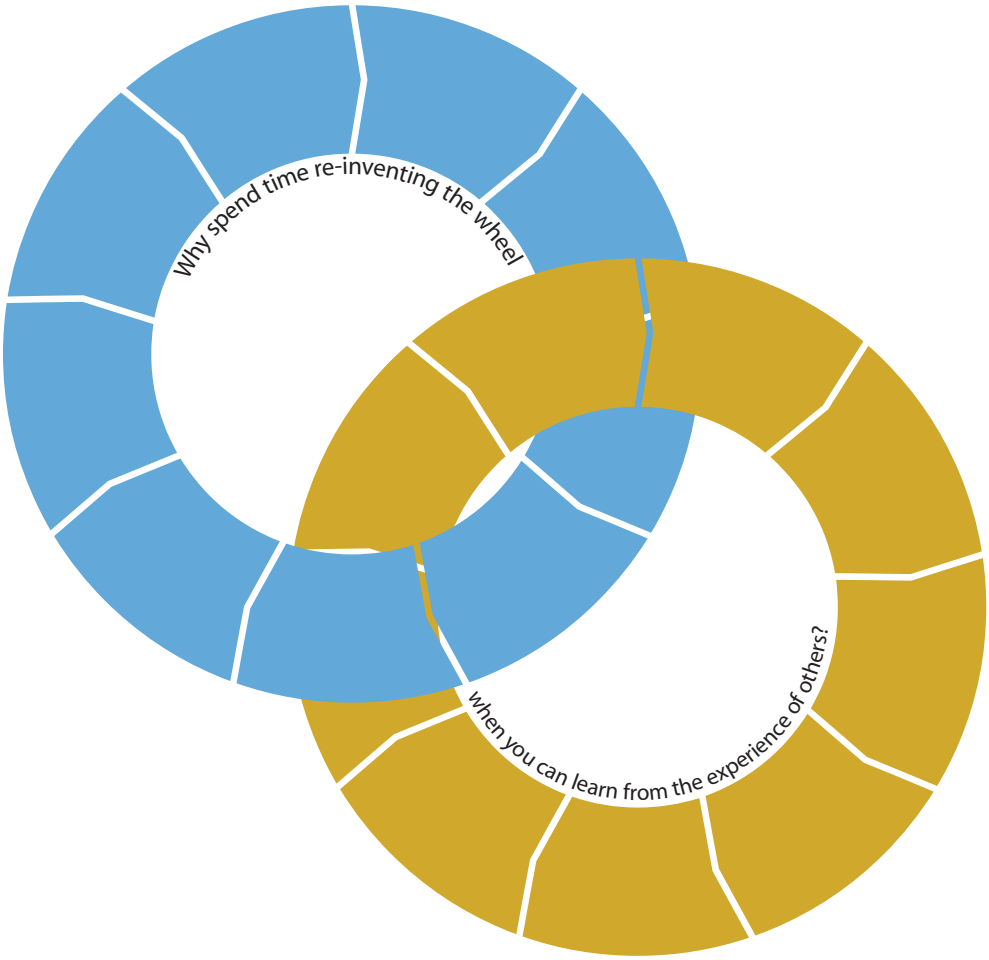
BPIR Management Brief - Volume 6, Issue 8

Customer Satisfaction Management



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The BPIR Improvement Cycle

- *Identify/Select an Area for Improvement*
- *Measure Performance*
- *Benchmark Performance*
- *Identify a Relevant Improvement Approach or Strategy*
- *Learn How to Implement*
- *Identify Best Practice Organisations*
- *Research Further Information*
- *Implement a Best Practice Approach*
- *Review and Calibrate*

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List of Contents:

The Definition p1
The Stage p1
Expert Opinion.....p2
Survey and Research Data p5
Example Cases p6
Measure and Evaluate p8
Self-Assessments p9
Summary of Best Practices p10
Words of Wisdom p10
Conclusion p11
References.....p12

Customer Satisfaction Management: The Definition

Customer satisfaction management involves the effective coordination of customer experiences and the careful management of product and service quality so that they meet or exceed customer requirements.

