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Customer Service Commitment
Report
Saturday, January 26, 2002

Customer Service Commitment Profile

Introduction

In recent years, it has become widely recognized and understood that an organization's success rests heavily upon how well it understands its customers needs and is then responsive to delivering what is required.

Extensive research from a wide variety of sources has identified six specific steps that are common to the excellent service providers. These steps are seen to be the foundation in building and managing extraordinary levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. In brief these steps suggest:

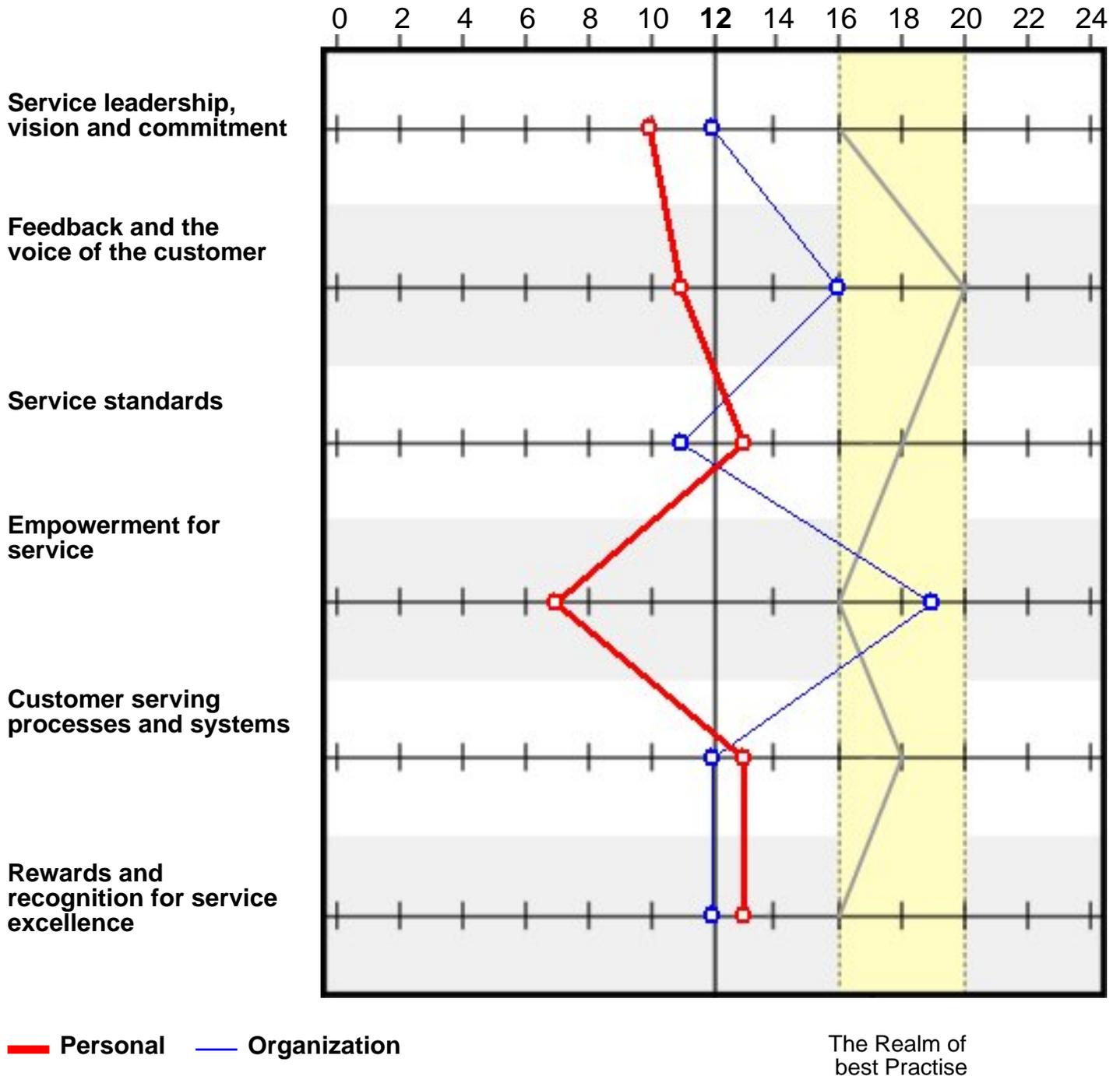
1. That a clear vision of what constitutes superior service should be communicated to all employees at every level, and that service quality is personally and positively important to everyone in the organization. This requires service focused leadership and commitment.
2. That the customer's voice must be heard, understood, and the organization should respond - often in unique and creative ways - to their evolving needs and constantly shifting expectations.
3. That concrete standards of excellent service quality should be established and regularly measured.
4. That customer focused and empathic people should be hired (particularly those in the front line), and should be coached carefully and extensively so that they have the knowledge and skills to achieve the service standards and are empowered to work on behalf of customers, whether inside or outside the organization.
5. That customer serving processes and systems should be widely understood and consistently improved by motivated and enthusiastic teams of employees across the organization.
6. That employees are fully aware of what it takes to give excellent customer service, and that recognition and reward for service accomplishments are in place both individually, and at a group level, to celebrate the success of employees who go "one step beyond" for their customers.

This instrument details all six of these customer service excellence steps as sub-categories in which participant answers have been scored from their own personal performance perspective and that of the wider organization around them.

Each of the above steps is described in more detail in subsequent pages.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

YOUR SUMMARY SCORES



Customer Service Commitment Profile

UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORES

Now that your individual score had been plotted, you should be in a position to:

- 1. Review your personal awareness and commitment levels in each of the six categories.**
- 2. Review the relative performance of the organization in terms of your perception of its scores in each category.**
- 3. Compare your score and the organizational score and the gap between the two in each category.**
- 4. Determine what you might like to prioritize for yourself and for the organization in terms of making future changes to you customer service behavior or actions.**

The essential value in any measurement instrument is in the extent to which it provides a useful indicator about a current situation and provides some guidance in terms of what you might do to change it for the better. This should ideally be helpful in a way that individuals can reflect upon and judge whether any adjustments or changes are necessary or desirable.

By completing this profile, the intensity of your scores and those that you have assigned to the organization as a whole, should provide a useful basis for such a review to take place. To deepen or extend this further, you may want to ask two or three of your colleagues to complete the profile as they see cultural diversity to be the same as you (especially as far as the wider organization is concerned). By averaging their scores and plotting them on the grid, this can create an interesting comparison between your own and the organization's awareness and commitment and the awareness and commitment that others perceive to exist.

Whatever your scores, and whether they are yours alone or enhanced by the views of others, you may want to develop your skills in categories other than the ones in which you are already strongest.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

THE SIX CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITMENT CATEGORIES

SERVICE LEADERSHIP, VISION AND COMMITMENT

Without a tangible vision of what service excellence looks like, we have no capacity to know how much we need to improve. A service vision needs to be created, shaped and broadcast at every opportunity. This is usually best done through direct leadership effort and ensuring that discussion about the service vision takes place in every conversation, to ensure the most widespread individual commitment and accountability for achieving it.

FEEDBACK AND THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

The customer defines service excellence and quality every time they deal with an individual or the organization. As such, as many 'listening posts' or listening channels as possible need to be developed to ensure that the ever changing voice of the customer is constantly heard and understood, and used to make any changes that would create benefit and be of value.

SERVICE STANDARDS

As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, every individual across the whole organization needs to ensure that standards of service excellence are widely known and met in every area and at all times. These minimum standards of service excellence should be driven into every part of the organization and communicated at all levels, including the customer, so that what can be expected is fully appreciated.

EMPOWERMENT FOR SERVICE

Service excellence is achieved through people. Every individual needs to understand who its customers are (internal and external) and what they need to be doing to provide service excellence. All individuals (and particularly customer facing ones) need to be given the authority and freedom to act to deliver service that is 'customer warm' and as empathic to customer needs as it is possible to be.

CUSTOMER SERVING PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

A powerful vision for service excellence, focused customer listening and highly empowered people, count for little unless service can be practically delivered on a consistent basis. To do this, every process or system of work needs to be well designed and to run smoothly or according to plan. In addition, because individual customer needs are never quite the same, this means ensuring that every process is flexible enough to 'bend' and adapt but continue to deliver service every time.

REWARDS AND RECOGNITION FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Although most organizations offer reward and recognition for achieving goals or targets, these rewards often reinforce goals other than customer commitment and service. Service excellence must be rewarded and recognized and seen to be offered at every available opportunity. This should include public opportunities for recognition, where these service achievements can become a role model for others.

