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'Respons'ible service quality

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this study was to bridge the gap between customer's assessment of service quality dimensions (SERVQUAL model) and the descriptors of training. A model of service quality is SERVQUAL, which measures the discrepancy between customer's perceptions and expectation on the customer service. The dimensions of service quality here are evaluated from the customer's point of view. Functional fluency as a model of transactional analysis identifies descriptors of interpersonal communication that helps employees improve their responses. Hence, to provide a clear training need assessment, the dimensions of service quality and descriptors of functional fluency must be mapped accordingly.

Design/methodology/approach – The semantic mapping of the dimensions of the service quality with descriptors of the functional fluency model.

Findings – Of the five dimensions of the SERVAQUAL model, four are behavioral and are mapped with four descriptors belonging to four different modes of the functional fluency model. The four modes are positive manner in which people can respond to improve service quality.

Research limitations/implications – The implication is the training needs that emerge by bridging the gap between SERVQUAL dimensions and functional fluency model for self-development.

Practical implications – This will provide an organization the training needs analysis for their employees for improving their interpersonal communication on service quality dimensions.

Originality/value – Bridging of the gap between customer's assessment of service quality dimensions (SERVQUAL model) and the descriptors of training (functional fluency model).

Keywords SERVQUAL, Service quality, Training, Functional fluency, Training needs

Paper type Conceptual paper

Inter personal communication

The interaction, during interpersonal orientation, concentrates more on the sharing of meaning, as the responsibility of sending, receiving and evaluating messages is divided between two participants. The meanings are shared for a better relationship, whether it involves verbal or non-verbal cues. The focus is on self awareness that enhances objectivity and promotes empathy. Here, one must choose responses rather than just react automatically (Temple, 2009a). Temple's (2002) Functional fluency model maps communication to help build positive and effective relationships.

TA model – functional fluency

Functional fluency promotes effective ways of behaving socially in many contexts along with other transactional analysis models and concepts (Temple, 2009b). Functional fluency model helps in understanding the manner in which we respond to situations. "It is about how to choose 'responses' rather than just react automatically" (Temple, 2009b). Temple (2002) has proposed the name functional fluency, which describes the behavioral manifestation of the integrating adult ego state. The model focuses on responding positively and avoiding the contaminated behaviors of either the parent or the child, therein the description of the integrated adult manifestation. One can engage clients, catch the

attention and understand their difficulties by communicating with them on subject matter with energy and enthusiasm.

The model uses the term functioning rather than ego states. Primarily related to the analysis of behavior, the way we use our energies and it gives the opportunity to people to own their behavior (Temple, 2002). Functional fluency model has three constructs. The first level has three categories of functioning namely, being socially responsible, reality assessment and self actualization. The second level further breaks down the socially responsible and self actualization category into two each. This makes the level have five groups of functioning; control, care, accounting, socialized self and natural self. The third stage further divides control, care, socialized self and natural self to each possessing a positive and a negative expression. Accounting is more a "reality check", and hence indicative of more or less than any subjective manifestation.

Now, this gives us the nine elements or modes of human functioning (as shown in Figure 1: functional fluency construct). The nine modes have both effective and ineffective expressions of functioning with six descriptors to each mode (Table I).

Interpersonal communication and customer service quality

In marketing, good interpersonal communication can result in better and empathetic understanding of a customer. This perspective customer service is an essential part of customer value proposition. Moreover, customer service is the differentiating tool in the hands of the service organization for delivering higher service quality than its competitors (Wong and Sohal, 2003). One such model on service quality is the SERVQUAL model. It represents service quality as the discrepancy between a customer's expectations for a service offering and the customer's perceptions of the service received, requiring respondents to answer questions about both their expectations and their perceptions (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The development of SERVQUAL by Parasuraman et al. (1988) as a generalizable measure of service quality was a seminal contribution that has been adapted and widely used across industries around the world (Dabholkar et al., 1996). It measures the responses on three parameters, people, processes and physical evidence, the three Ps of services marketing.

