to its customers in advance.

Models of service excellence

Johnston's framework of service excellence

Service excellence should generate extraordinary satisfaction; Rust and Oliver (2000) predict positive customer emotions resulting from an unexpected positive transgression of their expectations. But this definition is not without controversy. Johnston (2004, 2007) challenges the idea that businesses should rely solely on the delivery of unexpected and surprising service experiences. He recognises the

importance of extra effort in service delivery, a process that can surprise customers, but he asserts that exceeding expectations and surprising customers may cause superfluous costs for a business. If a customer believes the quality is excessive, beyond his or her initial expectations, the consumer also may anticipate that the company's costs are greater than necessary and thereby reason that the price charged must be too high. What the customer expected of the service could be achieved and delivered at a lower price – without the added element of surprise (Grönroos, 1990).

Therefore, Johnston (2004) argues that for reasons of practicality, such a definition of service excellence is inadequate; it is not sufficient to concentrate on providing unexpected and surprising customer services. Instead, he identifies factors that mark service excellence from a customer's perspective, which do not require the firm to exceed expectations. All that is required is that customers believe that the company offers an easy way to conduct business (Johnston, 2004). Furthermore, considering the drivers of service excellence, Johnston suggests four categories, related to keeping obligations towards customers, adding an individual touch to service delivery, devoting extra effort, and reacting appropriately in the case of a service failure, as depicted in Figure 1.

The third category, also known as “going the extra mile”, most closely resembles the traditional definition of achieving service excellence and customer delight; it also has tended to be the least frequently mentioned of the four categories. In contrast, responsiveness to problems and questions appear most frequently in Johnston's (2007) work.

The qualitative analysis of experts' statements regarding the essence of service excellence exhibited a completely different outcome though. The allocation of the collected statements to Johnston's four service excellence categories revealed that most experts perceived “going the extra mile” as an essential element of service excellence. The allocation of the remaining statements to the other three categories yielded the results in Table I.

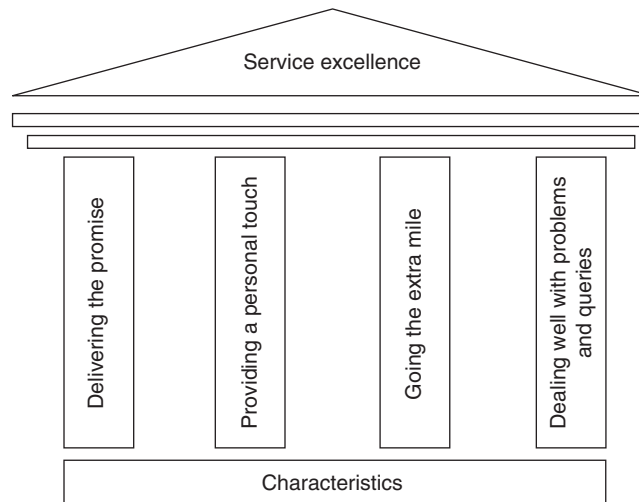


Figure 1.
Characteristics of
excellent service

Source: Adopted from Johnston (2007)

Thus, whereas Johnston's findings do not support the established definition of service excellence, the results of the current analysis aligned closely with this definition. As an explanation, perhaps customers often confront very poor core service quality, as exemplified in customer experiences with mass services such as telecommunications. The mere provision of good, standard service quality without failure can create delighted customers. In contrast, managers and government officials assume that the core service of their organisation involves an accurate service delivery quality level. Therefore, they associate service excellence primarily with individualised services that exceed standard quality offerings.

Another possible reason for the differing results could be the kind of service. Oliver *et al.* (1997) question if delighting and surprising customers is even possible in some service sectors. Lovelock (1983) distinguishes several kinds of services, which might influence the experience of excellent service or delight. For example, actions directed towards the consumer, such as a beauty treatment or a theatre visit, can easily involve moments of delight. Actions towards objects owned by the customer, such as insurance or freight transport, likely have a different threshold and fewer opportunities for delight. A similar distinction might be made for services with no formal relationship (e.g. public highways, mail service) or that offer continuous service delivery (e.g. telephone subscription). The example of luxury vs mass market services clearly reveals this distinction: for mass market services, customers are often happy if they receive an average service level without problems or failures, whereas in luxury service industries, customers have higher expectations, so service providers have to go the extra mile to delight them.