In the following pages, you will find each of the above categories elaborated further. Each category includes general action steps to improve in the future. A category graph is also included detailing the raw scores for yourself and the organization for individual questions. Finally, detailed action/coaching guidelines are included for individual and organization scores that total less than 3. (improvement scope is indicated)

Customer Service Commitment Profile

SERVICE LEADERSHIP, VISION & COMMITMENT

The "clarion call" of delivering outstanding service, or a service excellence vision, directs the attention of people in the organization toward the real priorities of the customer and helps to guide their individual actions. Communicating it to the customers helps to attract them to the organization.

Defining and communicating the service vision is a part of coaching employees, developing service delivery systems, measuring organizational performance, and managing the sales and marketing effort. A well-defined service vision declares an organization's competitive direction and must become its "guiding light". That means it has to be communicated over and over again, until everyone in the organization sings the same tune.

The service vision must become an integral part of an organization - employees at all levels must be aligned with a single vision of what the organization is trying to accomplish with customers and the way customers judge or view their performance. The service vision must therefore be actively communicated throughout the organization. This requires strong leadership and highly visible commitment. This cannot happen in words but in the deeds and behavior of everyone that leads a team.

To be entirely customer focused senior managers must believe that giving good service to their customers (who include their subordinates) involves open communication at all times and displaying clear leadership to their team. They need to be ever responsive to their team and act as their champion to ensure their subordinates have all the resources and facilities they need to deliver excellent service to their customers, whether they are internal or external.

Leaders should spend time each week talking to a small number of external customers to ensure that the service delivery to those customers, from whom they are often remote, is of a very high quality. At every meeting they attend, the first item on the agenda must be "What have we done since the last meeting, to ensure our service delivery is continually improving".

They should ensure that all formal or informal performance appraisals include customer commitment as key performance measures. They also should champion the measurement of customer service in their teams and/or departments.

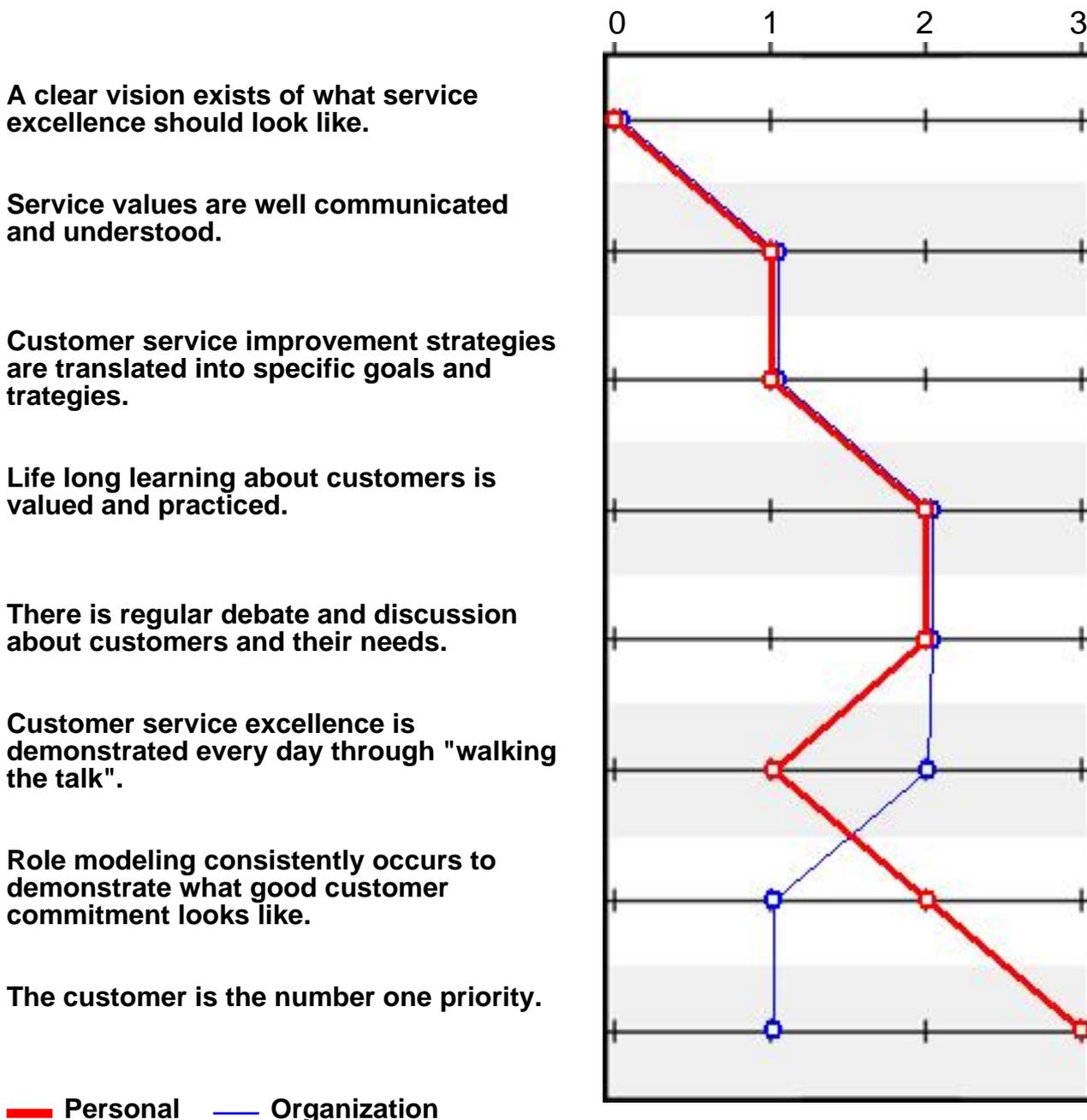
The vision 'lives' through the actions of individuals as role models for service. This, to a very large extent, determines the level of commitment that everyone has to any initiative taken by the enterprise. It becomes obvious, therefore, that on visiting various parts of an organization and talking to and observing employee behavior, the attitudes and commitment of the leaders are clearly mirrored. "Walking the talk" is therefore of extreme importance. People do not merely want to hear their leaders expressing commitment to customer service and service quality, they wish to see the commitment extending into the leader's behavior.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

SERVICE LEADERSHIP, VISION & COMMITMENT

Without a tangible vision of what service excellence looks like, we have no capacity to know how much we need to improve. A service vision needs to be created, shaped and broadcast at every opportunity. This is usually best done through direct leadership effort and ensuring that discussion about the service vision takes place in every conversation, to ensure the most widespread individual commitment and accountability for achieving it.

Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24
Organization: 10 out of a possible 24



1

Service Leadership, Vision and Commitment

A clear vision exists of what service excellence should look like tips

In recent years, many organizations have invested enormous amounts of effort in making sure that they have a clear vision of the future that they would like to create (although the effort is not necessarily successful of course). In many cases these overall or general visions are very detailed and describe new markets, growth in revenues or profitability or even new cultures of performance that will be created with widespread employee input and commitment. However, although a corporate vision will also often mention customer satisfaction, they rarely describe what customer service excellence may look like in the future.

A service vision is specifically concerned with all the ways in which it is intended that customer service will be offered or given by the quality standards, delivery flexibility and commitment, service feedback and action targets and even general responsiveness standards to service requests.

An effective service vision is often built on a solid platform of real knowledge about customer needs and expectations. Best practice organizations therefore ensure that they utilize a wide range of customer listening channels that can help them to keep up to date on the shifting needs of different customers over the medium to long term.

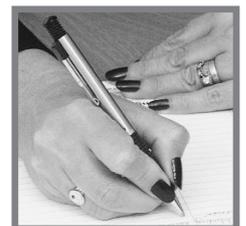
Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I understand my own service shortfalls, limitations and difficulties at the moment and appreciate what needs to be done to improve them in the future?
2. Have I spent quality time in identifying key priority areas that need to be in my personal service excellence vision?
3. Do I really understand what standards of service my customers expect of me (internal or external ones) – how do I keep up to date?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. What mechanisms are in place to understand the service shortfalls, problems and challenges that are occurring across the enterprise and what do we need to do to improve over the long term?
2. What mechanisms or channels are in place to listen to customer needs and expectations on an on-going basis and to ensure that they are reflected in the service vision?
3. Has a clearly written service vision been developed that is based on real customer needs and disseminated to all individuals in the organization?



1

Service Leadership, Vision and Commitment

Service values are well communicated and understood

Service values relate to the overall beliefs that are held by enterprise about how customers should be treated. This may include a range of tangible service commitments around the particular products being supplied (such as product quality, reliability, performance guarantees, delivery standards, etc). However, it can also include less tangible service commitments such as staff responsiveness, warmth, complaint handling ability, etc).

