

# **Customer Service Commitment Report**

**Sample User**

**3/31/2009 9:07:25 AM**

# Customer Service Commitment Profile

## Introduction

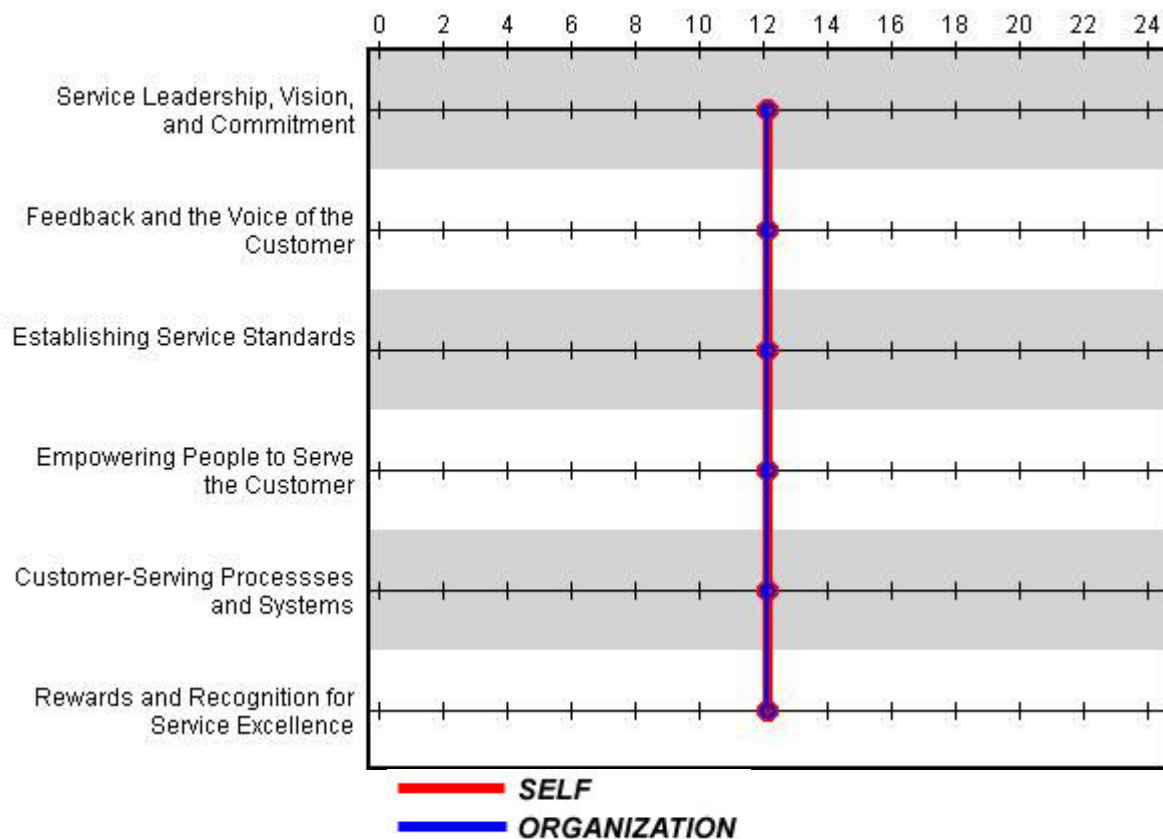
It is widely recognized and understood that an organization's success rests on how well it understands the needs of its customers, and how it responds to those needs by delivering what is required.

1. Organizations that set the standard for service excellence within their industries all do the same things when it comes to building and maintaining extraordinary levels of customer satisfaction and loyalty. Organizations looking to reach these benchmarks should take the following steps, in priority order:
2. Have a clear vision of what constitutes superior service and communicate it to all employees at every level. Everyone in the organization must believe in the importance of service quality. This requires service-focused leadership and commitment.
3. Pay attention to the customer. The customer must be heard and understood, and the organization should respond-often in unique and creative ways-to their evolving needs and constantly shifting expectations.
4. Establish concrete standards of excellent service and regularly measure to see how well these standards are being met.
5. Hire customer-focused and empathic people (particularly those on the front line), and coach them carefully and extensively so that they have the knowledge and skills to achieve the service standards required. Empower them to work on behalf of customers, whether inside or outside the organization.
6. Make sure that customer-serving processes and systems are widely understood and consistently improved by motivated and enthusiastic teams of employees across the organization.
7. Make sure all employees are fully aware of what it takes to give excellent customer service, and establish systems for recognition and reward for service accomplishments individually and at a group level. It is important that the entire organization celebrate the success of employees who go that extra step for their customers.

This instrument addresses all six of these customer-service "steps" as competency areas.

Each of the competency areas is described in more detail in subsequent pages.