In addition to the kind of service, the customer's purchasing phase might influence the requirements for delight, particularly in business-to-business services; Johnston (2004, 2007) refers primarily to business-to-consumer industries. Grönroos (1983, 1990) splits the customer relationship lifecycle into three phases: initial, purchasing, and consumption or usage phases. In the initial phase, the customer remains unaware of the company and its offerings; in the second phase, the sale takes place; the third stage encompasses the usage process of the service after the purchase. Thus going the extra mile and being easy to do business with may be of different relevance and provide different effects in the second and third phases, particularly for repeat purchases.

In the case of organisational buying, Ozanne and Churchill (1971) differentiate phases of awareness, interest, evaluation, trial, and adoption, whereas Webster and Wind (1972) identify the steps of the buying decision process as follows: identification of need, establishment of specifications, identification of alternatives, evaluation of alternatives, and selection of suppliers. Although both models omit service during and after usage, even in the stages addressed, it could be argued that being easy to do business with is relevant at the beginning, whereas going the extra mile becomes more

Johnston's service excellence characteristics	Allocated expert opinions ($n = 31$)
Going the extra mile	11
Providing a personal touch	8
Delivering the promise	7
Dealing well with problems	0
(Opinions that could not be allocated)	(5)

Table I.
Allocated expert opinions

relevant in later phases. The empirical verification of this prediction exceeds the scope of this paper though. Rather, from this brief overview of the term “service excellence” and introduction to the views of experts, this paper moves on to analyse extant excellence models.

Excellence models and national quality awards

National quality awards and their underlying models frequently provide the guidelines for quality initiatives (Bou-Llusar *et al.*, 2009). The first national quality award that gained broader recognition was the Deming Prize, introduced in Japan in 1951 in recognition of W. Edwards Deming, who introduced statistical methods for quality control to local companies after Second World War (Talwar, 2011). The Deming Prize encompasses ten equally weighted categories, though no model describes the relationships among them (Vokurka *et al.*, 2000).

The Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award (MBNQA) was introduced in the USA in 1987 through an act of Congress. Its goal was to improve the competitiveness of local firms and further their understanding of business excellence (Dror, 2008; Pun *et al.*, 1999). The model that underlies this award comprises seven categories: leadership, information and analysis, strategic quality planning, human resource development and management, management of process quality, quality and operational results, and customer focus and satisfaction. Each category is subdivided further into several criteria, which are attributed certain weights and add up to a maximum score of 1,000 points (Rao Tummala and Tang, 1996). Similar to other national quality awards, the underlying model is intended to serve as a tool for self-evaluation and benchmarking, to identify fields in which a company needs to improve (Pun *et al.*, 1999).

At the end of the 1980s, the EFQM was established by the heads of 14 major European firms, to improve the competitive standing of the continent’s companies by drawing attention to quality measures and supporting educational efforts (van Ham, 1989). The resulting model is valued mainly for its benchmarking purposes and application to evaluate companies (Ruiz-Carrillo and Fernández-Ortiz, 2005; Rusjan, 2005). Furthermore, it can be used to manage and enhance companies (Sandbrook, 2001), and it provides a basis for assessing candidates for the EFQM Excellence Award (Wongrassamee *et al.*, 2003).

In its revised 2010 form, this model features nine main fields, as in Figure 2. The first five areas of interest are enablers and account for 50 per cent of the score; the latter criteria are results and account for the remaining 50 per cent. The nine individual fields indicate the respective criteria against which each organisation’s excellence should be evaluated. Each field has a specific percentage weight, and they add up to 100 per cent. The weights thus indicate the relative significance of every field for the overall model and the assessment of the organisation’s excellence. The interconnections across fields indicate that the model is dynamic (Oger and Platt, 2002; Ruiz-Carrillo and Fernández-Ortiz, 2005; Rusjan, 2005).

