

DEFINING QUALITY CUSTOMER SERVICE COMPETENCIES
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-STOUT'S
MEMORIAL STUDENT CENTER: PHASE II

By

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ABSTRACT

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The purpose of this project was to assist the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Memorial Student Center (MSC) towards their goal of improving and maintaining their customer service quality. Surveys were administered to customers of the MSC to receive immediate feedback on what customer service competencies they felt were important for the employees to have in order to make their service of value. A total of 203 surveys were directly administered to the customers, with 194 of the participants being student customers and 9 of the participants being faculty/staff customers. The survey contained 39 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale and five open-ended or "other" responses were

developed for the use of this study. A previous study, which surveyed the employees of the MSC, was conducted prior to the assessment of the customers. All quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, *t*-tests, and factor analysis.

Qualitative data was analyzed by identifying which open-ended responses brought unique concepts to the study and which responses represented the already existing Likert-scale items. A comparison between the customer responses and the employee responses was also completed.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The issue of customer service has attracted more attention in recent years than ever before, with a big influence being the increasing sensitivity on the behalf of the customer (Gregory, 2000). Organization's must take into account what their customers' wants and needs are when they develop their products and perform their services. As the old saying goes, "the customer is always right." Especially when dealing with the subjective areas of quality and service, the interpretations that matter the most are those of the customer (Gutheim, 2000). The customers' perceptions are the facts, whether they match up with or do not match up with the views of the employees of the business. It's not enough to ask the customers what they think of an organization's product or service and then go back to business as usual. If a company is serious about measuring their customer's expectations, and finding ways to improve their customers' satisfaction overtime, then they need to take their received feedback seriously and use the information to the best of their ability.

A customer is defined as one who purchases goods or services. A customer is also seen as a person with whom a merchant or business person must deal with, usually on a regular basis. Furthermore, a service is often looked at as a contribution to the interest or well being of others (Webster's II, 1999). Harris (2000, p. 32) states, "Customer service is anything we do for the customer that enhances the customer experience". A similar perspective comes from Zemke & Woods (1998) which claims that customer service is a relationship with people who are essential to everything you do;

meeting the needs and expectations of the customer as defined by the customer and used to create a mutually beneficial relationship between itself and those it serves.

Understanding what an organization's customers want from their business is a long and extensive process. One way to find this out is by asking the customers themselves. The bottom line, states business consultant Gaylon Pyle is "if you want to sell what the customer buys, you must see the world through the eye's of the customer" (Gillis, 2000, p. 81). Businesses who closely track their customers' wants and needs typically enjoy greater success. Customer surveys are one of the best ways to do just that. One of the most effective and important things to remember when designing a customer survey is to define which attributes the business at hand would like to learn more about from their customers, then simply ask the customer how important they feel these attributes are (Motley, 1999). Conducting customer satisfaction and expectation surveys can help maximize a business's value and proceeds. Customer surveys provide an excellent customer relations tool by sending the customer the message that they are important, and their feedback is welcome (Harris, 1999). Customer surveys also create presence of mind, and provide another alternative for keeping in touch with an organization's customer base. Customers are also setting higher standards and expecting more from a business. This is in part due to an outcome called the "Nordstrom Effect", or the raised expectations created by such service knowledge businesses as the upscale department store chain (Gregory, 2000).

All people in all functions have impact on real customers, especially those in customer service types of employment. It is obviously more difficult to know what that impact is for some functions than others. By asking the customer, it gives the employees

as well as the overall organization a better understanding from a customer's standpoint. Customer knowledge refers to understanding your customers and their needs, wants and aims. It is essential if a business is to align its processes, products and services to build real customer relationships. With recognition that existing customers are the source of most of an organization's proceeds, there has been a sudden increase of interest in understanding customers from a long-term, relationship view (Guaspari, 1998). If companies are really going to embrace the concept of relationships they have to understand more about what their customers need and want to build a "shared future" with their customers.

Statement of Problem

This project is an exploratory analysis as opposed to a problem. The Memorial Student Center at the University of Wisconsin-Stout has never obtained feedback from their customers and/or employees for hiring and interviewing purposes. There is an initiative to do a needs assessment because they simply want to "hire the best" and give their customers the utmost service possible. They feel that by finding what the customers as well as what the employees think are important customer service competencies and finding those differences as well, it will in turn help them determine what qualities to look for when searching for future customer service job candidates. The Assistant Director of the Memorial Student Center would like to use the obtained data to prioritize where the focus should be on what customer service competencies the customers feel are most important. In addition, the results will be used to develop future training programs and an intake interview guide for customer service position openings. Furthermore, it will

be used to create, maintain and keep improving on the Memorial Student Center's goal of performing high-quality customer service.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of this study is to determine which customer service competencies are important for the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Memorial Student Center's (MSC) staff to have, according to their customers. This will be done by quantitatively researching customers' interpretations of quality customer service through a survey. The secondary purpose of this project is to compare the data obtained from the customer survey to previous data obtained from an employee survey. The employee survey measured what the employee's felt were important customer service competencies that they should embrace. The customer survey is known as phase two of this project whereas the employee survey is known as phase one.

The specific objectives are as follows:

- 1) To assist in the creation of a Memorial Student Center (MSC) customer service profile so the MSC can continue to "Hire the Best".
- 2) To assist in identifying training areas critical in providing quality customer service.
- 3) To assist in the development of training sessions to help the MSC provide quality customer service.
- 4) To compare previous employee survey data with present customer data and identify the gaps.