Particular service values will depend upon the specific nature of the organization, the products or services it provides, the markets that are served and the culture that prevails. Although each of these factors may therefore, change the focus or the emphasis of the chosen service values that are selected, great care should be taken to identify which service values will be adopted. This means that the organization should be capable of delivering on its service promises and build widespread commitment to supporting the values at every level of the enterprise.

Best practice organizations ensure that the service values are properly researched and that they are fully explained to all organizational members, so that each individual can play a fully supporting role.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I know which service values are likely to be important to external customers?
2. Do I understand the service values that my organization considers to be important?
3. Do I know how to support and apply the key service values in my particular job role in the enterprise?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Have we rigorously researched which service values are likely to be most appreciated by our customers and in the markets in which we operate?
2. To what extent have we engaged a wide cross section of front line/customer staff to help select and shape our final list of service values?
3. Have we widely and fully communicated important service values and shared why they need to be supported?



1

Service Leadership, Vision and Commitment

Customer service improvement strategies are translated into specific goals and targets

It is relatively easy to develop customer service strategy on paper. In other words, most organizations can develop quite well developed written plans to improve service in the future, without having to necessarily do anything about their aspirations. Unfortunately, these ‘paper only’ exercises are all too common with many enterprises promising to “lift delivery performance by 20%”, “reduce product complaints by half”, or, “improve survey satisfaction levels substantially” without any specific actions or targets. It is therefore not surprising that such strategies keep re-appearing time and time again.

Whether strategy concerns customer service, quality, finance, sales or any other area, if detailed goals and targets are not developed, little real improvement is likely to occur. Each strategy must be thought through fully and translated into action steps that individuals or teams of people can adopt and implement with the resources necessary to achieve ultimate success.

Best practice organizations ensure that every strategy is translated into a number of action steps and particular targets to be achieved within a given timeframe. They also ensure that individuals or teams are accountable for achieving positive results in the future.

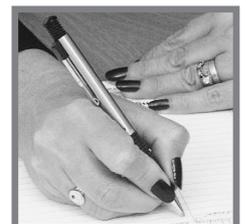
Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I fully understand overall enterprise wide strategies to improve service or correct general service shortfalls that may exist at the moment?
2. Are my personal goals and targets consistent with overall service improvement aspirations and goals?
3. Have I got sufficient time and enough resources to reach the service improvement targets that I am expected to achieve?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Are any of our service improvement strategies written as mere hopes or aspirations?
2. Have we made sure that every service improvement strategy is translated into a number of particular goals, with time and resources properly allocated?
3. Have we ensured that individuals and/or teams have been made accountable for achieving any service improvement targets?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

FEEDBACK & THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

In enterprises of every size and description concerned about continuous service improvement, the priority today is to continuously and carefully listen to customers, understand what they're saying as it applies to the business of serving them, and then respond creatively to what they tell you.

Listening has to have a purpose. There are four reasons to listen to customers. The first, is to understand the customer's moments of truth and map what the cycle of that experience looks like from the customer's standpoint. A 'moment of truth' is those critical customer contact times or moments when front line people interact with a customer and leave an impression upon them of one sort or another. There are literally thousands of these in most organizations every month. You can determine the critical contact points and measure how well your organization is managing the cycle towards a positive outcome.

The second is to keep tabs on the markets - the aggregate of individual customers' - changing wants, needs and expectations. "Understanding the customer's learning curve" is one expression for this kind of listening which is one of the critical foundations of the market research business. In an era of constant change, customer expectations and needs are as fluid as anything else.

The third rationale for diligent listening is to hear the unexpected or new ideas customers and those who work with them can bring to the table.

Finally, listening carefully to customers is a valuable way to involve the customer in the business. Breaking down "them and us" barriers isn't as cosmetic a reason as it may sound.

The listening effort begins with deciding just who it is you are talking about when you say "the customer". No emphasis can succeed by trying to be all things to all people, yet few organizations have a single, "plain vanilla" customer with a single set of needs and expectations.

There is no one best way to listen to customers - and no such thing as paying too much attention to customers' ideas and opinions. The cardinal sin is to believe that there is nothing more to learn. Here are some variations on the listening theme practised by excellent quality and service providers.

- Formal research
- Comment and complaint analysis
- Frontline contact
- Consumer advisory panels
- Customer hot-lines
- Mutual education

Developing multiple ways of continuously finding out about our customers and tracking their learning curves, gives the whole organization ample opportunities to tap into customers' ideas and experiences. The last drop of potential can then be squeezed out of every encounter we have with a customer who has something he or she believes is important for us to hear.

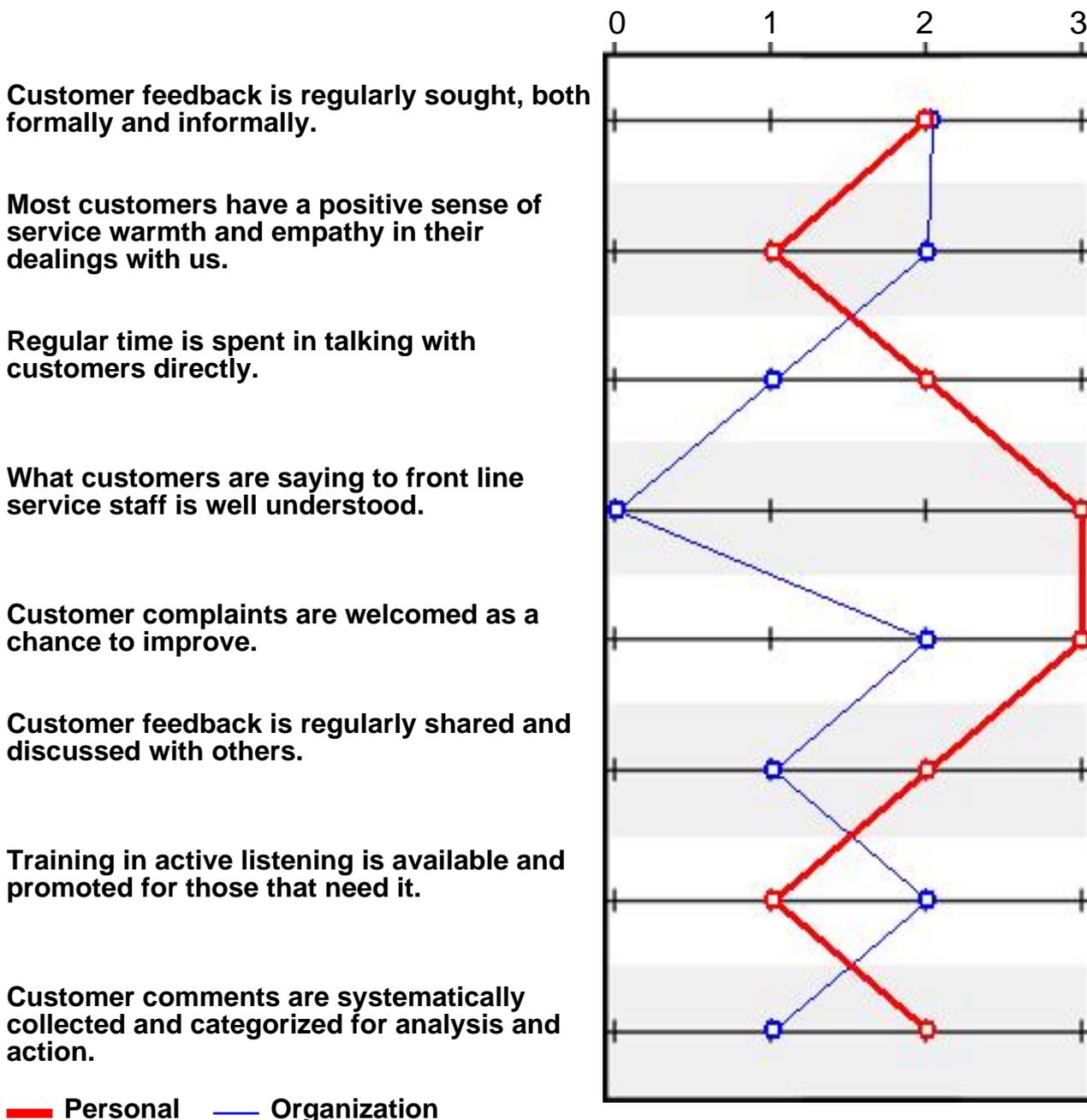
Doing something with what we learn is the ultimate key to our success. What good does it do us to codify our customers' moments of truth and chart their cycle of service if we don't use the information? Anyone who deals with a customer needs to know not only the moments of truth for that customer, but the impact of what happens at those moments of truth.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

FEEDBACK & THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

The customer defines service excellence and quality every time they deal with an individual or the organization. As such, as many 'listening posts' or listening channels as possible need to be developed to ensure that the ever changing voice of the customer is constantly heard and understood, and used to make any changes that would create benefit and be of value.