Overall, the EFQM model offers tools for achieving excellence in eight different areas; the first field refers to excellent results in general, so any party should be included. The model also requires the company to generate long-term customer value. The third concept aspires to visionary and determined leadership. Furthermore, the firm’s management should steer the organisation through a coherent system of processes. Employee involvement and continuous training also play major roles in achieving excellence. An improved organisation through innovation, learning, and

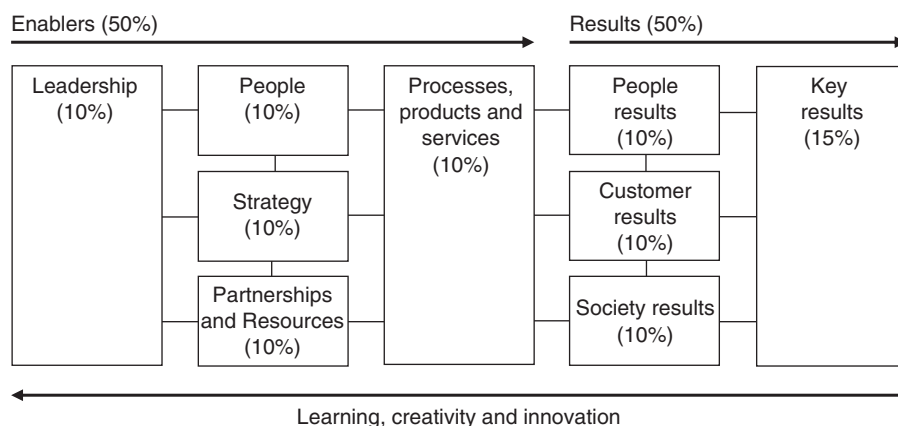


Figure 2.
EFQM excellence
model 2010

Source: Adapted from EFQM (2011)

creativity is another key to excellence. The final two concepts are the formation of partnerships and responsibility towards society (EFQM, 2010).

Globally most national quality awards are based on either the EFQM model or the MBNQA (Tan *et al.*, 2003). Whereas the MBNQA consists of seven pillars, the EFQM model contains nine categories (Nabitz *et al.*, 2000); some of the criteria also are described using different terminologies (Talwar, 2009). Furthermore, the MBNQA does not include the company's financial performance and weights the impacts on society to a lesser extent (Rao Tummala and Tang, 1996). Both the EFQM and MBNQA aim to offer guidelines for operationalising total quality management, so they both include quality management in all facets (Minkman *et al.*, 2007). Both models are reviewed and potentially modified every year (Nabitz *et al.*, 2000), with a stress on continuous improvement and a customer focus (Vokurka *et al.*, 2000). Generally the core criteria of any business excellence models or national quality awards are similar; it is just the exact definitions and weight given to each value that differ (Talwar, 2011; Vokurka *et al.*, 2000). However, for both these measures, the highest weights apply to customer satisfaction (Rao Tummala and Tang, 1996).

Considering these substantive similarities and minor differences, it seemed appropriate to include business excellence models and national quality awards into a single category, with the EFQM as its well-known representative. The results of the comparative analysis can be transferred equally well to other, similar models. In contrast with the EFQM model, Kano's model of customer satisfaction focuses on specific product and service characteristics, rather than the complete picture.

Kano's model of customer satisfaction

Since its introduction, Kano's (1984) model has provided academic researchers and practitioners with a focused research tool for determining which product or service qualities are most likely to evoke customer satisfaction and which characteristics should be addressed to prevent customer dissatisfaction. The model proposes six categories of customer requirements: must-be, one-dimensional, attractive, indifferent, reverse, and questionable. The first three main categories are also depicted in the Kano diagram in Figure 3.

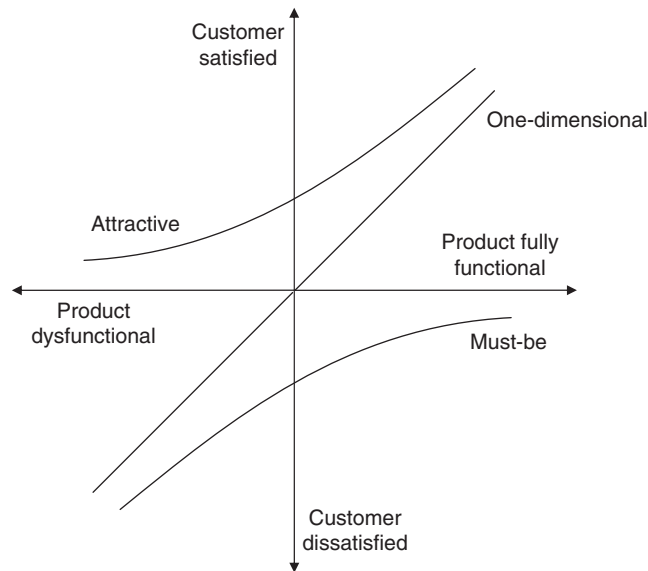


Figure 3.
Kano diagram

Source: Adapted from Zhao and Dholakia (2009)

