

How To Get It Right – Malaysia Government Agencies Toward Service Quality

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Abstract

With the rapid global growth in services industry has witnessed Malaysia government to explosively recognized service quality as an indicator to determine success rate in providing services as well as to be an excellent service provider. The unit of analysis of this study is Malaysia government agencies inclusive the State government, local authorities and statutory bodies. Challenges and failures will occur once the unperformed government agencies unable to deliver expected services to the perceived customers. Therefore, this study is concerning into the discussion of SERVQUAL dimensions and suggestions of recommendations by various researchers that can help the Malaysia government agencies to overcome those problems that appeared in every government agencies transactions.

Quality As A Strategic Orientation

Nearly a decade ago, academicians and researchers alike lamented the lack of research on quality within the services arena [18]. Today, service based research studies of quality are quite extensive. In fact, quality has become a major research interest [2][5]. Quality has been linked to factors such as customer satisfaction [7][19], return behaviour [12], recommendations to others [10], choice behaviour [21] and interaction with employees [11]. Organization worldwide have heard the promise of performance excellence through quality and have responded by making quality a predominant strategy [1][24]. From a strategic point of view, quality was initially proposed as a complementary component of cost leadership strategies through the development of value [22]. Quality has also been incorporated as a means by which firms may enhance differentiation strategies, allowing organizations to increasingly distance themselves from the competition [26]. For example, Bharadwaj identified quality and customer service skills as potential sources of competitive advantage. In their contingency model of sustainable competitive advantage, Bharadwaj maintains that delivering quality service can help to support a firm's competitive position in much the same way as cost synergies, organizational expertise, and brand equity [3]. Indeed, quality plays more than a supporting role in the strategic arena. The benefits to be gained from combining quality orientations with traditional generic strategies, such as cost leadership and differentiation, have resulted in a situation where quality now assumes a role as a strategy unto itself.

Indeed, quality is a viable competitive opportunity that may assume a singular strategic role within the organization [25].

Service Quality

How do we evaluate the quality of batteries? The value creation to the customer is one-dimensional and most people evaluate batteries according to their lifespan. Thus, when comparing a set of batteries, one can tell objectively which battery exhibits the best quality. However, when you turn to services, how objective can be an evaluation of a dentist, a theatre performance or even a flight- where at first sight in the last case the only relevant attribute is arrival on time at the scheduled destination? However, when evaluating airlines, customers also focus to the friendliness of the staff, waiting times at the check-in, etc [4]. This shows to us the importance of service quality in measuring customer satisfaction. Relevant caused- factors are not only based on single factor contribution but ultimately to a set of a group of factors. Concerning to the group of factors, had encourage various authors especially researchers in services industry to call out a list of them. Those researchers include A.Parasuraman, Christian Gronroos, Leonard Berry and others as well as Valarie Zeithaml. Valarie Zeithaml approach to the market and industry the “10 criteria consumers use in evaluating service quality” and in subsequent research, they found a high degree of correlation among several factors and consolidated them into five broad dimensions which is tangibles (concerning appearance of physical elements), reliability (measuring the dependability and accurate performance), responsiveness (promptness and helpfulness), assurance (looking into the matter of competence, courtesy, credibility and security), and empathy (pertaining easy access, good communications, and customer understanding). This dimensions have lead Valarie Zeithaml [27] to develop a survey research instruments called SERVQUAL which will help the customers to evaluate a firm’s service quality by comparing their perceptions of its service with their own expectations. It is believed that these instruments had helped many researchers to evaluate more into customer satisfaction in various industries and has become one of the best indicators of customer satisfaction so far, even it has been criticised by some other experts.