Summary Scores - Individual: 16 out of a possible 24
Organization: 11 out of a possible 24



Feedback and the Voice of the Customer

Most customers have a positive sense of service warmth and empathy in their dealings

No matter what they are buying or consuming in terms of products or services, every customer likes to feel that their patronage is valued and that they will be treated well in all of their dealings. Being valued and treated well is a relative term, that will vary from one customer to the next. However, service warmth and empathy is usually an important expectation for everyone (just think of your own experiences with restaurants, hotels, banks, etc). In fact, if customers perceive service empathy and warmth to be higher than average, they will often be considerably more loyal and typically spend more. However, if they experience a lack of empathy or a curt and/or cool response, they may quickly take their business elsewhere (particularly where lots of competitive choice is available). In other words, relative levels of empathy with individuals inside the enterprise, can be a critical service differentiator.

Best practice organizations ensure that all front line or customer facing staff are trained and able to deal with all customers in a warm and empathetic manner. In addition, they identify the major 'moments of truth' (or the many places and times when the customers makes contact with the organization and form either a good or bad viewpoint) and ensure that the customer feels positive about their experiences every time.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. What is my natural temperament or style when I deal with most customers? Is open, easy-going, friendly, warm, sincere, genuine and empathetic. If not why not?
2. To what extent do I look to establish and build a sound relationship with my customers (internal or external and over the phone or face to face) in order to ensure that they form a positive impression of my organization?
3. Do I always ensure that I avoid being cool, difficult, dismissive, rude or off-hand with customers, no matter what the circumstances?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. To what extent have we trained front line and any other employees that deal with customers frequently to ensure that they know how to establish a good relationship with their customers and build genuine empathy and warmth?
2. Have we clearly identified all the major moments of truth that exist between employees and customers and made sure that the customer experience will be a positive one as often as possible?
3. Do we systematically and frequently survey customers to find out how they feel about their experience of dealing with our organization and to measure how warm we are towards them on a consistent basis?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

ESTABLISHING SERVICE STANDARDS

When it comes to improving service commitment, the discussion begins and ends with the customer's assessment. Superior service quality is there if the customer says so, and it isn't there if the customer says that it isn't, or worse, votes with their feet and goes elsewhere to another organization to supply them. What's more, the only true and reliable measurement of service quality is the assessment of customer's most recent experiences with our organization and their level of satisfaction with those experiences.

Enterprises that enjoy reputations for distinctive service quality consistently meet their customers' expectations. Far from leaving anything to chance, they establish consistently clear, customer-oriented service performance standards throughout their organizations, and then constantly and meticulously measure performance against those standards. This might include standards of service in policies, procedures, work instructions, job descriptions or any other means to ensure that tangible standards are "written in" to the culture.

A commitment to service excellence without a commitment to standards and measurement would be a dedication to lip service, not customer service. Only with customer-focused standards and customer-based satisfaction measurements can we create and manage dynamic, information based service delivery systems that can be tuned and refined to changing customer expectations.

It has been frequently stated in recent times that "customer satisfaction is all very well and good, but my people don't see the customer". To overcome this problem, we need real standards and real measurement if service is to be delivered really well. In essence, the conflict turns out to be between internally generated standards and customer-centred measurement.

Knowing what to do and how to do it, in a technical sense, does not necessarily confer understanding of customer wants and needs, or customer expectations of how they would like you to satisfy those wants and needs.

One of the most common characteristics of the outstanding service providers is their dedication to measuring customer satisfaction and using the results to guide delivery processes. They measure formally. They measure frequently - on average, weekly. The really good companies measure daily, and they attach important individual, work-group and organizational outcomes to the results.

Their way of asking the questions may vary, but the questions asked are very specific to their particular customer profile. There is nothing immediately useful to be learned from an open-ended, global query. Instead, a carefully crafted series of questions will probe into customer assessments of all aspects of the encounter. Speed, accuracy, cordiality, helpfulness, completeness of information, response to inquiries and any other moments of truth that build the overall impression of quality.

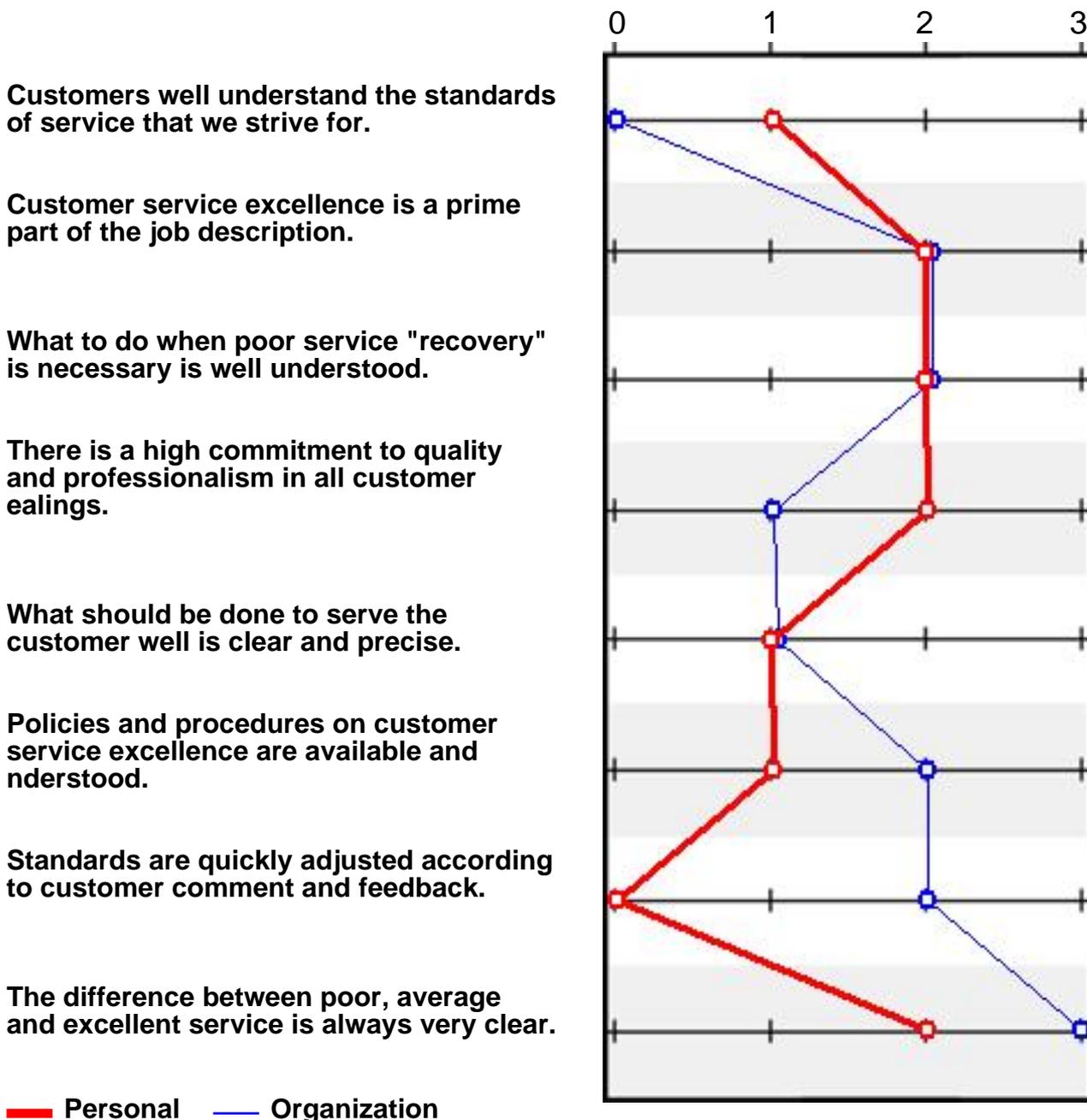
Measurement results typically become the agenda for subsequent internal dialogue and problem solving efforts. After all, an organizations service quality measurement system is only as good as the service improvement discussions it prompts.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

Service standards

As a chain is only as strong as its weakest link, every individual across the whole organization needs to ensure that standards of service excellence are widely known and met in every area and at all times. These minimum standards of service excellence should be driven into every part of the organization and communicated at all levels, including the customer, so that what can be expected is fully appreciated.