The Stage

Customer satisfaction is vital for organisational success. Dissatisfied customers quickly transfer their loyalties to competitors that are able to deliver the products and services they need with the quality they want. Good or bad customer service has an escalating effect. This means that when service is poor, customers will vote with their feet and transfer their allegiance elsewhere; they will also tell their friends about their bad experiences. Similarly, when service is excellent, they will share this information with people they know. Well-oiled customer satisfaction management processes are of critical importance, as satisfied customers are the lifeblood of any organisation.

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Expert Opinion

Ozgur Ekmekci, assistant professor at the Department of Clinical Management and Leadership at The George Washington University in the United States, writes that the quality of services experienced by customers is subjective, and based largely upon perception. In essence, this means that customer satisfaction is the memory of a customer's experience when he/she has dealt with frontline employees. [1]

Figure 1, see below, illustrates the relationship between perceived service levels provided and quality of products offered:

- Idolise: customers may fall into this category if they experience good service and find that the quality of products offered is superior to what they expected. In effect, they may idolise a company or organisation.
- Trivialise: if good service is experienced but the product is not considered to be superior, customers may trivialise their relationship with a company or organisation.
- Rationalise: if a service is bad but product quality is strong, customers may rationalise the situation for the sake of a good product.
- Criticise: bad service with a weak product will be criticised.

It should be noted that as the level of customer satisfaction falls, either because of poor service or inferior product quality, there are increased risks of losing both sales volume and customers.

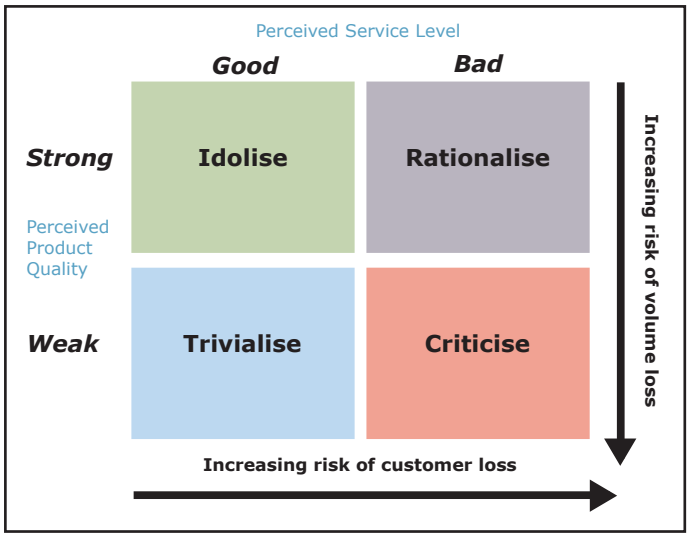

Figure 1: Service versus Product and Customer Perception of Quality [1]

Ekmekci notes that customer service is a holistic experience and seldom the result of a single exchange with a single individual. It is more of a "composite sketch" comprising all exchanges that have taken place over time. For this reason, it is vital to maintain historical records of customer interactions; these have to be made available to customer service personnel so that service issues may be addressed and a higher level of personalised service delivered. Customers expect organisations to serve them consistently by:

- asking them what they need
- telling them what the organisation will do for them—and when it will be done
- doing what needs to be done on time, and
- telling them what has actually been done, and when it was done.

