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# Wkład filozofii Henri Bergsona w rozwój teorii i praktyki zarządzania jakością w sektorze usług

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# Potential contribution of Henri Bergson's philosophy to the theory and practice of service quality management

*The article attempts to draw the attention of those academics and practitioners, who in their work are preoccupied with the subject of service quality management and measurement, to the potential contribution of Henri Bergson's philosophy to the theory and practice in the field. Firstly, the article examines theoretical deve-lopments within the discipline of service quality measurement and points at the are-as of controversy found in the existing publications. Then, it proposes that a greater appreciation of philosophy, in particular the writings of Henri Bergson, can help address the apparent inconsistencies and gaps observed in the literature. Finally, the article discusses potential implications of Bergson's philosophy for the measu-rement of service quality in contemporary organisations.*

## Introduction

Over the last two decades, the area of service quality has received a lot of attention from both academics and practitioners (e.g. Brown and Swartz, 1989; Burton *et al.*, 2001; Dabholkar *et al.*, 2000; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Robinson, 1999; Roest and Pieters, 1997; Sureshchandar *et al.*, 2002; Ranaweera and Neely, 2003). As a result, a number of models have been developed with the intention to support organisations in their efforts to manage and measure the quality of services delivered (Cronin and Tay-lor, 1992; Kuei and Lu, 1997; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Burton *et al.*, 2001; Svensson, 2002). The existing service quality measurement models have been applied in different industry settings, and it is possible to point at both those publications which report on success as well as failure of service quality management initiatives undertaken by contemporary organisations (e.g. Carman, 1990; Gagliano and Hathcote, 1994; Ket-tinger and Lee, 1994; Kettinger *et al.*, 1995; Sureshchandar *et al.*, 2002).

While acknowledging the value of the theoretical developments that have so far taken place within the field of service quality management and measurement, this arti-

cle will propose that there is a need for a greater appreciation of philosophy, and for directing attention towards the ontological and epistemological issues pertaining to the field, in order to address the apparent inconsistencies and gaps that can be observed in the literature on service quality. In particular, an argument will be put forward that a careful reading of Henri Bergson's writings (1911, 1944, 1960) can be a source of inspiration and benefit for those academics and practitioners, who would wish to achieve a more profound understanding of the definitional problems surrounding the concept of service quality as well as the issued relating to its measurement.

To this end, the article is structured as follows. It begins with an attempt to outline, through a brief literature survey of the field, the areas of controversy identified in the publications on service quality, which altogether provide support for the author's contention that, intellectually, the foundations of service quality management and measurement are not very profound. From here, the discussion of the origins of the domain will proceed with the purpose of tracing the philosophical underpinnings of the quality movement, found in Shewhart's (1931, 1939) writings on the theory of quality control. Having ascertained the two major philosophical currents that influenced Shewhart's work, namely the process philosophy and the philosophy of pragmatism, this article will present the essential arguments put forward by the two philosophical traditions. Further on, the focus will be on certain aspects of the ideas developed by the French philosopher Henri Bergson, whose theoretical orientation tends to be described as both processual and pragmatist (c.f. Pilkington, 1976; Kołakowski, 1985; Gale, 1968; Russell, 1945). Moreover, the potential relevance of Bergson's philosophy for addressing the gaps and inconsistencies in the theory of service quality and its measurement will be discussed.

## Inconsistencies and gaps in service quality literature

As mentioned before, the area of service quality has been researched for over two decades, and a number of models have been developed in order to capture the meaning of the service quality concept and measure the levels of quality delivered by service organisations. However, serious inconsistencies within the theoretical developments to date still exist. Through a brief literature survey of the field, the following areas of controversy existing within the service quality literature: the definition and content of the concept of service quality, contextualisation of service quality within the quality management movement, purpose of measuring service quality, and critique of the existing service quality measurement models, are going to be discussed.

### Definition of Service Quality

In spite of the commonly shared view that the development of research into the field of service quality is of high significance for both practitioners and academics, no agreement has been reached as to the exact meaning of the concept of service

quality. According to some authors, quality is metaphysical or transcendental and defies definition (Oliver 1997), and it exists at a level not accessible to human understanding and measurement. Others, e.g. Reeves and Bednar (1994), argue that there is neither an accepted nor a best definition of quality for every situation. Definitions relating to meeting customer expectations, as well as those focusing on excellence, conformance to specifications, fitness for use, and loss avoidance have all been criticised in the service quality literature (e.g. Albrecht, 1992; Asubonteng *et al.*, 1996; Bennington and Cummane, 1998).

In the view of Hernon and Nitecki (2001), fundamental to service quality is the belief that an organisation exists to service its customers. Their argument reinforces that of Kordupleski *et al.* (1993), who find the customer perspective to be crucial for the understanding of the concept of service quality, and thus distinguish between customer-perceived quality, termed 'true' quality, and business process quality, referred to as 'internal' quality. Similarly, Svensson (2001) emphasises the importance of customer evaluations, which, he argues, are highly subjective. However, Swartz and Brown (1989) draw a distinction between the objective and subjective dimension of service quality, and contend that the 'what' aspect of the service, referred to in literature as outcome quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), technical quality (Grönroos, 1990), and physical quality (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982), is the more objective dimension of the quality of a given service, whereas the 'how' of the delivery, also known as process quality (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985), functional quality (Grönroos, 1990), and interactive quality (Lehtinen and Lehtinen, 1982) is highly subjective in its nature.