## YOUR SUMMARY SCORES



## UNDERSTANDING YOUR SCORES

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

1. Review your personal performance in each of the six competencies.
2. Review the relative performance of the organization in terms of your perception of its scores in each competency.
3. Compare your score and the organizational score for each competency and study the gaps between each pair.
4. Determine your priorities (for yourself and for the organization) in terms of changing behavior or actions.

The essential value of any measurement instrument is in the extent to which it provides a useful indication of a current situation and some guidance in terms of what an individual can do to change it for the better. The individual can then analyze the results and decide whether any adjustments or changes are necessary or desirable.

The items on the assessment, when scored, should provide a useful basis for such a review. To deepen or extend this further, ask two or three of your colleagues to complete the profile as well, to see whether they share your perceptions (especially as far as the wider organization is concerned).

Whatever your scores (and whether they are yours alone or enhanced by the views of others), consider developing a stronger commitment in those competencies you are weakest in.

# THE SIX CUSTOMER SERVICE COMMITMENT COMPETENCIES

## Service Leadership, Vision, and Commitment

Without a tangible vision of what service excellence looks like, we have no way to know how much we need to improve. A service vision needs to be created, shaped, and communicated at every opportunity. This is usually best done through direct effort on the part of organization leaders, who make sure that they discuss the vision at every opportunity so there is widespread individual commitment and accountability for achieving it.

## Feedback and the Voice of the Customer

The customer makes judgments about service and quality every time he or she deals with the organization. The organization needs to develop multiple ways to get feedback about how it is doing to make sure that the ever changing voice of the customer is constantly heard and understood. That feedback should be used to make any changes that will create benefit and be of value.

## Establishing Service Standards

A chain is only as strong as its weakest link. Every individual across the whole organization must understand and be committed to standards of service excellence in every area and at all times. These minimum standards of service should apply to every part of the organization and be communicated and understood at all levels, including the customer.

## Empowering People to Serve the Customer

Service excellence is achieved through people. Every individual and team needs to understand who its customers are (internal and external) and what they must do to provide service excellence. All individuals (and particularly those dealing directly with the customer) need to be given the authority and freedom to deliver service that is "customer-friendly" and they need to be as sensitive to customer needs as it is possible to be.

## Customer-Serving Processes and Systems

A powerful vision for service excellence that focuses on customer feedback and a highly empowered staff is not enough: Quality service must also be delivered on a consistent basis. To do this, every process or system needs to be well-designed and to run smoothly, according to plan. Individual needs are never quite the same, so every process must be flexible enough to "bend" and adapt, but still continue to deliver service every time.

## Rewards and Recognition for Service Excellence

Most organizations offer rewards and recognition for achieving goals or targets, but these rewards often reinforce goals other than for customer commitment and service. Service excellence itself must be rewarded and recognized; public opportunities for recognition should be held on a regular basis so these service achievements can inspire others.

**On the following pages, you will find each of the above competencies elaborated on. Each competency includes general action steps to improve in the future, category graph that competency details the raw scores for yourself and the organization for individual questions, and finally detailed action/coaching guidelines for individual and organization scores that total less than 3 (improvement scope is indicated).**

## SERVICE LEADERSHIP, VISION, AND COMMITMENT

One of the most important purposes of having a vision of how customer service should be is to direct the attention of people in the organization toward the real priorities of the customer, and then guide their individual actions. Communicating this vision to the customers helps to attract customers to the organization.

Coaching employees, developing service-delivery systems, measuring organizational performance, and managing sales and marketing are all efforts that must be based on the vision. A well-defined service vision declares an organization's competitive direction. It is its "guiding light," so it will have 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 at all levels. All responsibilities must be aligned with a single vision of what the organization is trying to accomplish with customers and how it wants them to judge or view performance. The service vision must therefore be actively communicated throughout the organization through strong leadership and highly visible commitment. The actions and behavior of everyone who leads a team, not words, are what will communicate this.