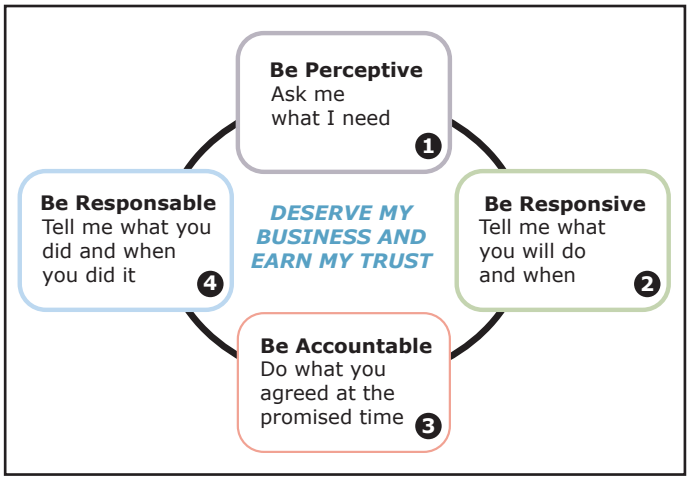

Figure 2: The Cycle of Customer Expectations (Adapted from Ekmekci) [1]

Mark Jones and Jeff Kober, founders of World Class Benchmarking, write that the pathways to customer satisfaction and customer loyalty are governed by the following elements (see Figure 3, next page):

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Elements Affecting Customer Satisfaction [2]	Comments
Promises: When expectations are not met—or experiences are not as good as promised, customers become upset.	*Marketing and sales must not be disconnected from operations and services.*
People: An organisation's people reflect its brand.	*The "Front of the House" is represented by the organisation's frontline staff; the "Heart of the House" is represented by all other supporting staff.*
Place: This is where a service experience happens; it may, in fact, be a virtual place such as a website.	*In this place, everything communicates something to the customer; therefore, everything should add value to their experience.*
Processes: Policies and procedures also "colour" the services that organisations provide.	*Customers directly experience the rules that govern the order and flow of securing products and services. Organisations should be easy to do business with.*
Products: The goods on offer have an impact upon an organisation's brand.	*Products and services should effectively reflect an organisation's culture and brand, and add optimal value to its customers. Successful organisations provide the best of what their customers really want.*
Price: The cost of all customer experiences—both tangible and intangible—should be taken into account.	*True costs go far beyond money and time and effort, and have significant weight in determining the value of an organisation's products and brand in the minds of customers.*

Figure 3: Elements Affecting Customer Satisfaction (Adapted from Jones and Kober) [2]

Quality consultant Stuart Weisbrod, a certified Six Sigma Black Belt, writes that when corporate cultures are degraded by repetitive cost-cutting cycles, the quality of products is affected and customer satisfaction inevitably deteriorates. Over recent years, there have been significant lapses in quality that have cost lives, had a role in environmental disasters, or led to massive product recalls. The following warning signs are indicators of potential changes in corporate attitudes towards quality.

1) Repeated cost-cutting cycles. When corporate cultures are degraded through one cost-cutting cycle after another, quality will eventually be affected, particularly if cutting costs short-circuits quality improvement activities. Organisations with well-trained staff can usually manage a certain amount of cost cutting without having a negative impact on quality. This is not true, however, when cost-cutting cycles become a primary strategy for meeting corporate goals or for achieving ever-increasing profit margins.

2) Operational signals being ignored or delayed. When employees develop a mind-set that allows them to ignore significant operational signals (or delay their responses to these signals), there may be severe ramifications for customers and employees alike. Organisations need to develop effective quality operating systems in order to know when equipment—or a mine, or an oil well—should be shut down.

3) Aging equipment or degradation of maintenance services. In order to remain competitive, organisations must be able to understand how they can extract the most from their plant and equipment. In this regard, the availability of internal or external service resources is important to minimize down time, particularly for highly capitalised equipment. In cost-cutting environments, there is a temptation to not upgrade older equipment and to neglect requirements for optimal equipment performance. Maintenance personnel and service contracts may even be eliminated. However, this is counter-productive; as equipment gets older, more resources are often required to achieve optimum performance levels.

4) Direct cuts to quality or to operational excellence personnel. The number of quality or operational excellence personnel employed is a direct measure of a company's commitment to its quality programmes. Such personnel establish and monitor projects that drive the continuous improvements or breakthrough improvements that are needed for organisational success.