This brief overview of the definitional problems regarding the quality of service suggests that the very meaning of the concept has not yet been fully captured by the literature of the field and, notwithstanding the research done over the last two decades, there is a need for a greater degree of clarity as to whether and how service quality should be defined. Moreover, despite numerous attempts to formulate an acceptable definition of the concept of service quality, the publications in the area show little evidence of preoccupation with any ontological and epistemological issues pertinent to the understanding of the concept. One of the arguments of this article is that, in order to comprehend the nature of any phenomenon, including that of service quality, it is necessary to demonstrate awareness of the ontological perspective from which the phenomenon in question is to be defined and analysed.

## Service Quality in the Context of the Quality Management Movement

Similarly to problems with defining the quality of service, research in quality management has been unable to arrive at a single definition of quality of a manufactured product (Sousa and Voss, 2002). Both product quality and service quality are regarded as multi-dimensional concepts. However, despite the similarities and the common origins of the two concepts, research into service quality has evolved in separation from product quality and the overall quality management movement and,

as Sousa and Voss (2002) notice, the service literature has a strong focus on consumer perceptions and marketing. This view reinforces the contention of Harvey (1998), that converse of product quality, service quality has been studied more intensely by researchers in marketing than in operations. The fact that those two areas have developed to a certain extent in isolation from one another seems to be in conflict with the works of the quality movement 'gurus', especially W.E Deming, who argued that *'the principles and methods for improvement are the same for service as for manufacturing'* (1990:183). In the context of the above, it seems that the relationship between service quality and product quality as well as the contextualisation of the area of service quality within the wider field of quality management deserves a greater attention from the academics preoccupied with the theorisation of the discipline. The author of this article believes that, once the understanding of the phenomenon of quality has been achieved on a certain level of abstraction, and it has been agreed with which view on the nature of the world and the character of knowledge the exploration of this concept is commensurate, the argument concerning the seeming separation of the area of service quality from that of product quality management will cease its relevance.

### Purpose of Measuring Service Quality

The purpose of measuring service quality is another subject of debate within the literature of the topic. According to Parasuraman *et al.* (1994), the most important feature of a measurement instrument is its diagnostic ability, since it allows for identifying scientific reasons for shortfalls in quality. At the same time, Cronin and Taylor (1992) place a great emphasis on the predictive validity of a measurement instrument. Jensen and Markland (1996) argue that in order to provide valuable management information, a service quality measurement tool must satisfy four main requirements, which they describe as: the ability to provide longitudinal measures of service quality, to track multiple related variables, to provide a measure of overall satisfaction, and to focus attention on non-systemic service delivery problems. In addition to the views expressed by the above authors, Svensson (2001) suggests that that the purpose of a service quality measurement instrument should be an identification of the direction of change in the level of service quality delivered by a given organisation.

In short, an overview of the literature addressing the purposes of service quality measurement allows to observe a paradox within the current thinking about the topic. Although the majority of authors favour the view that the measurement of service quality should help organisations realise the direction of change within the levels of quality delivered, which, in turn, would enable prediction or at least extrapolation of what is likely to happen in the future, it is the view of Parasuraman *et al.* (1994), who see diagnosis as the main objective of measurement, that has dominated the

way in which research into service quality has been conducted over the last two de-
cades. It is worth noting that the service quality measurement methodology, initially
proposed by Parasuraman et al. (1988), and subsequently modified and applied by
many researchers (e.g. Carman, 1990; Gagliano and Hathcote, 1994; Kettinger and
Lee, 1994; Kettinger et al., 1995; Mc Dougall and Levesque, 1994; Sureshchandar
et al., 2002) takes a static approach to the measurement of service quality, while the
common feature of the arguments put forward by Svensson (2001), Jensen and Mar-
kland (1996) and Cronin and Taylor (1992) is their focus on the dynamic aspect of
measurement. Both alternatives, i.e. static (diagnosis) vs. dynamic (prediction) can be
identified with two opposing sets of ontological assumptions, and with a philosophical
debate whose roots can be traced back to the pre-Socratics and arguments that were
articulated in Western culture ca. 2500 years ago. Thus, the author of this article pro-
poses that, before answering the question of why service quality should be measured,
the ontological issues underpinning this problem require a careful consideration.

## Critique of the Existing Service Quality Measurement Models

In addition to the lack of agreement among the researchers within the area of se-
rvice quality regarding the exact meaning and content of the service quality concept,
as well as the purpose of measuring service quality, the measurement models deve-
loped and applied to date have been subjected to a number of theoretical and opera-
tional criticisms. The most widely recognised service quality measurement models
are SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, each belonging, respectively, to one of the two
dominant, yet conflicting, paradigms: the disconfirmation and the perception para-
digm. As far as SERVQUAL is concerned, Parasuraman et al. (1988), who develo-
ped the framework, argued that the basis for measuring service quality is the gap
between performance and expectations. However, according to Cronin and Taylor
(1994), SERVQUAL is paradigmatically flawed because of its adoption of the di-
sconfirmation model despite the fact that perceived quality is best conceptualised as
an attitude, and as such requires an application of the adequacy-importance model of
attitude measurement rather than the disconfirmation model. Further, in the view of
Andersson (1992), SERVQUAL fails to draw on previous social science research,
particularly economic theory, statistics, and psychological theory, and was con-
structed without its authors following the principle of scientific continuity and de-
duction. Moreover, a subject of controversy found in literature relating to
SERVQUAL is the utility of incorporating expectations into the conceptualisation
and operationalisation of service quality, since, according to Teas (1993), the me-
aning of expectations tends to be ambiguous.