Definition of Terms

For clarity of understanding, the following terms need to be defined:

Customer: the participant of Phase two, a person who purchases goods or services. A person with whom a merchant or business person must deal with, usually on a regular basis.

Customer Service Competencies: the necessary and preferred skills and traits an employee needs in order to perform a job that deals with customer service

Employee: the participant of Phase one, a person who works for another and devotes their time in return for financial or other compensation.

High Quality Customer Service: a first-rate contribution on the part of the employee to the interest or well being of the customer to ensure they receive the most exceptional quality customer service possible.

"Hire the Best": the Memorial Student Center's phrase to ensure they hire the best employees with the maximum quality in customer service

Intake Interview Guide: a well-rounded, valid, and reliable set of interview questions and guidelines used to interview and hire the finest employees

MSC: abbreviation for Memorial Student Center, which is the site for this research project. The building itself is a community center for the members of the University of Wisconsin-Stout's community; this includes students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni and guests.

Phase I: the measuring of the employees' interpretations of which customer service competencies are important for them to possess in order for the customers to receive quality service.

Phase II: the main focus of this research paper, the measuring of customers' interpretations of which customer service competencies are important for the employees to possess in order for the customers to receive quality service.

Assumptions

There is one apparent assumption in this research:

1. That the customers of the Memorial Student Center who complete the survey will do so in an honest and accurate manner.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

Customers are demanding more and more awareness for higher levels of service expectations in recent years than ever before. They know what it takes to receive quality customer service and therefore expect more from the organizations in which they interact with. In addition, businesses are finding that customers' expectations play a critical role in the overall success of their organization (Bell & Zemke, 1988). An excellent way for companies to find out what their customers are looking for in the service they receive is by conducting customer surveys. Through research, organizations can accurately find what their customers are expecting from them, and in turn lead to accuracy in hiring and training the right employees for the service organization.

Customer Service

"Customer service is anything we do for the customer that enhances the customer experience" (Harris, 2000, p. 32). The experience the customer receives is critical to maintaining the ongoing relationship between the organization and the customer. The interaction linking the employee and the customer is viewed as important if not more important than the product being sold. The value of the overall end product is directly related to the overall quality service the customer receives (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992).

Zemke & Woods (1998), claim that customer service is a relationship with people who are essential to everything you do; meeting the needs and expectations of the customer as defined by the customer and used to create a mutually beneficial relationship between itself and those it serves. For example, in 1981, the market share for Harley-

Davidson fell from around 70% in the mid 1970's, to under 25%. The company was on the threshold of extinction. The manufacturing executives looked for a multi-faceted approach to quality, which focused on improvements that would count to customers. They paid attention to the overall interaction between the corporations, its dealerships, and those it served, and not just improving the quality of the product (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992).

There are two types of customers, internal and external customers. External customers are those asking for service or help, whereas internal customers are the employees and coworkers from other departments in the organization. Quality experts state that by providing these internal customers with top-notch service will result in increased productivity, efficiency and satisfaction (Ensmann, 1993). Some suggestions for giving superior service included; make it personal, build simple traditions, and encourage strong service in others. Making it personal means empathizing and treating each internal customer with respect and fairness. A company picnic or softball team could help build simple traditions by fostering teamwork and overall morale. Encouraging strong service in others starts with modeling the behavior. Managers and top executives should incorporate the necessary skills into their everyday contact with those they supervise. All internal customers should take the initiative to offer as well as accept simple service improvements, always aiming for a higher quality throughout the workplace.

A recent national survey found that poor service was the reason almost half of all consumers stopped doing business with a company during the past year (Purdy, 2001). Seventy percent of customers feel that if their relationships with the representatives of the company are strong, they are more apt to remain loyal. Service management literature

has repeatedly emphasized the importance of the human element in the delivery of superior service (Crosby & Stephens, 1987; Gronroos, 1990; Parasuraman et. al., 1985; Solomon et. al., 1985). Service loyalty is a service organization's commitment to its customers that is undertaken by the organization for the development of a long-term relationship with the customer. Berry (1987) projected the idea that companies earn loyalty by first being loyal themselves. Service loyalty precedes customer loyalty, and therefore it is vital that service organizations convince their customers of their commitment to superior quality of service. Customer loyalty is time-specific, and as a result is unstable. Organizations must constantly strive to develop and maintain their customer's loyalty or, as is common in the majority of relationships, risk losing it to someone else (Kandampully, 1998).

Customer Surveys

Conducting customer expectation and satisfaction surveys can help maximize a business's value and proceeds. Customer surveys provide an excellent customer relations tool by sending the customer the message that they are important, and their feedback is welcome (Harris, 1999). Before administering a customer survey, it is important to establish how the survey will fit into your overall business plan. Dennis Castiglione of Procom Management Group (Solon, OH) who serves as a Sales & Marketing Consultant with the Printing Industries of America's Solutions OnSite program, states "Strategic planning is valuable but you shouldn't draft your plan until you've formally surveyed your customers. You should understand what their needs are, how their needs have changed, to what level you've satisfied their needs and to what level others are satisfying their needs" (O'Brien, 1997, p. 25). A number of companies, in their drive to implement a

marketing plan, are not taking the time to understand their customers' concerns. Organizations need to really listen to what their customers are saying (Pritchard, 2001). They need to understand that a service business completes a circle within each transaction, from the employer and the employees who perform the service, to the customer and vice versa. Research by Gerson (1998) and Neumann & Giel (1995) recognized that customer satisfaction is directly linked to meeting or exceeding customers' expectations. As a result, the service provider must be aware of what specific customer needs exist through research. The quality of the information a company receives has to be relevant and credible in order for the change agents of the organization to utilize it. Relevant service-quality information focuses decision makers attention on the most important issues to meet and exceed external customer expectations, convert prospects, and enable employees to improve service (Berry & Parasuraman, 1997).