Summary Scores - Individual: 11 out of a possible 24
 Organization: 13 out of a possible 24



3

Service Standards

SS-1

Customers well understand the standards of service that we strive to achieve

Whatever the kind or type of enterprise, it is always easy to set standards in a vacuum or with little in the way of external opinion or feedback. In other words, we can set very high standards in cost effectiveness, service, or excellent quality for our customers internally but they mean nothing unless we tell the customers what we are aiming to achieve and get them to make a judgement as to whether or not we are succeeding in meeting these targets.

Best practice organizations publicize all of their service standards to all individuals in their enterprise at all levels. In addition they ensure that all their suppliers know exactly what is required and the targets they are aiming to achieve. Last, but not least, they openly inform their customers (usually in writing) of each standard that they can expect, and make sure that they make it easy for their customers to regularly tell them how they are doing.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. I am personally clear about the standards of service that I should be achieving to meet and exceed customer's expectations and are they written down in clear and unequivocal language?
2. Have I communicated my customer service targets and standards to my internal staff, suppliers and/or external customers so that they are fully aware of what they can expect from me (and so that I feel accountable to achieve this performance)?
3. Do I maintain a regular dialogue with my internal or external customers to ensure that I gain feedback on my performance against my personal or team service standards?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Have we invested quality time in developing a comprehensive range of service standards that will help us to consistently deliver what our customers want and expect from us?
2. Have we widely published or service standards and targets internally to all employees, to our suppliers, and to our customers, so that they are fully aware of what we intend?
3. To what extent are we systematically maintaining an effective system to monitor our actual performance against our standards, as it is assessed directly by our customers?



3 Service Standards

What should be done to serve customers well is clear and precise

In many organizations, customer service excellence is promoted as a general ‘call to arms’ with little in the way of specific goals or strategies. Put another way, a vision statement, slogan, letter from the CEO or glossy brochure/booklet is seen to be sufficient emphasis and employees are then left to follow their own path. Unfortunately, such approaches rarely work as a way to promote serious effort to serve customers well, and more tangible steps therefore need to be taken.

Best practice organizations often invest a considerable amount of time in determining what customer service excellence should look like (or to what people should aspire) for every product or service that they provide. This includes the development of detailed descriptions of standards and processes and the setting of clear and precise targets that should be attained. This clarity (created at a strategic level) then helps every department, team and individual to know exactly what is required of them to give service excellence.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Am I clear about the specific strategies, goals and tactics that the enterprise may have on how service excellence should be created in tangible ways?
2. Have I developed a clear and precise plan to serve my own internal and external customers well (according to their standards of good performance)?
3. Have I properly assessed different customer service needs that may exist for each product or service provision area or channel?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Have we fleshed out ‘an overall’ service vision to include specific strategies, goals, processes and steps to spell out exactly how to serve our customers well?
2. To what extent have we properly differentiated the service expectations that exist for different products or services that we provide (where necessary and appropriate)?
3. Have we published clear and precise service expectations and targets to which all employees can aspire in the future?



3 Service Standards

Standards are quickly adjusted according to customer comment and feedback

Standards or procedures should never be expected to last forever. Circumstances or conditions change and standards inevitably therefore have to keep up. This is even more the case when it comes to service standards, as it is customer comment or feedback that can often cause a particular approach to have to be adjusted.

Particular service standards will obviously be different from one organization to the next (and even different for various frontline team within the organization offering alternative products or services). However there are likely to be standards around quality, delivery, guarantees, deliveries, returns etc. that are relatively similar.

Best practice organizations write and apply these service standards with customer excellence in mind, and continue to gauge customer satisfaction with current performance (and make fast adjustments when customers change their expectations or want something new and different).

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I fully understand the standards of service that I am expected to achieve and recognize where they may not meet the needs and expectations of my customers?
2. Do I pro-actively ask for customer feedback and comment upon the standards that our organization offers and takes to solicit input on what (if anything) might need to be changed?
3. Do I quickly feed any customer concerns, complaints, or general comments to individuals that design or shape service standards to ensure that they are adjusted to be more 'fit for purpose'?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Are our service standards flexible enough to adjust and/or change when customer needs or expectations shift or alter?
2. Do we encourage frontline employees to feedback customer comments and complaints about our service standards so that they can be altered as quickly as necessary?
3. Have we established formal and regular audit processes to ensure that our service standards are reviewed to their applicability as far as customers are concerned?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

EMPOWER PEOPLE TO SERVE THE CUSTOMER

What happens between our frontline employees and our customers makes or breaks the enterprise at the moment of truth. Meet customers' expectations and we both win. Miss, and everyone loses. The ultimate success or failure of those critical, person-to-person transactions turns on success or failure when it comes to hiring good people, training them thoroughly, and managing them in a way that encourages them to "do what needs to be done" for customers.

Frontline service people must be able to "stand up" - sometimes literally - to a high level of customer contact. Not all of it will be pleasant. Dealing with customers calls for a level of maturity and self-esteem that allows personal feelings and problems to be put aside, to focus on customers and their wants and problems. Service workers need social skills and an understanding of the normal rules of social behavior.

Service workers also need tolerance and stamina. The strain of constant, intensive encounters with people who are essentially strangers leads to burnout. Under the constant stress and pressure, service providers need to be able to continue to perform capably and willingly without withdrawing into robotic, detached behavior or becoming aggressive and hostile.

Empowerment means encouraging every individual to make that extra effort, or to use their imagination and initiative. It also means tolerating their mistakes when well-intentioned efforts fail to work out exactly as planned. The goal is that best of all worlds where empowered employees confidently and capably address unique problems and opportunities when and as they occur.

When employees are satisfied with the way they are treated, with the availability of the right tools to do the job and with management support for delivering high-quality service, customers are more likely to be satisfied with the quality of treatment they receive from those employees and more likely to continue doing business with the organization.

There are two dimensions to empowerment -one organizational, one personal. Giving employees overt permission and encouragement to work consistently in our customer's best interests, providing support for their efforts, treating them as we expect customers to be treated, and rewarding and applauding their triumphs and achievements are organizational tactics necessary to convince our frontline workers that they really empowered to work for the customer. These responses recognize that empowerment isn't something given, it is a process of releasing the individual employee's power or capability by removing the barriers that prevent their expression.

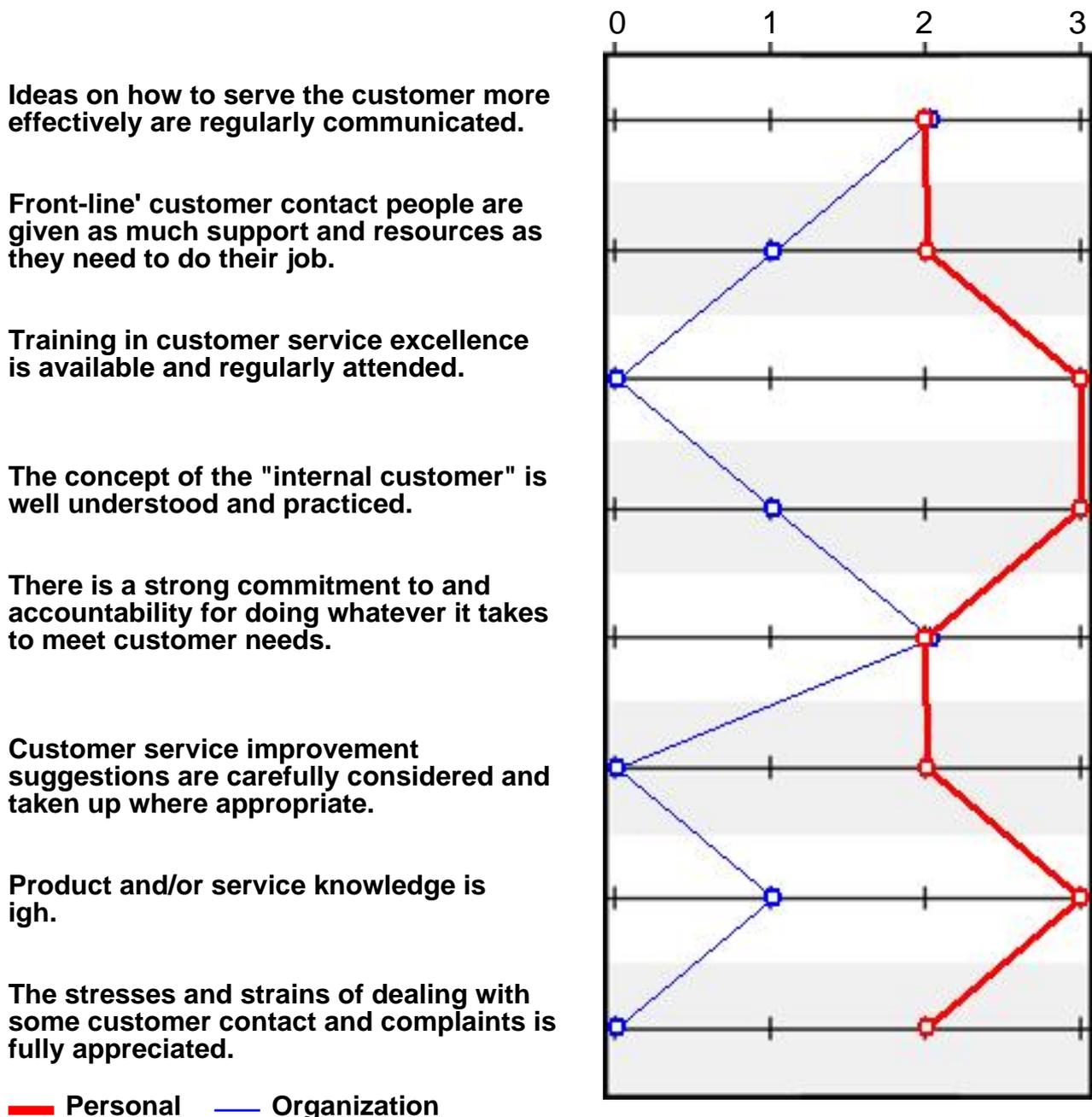
The personal dimension of empowerment has to do with things internal, with the capability and skill of the employee to respond appropriately when the barriers have been removed. The capacity, the potential, must be there, and it also must be nurtured and developed. Finding people with the capacity is a selection issue. Developing that capacity's potential is the coaching side of the coin. Neither, however, creates total customer commitment. That comes from the breadth and depth of experience that empowered employees amass and continually reinvest on behalf of the customer - to the benefit of both the organization and themselves.