5) Elimination or outsourcing of customer assistance resources. Satisfied customers are the key to successful organisations. Every organisation has to deal with situations where products are defective or fail to meet customer expectations. If organisations only focus on

improving profit margins, they may be tempted to reduce the number of personnel working in customer complaint-related positions. If such cuts are contemplated, they should be part of ongoing customer service improvements and use appropriate processes such as Six Sigma's DMAIC (Define-Measure-Analyse-Improve-Control) cycle. An efficient customer service process does not necessarily need more people.

In summary, Weisbrod recommends that organisations should highlight significant projects having the potential to drive customer satisfaction while at the same time lowering costs. Sufficient resources should be provided to ensure the success of these projects. Employees should be trained in the principles of Lean, Six Sigma and Total Quality Management, while working with suppliers to provide the highest quality materials for use in the organisation's manufacturing or service environment. These steps will lead to improved profitability, a safer work environment, and the highest quality products and services. In turn, these will inevitably lead to improved customer satisfaction. [3]

Customer Satisfaction Surveys

Tim Sullivan, a director at Touchstone Energy Cooperatives, and Henry Cano, senior principal of the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association's National Consulting Group (both in the United States), write that customer satisfaction measures in themselves do not make an organisation good or bad. Customer satisfaction measures simply provide an indication of consumer satisfaction at a given moment in time. The key value of customer satisfaction surveys lies in the changes and improvements that are made as a result of the information gathered. By asking the same customer satisfaction questions year on year, it is possible to benchmark an organisation's performance against its history and objectives. The results of customer satisfaction surveys should be used to identify areas for improvement, and then to:

- develop an action plan to address any identified performance gaps
- request, evaluate, and act on employee recommendations for improvement
- communicate and execute the plan, and hold people accountable for results
- set specific measures for each performance objective
- insist on regular implementation updates
- most importantly, publicise the fact that results will be measured and reported on, and that everyone—employees, management, and directors—will be held accountable for these results. [4]

Writing in *Customer Inter@ction Solutions* magazine, Brendan Read argues that to succeed, organisations have to deliver the products and services that customers want, and have the right mix of features, price, quality, and availability. To achieve this, surveys are commonly used to gather vital customer feedback. Sophisticated Enterprise Feedback Management (EFM) software enables organisations to centrally manage the creation, deployment, and analysis of surveys. According to Jim Davies, research director of Gartner, a leading information technology research and advisory company in the United States, EFM is a cost-effective tool that allows correlation between different surveys; this facilitates better coordination and avoids bombarding customers with an excessive number of surveys. EFM is also able to tap into unstructured data such as that found on social media sites. Predictive analytics can applied to this survey data to gain an understanding of what customers are likely to purchase in the future. [5]

"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."
Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon

"A satisfied customer is the best business strategy of all."
Michael LeBoeuf

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Survey and Research Data

Customers Harder to Impress

Respondents to a 2009 Convergys survey of some 2,000 customers from the United States and United Kingdom revealed that:

- 48% believed that organisations "did not know, and did not care" about their needs or their experiences, citing problems such as rude customer service staff, receiving wrong information, and employees who never solved problems
- 56% reported that companies seemed to do nothing with the feedback they received
- 42% reported that following a bad experience they would leave without saying why, and nine out of ten would tell their friends and colleagues about the bad experience
- Although some 80% reported satisfied expectations and exceptional service, 36% of the time, most people would leave for better value
- 78% believed that service trumped personalized features, and 86% believed that service defined a brand
- 55% of both the United States and United Kingdom respondents preferred automated resolution to waiting to speak on the phone. [6]

Customer Satisfaction Measurement in Europe

A service quality and satisfaction survey examined data from 564 customers of dentists in Germany, France, and Portugal. The following results were obtained:

- measures of customer satisfaction were found to be constant across the three countries
- customer satisfaction was greater—and service quality perceived as higher—when customer expectations were greater
- significant differences in perceived service quality and customer satisfaction were observed among respondents that had received a similar service encounter (this indicated that a pan-European approach was apparently not an optimal strategy)
- the service quality perceived and customer satisfaction expressed by both French and Portuguese respondents were not significantly different
- in Germany, service quality providers had to work harder to "delight" customers in regard to service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction. [7]