Service Quality in Malaysia Government Agencies

In today’s economic and political climate, government must find ways to trim costs and manage cash-flow while continuing to deliver excellent customer service. Elected officials are challenging their departments to increase efficiency, prevent errors and provide their constituents with more value for their tax dollars. It should be misleading to suggest that every government agency has not been concerned with quality throughout its existence. Government agencies evolved as a function of representative government and therefore have to concern themselves with the legitimate interests of their citizens. Government agencies were therefore required to be not only accountable to the localities in which they existed, but also proactive by “improving” the physical environment and the “civility” or manners of

the urban populace. In addition to external political pressures for change in local government, the emergency of quality control and total quality management in the latter part of the twentieth century has created various discourses which include the concepts of “excellence”, “value”, “conformance to specifications” and “meeting or exceeding customer expectations”. [13]

Service quality in Malaysia government agencies has been a challenging concept to be achieved. Whilst developing themselves in capturing the interests of the localities, they are facing with lots of challenges of becoming the best service provider. Due to that, researchers suggested few ways of achieving quality-based government agencies by referring to SERQUAL model as proposed by Valarie Zeithaml [27]. The servicescape and physical evidence of service organizations is manifest, internally and externally, in a variety of ways. Internally it is represented by the design and decor of the organization; furniture and furnishings; the grooming and appearance of staff; a wide range of collateral including, for example, brochures, pamphlets and other related stationery; and general facilities and equipment. Externally it is represented by the geographic location and environment, and the exterior design and appearance of the building and its surrounding. All of these considerations function, potentially powerful, as symbols and cues that serve to create expectations and influence perceptions. Furthermore, if these same considerations are designed purposefully to create sensory appeal, they also serve to create an environment which can attract and retain customers, and which is conducive to staff doing what they have to do in the best possible way. Consequently, we can say that the physical environment, or servicescape, can fulfil the number of roles, of both a strategic and functional nature. Functionally, it can serve to facilitate, rather than impede, service delivery; it can enable and enhance, rather than discourage, social interaction; and it can play a communications and promotion role. Strategically, the servicescape can foster approach rather than avoidance behaviour; it can provide a means of competitive differentiation; it can represent physically the quality and value offering of a service organization; and it also serve in established a particular ambient mood- for employees as well as customers [17]. Tangibility as the first dimension in SERQUAL is understood as concerning to the appearance of physical elements where the government agencies need to aware of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials. Furthermore, government agencies have to concentrate on the availability of providing excellent in displaying modern looking equipment, visually appealing physical facilities, the neat appearance of the employees as well as the ambience in the organization itself.

Satisfaction can be expressed via positive word of mouth, giving compliments to the service provider, and via loyalty to the brand, the shop or the dealer. In recent case, the relationship between customer and service provider is continued. Service quality, mutual trust and responsiveness are other important factors determining satisfaction and the continuation of the bond between the customer and the service provider. This implies it is critical to look further afield than merely reviewing satisfaction [14]. Making promises and turning it to be real is an answer to the second dimension in SERVQUAL; reliability. This dimension is proven by illustrating the ability of the government agencies to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Malaysia government agencies need to take action of showing

interest in solving customer's problem within the given time scheduled or by certain of time as what had they promised to do so. In the conjunction with customer satisfaction, government agencies will have to perform their services right the first time where it will avoid service failure that might be lead to dissatisfaction and unacceptable conditions by the customers.

To be noted, as a good service provider, Malaysia government agencies are encourage to providing their services at the time they promised to do and perhaps to develop value among the employer in achieving error-free records. Consequently, in order to create value, the service interaction process starts by integrating the customer into the service production process. Therefore a primary value activity of the service provider is to render possible customer integration. Within the interaction process of the value chain, everything is done to satisfy the customer. This includes all service options during the "moments of truth", starting with little services that are self-evident for government agencies [4]. Hence, responsiveness as the third SERQUAL dimensions acts as the appetizer in putting the whole service environment on track. It starts with the process of employees of excellent government agencies providing prompt services where they will tell the customers exactly when the services will be performed. Employees will be always willing to help customers and never be too busy to respond to customer requests. The process of entertaining the customers will change the negative perception once the customers understands and pretty well get the job done within the time limit and constraints. Responding to customers will help the government agencies to operate.

