



## Container terminal handling quality

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### Abstract

In any service market, the price/quality relationship is of main importance. In the container terminal handling market, quality is important in attracting and retaining customers. Meeting customer needs and delivering high quality for low costs are critical factors for terminals to be successful. Container transport companies are interested in speed and reliability. The time a ship or barge stays in a port must be minimised, and, therefore, the handling of containers must be executed in a fast and reliable way. The operations at the terminal, after the handling of the containers on and off the ship, must be reliable as well. Quantitative information on container terminal quality is hard to obtain. Container terminals are monitoring their quality levels, but the results are not publicly available. Therefore, a literature survey forms the main input for this paper combined with interviews with terminal operators. The aim of this paper is to offer an operational approach for the measurement of the quality of container terminal services. The central research question is; 'Which are critical performance conditions in terms of quality for container terminals?' For the container terminal sector in Europe, 'reliability' is now the number 1 quality aspect in their transport services (including container terminal handling). Quality levels must meet high standards set by container carriers. Costs, incurred by better quality performance cannot be recovered through higher rates. 'Reliability', in terms of meeting container carriers' demand, is thus a critical performance condition for maritime container terminals. An external performance improvement characteristic might be 'flexibility'. Deep-sea ship arrivals are no easy planning task, as weather influences and other problematic developments make the terminal operator's task more difficult. Through strict contracts, all risks of delays and terminal berth congestion are passed onto the terminal operator. This makes 'flexibility' a critical performance condition. A critical performance condition for continental terminal operators is a 'total service'.

*Keywords:* Container terminal; Terminal handling market, Quality of service.

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### 1. Introduction

In any service market, the price/quality relationship is of main importance. In the container terminal handling market, quality is important in attracting and retaining customers. In Europe, container carriers do have choices between different container

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