Customer Satisfaction Surveys – What Customers Want from Suppliers

According to a 2009 Convergys survey, customers in the United States wanted service providers to:

- have knowledgeable employees (65%)
- understand their needs early in the relationship (64%)
- treat them as valued customers (62%)
- demonstrate a desire to meet their needs (54%)
- provide value for money (49%)
- have courteous employees (45%)
- be a brand that they could trust (43%).

The study indicated that customers were not very forgiving of any breaches in service. When organisations did not meet expectations, failed to admit responsibility for an error or made no attempt to correct an issue that had been brought to their attention, customers tended to leave without warning. [8]

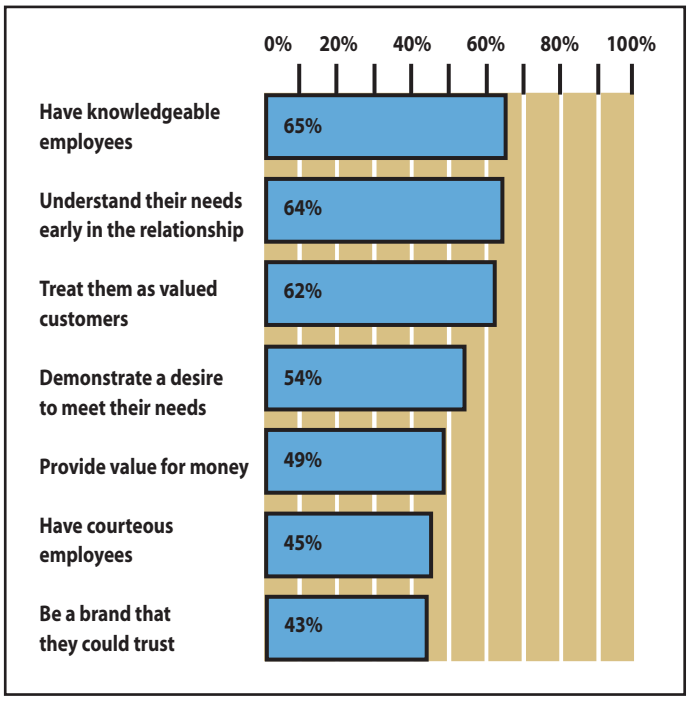

Figure 4: What Customers Want from Suppliers (Adapted from Schrag) [8]

Attributes to Improve Satisfaction

A study of customer satisfaction analysed the responses of 656 participants from a full year's worth of customer satisfaction surveys conducted by a United States organisation. Customers were asked for their opinion of the most important attributes required to meet customer needs and generate high levels of satisfaction. The following attributes were reported:

- courtesy
- a convenient time for the scheduled service
- on-time arrival for the service requested
- meeting customer expectations
- neatness and cleanliness
- answers to questions about the service
- competitive pricing
- quality of the products
- overall value. [9]

"Profit in business comes from repeat customers, customers that boast about your project or service, and that bring friends with them."
W. Edwards Deming

"Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means."
Albert Einstein

Example Cases

Valuable lessons can be learned from the following organisations:

Woburn Safari Park, United Kingdom
Lean Thinking Creates a Culture of Exceptional Service

At Woburn Safari Park, lean thinking was used to:

- understand customer expectations and identify value-adding activities
- map and analyse current processes, revealing the flow of value, information, and resources
- identify and validate improvements that would generate maximum benefits, while having the shortest payback period
- ensure that improvement sustainability was maintained through the use of knowledge management principles.

