



### Quality of Service Perceptions Among Service Providers in Texas

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# Quality of Service Perceptions Among Service Providers in Texas

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*Mary Lehman Held, Tuti Alawiyah, and Calvin L. Streeter*

## **Introduction**

Quality of service among public human service programs is an area that has received growing attention with increased expectations for positive qualitative and quantitative outcomes (Giannoccaro, Costantino, Ludovico, & Pietroforte, 2008; Knudsen, & Woods, 2007; Lee, McMullen). Specific organizational factors have been shown to correlate with the quality of services provided, as well as the satisfaction of customers (Dean, 2004; Hennig-Thurau, 2004; Scotti, Harmon, & Behson, 2007). Providing quality services has a number of organizational advantages that include employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, accreditation/licensure, gaining a competitive edge, and, ultimately, the survival of the organization. Additionally, delivering high quality services leads to loyalty by consumers (Dean, 2004).

Organization management teams benefit from understanding which organizational factors impact employee satisfaction, customer satisfaction, and quality of services (Scotti et al., 2007). Employees can impact the quality of services in many ways, one being through their interactions with customers. Customers interact with employees on a regular basis with direct service employees at the forefront of representing an agency (Schneider, Chung, & Yusko, 1993). A customer's perception of service quality is susceptible to an array of human variability factors affecting both employees and customers (Bowen, 1986). Human service organizations, then, have a responsibility to identify organizational and employee factors that improve or impede the delivery of quality services. Through interviews with

state employees, this study examines several factors that impact perceptions of service quality.

## **Literature Review**

Public and human service organizations face increased liability and increased expectations of providing high quality services (Giannoccaro et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2007). A number of human service organizations struggle with difficult demands and barriers to service. Limited resources, funding, and staff impair the ability to serve an increasing consumer-base with growing needs (Lee, et al., 2007). Organizations may have little control over these limitations, especially in the current economic climate. However, organizations do have control over other factors that can impact perceptions of quality of service, helping to overcome some of the identified limitations. Factors that impact perceptions of service quality will be examined.

## ***Perceptions of Quality***

Extensive literature has documented the correlation between employee and customer perceptions of service quality, demonstrating that employee perceptions are representative of customer perceptions (Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980; Scotti et al., 2007; Sureshchandar, Rajendran, & Anantharam, 2002). Additionally, employee satisfaction has been linked with employee and customer perceptions of service quality (Johnson, 1996; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995; Schneider et al., 1993; Schlesinger & Zornitsky, 1991; Yee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2008). Therefore, determining factors associated with employee satisfaction helps to provide an

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improved understanding of both employee and customer perceptions of the quality of services being provided. Specific factors that lead to improved employee satisfaction within organizations, and thus improved perceptions of service quality, will be examined.

### ***Accommodations, Employee Development, and Team Effectiveness***

Literature supports that organizational factors can influence employees' attitudes, satisfaction and perceived service quality (Dean, 1994; Johnson, 1996; Martensen & Gronholdt, 2001; Schmit & Allscheid, 1995). Three attributes of organizations that this study will examine are accommodations, employee development, and team effectiveness. Each factor has been shown to have a relationship with quality of service.

*Accommodations.* Accommodations comprise physical environment, pay, and benefits. The physical environment of organizations includes adequacy of computer resources, safety procedures, maintenance of facilities, and a sense of community. In the human service arena, employees are increasingly expected to provide a higher quantity and quality of care with increasingly limited resources and support (Lee et al., 2007). This strained environment, along with the current economic situation, progressively characterizes the nature of human services. Adequate physical resources and a positive organizational climate are imperative to providing quality services (Johnson, 1996; Schneider & Bowen, 1992). Schmit & Allscheid (1995) studied the role of the organizational environment on employees and their perceptions of the quality of the services provided. Their research explains the impact that direct supervisors, upper management, and policies and procedures have on an organizational climate. Without adequate physical amenities and the support of managers and coworkers, employees perceive that their job performance is less adequate. In fact, Schmit & Allscheid (1995) suggest that an insufficiency in even one component of the physical environment (such as policies and procedures) decreases an employee's ability to perform well. This decrease in performance abil-

ity is linked to decreases in both employee satisfaction and perceptions of service quality.

