

Interview

QUALITY IS PART OF OUR DNA.

Stephan Kasulke, Senior Vice President of Global Quality at T-Systems, on the impossibility of incident-free ICT, TÜV-certified quality management, and the highest levels of customer satisfaction in T-Systems' history.



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Senior Vice President Quality,
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Many industry analysts believe that quality of IT is now the biggest factor when it comes to choosing a service provider – it's even more important than the price. Why?

In a world of increasingly digitized processes and business models, IT quality is more important than ever before. Just think: how can companies benefit from having fully automated processes if they don't work reliably? At the same time, incidents are always going to happen. To deny that would be wishful thinking. But still, quality has become much more relevant – costs are no longer the only crucial factor. The way that businesses think has changed, and quality of IT has assumed a whole new level of importance.

How can service providers deliver on their quality promises? What factors affect the quality of IT?

IT – and the relationship between customer and provider – both go through several phases. These phases impact on quality management and the way that the customer perceives quality. For example, new requirements come to light during the implementation stage. Moreover, unexpected additions to the initial scope alter the basic structure of IT environments, and trigger delays. During the course of the partnership, technologies become outdated and employees can get into bad habits. As they begin to pay less attention to what they are doing, the risk of errors increases. These factors can mean that customers' subjective perception of quality differs to the objective understanding defined in the initial agreement. With this in mind, managing IT quality has to be an ongoing task across all levels – so that customers can perceive it at the level of processes, people and technology.

So, does it take more than state-of-the-art technology to provision reliable and stable systems?

Yes, it does. Because, as I have already mentioned, there's simply no such thing as incident-free IT. It's more important to make sure that people know how to use the technology properly. Cutting-edge technologies of redundant design help to maximize availability. However, to ensure incidents are resolved seamlessly, businesses must implement quality management programs on both HR and organizational levels. This is a key element of our Zero Outage program, and we can see that our approach to IT quality works. Since 2012, IT incidents have been reduced by 73 percent. What's more, early this year, TÜV Rheinland gave us extremely positive feedback for our Zero Outage processes.

You mentioned that people are important. What role do your employees play in ensuring high IT quality?

The employees are the cornerstone of our Zero Outage program. They embody our strategy and represent our approach to quality – within the company and externally. Their expertise and highly precise approach

helps us to deliver outstanding quality, both now and in the long term. This is one of the reasons why we encourage employees to take part in training programs – 21,000 have already attained IT quality certification. In addition, we deploy a sophisticated approach in our customer accounts, whereby we rotate service staff between projects every three to five years to ensure they always follow good practices.

How do you intend to maintain this level of quality in the long term?

Every element of our internal and external conduct is geared towards delivering outstanding quality, expanding our knowledge, and constantly improving. That's why we examine our own processes on an ongoing basis. Furthermore, we regularly check that the level of risk defined for each of the customer's applications is still relevant, and reflects the current situation. Because when our customers' needs change, their IT has to evolve too. In addition, we try to ensure that the defined SLAs are still valid. The topic of quality is important to the senior managers, too – when a situation reaches a pre-defined critical point, they automatically get involved. As far as I know, this is unique to T-Systems. Our Zero Outage goal is integral to our strategy and part of our DNA – it's what we aspire to, and what drives us every day.

What are the main attributes of the kind of good service quality that leads to customer satisfaction?

We do more than simply fulfill SLAs: our job is to always be one step ahead. We think with – and for – our customers, and constantly develop new scenarios to ensure their IT is not just reliable now, but also next year, and the one after that. That's our defined objective, and the significance of our task was proven by a recent study by ISG. It found that IT quality – in the form of reliable and stable processes – is becoming increasingly important for businesses. Moreover, 97 percent of the ISG consultants surveyed said that IT quality is very or extremely critical to the success of individual business processes. Gauging customer satisfaction is the best way to assess IT quality – followed by the number of major incidents. This shows that nowadays, customers demand stable processes, and state-of-the-art services. And we are focused on delivering both.

A high level of customer satisfaction indicates high IT quality standards. How does T-Systems fare in this regard?

We regularly ask market research organization TNS Infratest to measure our levels of customer satisfaction using their internationally recognized TRI*M index. Early this year, we achieved a TRI*M score of 84 points. It was the best result in T-Systems' history, and is above average in comparison with other organizations. In terms of customer satisfaction, we are in the top ten percent of European ICT service providers.