Other critiques of the existing service quality measurement models point out
that the frameworks are static (Svensson, 2001), they seem to focus on the process
of delivery and not the outcome of the service (Buttle, 1996; Genestre and Herbig,
1996), there is a lack of clarity about the number of dimensions on which the measu-
rement is based (Peter et al., 1993; Sprengh and Sigh, 1993), and the application of

both SERVQUAL and SERVPERF involves a number of practical difficulties (Babakus and Mangold, 1992; Oppewal and Vriens, 2000). Overall, the current state of the literature on service quality measurement can be described as *'little consensus of opinion and much disagreement over a number of conceptual and operational issues'* (Robinson 1999: 21).

In the context of the above critiques, it seems recommendable for researchers in service quality to work towards the development of such frameworks for service quality measurement, which would overcome the shortcomings of SEVQUAL and SERVPERF and offer an alternative view on measuring service quality compared to the existing ones. Additionally, from the point of view of this article, of particular significance is the development of an approach founded on a strong intellectual base, including the clarification of the worldview from which service quality is investigated, and maintaining an ontological consistency with regards to the nature of the concept of quality, the purpose of service quality measurement, and finally the measurement methodology itself.

### Summary of the service quality measurement literature

A number of conclusions can be drawn out of the above overview of the literature on service quality. First of all, despite its importance and the amount of attention that both academics and practitioners have given to the area, service quality and its measurement cannot be treated as a discipline of which most is already known. In particular, there seems to be a need for research aiming at establishing solid theoretical foundations of the field, including a consideration of ontological and epistemological issues. Both the more abstract definitional concerns as well as the methodological and operational problems relating to service quality measurement should be addressed.

Through pointing out at the incoherencies and gaps found in the service quality literature, it has been demonstrated that a lot of academic work still needs to be carried out before the problems surrounding service quality and its measurement can be resolved. In the following parts of this article, the philosophical underpinnings of the area of quality management are going to be discussed. Subsequently, the implications of these considerations, with a particular emphasis on the potential contribution of Henri Bergson, for the measurement of service quality in contemporary organisations will be presented.

### Philosophy behind quality management

As a result of discontent with the lack of literature discussing the ontological and epistemological foundations of the existing service quality measurement frameworks, the author has decided to carry out an investigation of the philosophical assumptions on which the quality movement has been premised. This required taking a retrospective view at the history and evolution of quality management.

Garvin (1988) points out that, as a concept, quality has been around for millennia, although it only recently emerged as a formal management function and as such, the discipline is still evolving. The origins of the industrial preoccupation with quality can be traced back to the inspection activities performed in manufacturing companies in 19th century (Hounshell, 1984). As the American system of manufacturing matured, inspection gained an ever greater importance and in the early 1900s it was given legitimacy by Frederick W. Taylor, who singled it out as an assigned task for one of the eight functional bosses (foremen) required for effective shop management. As Taylor (1919) himself explained:

> 'The inspector is responsible for the quality of the work, and both the workmen and the speed bosses (who see that the proper cutting tools are used, that the work is properly driven, and that cuts are started in the right part of the piece) must see that the work is finished to suit him. This man can, of course, do his work best if he is the master of the art of finishing work both well and quickly'.

A more formal link between inspection and quality control was marked by the publication of Radford's (1922) book 'The Control of Quality in Manufacturing', which, for the first time, viewed quality as a management responsibility and an independent function. However, in Radford's view, quality was limited to inspection and to some narrow activities such as counting, grading, and repair.

A scientific approach to the quality movement was first taken by W.A. Shewhart, who in 1931 published his book 'Economic Control of Quality of Manufactured Product'. As Garvin (1988) acknowledges, much of modern quality control can be traced to that single volume, in which its author, who was part of a larger group at Bell Telephone Laboratories that was investigating problems of quality, gave a precise and measurable definition of manufacturing control, developed different techniques for monitoring and evaluating day-to-day production, and suggested a variety of ways of improving quality. Moreover, Shewhart was the first to recognise that variability was a fact of industrial life and that this required a rethinking of the problem of quality. While Shewhart was certain that variation will continue at some level at all processes, he sought to find an answer to the problem of how to distinguish between acceptable and undesirable levels of variation. His analysis started from the formulation of the concept of statistical control:

> 'A phenomenon will be said to be controlled when, through the use of past experience, we can predict, at least within limits, how the phenomenon may be expected to vary in the future. Here it is understood that prediction means that we can state, at least approximately, the probability that the observed phenomenon will fall within the given limits' (Shewhart, 1931:5).

Based on his concept of statistical control, Shewhart developed the process control chart – arguably one of the most powerful tools used by today's quality professionals (Grant and Leavenworth, 1980). However, although Shewhart is rightly recognised as the founder of the modern quality movement (Deming, 1990), his

contribution to philosophy of science is rarely acknowledged. In spite of the fact that his work provides a comprehensive theory for the notion of continuous improvement, his ideas have not been widely recognised by the contemporary writers on management and the history of management (Wren, 1994).