Employee benefits, including wages and health and retirement plans, are positively correlated with employee satisfaction and negatively correlated with burnout (Jenaro, Flores, & Arias, 2007; Milliman, Czaplewski, & Ferguson, 2008). Benefits can be equally, or more, important than wages, depending on an employees' personal or family medical needs. Literature suggests that as employee satisfaction is impacted by wages and benefits that customer satisfaction and perceptions of quality will also be affected (Milliman, et al., 2008).

*Employee Development.* Employee development includes job training, access to job-related conferences and workshops, work groups, and supervisor's knowledge of employee work goals. An employee cannot perform a job well without an understanding of the job requirements and access to adequate training and resources. Ongoing training for the job itself and for the delivery of quality services are important for direct service employees who must comply with updated resources, procedures, and service delivery methods (Johnson, 1996). Employee development through training promotes confidence, sufficiency, and pride in one's job, leading to improved job satisfaction (Johnson, 1996; Karia & Asaari, 2006; Martensen & Gronholdt, 2001) and customer satisfaction (Wiley, 1991). Employees typically want to perform well at work and will do so when provided adequate support (Hackman and Wageman, 1995).

*Team Effectiveness.* Team effectiveness within an organization includes how well employees work together, the level of autonomy employees maintain over their work roles, trust, efficiency, participation in decision-making, and teamwork among employees. Teamwork and employee participation in decision-making are essential components of quality management within an organization (Boon, Arumugan, Safa, and Bakar, 2006; Daily & Bishop, 2003; Hackman & Wageman, 1995; Karia & Asaari, 2006; Laksham, 2006). Laksham (2006) highlights the importance of all employees being active participants in the organi-

zation and part of the team. An emphasis on teamwork, shared decision-making, and workgroups enables employees to understand roles outside of their immediate duties. This understanding facilitates employees' recognition of how their actions impact the performance of others as well as the quality of services (Sheng-Hsun & Huang-Pin, 2005). Literature supports that accommodations, employee development, and team effectiveness are important in studying perceptions of quality of provided services.

### ***Employee Satisfaction***

In addition to organizational factors, employee satisfaction is expected to impact employee perceptions of the quality of the services provided, and includes several factors -- job satisfaction, time and stress, burnout, and empowerment. As previously discussed, job satisfaction has been repeatedly linked to perceptions of quality; therefore, job satisfaction will be examined as an independent variable. Time constraints, stress, and burnout have long been associated with work in the human service arena (Arches, 1991; Brookings, Bolton, Brown, & McEvoy, 1985; Glomb, Kammeyer-Mueller, & Rotundo, 2004). The current economic environment has created more work for fewer employees facing greater time constraints and greater job stress. Time constraints and stress, as well as burnout, are shown to decrease job satisfaction and are important factors to examine in terms of perceived service quality (Arches, 1991; Glomb et al., 2004). Empowerment, on the other hand, has been extensively correlated with job satisfaction (Boon et al., 2006; Daily & Bishop, 2003; Karia & Asaari, 2006). Employees who have confidence in their abilities, feel that their opinions and thoughts are considered worthwhile, and believe that they have a sense of control over their job tend to experience increased job satisfaction and believe that they provide higher quality services. Literature suggests that job satisfaction, empowerment, time, stress, and burnout are all important factors to examine in relation to employee perceptions of service quality.