Designing a customer survey is a long and extensive process, as stated previously, a company needs to know what they hope to achieve. An important aspect of constructing a survey is making it simple and to the point, by asking exactly what you what to know. It needs to be simple to the customer as well as to the researcher. When designing the survey, stick to the basics, come up with a limited number of attributes and ask people how important they find them. While this is a simple approach, it also produces very effective and actionable results. Consistency is also important; using the same survey repeatedly will help find accurate trends as well as make it easier for comparisons. Monthly, quarterly, or bi-annual surveys will allow a business to examine their overall customer satisfaction (Motley, 1999).

Surveys are a great way of hearing what the customers themselves are concerned about. It is a non-invasive way to receive critical information from the customers. Many businesses use customer satisfaction or "voice of the customer" surveys to gather information (Pine & Gilmore, 2000). The best service-quality information surveys are built with qualitative and quantitative information, rather than just quantitative. Quantified data are summaries, averages of customers' perceptions of a very specific service issue. Quantitative data bring many benefits to the service information table, including easy analysis and comparability from one period to the next. What numbers do not offer are the tone, inflection, and feeling from customers' voices. If the report includes customers' verbatim comments, it may receive a different response. Combining customers' words with their numbers has synergy. The combination, when well executed, produces a high level of realism that not only informs but educates (Berry & Parasuraman, 1997).

Customer Expectations

In order for a service organization to achieve success, considering the customers' expectations is important. Understanding what the customers expect from an organization is a prerequisite for delivering superior service. Studies have defined customer service expectations in a variety of ways. One of the most popular ways for researchers to evaluate customer expectations is by using the rater method. This method categorizes customer service expectations into five overall dimensions: reliability, tangibles, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). *Reliability* means that the employee should have the capabilities to carry out the service in a consistent manner. Furthermore, it involves considering the needs and perspectives

of others (Dube, Renaghan, & Miller, 1994; Greenberg & Sidler, 1998). *Tangibles* consist of the aesthetic value of the facilities, equipment, and personnel (Booth, 1999; Parasuraman, Berry, & Zeithaml, 1991). *Responsiveness* refers to the employees' abilities to be assertive and ready to help customers and offer timely service (Gomez, 1999; Greenberg & Sidler, 1998). *Assurance* includes the ability of the employees to be polite and knowledgeable, as well as to convey a sense of trust and confidence (Cagle, 1998). *Empathy* deals with the caring and individualized attention received by customers. Empathy also means being able to emotionally identify with others (Dube, Renaghan, & Miller, 1994; Goodman, 2000). By focusing on these five areas organizations are able to pinpoint their customers concerns and expectations. An organization should consider these five topics while selecting and hiring their employees.

Hiring

Quality of customer service begins with the hiring process. Hiring the best possible people to perform the service is a key factor in services marketing. Yet many service companies have inaccurately low standards for the personnel they hire. They involve few employees in the recruiting, interviewing, and selection process, sometimes delegating these tasks entirely to the human resources department (Berry and Parasuraman, 1992). Some organizations are attempting to correct these oversights. They develop ideal candidate profiles for each type of position based on customer service expectations, and they use these profiles in recruiting candidates. The attraction, development, motivation, and retention of quality employees require a clear vision worth pursuing. Employees need more emotional motivation to serve customers as opposed to only monetary. The organization needs to observe how the quality of their employees'

affects the overall organization. On the other hand, the employees need to understand how the importance of their customer service competencies ties into the overall business (Kandampully, 1998).

Training

Employee training programs are thought to be critical in improving the level of service provided by an organization, and to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty (McColl-Kennedy & White, 1997). Research has shown that training is the most important resource. A large amount of profitable companies compete by hiring, rewarding, training and retraining (Berry, 1994). A common mistake that companies make is to look at employee skill and knowledge development as an event rather than an ongoing process. If they receive training, it is either too little, too late, or not the type of training they need. Schneider et al. (1994) stresses the importance of managerial support of training. In order for organizations to expect their employees to provide quality customer service, management has to make a long-term commitment to training. Not only do they need to support the training program, but they also need to model the performance that they expect from their employees.

Many successful customer-service training programs begin by educating employees in human relations and teaching them technical skills (Watson, 1988). As organizations place more and more emphasis on training, it is necessary that there is a direct link between employee and customer opinions of service quality and that these programs are training employees in the areas that are important to customers.