In this diagram, the must-be curve relates to taken-for-granted customer requirements. Their fulfilment will not make customers more satisfied, because their presence was expected. If this requirement is not fulfilled though, customers are likely to be dissatisfied. One-dimensional requirements assume a proportional relationship with customer satisfaction and the functionality of the product or service: The higher the level of functionality, the higher the likely level of satisfaction. The attractive curve relates to requirements that are neither expressed nor demanded, but their fulfilment significantly increases the level of satisfaction, because customers will be surprised and delighted to see them fulfilled. Their absence will not make customers dissatisfied though, because they were not initially expected. Identifying and delivering attractive requirements with surprising elements thus is a central criterion for achieving service excellence.

Kano's model also facilitates improved insight into the importance of certain requirements, by prioritising them according to their likely influence on customer satisfaction. This prioritisation can be performed by constructing and administering a customer questionnaire that contains two questions for each requirement. The first asks for a customer's opinion of what is essential for a specific requirement to be considered fulfilled (functional form), whereas the second question asks the customer what it means when the requirement is not fulfilled (dysfunctional form) by a company. The answers to the functional and dysfunctional questions reveal how to classify each requirement into these categories, through the application of the Kano evaluation table, as explained by Matzler and Hinterhuber (1998). Finally, the customer requirement category can be determined by adding the individual categorisations to derive the one with the highest value. With regard to the development or improvement of products or services, businesses can concentrate on requirements that will best satisfy their customer's needs (Berger *et al.*, 1993; Matzler and Hinterhuber, 1998).

This brief summary of the three approaches to service excellence should provide sufficient understanding of their backgrounds and hint at some of the most obvious differences and commonalities. To highlight some more subtle differences, the following analyses begin by differentiating three possible pairings of approaches.

Comparison and evaluation of the models

Johnston's service excellence understanding – EFQM excellence model

Johnston's framework and the EFQM model's approach to ensuring excellence differ conceptually. Whereas Johnston provided a mere definition, then performed additional research to augment the initial study, the EFQM offers a coherent, holistic model. Its focus is much broader, covering every aspect of an organisation. It can apply to both products and services. It contains eight separate fields of excellence, as well as nine areas for evaluation. In contrast, Johnston's framework focuses fully on the customer side. Although it is included in the EFQM approach, Johnston goes into far more detail and concentrates on service excellence. He also determines that to be truly excellent in the service sphere, other functional areas need to strive for excellence too. For example, similar to the EFQM model, Johnston's model stresses the importance of visionary leadership; continuous improvement and learning also appear in both approaches. Finally, coordination, processes, and results are ripe areas for service problems, as highlighted in both Johnston's framework and the EFQM model's concepts of excellence. The explanations expressed in the EFQM model are more detailed though, whereas Johnston only touches on them superficially.

In many areas, these excellence approaches demonstrate commonalities. Conceptually, the models do not contradict each other, but neither do they present the same proposals for obtaining service excellence. Instead, they offer different perspectives and ways to understand the broader concept of excellence, which implies that they can be combined easily. Both models also help explain the underlying rationale of service excellence and fill existing gaps in their respective perspectives. Whereas Johnston provides an overarching definition of service excellence and a specific list of what companies should and should not do to achieve excellence, the EFQM model offers a clearly defined approach to analysing a company's status quo and benchmarking it against competitors or their own performance over time. It thereby dissects an organisation into smaller units, to gain more detailed insights into various business operations. Johnston's main contributions align with the customer results section of the EFQM model, with connections to many other criteria, such as people and processes.

Finally, whereas the EFQM model states that customer value must be created, there is no definition or indication about what that is or what customers are looking for in an excellent company. Johnston's work comes into play at this point, by describing precisely and in detail which issues companies must avoid and what they must consider. He also sets a restriction on excellence that the EFQM model only implicitly includes. That is, a customer does not expect to be delighted or surprised constantly but rather just expects a problem-free, straightforward transaction. Therefore, there is a clear optimum to excellence, and the spiral that would drag down the results fields of the EFQM model can be averted.

Johnston's service excellence understanding – Kano's models of customer satisfaction

Johnston states that the primary objectives of his research are to develop a better understanding of the term "service excellence" and provide marketers and managers

with valuable insights into how it can be delivered. The background for the study is common, but it provides a different perspective. Johnston's research accentuates the essential characteristics of excellent service and draws attention to barriers that may impede its delivery. This basic framework thus provides an improved understanding of service excellence.