In his works, Shewhart was greatly influenced by the contemporary debates in the philosophy of science, in general, and by the pragmatist philosopher Clarence I. Lewis, in particular (Blankenship and Petersen, 1998). According to Dukich (2002), Shewhart was influenced by Alfred N. Whitehead, especially by his 1928 book 'Process and Reality'. At the same time, a philosopher whose ideas had an impact on Whitehead's work was Henri Bergson, who provided an illuminating perspective on the metaphysics of flux (Linstead, 2002), making a link between the pre-Socratic Greek philosophers, particularly Heraclites, and the contemporary philosophical debate on the nature of the world.

The fact that Shewhart is recognised as the 'father' of the quality movement on the one hand, and that he read widely and was influenced by many philosophers, as documented in the bibliography of his 1931 and 1939 books, on the other, poses the question about the philosophical underpinnings of the developments he made. As the core of his work, Shewhart had taken statistical and probability theory, whilst reinforcing his ideas with literature from the philosophy of science. At the same time, he was also adopting a polemic position against what he called 'exact science' – which were to be replaced by a statistical, variable or probable science (Shewhart, 1939: 2–7). Of particular importance in the context of this article is, in the first place, the ontological perspective, which led Shewhart to develop his epistemological device, namely, the process control chart, as well as the wider implications of this epistemological stance for contemporary quality management, and service quality measurement, in particular.

In a recent article, Wilcox and Sliwa (2003) point at two major philosophical currents underlying Shewhart's contribution to the development of the quality management movement. The first of them is the processual philosophy, while the latter stems from the philosophy of pragmatism. In the following parts of this article, the main assumptions pertinent to the understanding of these two philosophical traditions are going to be introduced, with an emphasis on the importance of Henri Bergson's philosophy as classified within both the processual and pragmatic perspectives (c.f. Pilkington, 1976; Kołakowski, 1985; Gale, 1968; Russell, 1945). Subsequently, the article will present certain aspects of the philosophical thought developed by Henri Bergson, which are of particular relevance as having potential implications for service quality management and measurement.

### Processual view of the world

The philosophy of process is a venture within metaphysics, the general theory of reality, which is concerned with what exists in the world and with the terms of reference in which this reality is to be understood and explained. According to the pro-

cessual view of the world, the pervasive and predominant feature of the real is change of every type – be it physical, organic, or psychological. Processists view natural existence as consisting in and best understood in terms of *processes* rather than *things* – of modes of change rather than fixed stabilities. Process philosophy pivots on the thesis that the processual nature of existence is a fundamental fact with which any adequate metaphysic must come to terms, and it opposes the view that denies processes or downgrades them in the order of being or of understanding by subordinating them to substantial things (Stanford Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, 2003). One of the oldest articulations of the process view of reality stemming from the Western philosophical tradition can be found in the following quote from the ancient Greek philosopher Heraclites, commonly recognised as the founder of the process approach, who around 500 B.C. wrote that:

> 'Everything flows and nothing abides; everything gives way and nothing stays fixed. You cannot step twice into the same river, for other waters and yet others, go flowing on. Time is a child, moving counters in a game; the royal power is a child's' (Kirk, 1954: Fr.214).

A careful reading of Shewhart's works allows to identify the impact of the processual ontology on the development of Shewhart's theory of quality management and his approach to measuring quality of manufactured product. As a consequence, an insight into process philosophy is central to the understanding of the nature of the concept of quality as postulated in this article.

If the understanding of the phenomenon of quality, including both the quality of tangible products as well as services, is to be gained using the lens of the processual view of the world, then the concept will need to be seen as dynamic, and the emphasis of measurement will be placed upon the change and its direction rather than the precision of measurement results at any particular point in time. As will be demonstrated later, reaching for Bergson's works allows to clarify why a dynamic picture of a phenomenon provides a more accurate insight into it and illuminates its understanding to a greater extent than a static one does.

## Philosophy of pragmatism

In the context of discussing the principles underlying the philosophy of pragmatism, the ideas of two figures are particularly worth mentioning, namely William James and Clarence Irving Lewis. James was one of the founders of the pragmatist movement and his central work, 'Pragmatism', was published in 1907 and included an explanation of this philosophical stance. He was also under a strong impression and influence of the writings of Henri Bergson, with whom he used to exchange correspondence (c.f. James, 1920; Perry, 1935). C.I. Lewis, on the other hand, was a pragmatist philosopher contemporary to Shewhart and he had a great impact on his thinking, as documented in the references Shewhart makes in his own writings.

James stood on the side of radical empiricism. To him, experience was neither mental nor physical. In his view, the distinction between 'thoughts' and 'things', like the distinction between 'the knower' and 'the known', was to be analysed wholly in terms of the different relations in which the elements of experience stand to one another. Just as the same geometrical point can lie at the junction of two intersecting lines, so the same item of experience can be a member of two different groups of experience, one of which constitutes a physical object and the other a mind.