Teamwork

An important dynamic in retaining service employees is the concept of teamwork. Research shows that teamwork is central to delivering excellent service (Pritchard, 2001, & Tjosvold, 1993). Many studies, conducted by different types of social scientists have documented the impact of cooperation, competition, and independence (Johnson & Johnson, 1989, Maruyama, et al. 1985). The findings consistently indicate that it is through cooperative teamwork, much more than through competition or independence. People who communicate directly, empathize, support each other emotionally, discuss different points of view constructively, solve problems successfully, achieve at higher levels, and feel confident and valued as a person more when there is a foundation of teamwork within the organization. Studies have also directly tested cooperative teamwork's contribution to customer service. The results point to the considerable value of cooperative teamwork for serving customers (Maschoff, 1992).

Working together empowers employees. Several people working together as a team can provide a comprehensive service. Employees benefit from talking to each other about how they can satisfy the complex needs of the customer. An interactive group of coworkers who help each other out and achieve together can also help counteract the feelings associated with job dissatisfaction, given that customer service can be considered as a demanding, often frustrating, and somewhat of a "burnout" position (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992). Team involvement can be rejuvenating, motivating and fun. Furthermore, it could demonstrate to the customers that the employees are enjoying their jobs as well as each other's efforts and collaboration. This

makes the overall atmosphere of the organization more pleasant. Exceptional customer service representatives are team players; they enjoy being part of a team and take comfort in the fact that they can depend on others and feel a sense of pride in the fact that others can rely on them (Goodman, 2000).

Goal Orientation

Teamwork also raises stakes for individual performance and goals. The organization as a whole needs to have the same goals and visions, starting with top management. One way to enhance the ability for customer service representatives to serve their customers is to have others within the organization come through for them. The way an organization treats and retains its employees is a critical component in the way the employees perform their jobs (Berry, 1994). Teams and departments throughout an organization must coordinate their goals and work together effectively to deliver value to their customers. Within this supportive environment, individuals and their teams are empowered to perform for and serve their customers (Tjosvold, 1993). If the employees have the same customer service goals in mind while performing their job duties, and they understand these goals, then they are more likely to deliver the same type of quality service the customer is searching for.

Flexibility and Efficiency of Employees

The way the customer service representative finds solutions to customer inquiries is a big part of how the customer is going to perceive their interaction with the business. The best customer service representatives solve problems with ease and speed. They are calm and clear headed, even under demanding situations, helpful and good-natured, and have the ability to solve problems. People who succeed in customer service are motivated

to please their customers and be helpful at the same time (Greenberg & Sidler, 1998). The response time, how long it takes for a customer service representative to find a solution to a problem or find someone else who can is also important. Customers not only focus on the actual interaction taking place, but the quality of that interaction. If the interaction is negative, the customer is more likely to take note of this (Dauten, 2000). Serving customers well is a complex task that cannot be performed alone. Individuals need to pool their information, ideas, and assistance to solve customer problems.

Individual and Personal Characteristics

Communication skills are critical in delivering quality customer service. Exceptional people skills, and the ability to give out information in a way that is interesting to the customer are important abilities for customer service representatives to have (Booth, 1999, & Evenson, 1999). Outstanding customer service representatives enjoy interacting with other people. They typically like staying busy with a full workload and enjoy meeting challenges of their work. They are able to identify emotionally with their employers as well as their customers. These employees are able to get along with different people from diverse backgrounds. They have an ability to please most people and accept constructive criticism and feedback. They are generally pleased with their past work experiences and past employers, and tend to work at the same place for a significant period of time (Goodman 2000). Hyland (2000) suggested doing what the Memorial Student Center has done; list the most important customer service elements and circulate questionnaires to customers as well as to the customer service representatives and ask them what they think is important.

Quality of Service

Quality of service is one of the most dominant themes of research in services (Fisk et al., 1993). Quality service cannot be forced, but comes out of a shared passion in the value of working together to serve customers. The quality of an organization's service is based on how the customer perceives it. According to Lewis (1990), service quality is a measure of the degree to which customer expectations matches the experience of the service delivered. This awareness leads to an emotional reaction that is obvious in the satisfaction or dissatisfaction of the products or services being purchased (Woodruff et al., 1983). Delivering quality service means yielding to customer expectations on a consistent basis. Customers will remain loyal to a service organization if the value of what they receive is determined to be relatively greater than their expectations (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). The amount of importance a company places on quality of service is directly related to their future. In a recent American Management Association survey of North American, Western European, and Japanese managers, seventy-eight percent of the sample indicated that improving quality and service to customers is the key to competitive success (Berry & Parasuraman, 1992). Without recognizing the steps involved in achieving the quality of service, an organization could experience a negative reaction from their customer base.

Summary of Literature Review

The reviewed literature states that customer service is an important, if not the most important aspect of doing business. While both the customer as well as the service organization value quality service, the ability to deliver it is not often matched up with

what the customer expects. There are numerous aspects of customer service that are seen as being vital to the overall success of an organization's efforts. The method used to attract and retain employees is the first stage in reaching customer expectations. Hiring and training the employees in areas the customers deem important is a crucial step. Furthermore, making employees aware of what not only the external customer but the internal customers as well will give them a well rounded view of what it takes to deliver quality service. A reliable way to find out what the customer expects from an organization is by conducting a survey. The real key is in listening and then listening some more. In this study, the Memorial Student Center looks at what the external and internal customers feel are important abilities to have in delivering quality customer service through quantitative and qualitative research methods.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology

Participants

A total of 203 surveys were obtained to best profile customer service attitudes and beliefs among the current customers. The goal of obtaining 200 surveys was chosen to closely match up with the 189 surveys obtained in Phase I, the employee assessment. Surveys were administered to customers of the Memorial Student Center, including both student and faculty/staff customers. Out of the grand total of 203 surveys gathered, 186 of the participants were student customers, 9 of the participants were faculty/staff customers, and 8 of the respondents did not record whether they were a student customer or a faculty/staff customer.