The above three are further measured along five dimensions viz. tangibility (physical facilities and appearance of personnel), reliability (dependable and accurate promised service), responsiveness (help with prompt service), assurance (courtesy exhibited by personnel) and empathy (caring and understanding displayed by personnel). This is evaluated from the customers' point of view on service quality. With the exception of

Figure 1 Functional Fluency Construct Temple (2004)

CONTROL ELEMENT Guidance and direction of others and self	Negative Control Dominating Mode	Negative Care Marshmallowing Mode	CARE ELEMENT Looking after others and self
	Positive Control Structuring Mode	Positive Care Nurturing Mode	
Reality Assessment Accounting Mode			
SOCIALIZED ELEMENT Relating to and getting along with others	Positive Socialized Self Cooperative Mode	Positive Natural Self Spontaneous Mode	NATURAL ELEMENT Doing my own thing in my own way
	Negative Socialized Self Compliant/Resistant Mode	Negative Natural Self Immature Mode	

Table I Mode descriptors with item refinement (Temple, 2002)

Negative control	Blaming Bossy Dominating Fault-finding Judgmental Punitive	Dominating mode	Marshmallowing mode	Inconsistent Overindulgent Overprotective Overtolerant Self-denying Smothering	Negative care
Positive control	Authoritative Consistent Well organized Firm Helpful Inspiring	Structuring mode	Nurturing mode	Cherishing Compassionate Empathic Encouraging Accepting Understanding	Positive care
Accounting element	Alert Aware Evaluative		Accounting mode	Grounded Enquiring Rational	Accounting element
Positive socialized self	Adaptable Assertive Confident Considerate Friendly Resilient	Cooperative mode	Spontaneous mode	Creative Curious Expressive Imaginative Playful Zestful	Positive natural self
Negative socialized self	Anxious Defiant Inhibited Placating Rebellious Submissive	Compliant/resistant mode	Immature mode	Egocentric Inconsiderate Infantile Reckless Selfish Unorganized	Negative Natural Self

tangibility, the other four dimensions point toward the behavioral aspects in dealing with the customer. Moreover, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy require evaluating the messages that are emitted and accordingly monitoring the appropriate message for a better relationship. McLean (2007) states that if there was an insistence on rules without any clear directions or explanation, then the customer complained and that customers were more impressed by the extra help provided. The frame of reference here is pointing towards the elements of human functioning or functional fluency and its orientation in customer service. Taking a cue from the nine elements of human functioning (Temple, 2002), the customer service may be improved by either responding through the five positive modes or by being cautious of the responses through the four negative modes of functional fluency. Interestingly, the modes of functional fluency resonate with four of these service quality dimensions: reliability and with structuring, assurance with cooperative, responsiveness with accounting and empathy with nurturing mode through their dictionary meaning match (Table II). The dimension tangibles is not applicable here because it does not directly measure response or a behavioral dimension on customer service.

Hence, the service quality dimensions and the functional fluency modes are mapped (Table II) as structuring (reliability), nurturing (empathy), accounting (responsiveness) and cooperative (assurance) modes. This mapping helps in bridging the training gap from the customer and personnel side as reflected in Figure 2.

Table II Mapping of ServaQual dimensions with functional fluency descriptors and modes

<i>ServaQual dimensions</i>	<i>Synonym (where applicable)</i>	<i>Mapping with function fluency descriptors</i>	<i>Mode</i>
Reliability (noun)	Consistency (noun)	Consistent (adj)	Structuring
Empathy (noun)	–	Empathetic (adj)	Nurturing
Responsiveness (noun)	Awareness (noun)	Aware (adj)	Accounting
Assurance (noun)	Assertion (noun)	Assertive (adj)	Cooperative

Sources: Reader's Digest's Universal Dictionary, 1988

Figure 2 Mapping Service Quality with Functional Fluency

Customer's Perceptions & Expectations	Service Quality		TRAINING MAPPING	Functional Fluency		Service Delivery
	DIMENSION			DESCRIPTOR	MODE	
	Reliability			Consistent	Structuring	
	Empathy			Empathetic	Nurturing	
	Responsiveness			Aware	Accounting	
	Assurance			Assertive	Cooperative	

Limitation

The limitation is that the linguistic synonyms mapping of the service quality dimensions with that of functional fluency descriptors may have a few synonyms that will be true for other descriptors in other modes as well. Hence, the closest descriptor-mode match was adopted.

Conclusion

The customer evaluates the service delivery of an organization's offerings through the personnel's interactions. The interactions can be positive and negative and thereby affecting the perceptions and expectations of the customers. This affects the loyalty of the customer. Organizations' spend millions on getting to understand its service quality through their customers. SERVAQUAL and its dimensions give this understanding. However, what does one do with low scores on dimensions like reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance that are behavioral in nature? Functional fluency model of human functioning helps in developing training program that help personnel monitor their responses. Modes like structuring, nurturing, accounting and cooperative with their specific descriptors addresses this gap. Hence, training that maps service quality dimensions with functional fluency's mode and their descriptor gives this start point on identification of training needs.

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