The production of current state maps enabled the identification of waste in terms of time, transportation, and money; these were then analysed and used to create possible future state maps. By focusing on customer value and the elimination of waste, large savings were generated. This increased profit margins without having a negative impact on customer experiences. The mapping processes and value stream analysis within the organisation increased the understanding and expectations of its internal customers; this provided an overview of the entire value stream for external customers, which, in turn, created a culture of exceptional service and fostered the retention of staff. [10]

Ceridian Corporation, United States
Customer Listening Posts in a Service Organisation

To get a better fix on customer satisfaction, Ceridian Corporation, a provider of human resource solutions in the United States, designed and implemented a variety of programmes and practices to enhance its "customer listening" efforts. The following points summarise Ceridian's achievements:

1. Customer advisory boards were established. These met physically twice a year and held conference calls up to five times a year, providing Ceridian with feedback on all aspects of services and support.

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2. Customer satisfaction was measured to gauge the loyalty of the organisation's customer relationships.

3. Customers were surveyed to rate their willingness to recommend Ceridian products and services to business colleagues.

4. Key executives were engaged in annual customer listening visits, which followed up Net Promoter Scores, interviewed customers about issues or problems, and listened to what customers were saying about the organisation. Feedback was then analysed, action plans identified, and improvement initiatives developed.

5. Multiple Centres of Excellence for customer service were established to provide customers with the highest level of customer support available within the industry.

The customer advisory boards enabled Ceridian to clearly hear the voice of the customer. As a result, Net Promoter Scores rose steadily, and customer retention levels reached an all-time high. [11]

Citroën, United Kingdom
Customer Satisfaction Improvement Programme Achieves Desired Results

To improve its Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI) scores, Citroën UK initiated a service performance measurement system. Earlier customer research was analysed, desired service behaviours defined, and service performance views obtained from sales and after-sales managers. A customer questionnaire was developed and administered by sales and after sales staff. Feedback from the questionnaire was used to prepare personal action plans for improvement. After a successful pilot programme, the system for gathering data and developing improvement plans was introduced to dealerships that had recorded the worst CSI performance. Some 150 managers and 450 sales/after sales staff associated with 55 dealerships took part. The results were impressive: CSI scores increased across all of the agreed indicators and by a greater percentage than the dealerships that were not included in the programme. Improvements were reflected across both sales and after-sales customer experiences. [12]

Dell, United States
Customer Focus Approach Results in Thousands of New Ideas

Dell won the 2010 Forrester Research "Voice of the Customer" award in recognition of its customer focus approach. The company was judged across five categories: clarity of approach, business value to the organisation, positive impact on customer experience, innovation, and the potential for other companies to repeat the practice. Dell's rationale was to place its customers at the core of its existence. Dell also reinforced its already significant focus on employee and customer collaboration by instituting forums that allowed its customers and employees to share ideas for new products. Customer ratings and reviews were used to drive product enhancements. Dell's engineers were challenged to earn average ratings of 4.5 stars (out of a total of five) for new products. Through feedback and conversations, the forums generated thousands of ideas, of which 400 were implemented. [13]

HMS National, Inc., United States
Voice of the Customer Process Lifts Repeat Business

HMS National used in-depth customer interviews (or Voice of the Customer research) to increase customer satisfaction. As a result, repeat business rates were lifted by 20 per cent across the board. The process also helped the company to chart a new course using customer satisfaction as its guiding light. The Voice of the Customer process was used to gather customer views and experiences concerning:

- HMS Products
- The HMS Value proposition
- positive and negative customer experiences
- customer satisfaction
- communications, contact methods, and the customer's openness to further engagement. [14]

"Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends."
Walt Disney

Measure and Evaluate

It is important to measure customer satisfaction because a satisfied customer is more likely to repurchase or to recommend an organisation to friends and colleagues. A study commissioned by Xerox found that very satisfied customers were six times more likely to repurchase a product within the next 18 months than a customer who was simply satisfied. Customer attitudes and behaviour should also be monitored, for example, are they sufficiently satisfied to:

- repurchase—or will they perhaps try a competitor next time?
- recommend your organisation to others?
- be willing to pay a price premium for your products or services?