### ***Theoretical Framework***

A management framework aimed at improving organizational quality was initially introduced by W. Edwards Deming. This framework changed the notion of management, as Deming's ideas continue to infiltrate organizations that are striving to improve quality of services. Deming maintained the premise that organizations had to work cohesively with the commitment of all employees focused on improving quality (Anderson, Rungtusanatham, & Schroeder, 1994). He understood the importance of each employee's contribution to the system and the benefit of having employees who are satisfied with their jobs. His approach to quality of service promotes internal practices geared to meeting the needs of employees and customers alike. Currently, much of Deming's work is included in the framework of Total Quality Management (TQM).

TQM focuses on the whole employee system within an organization and calls for all employees to work towards improving service quality and meeting the goals of customers (Hsu & Shen, 2005; Ooi, Arumugam, Teh, and Chong, 2008). TQM not only requires a commitment from employees, but offers a great deal back to employees through improved organizational climate and improved employee satisfaction. TQM methods utilize a number of organizational characteristics to create a climate of support and enrichment for staff (Hsu & Shen, 2005). This process is facilitated through management tactics. Organizational leaders help to instill an atmosphere of support, collaboration, continual striving for improvement, and pride in one's job (Anderson et al., 1994; Hsu & Shen, 2005). This atmosphere is believed to encourage improved employee satisfaction.

TQM methods have been found to aid in improving job satisfaction (Gardner & Carlopio, 1996; Ooi, et al., 2008). Several facets of TQM have yielded a positive correlation with employee satisfaction to include teamwork, collaboration, (Ooi et al., 2008) and empowerment (Boon et al., 2006). An environment is created that improves employment satisfaction as well as quality of service. This approach aids in the current study by outlining a framework that values the importance

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of organizational accommodations, employee development, and team effectiveness. Likewise, TQM methods reduce dissatisfaction with a job and organizational stressors associated with employee stress and burnout by encouraging collaboration, training, and job autonomy with the goal of improving the quality of services. This framework supports the notion that positive organizational and worker attributes foster employee satisfaction and quality of service.

### Methodology

#### *Data and Sample*

The current study utilized data from the Survey of Organizational Excellence (SOE), a survey of public agencies conducted by the University of Texas at Austin School of Social Work for the State of Texas. Data from employees at one state agency (N= 1830 samples) were examined in this study. The data utilized were collected between February 19 and March 15, 2008. The SOE began in 1979 based on a request by the Governor's office and is aimed at measuring employee perceptions of the services offered by their organization, as well as the level of satisfaction with the organization. The information obtained is beneficial in helping organizations examine areas that influence employee and customer satisfaction.

#### *Measures*

The dependent variable in the current study was the perception of service quality among employees, and it included the following six questions (Cronbach Alpha = 0.82): we are known for the quality of service we provide; we are constantly improving our services; we produce high quality work that has a low rate of error; we know who our customers (those we serve) are; we develop services to match our customers' needs; and outstanding work is recognized.

The independent variables were organizational attributes that included worker accommodations, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction. Independent variables were rated on a five-point Likert scale (5=strongly agree; 1=strongly disagree). Some of the questions are reverse coded so that an answer of "5" always signifies a higher score; therefore,

no reverse coding was necessary in the analysis.

Worker accommodations (Cronbach Alpha = 0.78) included ten questions, such as "people are paid fairly for the work they do," "our workplace is well maintained," and "I understand my benefit plan." Employee development (Cronbach Alpha = 0.89) consists of four questions including the following: "Training is made available to us for personal growth and development" and "we have access to information about job opportunities, conferences, workshops, and training." Team effectiveness (Cronbach Alpha = 0.81) includes seven questions, including the following: "work groups receive adequate feedback that helps improve their performance"; "decision making and control are given to employees doing the actual work"; and "work groups are actively involved in making work processes more effective." Employee satisfaction (Cronbach Alpha=0.92), which includes 12 questions, aims to capture the level of satisfaction related to job, time and stress, burnout, and empowerment. Among the questions for worker attributes are "we are given the opportunity to do our best work," "the environment supports a balance between work and personal life," and "my ideas and opinions count at work." Information on the three organizational attributes and employee satisfaction are shown in Table 1.