Similarly to James, C.I. Lewis assigns a high degree of importance to experience and perception. The main thesis of Lewis's most influential book 'Mind and the World Order' (1929), which shows a great continuity with the ideas of William James, results from the conformity of what is sensorily given with concepts which are fashioned a priori. Lewis admits no distinction between things as they appear to us and things as they are in themselves. He conceives of the distinction between appearance and reality as falling wholly within experience. Moreover, as a pragmatist, Lewis regards all empirical properties as subjective in the sense that 'Any property of an object is something determined through experience, and in that sense definable in terms of the experience, which would sufficiently assure it'. (Lewis, 1946: 458)

The importance of the above arguments, put forward by the two central figures within the pragmatist movement, for the theory of service quality and its measurement, can be explained as follows. Firstly, it needs to be understood that an 'objective', i.e. abstract and unrelated measure of service quality, cannot be obtained. The measurement and analysis of the levels of service quality delivered make sense only when discussed in the context of its meaning for those who experience them. Similarly, all measures of quality are subjective and will be determined and validated by the perception of the 'knower' or 'observer'. Thus, viewing quality from the pragmatist perspective precludes the search for 'ideal' or 'objectively measured' quality 'in itself'.

## Philosophy of Henri Bergson

As mentioned before, reaching for ideas from philosophy allows to shed a new light on a variety of issues encountered by academics preoccupied with the management of contemporary organisations. In particular, it has been suggested here that conceiving the concept of service quality from the point of view of processual philosophy and philosophy of pragmatism helps illuminate the topic of the measurement of service quality. In this context, a crucial figure is that of Henri Bergson, whose philosophy has been classified as falling within both the processist and pragmatist traditions (c.f. Kołakowski, 1985; Pilkington, 1976; Gale, 1968; Russell, 1945).

In a recent article, Ruse (2002) observes a renewed interest in the philosophy of Henri Bergson, including his relevance to current work in biophilosophy, philosophy of mind and epistemology; and he contends that Bergson's philosophy reveals a possible way of clarifying the relation between our intellectual understanding of the world (secondary reality) and the world of immediate experience (primary reality).

Similarly, Lorand (1999) states that while Bergson's philosophy was almost entirely forgotten soon after his death in 1941, partly because of the French philosopher's poetic style and inclination towards intuitive knowledge, there is currently a revived interest in Bergson's ideas, mainly in his theory of time. In the context of this revived interest in the writings of Henri Bergson, it seems justified to examine the implications of his philosophy for the management of contemporary organisations, specifically the measurement of service quality.

Jones (2002) points out that Bergson's philosophical project was to step outside the competing schools of idealism and materialism, and to arrive at an intuitive understanding of the nature of unified reality. For this article, of major significance are Bergson's ideas regarding the nature of time, the meaning of psychological duration, and the understanding of the limitations of conventional science.

In 'Time and Free Will' (1960) Bergson analyses the workings of the intellect and explains that forms of the understanding borrowed from our interaction with inert matter lead to irreconcilable dichotomies when applied to our experienced consciousness. These forms of understanding rely upon relations of externality, which fundamentally are involved in the concepts of number and space. This relation originates in the need for action, language and social life. Although we use these forms to better understand ourselves, we unintentionally construct a superficial self in the process. An example of Bergson's discontent with the application of the concepts of number and space to the analysis of reality in time is given in the following fragment of one of his letters to William James:

> 'I had (been)... wholly imbued with mechanistic theories... it was the analysis of the notion of time, as that enters into mechanics and physics, which overturned all my ideas. I saw, to my great astonishment, that scientific time does not endure... that positive science consists essentially in the elimination of duration. This was the point of departure of a series of reflections which brought me, by gradual steps, to reject almost all of what I had hitherto accepted and to change my point of view completely' (Bergson in a letter to William James, in Perry, 1935, Vol. 2, p. 632).

In order to understand the reasons behind Bergson's disappointment with the scientific approach to time, it is necessary to realise that to him, time was fundamentally different from how we normally conceive it. In Bergson's view, the nature of time is in that it is flowing, while the intellect represents time as composed of juxtaposed immobile instances. Through the actions of the intellect, a given phenomenon becomes organised as its natural flow is subjected to segmentation. The intellect attempts to 'fix' the flux of experience, in order to achieve its objectification, through a number of formal fabrications, which include the calendar and the clock time.

In 'Creative Evolution' (1944), Bergson argues that consciousness is similar to a cinematograph, in that it presents the world as a succession of states. The states are cut out of the duration of what is perceived, and they are abstractions from the flow of events in the world. The following citation illustrates Bergson's contention regarding inherent flaws rooted in the intellectual cognition:

'Instead of attaching ourselves to the inner becoming of things, we place ourselves outside them in order to recompose their becoming artificially. We take snapshots, as it were, of the passing reality, and, as these are characteristics of the reality, we have only to string them on a becoming, abstract, uniform and invisible, situated at the back of the apparatus of knowledge, in order to imitate what there is that is characteristic in this becoming itself. Perception, intellection, language so proceed in general. Whatever we would think becoming, or express it, or even perceive it, we hardly do anything else than set going a kind of cinematograph inside us. We may therefore sum up what we have been saying in the conclusion that the mechanism of our ordinary knowledge is of cinematographical kind' (Bergson,1911 in Gale,1968:399).