Relationship quality stands for the customer's perception of the relationship to the provider and is defined as the ability of the provider to fulfil the customer's relational needs. Relationship quality is not just the sum of the qualities of all the interactions within a customer relationship, but also concerning the aspects that are central to the concept of the relationship. Consequently, relationship quality consists of dimensions that are different from quality service. In two studies, two central dimensions of relationship quality could be identified customer's trust in the corporation and familiarity between the customer and corporation. Trust is defined as the customer's willingness to forgo any additional investigation and just rely on the corporation's behaviour in the future. Various processes for the emergence of trust can be identified in the context of the trust-building process [4]. In the fourth dimension of SERQUAL, it concerns the variable of assurance where focusing into the matter of credibility, competence, courtesy and security. This dimension comprehend those values of trustworthiness, believability, honesty of the service provider, possession of the skills and knowledge required to perform the service, politeness, respect, consideration and friendliness. Here, focus will tag along the freedom from danger, risk or doubt. Up to this concern, Malaysia government agencies should ensure that the behaviour of their employees as an excellent service provider will instil confidence in the heart of customers. As for customers, they need to be able to feel safe in every of their transaction as they put high level of trustworthiness the service transactions. In achieving good service quality, it is to be encouraged that excellent government agencies need to consistently courteous with customers as they perceived the service value. The government agencies need to guarantee that each of their employee will have the knowledge to answer customers' questions not only to develop cus-

customer's trust but up to the relationship quality between the service provider and customer as it is an important driver to optimize positive customer's behaviour.

While the post-purchase stage is treated in considerable detail in the chapters dealing with customer satisfaction and complaining behaviour, there is nonetheless a need to examine work in the area of consumers' intrinsic needs and values to gain a comprehensive understanding of the decision-making process. Intrinsic needs and values are of central importance to managers who seek to understand and influence consumer behaviour. Because of the social interaction involved in service delivery (at least for high-contact services), understanding customers' values or fundamental human needs (as distinct from desired service attributes or expectations) is essential to achieving a successful outcome, satisfaction and loyalty. Conscious expectations about the performance of product attributes are a means to an end- the end being the fulfilment of deeper, more fundamental human needs and personal values, such as self-esteem, respect, self expression and power [17]. Therefore, the last dimension in SERQUAL is empathy variable where it pertains to easy access, good communications, and customer understanding. This will cover matters of approachability and ease of contact, listening to customers and keeping them informed in language they can understand and making the efforts to know customers and their needs. Based on empathy dimension, Malaysia government agencies are heartened to provide and give customers individual attention as they need it from the beginning of the service encounter. To be excellent, it is necessitated for the Malaysia government agencies to provide operating hours that are convenient to all customers. Employees are encouraged to have the customers' best interests at heart as they need to understand the specific needs of their customers.

How To Get It Right - Service Quality Adoption In Delivering Services By Government Agencies

Hire the Right People

Hiring the right people includes competing for applications from the best employees in the labour market, then selecting from this pool the best candidates for the specific jobs to be filled. That means a firm has to compete first for talent market share, engaging in, as called "the war for talent". Competing in the labour market means having an attractive value proposition for prospective employees, and includes factors such as having a good image as a place to work, as well as delivering high-quality products and services that make employees proud to be part of the team. There's no such thing as the perfect employees. Different positions are often to be filled by people with different skill sets, styles, and personalities. For example most of the services companies assess prospective employees in terms of their potential for frontstage or backstage work. Frontstage workers, known as frontliners, are assigned to the roles for which their appearance, personalities, and skills provide the best match. What makes outstanding service performers so special? Often it is things that cannot be taught. It is the qualities that are intrinsic to the people, and qualities they would bring

with them to any employer. Also, HR managers have discovered that whereas good manners and the need to smile and make eye contact can be taught, warmth itself cannot. The only realistic solution is to ensure that the organization's recruitment criteria favour candidates with naturally warm personalities. The logical conclusion is that service firms particularly in this focus area; Malaysia government agencies should devote great care to attracting and hiring the right candidates [16].

