

Customer Satisfaction- Using Surveys

Introduction

Customer Satisfaction is the measure that indicates current and can be a leading indicator for future performance. Although each individual or organization may have their own expectations, consistent metrics can be defined for an organization based on the “Mission Statement”.

What is stated in yours?

Quality-To be better than our competitors

Delivery-Always when needed

Customers-Always number 1

Most organizations, product or service related, have the same basic concepts. The areas can be expended to better define the topics. The key to remember though, our Mission Statement is not what is posted on the wall; it’s how we treat our customers and ourselves.

Not all of us have interaction with our external customer, guest, or client. Our jobs or activities are daily tasks. We all have an interaction with internal customers. We need to identify that alignment of Customer Communication.

Customer Relations

External Customer Relations

External communication of requirements or standards may be our Mission Statement. Some companies may have a Brag Sheet or overall summary of our services, processes or products. In business to business relationships (B2B), customers have their own communicated and un-Communicated expectations. These expectations may have different definitions, names or requirements. To commonize the measures for consistency, binning or coding similar measures will provide a standard measurement format.

Business to Customer (B2C) relationships are not as direct. A business will define their services in a general way to attract the largest customer base. In some cases, the Customer may not know their needs or they may expand based on the “qualification” of the by the business contact. With this type of relationship, understanding the expectations and the satisfaction level expected and achieved is limited at the time of service. The customer’s feedback or measure may be delayed.

Internal Customer Relations

I was first introduced to the concept of internal customers by Phil Crosby, author of Quality is Free ¹. The initial concepts flow of Customer Connection Duplication of effort Internal/ External Quality Costs were presented at the “Quality College”. Measures of internal Customer/ Supplier interactions are developed to identify and correct costs of Poor Quality. Crosby’s definition of Quality is “Conformance

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to Requirements". The key is to define those requirements and measure against those requirements. Communications is the consistent thread in the customer satisfaction process.

For internal requirements, a statement of standards would include: Department Charter, Organization Hierarchy, Job Descriptions, and there are un-Communicated expectations. When department and personal objectives are aligned with the organization's, standards or requirements can be consistent and understood.

Customer Feedback Methods

Business Scorecards

Most business to business relationships have some type of scorecard as a presentation of met expectations. This report card is a reference to performance on a periodic basis. Typically a purchasing department is responsible for the measures, scoring and reporting. Receiver of the information at the supplier may be the Sales or Quality departments. Each customer will have a different format, but the basic expectations are:

- What do I need
- When do I need it
- How much does it cost
- What is the Quality of the product received?

I mentioned earlier, although there are different formats or categories the individual measures can be coded or binned to align multiple customer's measures in a single presentation.

Communication External Old School

Initial customer surveys were Table Cards. This method has standard questions that may be asked in a way to drive the customer to a specific answer. The questions may not be directed towards the customers' expectations. This method is manual feedback that requires input for analysis. Initially this method was used in the food service or hospitality industry. It has been expanded to different services industries as a Customer Survey.

My favorite now is the customer survey after a service is performed and printed or referenced is some, "If I am not a 10 I want to know before you submit". Does this sound Confrontational to you? Would you score all 10's so you did not need to speak to a person about your experience?

The intent of measuring Customer Satisfaction is not the score, it's the improvement.

Social Media

In the past ten years, social media has been the greatest expansion on direct customer feedback. Sites are designed with mobile applications that allow for the customer to provide immediate, free flow, feedback or opinion. Some will do this while still in the business provider.

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There are Blogs written by people that define their own expectations and performance that may become the norm for a specific commodity and may be different than what was originally defined by the provider.

Owner forums dedicated in general or specific products. Initially intended to provide help for other owners, the details provided by members can also rate the performance of product along with the after sale service of the provider.

Most companies that would be affected by this method monitor posts and response to understand the customer feedback.

Electronic Surveys

In the current environment, probably the most effective method is the use of electronic surveys. There are different companies that provide services that collect and analyze data. If your organization connects directly with the consumer, some of the companies have many surveys already developed and executed. You can specify your survey scope and population demographics to receive survey data. These companies do direct surveys to volunteers that may receive general benefits not associated with the survey.

These companies will also assist with developing your specific survey that may be directed to their survey population or you can specify the expected participants. They can also provide assistance with analysis.

Survey Design

If you use a pre-developed survey or create your own, survey design should take the most of your time resource. As with any project, planning may take the most time but is the most effective to achieve the results desired.

Start out with the survey scope, what information do we want to know documented is the most general terms. This will help in the selection or development of the questions that will be asked. Questions will be used to help define data that will be evaluated to create definition of current state and establish direction for actions to improvement.

Questions also need to be developed or selected to confirm initial response. This would be simply rewording some questions to verify similar results. During the development identification is necessary to link these questions for analysis after results are received.

Questions on both how it is now and what would we like it to be can create information for a customer expectation gap analysis. This is an understanding of customer needs either internal or external.