Whereas Johnston identifies certain business areas in which the delivery of service excellence may be constrained, he does not offer businesses a comprehensive model for generating service excellence. Using focus group discussions, he identifies various characteristics of excellent service, including keeping the promises made to customers. In Kano's model, those promises are must-be requirements. Their fulfilment is unlikely to leave customers more satisfied, because they already are taken for granted. According to other suggestions regarding how to achieve service excellence, the emphasis should be on fulfilling customer requirements that customers had not expected or demanded prior to the purchase (Ford *et al.*, 2001; Heracleous and Wirtz, 2009; Horwitz and Neville, 1996; Wirtz and Johnston, 2003). This description refers more to the attractive requirements introduced by Kano, not the must-be requirements or promises, as implied by Johnston.

Yet Johnston's characteristics of excellent service still combine with Kano's customer requirement characteristics. As mentioned, delivering the promise constitutes a must-be requirement. Dealing well with problems and queries is another influential factor, which can be attributed to one-dimensional requirements. Although effective complaint management is expected by customers, it can influence both satisfaction and dissatisfaction, through its impact on perceived service quality (Goodwin and Ross, 1992; Rothenberger *et al.*, 2008). Going the extra mile and making the service experience personal in turn can surprise and delight customers. Nevertheless, care must be taken to avoid any inflation of customer requirements, as exemplified by Singapore Airlines. The company tries to delight travellers with personalised services, not by offering cost-expanding additional services (Heracleous and Wirtz, 2010). That is, it offers attractive requirements.

Kano's model enables organisations to identify and measure Johnston's characteristics, as well as include additional customer requirements in a customer questionnaire, facilitated by the formulation of functional and dysfunctional questions. The model offers a viable extension to Johnston's framework, as well as a clearly structured approach to measuring the influence and obtaining a better understanding of the significance of particular product- or service-oriented customer requirements. Furthermore, by adapting Kano's approach, businesses can concentrate on requirements that are most likely to enhance satisfaction or even surprise and delight customers, after having satisfied all the essential requirements (Berman, 2005).

Yet Kano's traditional model does not provide any indications about the degree to which a requirement is likely to influence customer satisfaction. To compute such values, the approach introduced by Berger *et al.* (1993) might identify greater and lesser degrees of customer satisfaction and how they might be expected to increase or decrease, following the implementation of a customer requirement. This approach enhances the applicability of Kano's model by broadening its focus to allow for both qualitative and quantitative analyses.

EFQM excellence model – Kano's model of customer satisfaction

As emphasised by Ruiz-Carrillo and Fernández-Ortiz (2005, p. 32), the EFQM model is based on the assumption that "the satisfaction of customers [...] employees and

a positive impact on society can be achieved by means of political and strategic leadership, [the] right [employee] management, an effective use of the resources available and an adequate definition of the processes, which finally lead to excellence results". The similarity to Kano's model is evident. Despite the EFQM model's organisational focus and shared customer focus with Kano's model, both approaches pertain to ensuring satisfaction and achieving excellence.

The three desired outcomes of the EFQM model can be summarised as customer, employee, and societal satisfaction (Muffatto and Panizzolo, 1995). The applicability and benefits of Kano's approach, with respect to identifying and prioritising customer requirements to enhance satisfaction, were clear from the comparison with Johnston's concept. In relation to the EFQM model, Kano's model can provide a better understanding of how to achieve customer satisfaction, though its application is not limited to customer needs. Because a Kano questionnaire can be designed specifically to include any relevant requirements, it might feature elements valued by employees or members of society. Thus managers gain an effective tool to classify expectations and improve employee satisfaction too (Matzler and Renzl, 2007). Furthermore, the Kano model's clearly laid-out approach facilitates the measurement of requirements and provides a viable addition to the EFQM model. By prioritising requirements according to their likely influence on customer, employee, or societal satisfaction, businesses can concentrate on selected requirements, such as the effective use of available resources.

The combination of models

The objective of the preceding analysis was to identify whether three common models could be used to gain a better understanding of service excellence, by combining and extending their respective definitions and proposed approaches. The contextual similarities and differences across these models are summarised in Table II.