Customer Service Commitment Awareness Profile

Empowerment for service

Service excellence is achieved through people. Every individual needs to understand who its customers are (internal and external) and what they need to be doing to provide service excellence. All individuals (and particularly customer facing ones) need to be given the authority and freedom to act to deliver service that is 'customer warm' and as empathic to customer needs as it is possible to be.

Summary Scores - Individual: 19 out of a possible 24
Organization: 7 out of a possible 24



4 Empowerment for Service

Customer service improvement suggestions are carefully considered and taken up where appropriate

Because the ‘formula’ for customer service success will be different for every enterprise and over different periods of time of course) it is safe to assume that the variables or components that make up the service excellence mix are many and various. The variables typically relate to systems, processes and individual behavior that combines to create a positive result for the customer. If this is the case, ideas or suggestions for better systems, processes or behavior are constantly needed to keep the service offering fresh and always improving.

Best practice organizations do not leave the service or idea generation process to chance. Instead, they manage this process carefully by ensuring that the need for new ideas is widely promoted, that every suggestions is analyzed for its worth and that the best ideas are taken up and quickly implemented without delay.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Am I regularly thinking about ways and means to improve service or suggesting new ideas about creating greater customer satisfaction?
2. Am I clear about how I can make suggestions to improve service (in procedural terms of how, to whom, etc) and what I can expect to see happen?
3. Do I listen carefully to other people’s ideas and suggestions on customer service improvements and help these to be systematically processed?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Is a well-designed system for service improvement suggestions in place and well understood at all levels?
2. Is the suggestion process properly managed and co-ordinated so that the need for ideas is promoted, suggestions are analyzed properly and the best ideas efficiently implemented?
3. How well and widely do we publicize effective service improvement ideas to create an internal advertisement to all employees?



4 Empowerment for Service

The stresses and strains of dealing with some customer contact and complaints is fully appreciated.

Although nobody likes having to deal with customer complaints, any failure to ensure that highly effective people are in place to deal with problems can have a potentially devastating effect on any enterprise. However, even the appointment of good front-line complaint handlers is not the only step that has to be taken. By their very nature, complaints typically arise because systems and processes have failed to operate properly to prevent a problem from arising and a fast and flexible solution is therefore necessary to rectify the problem. Unfortunately, not every problem can be solved immediately and as such front-line staff can experience considerable pressure from customers (not to mention irritability, anger, and general abuse).

Best practice organizations recognize the stresses and strains of being in a complaint handling role and make sure that an extensive support mechanism is in place to help front-liners feel that they are not alone and that their efforts to help customers are highly valued and appreciated.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. To what extent do I fully appreciate the kind of problems or complaints that front-line people have to deal with in my organization (have I asked them directly)?
2. Can I find ways in which I could increase my awareness of customer problems by volunteering to assist or provide direct support to front-liners?
3. Am I fully aware of what else I might be doing to provide assistance, support or resources to front-liners to make their job a little easier in dealing with customer complaints?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. To what extent do we hold our supervisors (and managers at the top of the enterprise) accountable for directly experiencing the range of complaints that are dealt with on a day to day basis by front-line staff?
2. Have we designed good systems to ensure that front-line customer complaint handling staff are fresh, energetic and motivated (e.g. shift rotational systems, flexible breaks, special training, technology assistance, etc).
3. Do we openly appreciate the efforts of individuals and teams that handle customer complaints successfully and ensure that they feel their stresses and strains are understood and that their efforts are valued?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

MANAGE PROCESSES & SYSTEMS THAT SERVE THE CUSTOMER

The commonly held view is that most businesses have hundreds of processes but only perhaps 20-30 along which the critical value to the customer flows. When these are as simple as possible, and well managed to ensure consistency and reliability, customer satisfaction is invariably higher. Unfortunately processes almost always flow across and not up and down the organization. End to end ownership is often difficult, and consequently various parts of the organization can regress to arguing about who is at fault when the process breaks down, fails to deliver or causes a complaint from the end consumer.

It is suggested that all organizations have only three global or major customer serving processes. These are:

1. Demand generation (or creating demand from the customer for products and services - typically, covering functions such as research, sales and marketing).
2. Demand fulfilment (or fulfilling customer orders created by the demand generators - typically covering functions such as production, logistics and distribution).
3. Cash generation (or funding the business or collecting the money from customers that have bought products or services-typically covering the financial functions).

If this model holds true, it is relatively easy to describe the sub processes that sit under each of these headings. Once this has been done, a robust mechanism to manage these processes can be set in place and an action oriented journey to satisfy customers through process improvement and quality methods begun.

Whilst processes need senior management ownership and custodianship across functional boundaries, the primary mechanism for improvement in excellent service companies, has been the extensive use of well trained and focused teams. Such teams are skilled in sound fact based problem solving techniques and coached by trained facilitators and team leaders. This allows the whole organization to potentially work on process improvement towards greater customer satisfaction.

Effective process and systems design for the customer means:

- **Teams need to be formed with people who work in the process to be improved.**
- **Analysis techniques based on hard data and facts should be systematically used.**
- **Everyone should be trained in effective teamwork and problem solving skills.**
- **Team recommendations should be clearly accepted or rejected and where implemented, standardized across the process.**