As Niemeyer (2003) explains, this way of representing world as a succession of states provides the basis perceptions, memories, words, logic, science and the bulk of Western consciousness, which demonstrates that the cinematograph system works well for conceiving and executing plans. In doing so, human intellect fulfils its pragmatic function; both in everyday life and in scientific investigation, it is essentially a practical organ of 'life': it is not interested in reality as it truly is but only in its potential utility from the point of view of human biological needs (Kołakowski 1985). The mechanistic approach to time involves a mere counting of points along a scale as opposed to appreciating experiential duration. As a consequence of this perspective, science becomes a means of practical simplification, serving the purpose of fulfilling practical needs. To Bergson, epistemology of science is pragmatic, in that it focuses on what is useful and valuable to human pursuits, and it is characterised by an abstract constant point of view, wherein 'reality' is grasped in terms of conventional scientific terminology. Bergson stresses that he does not want to deny the competence of intelligence and of the science which is its product. While assigning to science a competence, which is already possessed anyway, he also states that it cannot be claimed to give an adequate account of reality in all its aspects (Pilkington 1976). At the same time, Bergson points out that the temporal and functional fragmentation of continuous reality into states imposes on our consciousness certain significant limitations. Although the structure of human experience is made out of temporalising and spatialising tendencies, that are not available separately but are functionally interdependent, a consciousness of states fails to perceive the duration of a given phenomenon. In order to overcome this limitation, it is necessary to modify our thinking and perception to focus on the flow of time.

The above contention takes the examination of Bergson's theory of time to the next stage, namely the discussion of the nature of duration, and the difference between the temporalised and spatialised perception.

As mentioned before, for Bergson, *time is real*, and, as such, it is irreducible, effective, and relevant to the true understanding of reality. In 'Matter and Memory' (1911), Bergson overcomes the tension between idealism and realism by uncovering a common assumption held by each school, i.e. the assertion that perception is built up out of sensations. According to Bergson's argument, sensation is the measure of

the real action upon the world. Further, Bergson suggests that perception must be understood from a temporal perspective in terms of how it is entirely bound up with action. To him, perception represents the mind's tendency to organise data according to 'spatialised time'. This specific sense of time underlies both objective and causal descriptions, and, for an event to be described in terms of either a property or as the effect of a cause, it needs to be extracted from its own becoming. Borradori (2001) explains that such an extraction 'freezes' the event in a state, where the changing character of time is ontologically deactivated. Duration, on the other hand, constitutes the purely qualitative sequence of states of consciousness, which are irreducible and thus render time a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous medium. In contrast to the spatialised time, duration can be neither quantified or analysed as an infinity of instants with no length. Bergson proposes that an alternative to the mechanistic approach to time, is to take psychological time (*durée*) seriously, in an attempt to comprehend process, change, activity and evolution as experienced by a conscious being, i.e. an individual. As Letiche (2000) explains, perception is direct, and perspectivism or symbolic process(es) of representation do not intervene between the observer and the observed. *Durée* needs to be understood as the principle of the whole, a principle that is qualitative rather than quantitative. Durational perception (intuition) is seen by Bergson as the reliable channel for comprehending the true nature of things, whereas spatial (geometrical) thinking is only given pragmatic values.

The above distinction between a 'spatialised' or mechanistic, approach to time on the one hand and a qualitative or experiential one on the other may, at first sight, suggest that the two perspectives are incommensurable. However, as Letiche (2000) points out, while traditional epistemology was developed around a series of antinomies, such as unity versus plurality, subject versus object, or logic versus perception; adopting a position such as Bergson's, which defends the radical plurality of knowledge, is an alternative to the conventional view. For Bergson, there was no unity of the science but a plurality of valid cognitive models. Similarly to other arguments pertinent to Henri Bergson's philosophy, the postulate regarding the plurality of perspectives will also have its implications for the measurement of service quality.

## Implications for service quality measurement

A number of implications for the measurement of quality in service organisations can be drawn from the above account of Bergson's ideas. Firstly, Bergson's postulate that time is real, and that the appreciation of the flow of events is essential for the understanding of the nature of reality, translated into the field of service quality measurement means that in their effort to monitor and measure the quality of services provided, organisations should not ignore the temporal aspect of service and its quality. Therefore, whichever aspects of quality are monitored, the measurements should be recorded chronologically in the order of their occurrence. In practical terms, that

would mean avoiding those approaches to quality measurement which propose the analysis of data obtained from measurement using such techniques as normal distribution or percentages. This is because these approaches disregard time and flow, and as such are not appropriate when the ontological perspective adopted for the understanding of the phenomenon under study is that proposed by the process philosophy. In particular, some of the instruments commonly applied to service quality measurement, for example SERVQUAL and SERVPERF, should be treated with caution, as they are constructed based on a static view of the concept of quality, and therefore are of little use when the purpose of quality measurement is to observe the dynamics and the direction of change with regards to the levels of service quality delivered.

Having rejected those approaches to service quality measurement, which ignore the temporal aspect of reality, the next step in making the Bergsonian way of thinking applicable to contemporary organisations wishing to measure the quality of services they deliver is to choose those techniques that allow for the temporal sequence of events to be recorded. Despite Bergson's assertion that 'duration' represents the more authentic temporality than 'spatialised time', for practical reasons, there is a need to measure time, and to be able to present the results of this measurement quantitatively. Borradori (2001) suggests that for such a measuring to be possible, it is necessary to ontologically deactivate the passing (durational) character of time, and spatialise it. Similarly, in spite of Bergson's disappointment with the scientific, rational approach to time, Lorand (1999) gives an example of how useful the intellect is in helping to understand the natural flow of a phenomenon. In her view, motion pictures, which are one of Bergson's favourite examples, do not only illustrate how motion is broken into motionless, separate frames, but also how those motionless objects turn into a flowing, durational succession. Thus, the flow of the 'living', moving pictures simulates the natural flow of events, and it is demonstrated that not only can the intellect fracture vital orders, but that the intuition can move from geometric order toward vital order.