Long-term relationships can be developed with customers by identifying the drivers of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It is important to note that when determining customer satisfaction, a customer's perception of performance is often just as important as the actual performance of an organisation. Even if an organisation's performance is of a high standard, customers may perceive it as being no better than competitors and might express low customer satisfaction. The importance that customers place on various dimensions of performance must be understood. Organisations need to excel at the things that matter most to customers. There is little benefit in being great at the things that do not matter to customers. Customer surveys are the most popular method used to measure customer satisfaction. [15]

The following provide some simple ideas on how customer service management programmes can be assessed:

Customer Expectation of Price, i.e. the customer's perception of the value of a product or service. This measure provides an input into the calculation of product/service value, and is commonly collected using market research.

Customer – Loss, i.e. the numbers or percentage of customers lost over a given period. This provides data for the analysis of customer satisfaction.

Customer Loyalty, which may be calculated using an aggregation of loyalty measures such as repeat purchases, numbers of different products purchased, and relationship duration. This may be presented as an index and used in conjunction with other leading measures—such as customer satisfaction—to predict market trends and assess current organisational performance.

Customer Relationship – Duration, i.e. the average duration of customer relationships or the duration of relationships with key customers. This measure can be used to assess customer loyalty.

Customer Satisfaction – Financial Value, i.e. the increase or decrease of revenue against percentage customer satisfaction variations. This measure quantifies in dollars the impact of variations in customer satisfaction. This information may be used as an aid in strategy development processes.

Customer Satisfaction Index (CSI), which is calculated using an agreed standard series of weighted measures or indicators. A key benefit of CSIs is that they represent a uniform and comparable system of measurement. Values derived from standard models are frequently published to facilitate systematic benchmarking against other organisations.

"Do what you say you are going to do, when you say you are going to do it, in the way you said you were going to do it."
Larry Winget

"Customers don't expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong."
Donald Porter, Vice-President, British Airways

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Self-Assessments

Self-assessments can be used to find out how effective organisations are at implementing various strategies, tools and techniques.

The following self-assessment (see Figure 5, below) will help to assess the quality of the customer services offered by your organisation. Answer each question by ticking the boxes which apply to you.

Areas of Interest	Questions	Not At All	Partial	Complete
Operational Planning	Are procedures and practices in place to ensure that all potential service failures are located and fixed?			
	Are procedures in place to ensure that customers do not experience the same problem or fault more than once?			
Decision Making	Have you empowered frontline employees to recognise customer problems?			
	Have you empowered frontline employees to make decisions and to correct customer problems?			
Information Management	Have organisational information flows been optimised to enable employees to fully understand and to meet customer expectations?			
Employee Motivation	Does your organisation seek to motivate frontline employees so that they feel compelled to create memorable experiences for customers?			
	Do you seek to develop a service culture in which frontline employees have a sense of fun, celebrate successes, generate energy, display accountability, and demonstrate responsiveness?			
Customer Relations	Have frontline staff been instructed how to build customer relationships, thereby ensuring that customer expectations are met?			
	Have frontline employees been trained in how to effectively handle customer complaints?			
Quality	Have you ensured that all employees have mastered the challenges of evaluating the quality of the services that they provide?			
	Have you established meaningful performance indicators for measuring memorable customer experiences?			
Ethics	Have you prepared frontline personnel to deal with non-ethical requests from customers?			
	Have you trained frontline employees in how to cope with the emotional pressures faced when dealing with customers?			

Figure 5: Assessing Customer Service Quality (Adapted from Ekmekci) [1]

Scoring:

Any area that is not completely satisfied provides an opportunity to make improvements to the quality of customer services offered by your organisation.