Research Setting

The University of Wisconsin-Stout has a total enrollment of 8,147 students, and 1,239 employees. It is located in the city of Menomonie, Wisconsin, which has a population of approximately 14,000. The Student/Faculty Ratio is considered 20:1. The overall gender percentage is 50% Male, 50% Female. The ethnicity breakdown is as follows: .5% American Indian, 1% African American, 1.5% Asian American, .8% Hispanic American, 1.9% International and 94.3% Caucasian (www.uwstout.edu).

The specific site for this research project is the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Memorial Student Center (MSC). The Memorial Student Center is a "community center"

for members of the UW-Stout community-students, faculty, staff, administration, alumni and guests. A community that celebrates individual differences, promotes collaboration, and inspires respect and trust. It is a place to get to know and understand one another. It also provides opportunities to learn through involvement and experimentation. The Student Center represents a building, an organization, and a program that supports and enhances the special mission of UW-Stout by providing quality facilities, services and programs to the university community. The Memorial Student Center is centrally located on the campus.

Instrumentation

A survey containing 39 items rated on a 7-point Likert type scale was developed for use in the study. The questions were drawn from the themes extracted from the review of the literature in Phase I, and addressed general areas such as problem solving, attitude, work qualities, teamwork, interpersonal skills, critical thinking skills, and personal development. All questions were rated on a scale ranging from "1" strongly disagree to "7" strongly agree. Five open-ended ("other") responses were included to give customers the opportunity to additionally rate other areas in which they felt were important but were not already included on the survey. A brief letter was attached to the survey to ensure the customers' participation was strictly voluntary. It also stated the intended purpose of the study as well as an extended gratitude of thanks for their time and effort.

The researcher, the Assistant Director of the Memorial Student Center, and the Research Advisor of the first phase constructed the employee survey used in Phase I of this project. The same questionnaire was used in Phase II in surveying the customers for

comparison purposes, with only a few minor adjustments to some of the questions to tailor it to read from a customer's standpoint. One question regarding if the customer was a student or faculty/staff was added to check for differences. The employee demographics section of the survey in phase one was omitted due to the information being unnecessary regarding the customers (Appendix A).

Procedure

During December of 2001, a survey was distributed to customers of the Memorial Student Center in order to measure which customer service competencies they found important. The data was analyzed to generate quality customer service at the Memorial Student Center in the future, as well as to aid in the development of prospective interviewing guides and training sessions.

The questionnaire was reviewed and approved by the Assistant Director of the Memorial Student Center, the Research Advisor, and the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. The first phase of this project, the employee survey was administered to employees of the Memorial Student Center and data has been collected and analyzed. The second phase of this project, the customer survey was also conducted and the data was collected. The researcher, the research advisor, and some employees at the Memorial Student Center have all contributed in administering the survey.

Data Analysis

All quantitative data was entered in SPSS and analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlations, t-tests, and factor analysis. It was added to the data obtained from the employee survey for comparison purposes and to identify any gaps. Qualitative data was analyzed by first identifying open-ended responses that could be seen as replicating any of the existing Likert scale items and second by identifying and organizing the qualitative responses that introduced distinctive concepts.

CHAPTER 4

Results

Mean, standard deviation and median values for the individual items across the entire 39 questions of the sample are reported in Table 1. Although a 7-point Likert scale was used to reduce a ceiling effect, customers of the Memorial Student Center did not make meaningful distinctions between the items and rated each at the top of the 7-point scale.

TABLE 1

Item	Mean (Standard Deviation)	Median
1. Work toward the goals of the organization and the department.	5.9 (1.1)	6.0
2. Know my individual responsibilities and priorities and how they relate to others.	6.1(1.0)	6.0
3. Contribute to an informal, comfortable, and tension free workplace.	6.0(1.0)	6.0
4. Be able to resolve conflict effectively.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
5. Find positive resolutions to problems.	6.1(1.1)	6.0
6. Take the initiative to resolve issues before they become problems.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
7. Remain calm when things get hectic.	6.1(1.2)	6.0
8. Be enthusiastic about work.	5.8(1.2)	6.0
9. Exhibit high morale.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
10. Maintain a positive frame of mind.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
11. Be eager to try new approaches.	5.8(1.2)	6.0
12. Be willing to compromise.	6.1(1.1)	6.0
13. Be willing to collaborate.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
14. Display a high level of productivity.	5.9(1.1)	6.0
15. Pay attention to detail.	5.9(1.1)	6.0
16. Follow through with commitments.	6.1(1.1)	6.0
17. Display knowledge of	6.0(1.1)	6.0