Demographic characteristics that served as control variables were included in the analysis: sex, race, age, education, and annual salary. Other variables related to individual employee attributes were also included: years of service at the agency, and four dichotomous variables (having supervisory role, receiving promotion, receiving merit increase, and planning to work more than two years).

#### *Analysis*

The purpose of the analysis is to assess whether worker accommodation, employee development, team effectiveness and employee satisfaction predict service quality perceptions among service providers in a public agency in Texas. To perform this analysis, bivariate correlation and hierarchical regressions analysis were used. Frequencies and means were calculated for the entire sample. Preliminary data screening shows that the

Variables	Number of Items	Means (SD)
Service quality perceptions (Alpha = 0.82)	6	21.8739 (4.46573)
Worker Accommodation (Alpha=0.78)	10	30.7979 (6.37494)
Employee development (Alpha=0.89)	4	16.2051 (4.21153)
Team effectiveness (Alpha=0.81)	7	20.5480 (6.36076)
Employee satisfaction (Alpha=0.92)	12	41.6399 (10.44432)

distributions of four independent variables were normal with no extreme outliers. The largest correlation between predictors ( $r=0.85$ ) did not indicate extremely high multicollinearity. Thus, the assumptions required to perform multiple regression analysis were reasonably well met.

**Results**

**Sample Characteristics**

For this study, the overall sample was 1,830 respondents who work in the provider services division in a state agency in Texas. As shown in Table 1, the majority of employees were white females between the ages of 40 and 56 years with some level of higher education. Regarding the annual salary, almost one-third of respondents earned \$25,000 or less, nearly half of them earned between \$25,000 and \$45,000, and less than one-fourth of them earned over \$45,000.

In terms of individual employee attributes, most of the employees had not received a promotion and more than half of them had not received a merit increase in the last two years. However, the majority of them were planning to work at the agency for more than two years, and had more than 10 years of service at the agency. Around 40% of the respondents were in a supervisory role.

As shown in Table 3, bivariate analyses were conducted to examine relationships between independent variables and perception of service quality. With regard to service quality perception, age, annual salary, a supervisory role, employee pro-

motion, a merit increase, planning to work more than two years, worker accommodations, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction were statistically significant.

The service quality perception was correlated with two demographic variables (age and annual salary) and four employee attributes were correlated with a weak relationship. These factors suggest that older people ( $r=.06$ ,  $p=.05$ ), individuals with higher annual salary ( $r=.13$ ,  $p=.001$ ), those who had a supervisory role ( $r=.14$ ,  $p=.001$ ), who received a promotion ( $r=.07$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and received a merit increase ( $r=.10$ ,  $p=.001$ ) in the past two years, and who planned to work more than two years at the agency ( $r=.19$ ,  $p=.001$ ) had higher perceptions of service quality.

Furthermore, perception of quality of service was also correlated with worker accommodations, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction. Thus, respondents who perceived having better accommodations ( $r=.58$ ,  $p=.001$ ) and employee development ( $r=.62$ ,  $p=.001$ ), perceived more effective workgroups ( $r=.71$ ,  $p=.001$ ), and were more satisfied as employees ( $r=.75$ ,  $p=.001$ ) had higher perceptions of service quality.

**Results of Multiple Regression Analysis**

Hierarchical regression analysis was used to predict service quality perception among the employees of state service providers. Step 1 includes demographic variables (age and salary) and individual employee attributes (supervisory role, re-

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**Table 2. Sample Characteristics**