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Data Type

The data type expected from the survey needs to be defined. This becomes your collection of information and verification. There are two basic types of data, attribute and variable.

Attribute is data which on one of a set of discrete values such as pass or fail, yes or no. These questions are used to confirm a statement and do not allow for opinions of the participant.

Variable is Data that can be measured on a scale and compared with other data. This allows for a level of information from the participant. The information provides an opportunity for the participant to comment on a specific question in a controlled environment that will allow for analysis.

Data Type		
Attribute	OR	Variable
Yes or No		Likert Scale

Likert Scale

If you're trying to measure someone's attitudes or behaviors, a Likert scale is one of the most popular (and reliable) ways to do so. This format measures attitudes and behaviors using answer choices that range from one extreme to another. Having a range of responses will also help you to more easily identify areas of improvement—whether you're sending out a questionnaire to understand the levels of effectiveness of the course you're teaching, or gathering participant opinions on the quality of services either of the organization or area responsibility.

Often five ordered response levels are used, scaling from best to worst. There are references that provide examples of questions using this format.

Text based comments

Many surveys provide open text opportunity for the participant to comment, in free form, about defined areas of the survey. Most are limited to 255 characters because of field size for the database that will organize the final data.

Analysis of these types of response will require data mining, either automatic or manual. The most success with these questions is when the participant also provides contact information for additional follow up after the results are compiled.

Survey Execution

Once the project is developed, questions and interaction matrix, and the participants have been identified the survey time frame needs to be established. A cover letter or descriptive summary needs to be developed to identify the survey scope or rational. As an additional motivator, based on the project scope, you may commit to provide summary results to participants if desired.

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Survey Execution-External

The best way to execute electronic surveys is through a third party source. This allows for confidentiality of the participant, if desired, by screening the respondent information. This will encourage a larger response from the population and a more candid response.

When performing an external survey, customers, you will want to distribute the request to the greatest number of recipients in the defined population. In a business to business performance survey, you can define specific contact information for designated participation by providing current customer listing.

Another type of external survey may include a broadcast to a selected demographic of either direct customer or business participants. Lists are available that can limit your specific requirements.

Survey Execution- Internal

Surveys developed for internal feedback and actions are also best executed by a third party because of the confidentiality reasons listed above. Because of the limited distribution of the survey it is best to clarify the steps in place to safeguard the response of their participation. This is done with a clear cover letter describing the survey either prior to execution and or as the initial information at the beginning of the actual survey.

As part of an internal survey, it can be beneficial for the team to also complete a self-evaluation using the actual survey. This can help the team articulate the collective views and have the team on “the same page”.

Survey Data Analysis

There are many different statistical methods for the analysis of the response data. Survey companies can provide from raw data to a complete analysis. In some cases, allowing a third party to complete the analysis to remove any evaluation bias.

Analysis Actions

The data from a survey, either internal or external, needs to be used as if it were an assessment not a performance measure. Evaluate current state against expected or desired state. Look for the gaps; this is where the actions should be focused. Identify areas for most improvement and also identify areas for no improvement.

One type of evaluation tool is a Force Field Analysis.

Force Field Analysis		
Current Team	vs.	Customer Future
Future Team		Customer Future
Current Team		Team Future

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This listing is a comparison that would provide direct results for gap actions. Customer in this matrix may be either internal or external. Team can be defined as: the organization for an external survey or as the department for an internal.

The action plan steps can be developed by different means. Brainstorming with in the team, getting feedback from participants, Benchmark either: other Internal Departments, Same Department different company or industry or Baldrige Award winners.

Customers Internal -the Plan

A benefit of an internal survey is the contact level to your customers. Once the areas for action have been identified, customer interviews can be developed and completed to clarify what steps in the plan can be developed.

Not all customers or survey participants need to be interviewed. We need to identify the key “stake holders” of your department’s actions. The survey data provides reliable perspective but we need detailed in site into perceived service needs and performance. This interview would be with key internal customer representatives. During the interview remain objective with no counter discussion or justification for the departments current actions. Use a standardized interview outline to collect data and keep the interview on track.

Analysis/Action Feed back

Communication can be one of the strongest tools in Customer Satisfaction. Share your data summary Share your analysis and Action Plan, thank all for their participation. With external customers, they may have requested follow up on the survey or provided contact information as they participated. With internal customers, share the information customer department contacts. Visual management would include posting the information in your own department communications area. Identify and execute Feedback Cycle for stake holders.

Mission Statement

At the beginning I discussed that the Organization Mission Statement should be the driver for customer satisfaction both internally and externally.

- How does your Department Support?
- How does your Job Support?

These are questions that need to be answered. With internal customers we need to communicate our actions to all.

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Summary

Although not all areas have direct contact with the organizations external customers, the support to internal departments provides “overall customer satisfaction”.

A survey, with follow-up actions, is a tool used to evaluate current and define future actions. The survey design and analysis is used to define those actions.

Using customer feedback can help align department actions and performance to Customer Satisfaction.

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References

¹ Quality is Free, Philip B. Crosby.