products/services.		
18. Stay focused on tasks.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
19. Respond quickly.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
20. Respond effectively.	6.2(1.0)	6.0
21. Give continuous attention to customer satisfaction.	6.2(1.1)	7.0
22. Show interest in other team member's achievements.	5.7(1.1)	6.0
23. Show confidence in other team members.	5.8(1.1)	6.0
24. Show trust in other team members.	5.8(1.1)	6.0
25. Be cooperative rather than competitive.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
26. Respect the final decisions of the team.	5.9(1.2)	6.0
27. Not to dominate others in interactions.	5.8(1.3)	6.0
28. Exhibit open lines of communication with other staff.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
29. Be sensitive to the feelings of others.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
30. Listen effectively.	6.1(1.2)	7.0
31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.	6.2(1.1)	7.0
32. Display a positive self-image (one's conception of oneself or of one's role).	6.1(1.1)	6.0
33. Understand other cultures.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
34. Show concern for the needs of others.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
35. Gain the trust of the customer.	6.0(1.1)	6.0
36. Gain the respect of the customer.	6.2(1.1)	7.0
37. Readily accept feedback on performance.	6.1(1.1)	6.0
38. Be open to criticism.	6.0(1.2)	6.0
39. Be tolerant to different points of view.	6.1(1.2)	6.0

A series of independent sample *t*-tests were used to examine rating differences between faculty/staff customers and student customers. The means of three items were significantly different across groups. First, "show interest in other team member's achievements" (Student Customer Mean = 5.7, Faculty/Staff Customer Mean = 5.1, $t=$

2.4, $df = 193$, $p = .038$). Second, “show confidence in other team members” (Student Customer Mean = 5.8, Faculty/Staff Customer Mean = 5.4, $t = 2.3$, $df = 193$, $p = .041$). Lastly, “be cooperative rather than competitive” (Student Customer Mean = 6.0, Faculty/Staff Customer Mean = 6.5, $t = 2.5$, $df = 193$, $p = .028$). All three of the significant items were related in the sense that they demonstrated teamwork. Therefore, the customers of the Memorial Student Center feel that teamwork skills and cooperating with your co-workers are important qualities to possess for a person performing a customer-service oriented job. Furthermore, the employees of the Memorial Student Center also had significant differences found in the area of teamwork. The Employee Survey's data showed two significant items. These items included “show confidence in other team members” (Student Staff Mean = 6.3, Permanent Staff Mean = 5.7, $t = 2.2$, $df = 183$, $p = .027$). Second, “show trust in other team members” (Student Staff Mean = 6.4, Permanent Staff Mean = 5.8, $t = 2.3$, $df = 182$, $p = .021$). However, over-interpreting these differences in each phase needs to be considered in that significance at the .05 level suggests that these differences would be observed (out of 39 analyses) simply by chance.

Factor analysis was used to identify and record component factors within the items. Table 2 displays the rankings and factor loadings of the individual items. Four factors resulted when Varimax rotation of the matrix was attempted after PC extraction. The four factors included: Flexibility and solution as to getting the job done, team work, individual and personal characteristics, and goal oriented. The four factors had the following for Eigen values respectively; 24.56 and explained 63.0% of the total variance across the 39 items, 1.7 and explained 4.4% of the total variance, 1.2 and explained 3.1% of the total variance, and finally the fourth factor had an Eigen value of 1.0 and explained

2.6% of the total variance across the 39 items. An Eigen value simply explains how much variance each component has when it is extracted.

TABLE 2

Item	Factor Loading
18. Stay focused on tasks.	.849
30. Listen effectively.	.846
5. Find positive resolutions to problems.	.839
37. Readily accept feedback on performance.	.835
26. Respect the final decisions of the team.	.835
12. Be willing to compromise.	.826
20. Respond effectively.	.825
6. Take the initiative to resolve issues before they become problems.	.824
34. Show concern for the needs of others.	.821
11. Be eager to try new approaches.	.821
36. Gain the trust of the customer.	.820
28. Exhibit open lines of communication with other staff.	.819
10. Maintain a positive frame of mind.	.819
29. Be sensitive to the feelings of others.	.816
31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.	.814
39. Be tolerant to different points of view.	.811
16. Follow through with commitments.	.805
13. Be willing to collaborate.	.804
7. Remain calm when things get hectic.	.802
32. Display a positive self-image (one's conception of oneself or of one's role).	.802
21. Give continuous attention to customer satisfaction.	.800
2. Know my individual responsibilities and priorities and how they relate to others.	.785
38. Be open to criticism.	.782
24. Show trust in other team members.	.781
4. Be able to resolve conflict effectively.	.780
3. Contribute to an informal, comfortable and tension free workplace.	.778

36. Gain the respect of the customer.	.778
27. Not to dominate others in interactions.	.772
15. Pay attention to detail.	.772
14. Display a high level of productivity.	.765
9. Exhibit high morale.	.762
25. Be cooperative rather than competitive.	.762
22. Show interest in other team member's achievements.	.762
23. Show confidence in other team members.	.760
17. Display knowledge of products/services	.759
33. Understand other cultures.	.731
8. Be enthusiastic about work.	.724
19. Respond quickly.	.716
1. Work toward the goals of the organization and the department.	.710

Ideally, separate factor analyses would test for potentially different factor structures across the two customer groups. Nevertheless, subdividing the sample created group sizes that would not be sufficient for such procedures.

Next, a qualitative analysis was completed to offer the respondents an opportunity to add any other comments or ideas that they feel are important customer service competencies for the employee's of the Memorial Student Center to possess in order to ensure their visit is the best that it possibly could be. Out of 203 total participants, 20 (10%) offered additional open-ended responses. One Faculty/Staff Customer offered responses (5%), and nineteen Student Customers (95%) offered open-ended responses. The unique comments that were made by the respondents are highlighted in Table 3 below. Comments that were related to existing items found in the survey can be found in Appendix B. Some of the unique comments also touched slightly on a few of the already existing items, but did not generalize into one specific category. It was determined that

30% of the responses could be linked to existing scale items (See Appendix B), while 70% of the responses were determined to be unique (See Table 3).