Variables	Frequencies	Percentage
<i>Total Sample = 1830</i>		
Sex		
Female	1360	74.8
Male	458	25.2
Race		
African American	318	17.6
Hispanic	267	14.8
White	1143	63.2
Asian	38	2.1
Multiracial/Others	43	2.4
Age		
16 – 29	173	9.6
30 – 39	304	16.8
40 – 49	511	28.2
50 – 59	655	36.2
60 and above	166	9.2
Education		
Less than high school	25	1.4
High school or equivalent	381	21.0
Some college	519	28.6
Associate degree	244	13.4
Bachelor's degree	377	20.7
Master's degree	239	13.2
Doctoral degree	32	1.8
Gross-Salary		
Less than \$15,000	32	1.8
\$15,001 – 25,000	553	30.7
\$25,001 – 35,000	538	29.9
\$35,001 – 45,000	294	16.3
\$45,001 – 50,000	119	6.6
\$50,000 – 60,000	124	6.9
\$ 60,001 – 75,000	100	5.6
Over \$75,000	40	2.2
In supervisory role		
Yes	733	40.6
No	1074	59.4
Received promotion in the last two years		
Yes	467	26.3
No	1307	73.7
Received merit increase in the last two years		
Yes	825	46.0
No	968	54.0
Plans to work at agency for two years		
Yes	1568	88.6
No	201	11.4
Years of service at agency		
Under 1 year	143	7.9
1 to 2 years	164	9.1
3 to 5 years	218	12.1
6 to 10 years	329	18.2
11 to 15 years	248	13.8
Over 15 years	701	38.9



ceiving promotion, receiving merit increase, and working for more than two years). Step 2 includes accommodations, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction. The purpose of the hierarchical regression analysis is to assess whether there are significantly different changes between the first and the second model.

Demographic characteristics and employee attributes were entered in Model 1. This model showed that gross salary and three employee attributes (having a supervisory role, receiving a merit increase, and planning to work more than two years) had a positive relationship with service quality perception. The model also indicated that these variables significantly predicted perception of service quality ( $F(6, 1490) = 22.129, p=.001$ ) and explained 8 % of the variance.

In Model 2, the four independent variables (accommodation, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction) were added to the model. This model indicated that age, salary, having a supervisory role, planning to stay at the agency more than two years, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction were significant predictors of service quality perception ( $F$

(10,1486) = 217.484,  $p=.001$ ). This model explained 59 % of the variance. The results also indicated that among demographic variables, age became a significant predictor when the independent variables were added to the model. The bivariate analysis indicated that age was strongly correlated with years of service at the agency. Those who had more years in service were more likely to have a higher salary and to receive a promotion. Of those independent variables, team effectiveness and employee satisfaction made the largest unique contribution. Worker accommodations and employee development were not significant predictors in the regression model.

**Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to examine four independent variables (worker accommodation, employee development, team effectiveness, and employee satisfaction) in terms of their relationship to employee perceptions of quality of service. Following the expectation, a relationship was found between each of the variables and employee perceptions of quality of service. Out of these variables, team effectiveness and employee

Table 2. Correlation between service quality perception, demographic characteristics, and four independent variables  
\*\*p<.05 \*\*\*p<.01

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Perception of service quality	—	.00	.06*	.01	.02	.13**	.14**	.07**	.10**	.19**	.01	.58**	.62**	.71**	.75**
2. Sex		—	.05*	-.03	.13**	.08**	.12**	.02	.01	.00	.01	.04	-.03	-.02	-.04
3. Age			—	-.00	.05*	.14**	.08**	-.12**	.08**	-.03	.47**	-.02	-.05*	-.03	-.01
5. Race				—	-.06*	-.07	-.01	.05	.06*	.03	.05	.03	.01	.02	.01
4. Education					—	.60**	.16**	.07**	-.01	-.11**	-.10**	.06*	-.04	-.03	-.04
6. Salary						—	.26**	.10**	.01	-.03	.010	.14**	.06*	.07**	.08**
7. Supervisory role							—	.18**	.15**	.02	.19**	.04	.11**	.10**	.07**
8. Promotion								—	.15**	.05*	-.03	.10**	.11**	.10**	.09**
9. Merit Increase									—	.05*	.24**	.05*	.08**	.09**	.10**
10. Working in two years										—	-.01	.12**	.18**	.17**	.22**
11. Years in service											—	-.09*	-.06*	-.06*	-.07**
12. Accommodation												—	.63**	.66**	.74**
13. Employee Development													—	.79**	.76**
14. Team effectiveness														—	.85**
15. Employee satisfaction															—