Within the field of quality measurement, an example of a relevant tool, which allows for the quantitative recording of the temporal aspect of a given phenomenon, is the process control chart, first developed by Dr. W. A. Shewhart in 1931, who, as mentioned before, remained under the influence of the writings of process philosophers and pragmatists alike. As a quality measurement device, the control chart has for over seventy years been applied to the measurement of quality of manufactured products. However, it has only to a limited extent been utilised for the purpose of service quality measurement.

Technically, employing the control chart methodology involves recording the numerical values of a given phenomenon in regular intervals, and subsequently plotting them on a graph to show how they fluctuate over time. Although it is quite likely that Bergson (1955) would compare the procedure of measuring quality using the control chart to 'asking from time to time where the object is, in order we may know what to do with it', at the same time he would admit that 'nothing could be

more legitimate than this method of procedure so long as we are concerned only with a practical knowledge of reality'. In other words, considering the pragmatic needs of an organisation that aims to measure the levels of quality delivered, it is feasible to attempt to reconstruct the natural flow of the phenomenon of quality through recording the values of measurements taken at different instants, and trying to build up a picture of the flux and the direction of change out of these motionless points. Doing so implies that the concept of service quality is understood from a dynamic perspective and in consistency with the assumptions behind the processual ontology. At the same time, the very method of measurement serves utilitarian purposes of the organisation in question, and as such it remains commensurate with the essential arguments of the philosophy of pragmatism.

Another crucial issue in applying Bergson's ideas to the measurement of service quality in contemporary organisations is that of how to operationalise Bergson's postulate regarding the need to focus on the qualitative aspect of durations and their heterogeneous nature. At first sight, the attainment of this task may seem problematic. However, in this respect, Letiche (2000) offers an interesting solution. He proposes that, in an effort to focus on the *durée* side of contemporary organisation studies, it is necessary to develop such ethnographies that will illuminate the experiential aspects of phenomena within organisations. Further, Letiche (2000) recommends studying organisations using narrative approaches and story telling.

For organisations wishing to measure the levels of service quality delivered and to understand the dynamics as well as the direction of change in the flow of the phenomenon under study, this would imply listening to the voices of those involved in both the supply and demand aspects of the process of service quality delivery. In the case of particular organisations, it would be necessary to conduct, on regular basis, in depth interviews with different categories of employees as well as those who are on the receiving end of the service quality process. Paying attention to their stories would perhaps give a deeper insight into the subjective views of those participating in the process of quality delivery, and would assist in identifying and comprehending the way the perceptions of quality are changing, since, by their very nature, narrative approaches help bring out the subjective and qualitative aspects of perceived reality (Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002; Miles and Huberman, 1994).

So far, this article has suggested that for organisations wishing to apply Bergson's ideas to the measurement of service quality, it would be advisable to use those techniques, which do not disregard the temporal dimension of the phenomenon monitored, as well as those which allow for gaining access to the subjective and changing perceptions of the different participants with regards to the quality of service. Specifically, the control chart methodology and qualitative interviewing / story telling, have been proposed as feasible methods for examining the dynamic nature of service quality. Thus, the final question that needs to be addressed is whether these two different approaches to studying quality can be used concurrently.

According to some contemporary writers on research methods, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques is seen as paradigmatically incompatible, whereas

for others this approach is considered as not only possible but also as increasing the credibility of the study undertaken (c.f. Flick, 2002; Mason, 2002; Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Coffey and Atkinson, 1996). Notwithstanding the importance of the more recent views on the problem, it needs to be stated that the issue of the appropriateness of using quantitative methods simultaneously with qualitative ones while examining a given phenomenon would not probably be seen as problematic by Bergson himself, who, as Letiche (2000) points out, postulated the plurality of different perspectives and cognitive models rather than the unity of science. Both of the methods suggested here focus on the temporal aspect of service quality: the first one, which works similarly to Bergsonian cinematograph, through recording the flow of the phenomenon in a quantitative, 'spatialised' manner; the latter through attempting to gain access to the qualitative, experiential dimension of the durée. It is worth noting that both approaches are consistent with the view of reality proposed by the ontology of flux. At the same time, the application of the control chart to the measurement of service quality can be described as pragmatic and commensurate with the mainly utilitarian objectives of an organisation intending to monitor the levels of service quality delivered, whereas the effort to study service quality through the application of qualitative, narrative approaches can be seen as aiming to grasp the nature of reality in flux.

## Concluding remarks

The major objective of this article has been to draw the attention of academics preoccupied with the area of service quality to the potential influence of philosophy, in particular the ideas developed by Henri Bergson, on the understanding of the concept of service quality as well as the approaches taken to its measurement. It has been pointed out that, as an academic discipline, service quality management and measurement would benefit from a stronger emphasis on the intellectual foundations of the field. A deeper insight into those intellectual underpinnings, particularly into the importance of both process philosophy and the philosophy of pragmatism for the development of the quality management movement would, in turn, help provide answers to the contemporary debates on the nature of service quality, the purpose of its measurement, and the type of tools that could be useful for organisations wishing to measure the quality of services they deliver. In particular, this article has pointed at the implications for service quality measurement of Bergson's views on the nature of time, the meaning of durational perception, the importance of subjective experience, and the postulate of plurality of knowledge and cognitive models.