TABLE 3

Customer Information	Unique Comments
Student Customer	Be on time
Student Customer	Be on time
Student Customer	Be efficient
Student Customer	Not make the customer feel alienated or stupid
Student Customer	Be adaptable
Student Customer	Be patient
Student Customer	Be caring
Student Customer	Enjoy their job
Student Customer	Be able to enjoy their work/have fun while working
Student Customer	Smile
Student Customer	Smile
Student Customer	Smile and greet customers with it
Student Customer	Clean and appropriate personal appearance
Student Customer	Be clean
Student Customer	Be clean
Student Customer	Stay clean
Faculty/Staff Customer	Clean and appropriate personal appearance
Student Customer	Clean serving area
Student Customer	Clean serving area
Student Customer	Bathrooms need cleaning
Student Customer	Clean kitchen
Faculty/Staff Customer	Desire to continually improve
Student Customer	Make employees feel comfortable
Student Customer	Make customers feel comfortable

Being on time and being efficient were both mentioned in the open-ended section of the survey. Many of the responses had to do with simply being friendly and inviting to the customers, and not making the customer feel "alienated or stupid". A few of the participants also wanted the employees to enjoy their work and have fun while they were working.

Both student and faculty/staff customers mentioned personal hygiene of the employees as an important issue that needs to be addressed. Cleanliness of the physical facilities was mentioned as well. Smiling and being courteous to the customers was also a definite unique category.

A table was also compiled using a factor analysis to find the top ten responses of Phase I and Phase II to test for differences between the importance of employee and customer responses (See Table 4).

TABLE 4

Employee Responses	Customer Responses
1. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.	1. Stay focused on tasks.
2. Be willing to collaborate.	2. Listen effectively.
3. Listen effectively.	3. Readily accept feedback on performance.
4. Follow through with commitments.	4. Respect the final decisions of the team.
5. Be willing to compromise.	5. Be willing to compromise.
6. Show concern for needs of others.	6. Respond effectively.
	7. Take the initiative to resolve issues before they become

7. Stay focused on tasks.	problems.
8. Give continuous attention to customer satisfaction.	8. Show concern for the needs of others.
9. Readily accept feedback on performance.	9. Be eager to try new approaches.
10. Display positive self-image (one's conception of oneself or of one's role).	10. Gain the trust of the customer.

Listen effectively, be willing to compromise, show concern for needs of others, stay focused on tasks and readily accept feedback on performance were all mentioned in the top ten responses of both customers and employees of the Memorial Student Center. These items seem to all be related to the category of teamwork. Interestingly, in addition to teamwork being the utmost priority for both the customers as well as the employees, the employees had a secondary focus on positive customer interaction whereas the customers saw being a proactive employee as a high priority for guaranteed satisfaction for their visit at the Memorial Student Center.

In phase II, there were two types of external customers; the student and the faculty/staff customers. Phase I encompassed the internal customers; the employees. Through quantitative analyses, both the customers and the employees of the Memorial Student Center recorded that teamwork is an important skill to have in a customer service position. Personal characteristics such as being goal-oriented, friendly, and outgoing were also shown at the top of the customers' lists. The qualitative analysis brought out more unique suggestions such as smiling, personal hygiene of the employee, and

cleanliness of the physical facilities. All in all, having an overall friendly attitude and showing teamwork skills were of the utmost importance according to the customers of the Memorial Student Center.

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this project was to assist the University of Wisconsin-Stout's Memorial Student Center towards their goal of improving and maintaining their customer service excellence. This was accomplished by surveying the external, as well as the internal customers of the Memorial Student Center on what they felt were important customer service competencies for the employees to have. In the near future, the data obtained will be used to develop and improve hiring and training procedures. The subjects involved in Phase II were the external customers of the University of Wisconsin-Memorial Student Center, with the majority of them being traditional college students.

The present survey was designed in a consistent and simple way. As the literature suggested, both qualitative and quantitative methods of research were used. Coming up with a limited number of attributes and asking how important they were was an excellent approach in retrieving the anticipated data (Motley, 1999). The instrument used was a 39-item questionnaire rated on a 7-point Likert scale and five open-ended or "other" responses, which allowed the participants to give unique opinions. Descriptive statistics (means, standard deviations, and median values) and *t*-tests were configured to determine what the customers felt were important. Teamwork played a big role in what customers perceived as important traits for the employees to have. A factor analysis was used to identify groups of factors. The four most important factors that emerged were; Flexibility and problem solving, teamwork, individual and personal characteristics, and goal orientation, respectively. The unique, open-ended questions also contributed to the final

data collection. Being on time, being efficient, smiling, making people feel comfortable, and having a clean personal appearance were some of the responses (see Table 3).

The results from Phase I, which assessed the internal customers opinions of customer service, showed that the employees seemed to have more of a global perspective, and encompassed every trait as being important. Therefore, the results obtained from Phase II should be a nice asset to the refining of the hiring and training procedures.