As indicated, they share applicability to services, such that any one of the models should be compatible with the others. They are complementary. Each model and approach adds and contributes valuable information to the concept of service

	Johnston	EFQM	Kano
<i>Width of the approach</i>			
Holistic	×	✓	×
Focused	✓	×	✓
<i>Application of the approach</i>			
Application for products	×	✓	✓
Application for services	✓	✓	✓
Measurement of application	×	✓	✓
<i>Perspective of the approach</i>			
Organisation/internal oriented	✓	✓	×
Customer focused	✓	✓	×
Product oriented (service)	×	×	✓
<i>Service excellence-specific elements of the approach</i>			
Satisfaction focused	(✓)	✓	✓
Surprise focused	(✓)	×	✓
Customer delight focused	✓	×	✓

Notes: ✓, applicable; (✓), partially applicable; ×, non-applicable

Table II.
Evaluation criteria

excellence. Because they provide new, different information, their simultaneous application is viable, useful, and advisable. When a company decides to use one approach, it is likely to discover and deal with only a narrow, excessively specific aspect of service excellence. Instead, it should expand the visible spectrum of information by using all three approaches. However, service excellence is a diverse subject, and even in such cases, only a small, though more detailed, portion of the overall reality can be captured.

The links between the models presented in detail imply that the combination of all three frameworks should produce synergy, in that they can feed information to one another. They offer different perspectives, depending on whether they serve analysis or implementation purposes. The individual models were created with both uses in mind, so both are possible and should be employed alternately, as is stressed in the overarching, guiding principle of the EFQM model: “innovation and learning” (Ruiz-Carrillo and Fernández-Ortiz, 2005).

For benchmarking, Kano’s model provides detailed instructions for measuring customer satisfaction and customer delight and thus provides some insight into how delight can be achieved. Yet it fails as an independent service excellence model on its own. Following its author’s perception of service excellence, the model is product or service driven, not capability centred. Nevertheless, it provides a useful addition and complements the other two service excellence models. For example, data derived from Kano’s model could be used as input for Johnston’s definition, as well as for the EFQM model. In the EFQM model, this information would be helpful particularly in the field of customer results. Considering Johnston’s analysis, the figures also provide valuable information; for any service that is supposedly excellent, Johnston notes that the customer should feel that the promise has been delivered and that the company has gone the extra mile. Using Kano’s language, the must-be criteria need to be fulfilled for the former and the attractive requirements for the latter. As described in detail, Johnston offers insights into service excellence in the fields of processes, customer results, and people results. Although the EFQM already contains questions in these categories, Johnston adds further criteria, which are tailored more specifically to the goal of service excellence.

In an implementation phase, the process should start with the EFQM model. Ideally, a company would assess its situation and employ the described process with the three models. In this case, the focus should be on models that scored worst and for which the greatest need for improvement has been identified. Otherwise, the focus should be more or less distributed according to the percentages given in the EFQM model – that is, the most resources should be devoted to customer results and key results. Because the other two models also have a clear focus in this area, this decision is easy. In contrast with the EFQM approach though, Johnston places more emphasis on the culture of the company, which appears in the leadership field, and the firm’s employees, who are allocated to the people results criterion. Because Johnston’s definition of service excellence fits the overarching goal of this analysis, an appreciation of the relative importance of those sections is appropriate. For Johnston, implementation methods do not play an important role, yet he offers plenty of advice about the processes, attitudes, and means that firms must have in place to offer excellent service. This concrete advice pertains to the four EFQM criteria: leadership, processes, products and services, customer results, and people results. Finally, Kano again offers the most specific and applicable of the approaches under discussion. After delivering current figures to be processed during benchmarking, the model describes a precise

and detailed procedure to design and innovate processes for new, excellent services. Designers planning a new service or who have identified a service that is not yet excellent and needs to be improved will find all the ingredients they need. However, they still need to question customers, to determine which ingredients can be categorised as must-be, attractive, or another type of Kano's requirements.

Overall, the described approaches to benchmarking and implementation offer various advantages, requiring only minor increases in effort and resources, due to the synergies they generate. The definition of service excellence, building on Johnston's work, becomes even more precise with the addition of the other two approaches. Some approaches also make it easier to measure and evaluate the claims of the others. Finally, the variety of perspectives offered by the individual modes enables management to obtain an image of the company that more closely resembles reality. Nevertheless, more research is necessary to make it easier and more straightforward for firms to strive for excellence.