Enable Your People

If a firm has a good people, investment in training can yield outstanding results. Service champions show a strong commitment to training, in words, dollar and action. As Benjamin Schneider and David Bowen put it, "The combination of attracting a diverse and competent applicant pool, utilizing effective techniques for hiring the most appropriate people from that pool, and then training the heck out of them would be gangbusters in any market [23]. Therefore, service employees need to learn first, the organizational culture, purpose and strategy. Employees need to start strongly with new hires, and focus on getting emotional commitment to the firm's core strategy. Promote core values such as commitment to service excellence, responsiveness, team spirit, mutual respect, honesty and integrity. Secondly is interpersonal and technical skill. Interpersonal skills tend to be generic across service jobs, and include visual communications skills such as making eye contact, attentive listening, body language and even facial expressions. Technical skills encompass all the required knowledge related to processes, machines/ system and rules and regulations related to customer service processes. Both technical and interpersonal skills are necessary, but neither alone is sufficient for optimal job performance. Lastly is concerning product/ service knowledge where knowledgeable staffs are a key aspect of service quality. They must be able to explain product/ service features effectively and also position the product/ service correctly [16].

Virtually all breakthrough service firms have legendary stories of employees who recovered failed service transactions, or walked the extra mile to make a customer's day, or avoid some kind of disaster for that client. To allow this to happen, employees have to be empowered. Employee-self direction has become increasingly important, especially in service firms, because front-line staffs frequently operate on their own, face to face with their customers, and it tends to be difficult for managers to monitor their behaviour closely. Research has also linked high empowerment to higher customer satisfaction. For many services, providing employees with greater discretion (and training in how to use their judgement) enables them to provide superior service on the spot, rather than taking time to take permission from supervisors. Empowerment looks to front-line staff to find solutions to service problems, and to make appropriate decisions about customizing service delivery [16].

Motivate and energize Your People

Once a firm hired the right people, trained them well, empowered them, and organized them into service delivery teams, it's the time for ensuring excellence service delivery. Staff performance is a function of ability and motivation. Effective hiring, training, empower-

ment, and teams give a firm able people; reward systems, meantime, are the keys to motivation. Service staffs must get the message that providing quality service holds the key for them to be rewarded. Motivating and rewarding strong service performers are some of the most effective ways of retaining them. The staffs understand that those who get fired are those who haven't delivered at customer level. Service providers considered as fail when they are unable to utilize the full range of available rewards effectively. Most of firms think in term of money as reward, but it does not pass the test of an effective reward. Receiving a fair salary is a hygienic factor rather than a motivating factor. Paying more than what is seen as fair has only short-term motivating effects, and wears off quickly. On the other hands, bonuses that are contingent on performance have to be earned again and again, and therefore tends to be more lasting in their effectiveness. Other, more lasting rewards are the job content itself, recognition and feedback, and goal accomplishment [16].

Conclusion

As a developing country that envisage development through Malaysia Vision 2020, it is believed that Malaysia Government is now moving towards grasping all strategies in achieving those success elements in Vision 2020. Researchers believe that the importance of seeing service quality as an indicator to measure success can bring up many advantages in turning the perception of avoidance and rejection to an acceptance and satisfaction. This study shown us that the ability and initiatives taken in order to provide better service in becoming a good government service provider can be took place at the very beginning as of hiring people or staffs. This is due to the individual's spirit of placing themselves into the right position and plays the role as what they are required to do so. Whenever the service performance is played, the perceived value of the recipient is counts. Therefore, researchers always believe that putting the right person on the right time will turn a disaster to a big pleasure; turning a complainer to a loyal customer.

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