(Note: this is a representative portion of the full self-assessment, which may be found in the member's area of BPIR.com)

Summary of Best Practices

The following is a summary of the best practices and/or insights associated with customer satisfaction management that are covered in this Management Brief:

1. Understand that customer service is a holistic experience and seldom the result of a single exchange.
2. Serve customers consistently by asking what they need, telling them what the organisation will do and when this will be done, delivering the service or product on time, and advising them what has been done and when it was done.
3. Understand that an organisation's people reflect its brand.
4. Provide products and services that reflect your organisation's culture or brand, and which add optimal value for customers.
5. Do not undertake repeated cost-cutting cycles without considering the impact on quality and service delivery, as this can be compromised.
6. Beware of allowing repeated delays in responding to operational signals. This has the potential to have severe consequences that affect both customers and employees.
7. Take care when outsourcing or eliminating customer assistance resources; any cuts contemplated should be part of ongoing process improvements using appropriate tools such as Lean, Six Sigma or Benchmarking.
8. Use customer satisfaction survey feedback to make changes and improvements to products, services, and processes. Run the same survey at regular intervals to benchmark performance then:
    a. develop action plans to address performance gaps
    b. act on employee recommendations for improvement
    c. communicate and execute plans while holding appropriate persons accountable for results.
9. Develop long-term relationships with customers by identifying the drivers of customer satisfaction and loyalty.
10. Seek to understand the importance that customers place on various dimensions of performance, and excel at the things that matter most to customers.

Words of Wisdom

"We see our customers as invited guests to a party, and we are the hosts. It's our job every day to make every important aspect of the customer experience a little bit better."
Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon

"Profit in business comes from repeat customers, customers that boast about your project or service, and that bring friends with them."
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"Do what you do so well that they will want to see it again and bring their friends."
Walt Disney

"Setting an example is not the main means of influencing others; it is the only means."
Albert Einstein

"Customer service doesn't come from a manual, it comes from the heart. When you're taking care of the customer, you can never do too much. And there is no wrong way... if it comes from the heart."
Debbie Fields

"A business absolutely devoted to service will have only one worry about profits. They will be embarrassingly large."
Henry Ford

"To give real service you must add something which cannot be bought or measured with money, and that is sincerity and integrity."
Douglas Adams

"Do what you say you are going to do, when you say you are going to do it, in the way you said you were going to do it."
Larry Winget

"Customers don't expect you to be perfect. They do expect you to fix things when they go wrong."
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Conclusion

Customer satisfaction management is a basic and constant requirement for any organisation, whether it be private or public. Satisfied customers lead to repeat purchases or referrals, and are an indicator for public institutions that public funds are well-spent. Customer satisfaction is an important aspect of both strategic and operational planning, and is an integral part of marketing and quality improvement initiatives. The measurement of customer satisfaction is an ongoing requirement. It is needed to assess an organisation's performance adequately, so that continual improvements can be made.

Note

The techniques and case studies mentioned or summarised in this article may be found in greater detail at BPIR.com, together with the full text of most of the articles and reports cited in the following reference list.

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"Customer service doesn't come from a manual, it comes from the heart. When you're taking care of the customer, you can never do too much. And there is no wrong way... if it comes from the heart."
Debbie Fields

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These articles and reports can be found in full at *www.bpir.com*.

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[15] Centre for Business Performance, Cranfield University, a partner of BPIR.com.

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- Customer Profitability Management
- Customer Satisfaction Surveys
- Customer Support and Service
- Diversity Planning
- Emotional Intelligence
- Employee Development
- Employee Motivation
- Employee Suggestion Schemes
- Enterprise Risk Management
- Ethical Business Practices
- Flexible Work Arrangements
- Knowledge Creation
- Leadership Development
- Leadership Development 2
- Lean Techniques
- Managing Innovation
- Manufacturing Outsourcing
- New Product Development - Innovation Strategy
- New Product Development Tools
- Occupational Safety
- On the Job Training
- Organisational Culture
- Organisational Ethics
- Performance Management
- Product Lifecycle Management
- Project Management
- Recruitment and Selection
- Relationship Management
- Six Sigma
- Strategic Planning
- Strategy Deployment Metrics
- Succession Planning
- Succession Planning 2
- Supply Chain Management
- Sustainable Development
- Total Quality Management
- Work and Life Balance
- Workplace Conflict
- Workplace Wellness

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