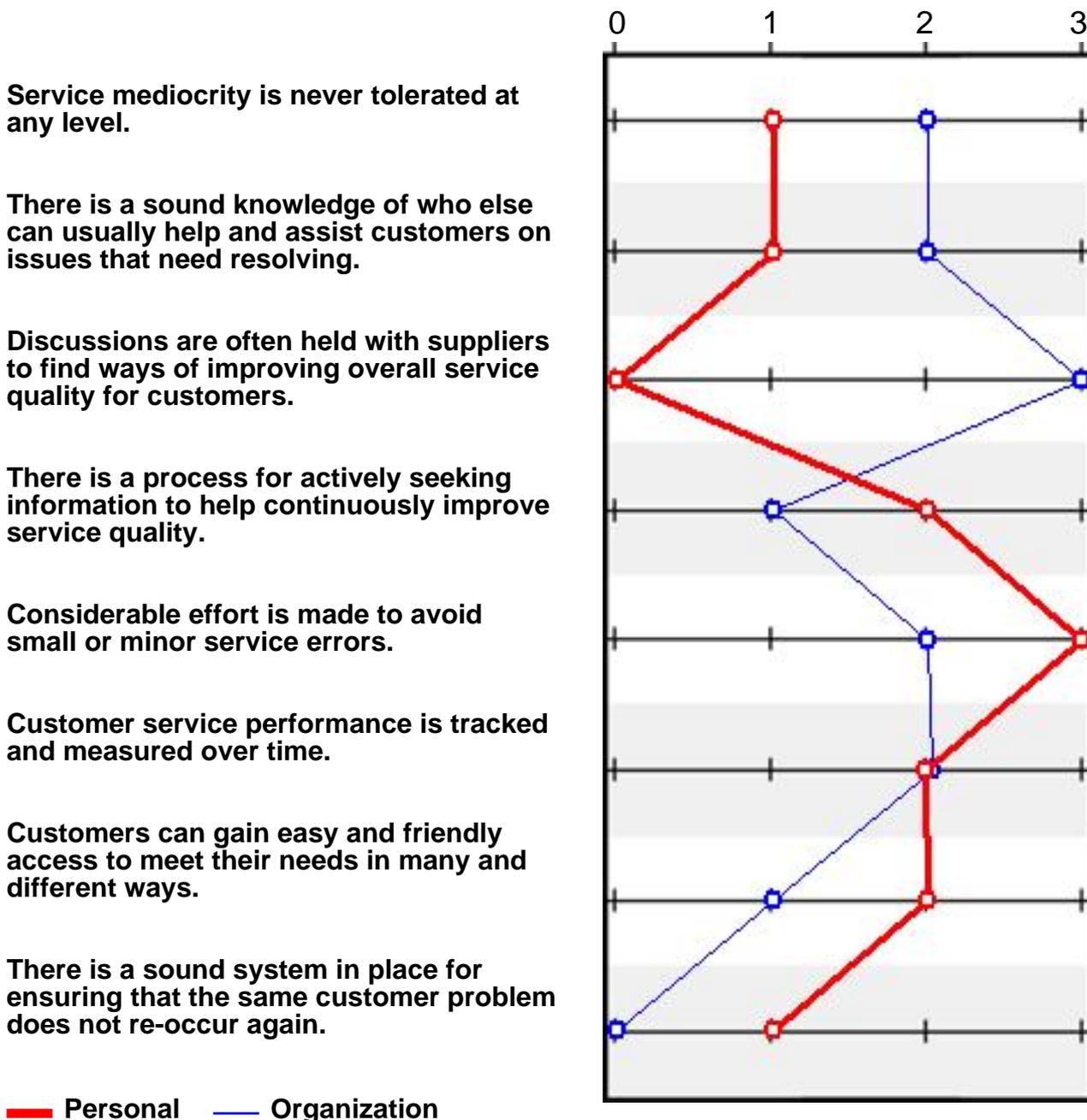
Although all of the above sounds just good common sense, it is remarkable how quickly we can ignore some or all of these factors. Excellent service companies manage their process improvement teams well and delight their customers in the process.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

Customer serving processes and systems

A powerful vision for service excellence, focused customer listening and highly empowered people, count for little unless service can be practically delivered on a consistent basis. To do this, every process or system of work needs to be well designed and to run smoothly or according to plan. In addition, because individual customer needs are never quite the same, this means ensuring that every process is flexible enough to 'bend' and adapt but continue to deliver service every time.

Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24
 Organization: 13 out of a possible 24



5 Customer Serving Processes and Systems

There is a sound system in place for ensuring that the same customer problem does not keep re-occurring

From time to time, customer problems, difficulties and complaints will inevitably occur. Whilst we would like to minimize such occurrences, it is often more important to ensure that the problems are well understood and can be prevented from happening again if at all possible.

The only way in which most organizations can stop customer problems from re-occurring is to have a sound system in place to analyze the problems when they arise in the first place. For the most part, this involves designing an effective tracking process that achieves two main ends. Firstly, the frequency of similar complaints and problems needs to be recorded so as to quickly recognize the same issue seems to be re-surfacing in different guises. Secondly, the system needs to allow for the time and the ability to analyze the problem carefully and recommend structural solutions that help get to the root causes of the issue.

Best practice organizations make sure that all customer problems and issues are properly collated and that people are responsible for analyzing why the problems are occurring. In addition, they aim to develop strategies and solutions that will not only fix the problem in the short term but help to avoid any re-occurrence for the same or other customers.

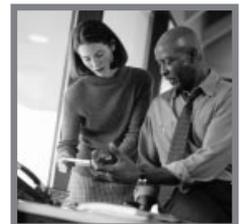
Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I know what problems, difficulties, issues or complaints tend to occur most frequently for customers when they deal with our enterprise?
2. Is a good system in place to collate and analyze on-going problems that customers' experience and to look at addressing the root causes of the issues, so as to fix it once and for all.
3. Do I share my experiences of customer complaints with work colleagues from other teams and actively discuss ways in which we might adopt better processes to eliminate the problem.

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Have we designed a sound process to collate the wide variety of problems and difficulties that customers' experience when dealing with our enterprise so as to analyze any patterns or trends?
2. Do we sufficiently emphasize the need to find the root causes of customer problems rather than accept quick fixes that allow the problem to occur again?
3. Have we established an effective communication process to share experiences of customer complaints or difficulties and to quickly spot where a potentially recurring issue may be emerging?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

REWARD & RECOGNIZE PEOPLE FOR SERVING THE CUSTOMER

Managers in the exemplary service organization understand the 'twin-engine' motivation of good and widespread reward and recognition. Recognizing employees for a job well done isn't seen as a superficial or wasted effort. It is understood for what it truly is—a confirmation of accomplishment and a reinforcement of commitment.

In most of these organizations there is a positive payoff for trained employees who meet the service standards. Those who go one step beyond for the customers become "service heroes". They are held up as role models and rewarded accordingly, because their managers and their managers' managers, know that the celebration of organizational, group, and individual service accomplishments is essential if the delivery of high quality service is to be the norm, not the exception.

If people are a resource, they can and should be developed and refined to increase their ultimate value. The never ending process includes formal on the job training, guided experience, effective coaching and monitoring performance review, organizational support, and general service awareness training (which can be largely devolved to local efforts in each department or location).

Whilst some general training can be very effective, there is often little widespread emphasis on customer service behavior as opposed to skill or knowledge improvement. Most enterprises are therefore, widely in need of an integrated approach, using a common language for all employees across the company. However, although common language and core training should be the same, we understandably have varying levels of base knowledge and awareness. Training should therefore recognize these different levels of ability and programs designed accordingly. Of course training is no panacea in itself. Self learning and practice in the use of new behaviors is the cultural payoff. This new behavior is then reinforced by plenty of support and encouragement being openly provided as often as possible.

Effective incentive and reward programs can be created from a combination of "vacational" trips to merchandise and purely "feel good mental" pay-offs. Many organizations have made only minimal and sporadic use of such recognition in the past and a structured approach is needed in order to make it a widespread part of the way that business is done. The key to this culture change is to start in small ways by immediately identifying and publicising customer service excellence, such that little by little, the whole organization derives the knowledge that certain behavior yields the most recognition.

Often linked with the recognition and reward is creating a sense of celebration.

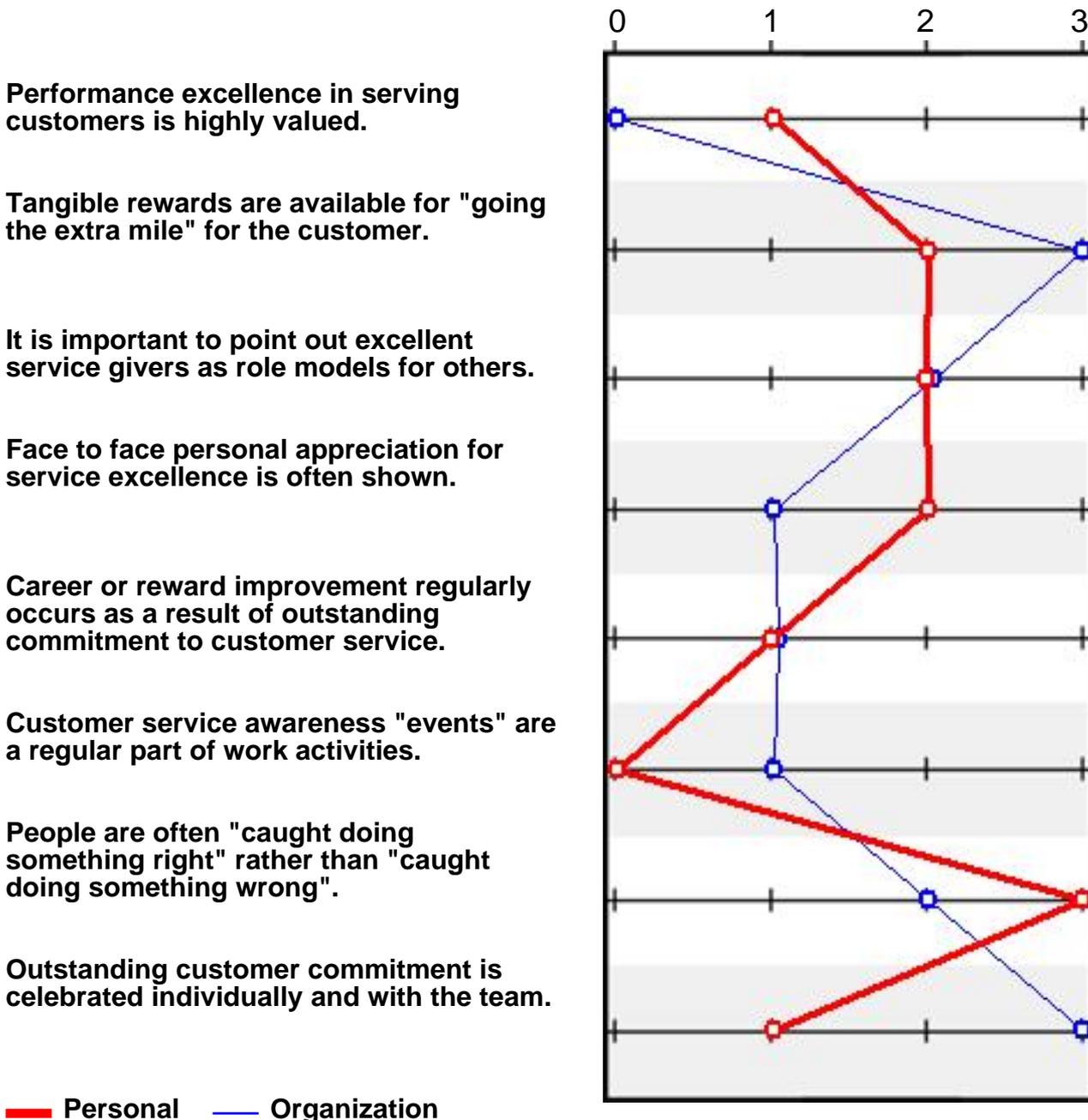
To all employees in any organization with ambitions of providing high levels of service excellence to its customers, the importance of being a part of something important may be the most important operating principle of all. A strong culture of celebration therefore needs to be developed to lift and sustain the highest possible employee morale.