In discussing the relevance of Henri Bergson's philosophy for the theory and practice of managing quality in service organisations, this article has attempted to respond to the pessimism of Hanna (2003), who expressed a fear that Bergson's particular accomplishment, i.e. that of creating a philosophy that resonated outside the walls of academic institutions, died with him, as knowledge has become highly specialised, arcane and technical, with academics no longer speaking beyond the boundaries of their narrowly defined community.

However, despite the author's belief that reaching for ideas from philosophy in general, and the theories developed by Bergson in particular, offers a deeper insight into the phenomenon of service quality, it is necessary to acknowledge the limitations of the arguments regarding service quality measurement presented here. Helpful in this context is the following comment that Read (2003) provides with regards to Bergson's theory of time:

> 'Bergson deserves credit for trying really hard here; his philosophy certainly appears to offer more hope for avoiding the misunderstandings of time than do most Anglo-American efforts. But my point is this: However fast you run your cinematograph (unless it is 'infinitely fast'), you are not going to arrive at a durée. What is really needed, I am suggesting, is not quite even 'durée', but once again, simply... time. It is just time, in its manifold manifestations, that needs to be recovered for our attention, if anything does'.

Following Read's (2003) suggestion, the author acknowledges that the approach to capturing the reality in flux, as conceptualised by Bergson, is not easily operationalised. Certainly, further research is needed in order to pursue the theoretical development of the discipline, and the empirical applications of the theory to the measurement of quality in service organisations in a way consistent with the arguments proposed by Bergson.

In conclusion, it can be stated that although a lot of work will still have to be done, through an effort to direct the attention of academics towards the temporal aspects of service quality, as well as the need for combining quantitative and qualitative approaches to measuring the changing levels of quality, this article has attempted to open up a way for developing alternative methodologies for service quality measurement, which could be provide an interesting and intellectually satisfactory alternative to those traditionally applied in the area.

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## Wkład filozofii Henri Bergsona w rozwój teorii i praktyki zarządzania jakością w sektorze usług

### Streszczenie

Niniejszy artykuł zawiera analizę wniosków z wybranych aspektów filozofii Henri Bergsona dla rozwoju teorii i praktyki zarządzania jakością, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem zarządzania i pomiaru jakości w sektorze usług. Inspiracji do sięgnięcia po powyższy temat dostarczył autorce fakt, iż pomimo ożywionego, w ostatnich latach, zainteresowania twórczo-

ścią Bergsona ze strony teoretyków organizacji i zarządzania, nie dokonano do tej pory próby analizy dyscypliny zarządzania jakością z punktu widzenia idei wprowadzonych i rozwiniętych przez tego filozofa.

Już od ponad dwóch dekad, zarządzanie jakością w sektorze usług funkcjonuje jako temat badawczy podejmowany przez wielu autorów, zarówno tych wywodzących się z kręgów akademickich, jak i przez praktyków odpowiedzialnych za kwestie zapewnienia jakości w różnych organizacjach. W rezultacie zainteresowania tą dziedziną powstało wiele modeli teoretycznych, mających na celu wspomaganie organizacji usługowych w wysiłkach skierowanych na zarządzanie i pomiar poziomu jakości dostarczonych usług. Owe modele teoretyczne znalazły zastosowanie praktyczne w różnych przemysłach, a istniejące publikacje pozwalają na wskazanie przykładów nie tylko pozytywnych rozwiązań i rzeczywistych usprawnień, lecz także niepowodzeń w podnoszeniu poziomu świadczonych usług. Nie kwestionując i nie umniejszając wartości dotychczasowych osiągnięć w zakresie rozwoju teorii i praktyki zarządzania jakością w sektorze usług, istnieje potrzeba głębszej refleksji filozoficznej nad tą dziedziną, a w szczególności skierowania uwagi badawczej na kwestie ontologicznych i epistemologicznych założeń dyscypliny zarządzania jakością. Ponadto, autorka argumentuje, iż uważne przestudiowanie twórczości Henri Bergsona mogłoby być źródłem inspiracji dla tych teoretyków i praktyków zarządzania, którzy stawiają sobie za cel dogłębne zbadanie kwestii definicji i metodologii pomiaru jakości w organizacjach usługowych.

Struktura niniejszego artykułu jest następująca. Część pierwsza zawiera krótki przegląd istniejących publikacji z zakresu teorii zarządzania jakością w sektorze usług, z uwzględnieniem tych obszarów literatury, co do których, jak do tej pory, trwa otwarta debata wśród badaczy zajmujących się tą dyscyplina. Następnie, treścią artykułu są historyczne i intelektualne podstawy zarządzania jakością, w szczególności dwóch nurtów w historii filozofii, mianowicie filozofii procesualnej i pragmatyzmu. Kolejna część artykułu zawiera analizę wybranych aspektów tez rozwiniętych przez francuskiego filozofa Henri Bergsona, którego uznaje się za przynależącego do orientacji teoretycznej zarówno filozofii procesualnej, jak i pragmatyzmu, po czym prezentuje się wnioski wypływające z jego idei dla teorii i praktyki zarządzania jakością w organizacjach usługowych. W końcowej części artykułu autorka wskazuje na praktyczne ograniczenia sugerowanych rozwiązań metodologicznych i wysuwa propozycje kierunku rozwoju dalszych badań nad teorią omawianej dziedziny.