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Table 4. Hierarchical regression model to predict service quality perception

		Model 1			Model 2		
		B	SE	Beta	B	SE	Beta
Individual Employee Attributes	Age	.152	.103	.038	.243***	.068	.061
	Gross salary	.293***	.070	.109	.140**	.047	.052
	Supervisory role	.907***	.239	.100	.582***	.160	.064
	Promotion	.352	.261	.035	-.083	.174	-.008
	Merit increase	.549**	.227	.062	.122	.152	.014
	Working more than two years	2.935***	.358	.204	.503**	.247	.035
Organizations and Worker Components	Accommodation				.020	.018	.028
	Employee development				.023	.030	.022
	Team effectiveness				.186***	.024	.264
	Employee Satisfaction				.199***	.015	.468
F-value		F (6, 1490)= 22.129***			F (10,1486)= 217.484***		
R Square/Adjusted R		.08/.08			.59/.59		

\*\*p<.05 \*\*\*p<.001

satisfaction were the greatest predictors of perceived quality of service. Additionally, employees in higher job positions, with higher salaries, who received a promotion and/or merit increase in the past two years, and who planned to still be working at the agency in two years all demonstrated higher perceptions of quality of service. Further research to indicate factors contributing to employee satisfaction and team effectiveness would be beneficial in order to specify improvement and quality-promoting strategies that contribute the most to employee perceptions of quality.

The results demonstrate that worker accommodation and employee development were not significant predictors in the regression model. Employee satisfaction and the effectiveness of work groups are greater predictors of perceived quality of service. If employees feel satisfied with their jobs and that their coworkers work well as a team, they are more likely to perceive the quality of service they provide to be high. These results are in line with Deming's TQM framework that promotes improved job satisfaction and organizational support as methods that will improve quality of services.

Worker accommodations and employee development may be more important in other settings, such as private companies. In public agencies, these factors are perhaps less important in predicting the perception of quality among employees. The results are understandable because factors other than payment and worker accommodations motivate people to seek jobs at public agencies and to provide high quality services. Employees often enter the public service arena with an acceptance of lower salaries and smaller agency budgets. Additionally, the concept of aiding those in need is likely to serve as both a reward and motivation for their work.

Also employee development did not predict the service quality perception. Again public agencies often lack the financial resources that are available to private, for-profit companies. Employee development programs and trainings may be less affordable for agencies with limited funding. Outside conferences and training are also costly, possibly limiting the attendance of public employees.

Team effectiveness and employee satisfaction are the greatest predictors of perceived service quality in this study. These results support previ-

ous research that found a link between employee satisfaction and employee perceptions of service quality (Yee et al., 2008), as well as a link between team effectiveness and quality management practices (Boon et al., 2007). These results help us to understand that employee satisfaction and effective work groups are relevant to perceptions of better service quality specifically for public service workers.

There are several limitations to this research. Despite the established correlation between employee perceptions and customer perceptions of service quality, interviewing customers may have provided greater insight into their perceptions of quality. Additionally, all providers were grouped together, as opposed to examining separate employee positions. Separating out the distinct job categories could best inform individual departments about their specific results. This study does, however, provide a preliminary understanding of perceptions of quality of services at one state agency and serves as a basis for further research.

These findings also inform social workers who are already in public service agencies or those who aim to enter public service agencies of factors to consider that may impact both job satisfaction and service quality. Social work educators who develop curricula can benefit from this knowledge through bringing awareness of tactics to improve quality of services at both an organizational and an employee level and can better prepare social work students for working with public service agencies and clients. Further research would be beneficial to determine if these results are reflective of other public agencies and to explore the differences between public and private organizations.

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