Customer Service Commitment Profile

Rewards and recognition for service excellence

Although most organizations offer reward and recognition for achieving goals or targets, these rewards often reinforce goals other than customer commitment and service. Service excellence must be rewarded and recognized and seen to be offered at every available opportunity. This should include public opportunities for recognition, where these service achievements can become a role model for others.

Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24
 Organization: 13 out of a possible 24



Rewards and Recognition for Service Excellence

Performance excellence in serving customers is highly valued

Despite the fact that customers may value the intrinsic quality of a product or service provided by a particular enterprise, the vast majority of customer survey data and feedback suggests that it is personal service that customers value the most. This is not surprising when you stop to consider that it is personal interaction and communication that mainly distinguishes one organization from another (and sometimes it is the only differentiator!)

If any enterprise seriously wants to maintain or raise customer satisfaction levels, it is the performance of its people that is most important (and is likely to pay the greatest dividend). Consequently, any outstanding or excellent effort on the part of individuals and/or teams of people needs to be not only privately valued, but publicly recognized or appreciated.

Best practice organizations make sure that front line/customer facing staff are highly appreciated and applauded for their on-going efforts. In addition, any individual that goes the extra mile for the customer is openly recognized for their efforts and given genuine support and encouragement.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Am I sufficiently appreciative of people around me who give excellent customer service or perform outstanding work for and on behalf of the customer?
2. Do I treat front line/customer facing staff with the respect that they deserve for their on-going efforts to serve customers well?
3. Do I go out of my way to thank colleagues or team-mates when they have done some outstanding work that has helped to lift customer satisfaction levels.

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Do we regard our front line/customer facing staff as being extremely important in our effort to meet and exceed customer needs and regularly appreciate their performance efforts?
2. Do we publicly recognize the outstanding performance efforts of individuals and teams when they do something special for our customers?
3. Have we established a strong culture in which performance excellence in serving customers is likely to yield as much if not more appreciation than any other performance than people may demonstrate?



6 Rewards and Recognition for Service Excellence

Customer service awareness 'events' are a regular part of work activities

Although front line employees may be highly familiar with customer needs and expectations and (for the most part) have a high level of general awareness about the sort of service that customers expect, the majority of people in the enterprise are not so close to the 'action'. This means that most people actually have little or no knowledge about service needs on a detailed basis and cannot be therefore expected to understand what they have to do when the enterprise calls for more service effort or commitment.

Best practice organizations lift overall levels of service or understanding by holding awareness 'events' as an on-going part of the day to day activities of the enterprise. These 'events' can be small and informal or large scale and formal affairs (such as full workshops or conferences). In both cases, the aim is to expose as many employees as possible to real customer needs.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. How do I maintain a high level of awareness about the needs and expectations of my internal or external customers?
2. Do I take an interest in attending formal or informal awareness events that help to build my knowledge of how to give better customer service?
3. To what extent do I think about planning my own awareness events to help share my customer service knowledge with others when appropriate?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. To what extent have we developed an effective strategy to maintain reasonable knowledge of customer needs across the organization through a series of formal and informal service awareness events?
2. Do we encourage people with high contact with customers to share their knowledge through special group meetings, events and coaching sessions?
3. Are service awareness events regularly organized, interesting and widely accessible to all employees?



6 Rewards and Recognition for Service Excellence

Career or rewards improvement regularly occurs as a result of outstanding commitment to customer service

If outstanding customer service is a genuine goal for an enterprise, the achievement of this goal will be made by the collective efforts of employees on a consistent basis. This often requires considerable and sustained effort and a commitment to doing more than may be expected of them on a regular basis.

If this continued or sustained effort is to continue, individuals need to feel that their extra input is worthwhile and will therefore look for the tangible returns that are given to those people that are seen to be 'leading the charge'. In other words, individuals will carefully watch to see whether the best service gets rewarded for the effort as a way of deciding how much extra effort they may want to invest in customer committed behavior themselves.

Although rewards can be tangible and intangible, it is the objective and measurable tangible rewards that are most influential on people's perceptions. As such, outstanding service givers can be rewarded in either monetary terms or in terms of their career progression. Best practice organizations recognize that prioritization of customer service requires that outstanding service performance should be the most rewarded behavior. As such, the best service givers are the best paid and the fastest promoted to higher levels in the organization echelons.

Ask the following questions

FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I feel that the monetary reward system favors outstanding performance in customer service as much if not more than any other kind of performance?
2. Do I feel that the best service givers are rewarded the most, or win the best positions and promotions when they occur?
3. Are my own service efforts (good and poor) fairly rewarded according to the time and energy I put in?

FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Are we committed to ensuring that our monetary reward system sufficiently recognizes outstanding commitment to customer service as a major priority in the overall performance efforts of individuals?
2. Do we promote our best service givers in practice (and provide a signal to others that similar effort will reap similar rewards)?
3. Do we regularly review or audit monetary or career progression to ensure that the best service givers are getting their just desserts?



Customer Service Commitment Profile

Summary

Customer service can be both a complicated and an easy subject for organizations at the same time. It is particularly complicated when an enterprise commits to better customer service, but fails to plan and settle its overall priorities in aiming to make the improvement real. This assessment of customer commitment has suggested a particular framework within which any enterprise can become more customer focused or committed, at both an individual and organization wide level. It has been suggested that this needs to occur at six levels. These are:

1. Its service leadership and vision
2. Its ability to capture the voice of customer feedback
3. Its ability to develop and adhere to service standards
4. Its capacity to empower employees to offer service excellence
5. Its control of internal customer serving processes and systems
6. Its process for rewarding and recognizing high service achievement

To focus on increasing customer satisfaction often entails allowing the customer to shape a particular supplier organization in the way that it provides its goods or services. If the enterprise resists this 'shaping' influence, it is unlikely to achieve its service goals and find the experience difficult and frustrating. On the other hand, an enterprise that truly puts the customer first and lets everyone in the organization know that the primary focus is on meeting customer needs is likely to find the journey both considerably easier and potentially highly rewarding. This often entails a significant shift in traditional organizational systems and structures and ideally a metaphorical 'inverting' of the organizational pyramid such that everyone serves the customer, or serves someone that is. In such an organization, front line staff are given the freedom and empowerment to do what they need to do to meet customer needs within the bounds of their common sense. This may sound like an idyllic state of affairs to most individuals and teams. Whilst it is certainly an exception rather than the rule, many organizations have already achieved great success and are reaping the rewards along with their customers.

My Contract For Change

1. My personal goals to manage customer commitment more effectively in the future are:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
2. As a result I will make more time to achieve the goals by giving less priority to:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
3. Each week I will record my progress by _____

4. My support person(s) will be _____

5. My support person(s) will help me by _____

6. I will use the following methods to maintain my momentum and learn along the way:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____
7. I will reward myself for achieving my milestones by _____

8. My end reward will be _____

Signed _____ **Dated** _____