During the hiring process, the Memorial Student Center should look for those qualities that the customers deemed important. Such things that may be touched upon in the interview guide could be efficiency in finding solutions to problems and teamwork capabilities. Looking at past job experiences and length of stay can also be helpful in determining types of employees (Goodman, 2000).

The quest for quality service is a never-ending journey; there is always room for improvement. For future research purposes, surveying the customers again to see if there is any change in their responses after the training of the employees in the suggested areas takes place would be a good initiative. Continuing the research not only reveals progress and strengths but problems and weaknesses as well. Furthermore, surveying the customers as to their perception on the service they already receive could be critical and useful information. For example, a question stating "How satisfied are you with the overall business, why or why not?" could be practical. Organizations need to understand if the customers are satisfied with the present service as well as where their concerns are (O'Brien, 1997).

Managers should directly interact with both the internal and external customers, and should become personally involved in listening to the voices of the customers. This

could be done informally throughout normal business hours or more formally in focus groups. Listening to them in person makes it more "real" and nonverbal actions and tones can also play a crucial part in determining the meaning behind the responses (Berry & Parasuraman, 1997). As far as the employees go, a need for a new or improved reward system that gives them incentives for improving their customer service skills could be designed. This could potentially help give them more motivation and encouragement to strive to do their best and be their best for themselves as well as for the customers. A service is a performance, and it is usually difficult to separate the performance from the people. If the people do not meet customer expectations, then most likely the service organization will not either. To understand its potential in creating and maintaining quality customer service, an organization must recognize the multiple dimensions of customer service.

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Appendix A

Defining Quality Customer Service Competencies at University of Wisconsin-Stout's Memorial Student Center

The purpose of this questionnaire is to identify quality customer service competencies in the departments affiliated with the University of Wisconsin-Stout Memorial Student Center. This survey will assist in the completion of the following goals:

- To create a Memorial Student Center customer service profile in order to continue to “Hire the Best”.
- To develop an interview guide based on the customer service profile.
- To identify training areas critical in providing quality customer service.
- To assist in the development of future training sessions to help provide quality customer service.

Data obtained from this questionnaire will be used to develop future training programs and an intake interview guide for customer service position openings. Your input is much needed to create and maintain high-quality service. Your time and efforts invested in providing this information are greatly appreciated.

I understand that by returning this questionnaire, I am giving my informed consent as a participating volunteer in this study. I understand the basic nature of this study and agree that any potential risks are exceedingly small. I also understand the potential benefits that might be realized from the successful completion of this study. I am aware that the information is being sought in a specific manner so that no identifiers are needed and so that confidentiality is guaranteed. I realize that I have the right to refuse to participate and that my right to withdraw from participation at any time during the study will be respected with no coercion or prejudice.

UW-STOUT MEMORIAL STUDENT CENTER CUSTOMER SURVEY:

If you have already had the opportunity to complete this survey, please do not fill this out again.

Customer Information:

Which are you? (check ONE) _____ Student Customer _____ Faculty/Staff Customer

Please circle the number to each statement that best describes its importance for customer service.

As a customer, I think that it is important for the employee to:

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

1. Work toward the goals of their organization and their department.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Know their individual responsibilities and priorities and how they relate to others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Contribute to an informal, comfortable and tension free workplace.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Be able to resolve conflict effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Find positive resolutions to problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Take the initiative to resolve issues before they become problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Remain calm when things get hectic.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Be enthusiastic about work.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Exhibit high morale.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Maintain a positive frame of mind.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. Be eager to try new approaches.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Be willing to compromise.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Be willing to collaborate.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

As a customer, I think that it is important for the employee to:

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

14. Display a high level of productivity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
15. Pay attention to detail.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
16. Follow through with commitments.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
17. Display knowledge of products/services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
18. Stay focused on tasks.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
19. Respond quickly.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
20. Respond effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
21. Give continuous attention to customer satisfaction.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
22. Show interest in other team member's achievements.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
23. Show confidence in other team members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
24. Show trust in other team members.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
25. Be cooperative rather than competitive.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
26. Respect the final decisions of the team.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
27. Not to dominate others in interactions.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
28. Exhibit open lines of communication with other staff.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
29. Be sensitive to the feelings of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
30. Listen effectively.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
32. Display a positive self-image (one's conception of oneself or of one's role)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
33. Understand other cultures.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
34. Show concern for the needs of others.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
35. Gain the trust of the customer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
36. Gain the respect of the customer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
37. Readily accept feedback on performance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
38. Be open to criticism.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
39. Be tolerant to different points of view.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

As a customer, I think that it is important for the employee to:

Strongly Disagree Strongly Agree

40. Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
41. Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
42. Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
43. Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
44. Other _____ _____	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Thank you for your time.

Appendix B

Qualitative Comments Related to Existing Items

Customer Comment	Item Relation
Be willing to try new things if job permits	#11. Be eager to try new approaches.
Have answers to FAQ's	#17. Display knowledge of products and services.
Be organized, know where things are located	#17. Display knowledge of products and services.
Be organized, know where things are	#17. Display knowledge of products and services.
Go out of their way to help customer	#21. Give continuous attention to customer satisfaction.
To be respected	#29. Be sensitive to the feelings of others.
Courteous	#31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.
Be friendly and personable	#31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.
Approachable	#31. Interact in a friendly, courteous manner.
To feel worthwhile	#32. Display a positive self-image (one's conception of oneself or of one's role)