Implications and further research

In the modern economic environment, it is of vital importance for firms to differentiate themselves from their global competitors by providing excellent service to customers. Therefore, the framework developed by Johnston, the model by Kano, and the EFQM approach – representative business excellence models based on national quality awards – have been compared and contrasted in this paper, with a clear focus on how to ensure service excellence. This analysis offers new insights into service excellence and an innovative approach to the use of the three most important and best established models. Furthermore, it demonstrates the synergy effects of these models.

This paper analysed the holistic EFQM model, which focuses on several partly opposing forms of excellence. Its repositioning involved the addition of other frameworks, which concentrate more on emotions. Whereas the EFQM originally took a rational perspective, Johnston and Kano add feelings, excitement, and passion to the consideration. These models expand the rational worldview by adding constructs that entered into economic thinking only recently, such as employee delight, customer delight, and surprise.

In this context, it is vital to recognise that service quality leaders must change their marketing focus, from the management and measurement of only customer satisfaction to a consideration of all indicators of customer delight. This shift may appear simple at first, but it constitutes a real challenge for most service companies, because they need to implement a new philosophy and new approaches. Customer delight cannot be understood merely as a higher level of satisfaction; the construct contains additional emotional dimensions that do not appear in most customer satisfaction measurement approaches. Furthermore, service companies should look for special measures that will enable them to stimulate feelings of delight, as perceived by the customer. Businesses should recognise that personal service experiences are often better suited to create surprising and delighting service experiences for their customers than are standard processes (Heracleous and Wirtz, 2010). They therefore need new human resource instruments to support employee delight, because delighted employees better stimulate customer delight (Rust *et al.*, 1996). Emotions in service encounters, particularly with a focus on excellence, demand considerable additional research.

It also should be noted that the importance of surprise and emotions is not constant across industries. These issues are important in many industries to achieve true

service excellence, but in the convenience or consumer goods sector, for example, they encompass a much lower level of significance. Consider the different service excellence elements identified by Johnston; some include a greater emotional component than others. This issue also presents interesting research opportunities. Comparative studies could address the management of service excellence in distinct sectors to refine excellence models or else apply knowledge and processes that have proven beneficial in one industry in another setting.

Finally, this study has provided additional insights into the construct of service excellence and the relationships of existing models and frameworks, but the findings still include a call for a new, focused model that represents service excellence as a management system and also is implementable, as depicted in Figure 4. This call does not imply that existing excellence concepts, some of which were described herein, should be replaced. Their individual merits and benefits persist (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2010) and should be consulted for their intended purposes and to inform businesses with a particular need. However, to fully grasp the concepts of service excellence and customer delight, the gaps among the models need to be addressed.

The comparative analysis in this paper should help firms that seek service excellence, but when it comes to the simultaneous use of the three approaches, a unified model is needed more than ever. Furthermore, the connection of service excellence to not only customer delight but also customer satisfaction needs to be investigated further. Organisations cannot delight every customer at each touch point. The goals of delight and satisfaction thus should be pursued simultaneously to maximise customer loyalty.

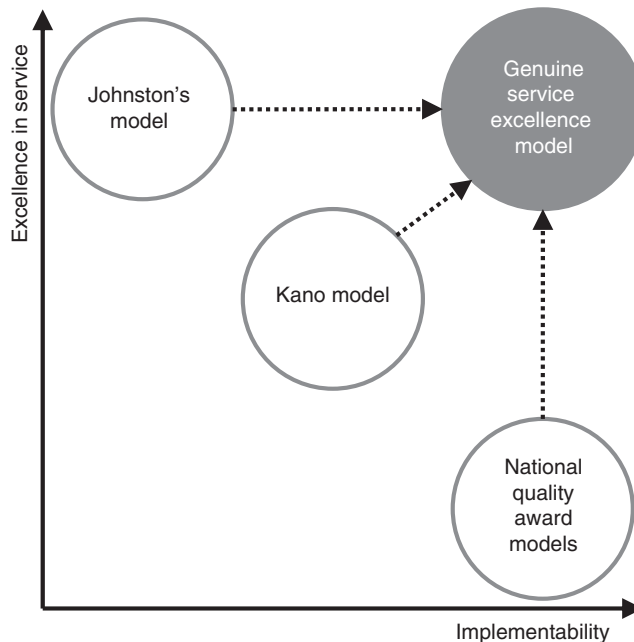


Figure 4.
Positioning of existing
service excellence models
and the need for a more
comprehensive one

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