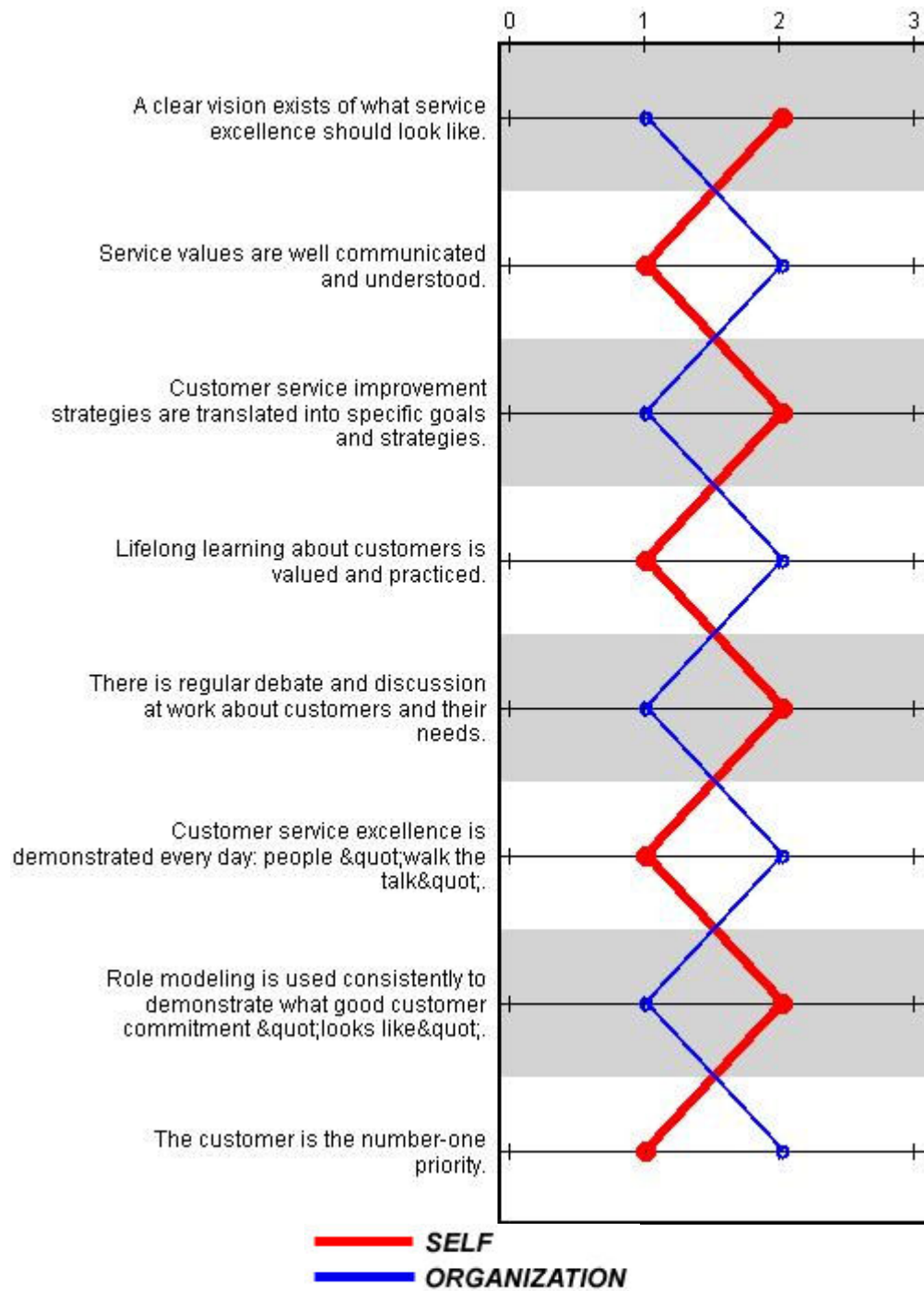
To be entirely customer-focused, senior managers must believe that giving good service to their customers (including their subordinates) involves clear leadership and open communication at all times. They need to be ever-responsive to their team and act as its champion. Their subordinates must have the 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 make sure that they are receiving excellent service. Every time they meet with them for any reason, the first question they should ask is, "What have we done since the last meeting to improve our service?"

All formal or informal performance appraisals should cover customer commitment as a key performance measure. Leaders should also encourage teams and departments to measure customer service in their teams and/or departments.

The vision "lives" through the actions of individuals as role models for service, and it is these role models who, to a very large extent, determine the level of commitment to any initiative taken by the enterprise. It becomes obvious that the attitudes and commitment of the leaders will be clearly mirrored when leaders visit various parts of an organization and talk to and observe employees. "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 in the leader's behavior.

Summary Scores - Individual: 12 of a possible 24



## 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?



## FEEDBACK AND THE VOICE OF THE CUSTOMER

Every enterprise that is seriously concerned about continuously improving its service makes it a priority these days to continuously and carefully listen to its customers, understand what they're saying as it applies to the business of serving them, and then respond creatively to what they say about how the organization is doing.

Listening, however, is not enough-there has to be 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 a critical customer contact time or moment when front-line people interact with a customer and make an impression of one sort or another. There are literally thousands of moments of truth in most organizations in any given month. You can determine the critical contact points and measure how well your organization is managing the cycle toward a positive outcome.

The second reason why you should keep up with what customers are thinking is to keep tabs on the markets-the pool of individual customers' changing wants, needs, and expectations. Understand that in this era of constant change, what the customer knows, expects, and needs (critical to the market-research business) is as fluid as anything else. You must keep up with these changes and even learn how to predict them.

The third reason to listen and listen diligently is so you do not miss the unexpected or the new. The public knows what it wants or needs; if you don't want to hear their suggestions, the competition will.

Finally, listening carefully to customers is a valuable way to involve the customer in the business. Breaking down them-vs. us barriers is usually the beginning of a good business relationship.

The listening effort begins when you decide just who it is you are talking about when you say "the customer." You can't be all things to all people, yet few organizations have "plain vanilla" customers with the same needs and expectations.

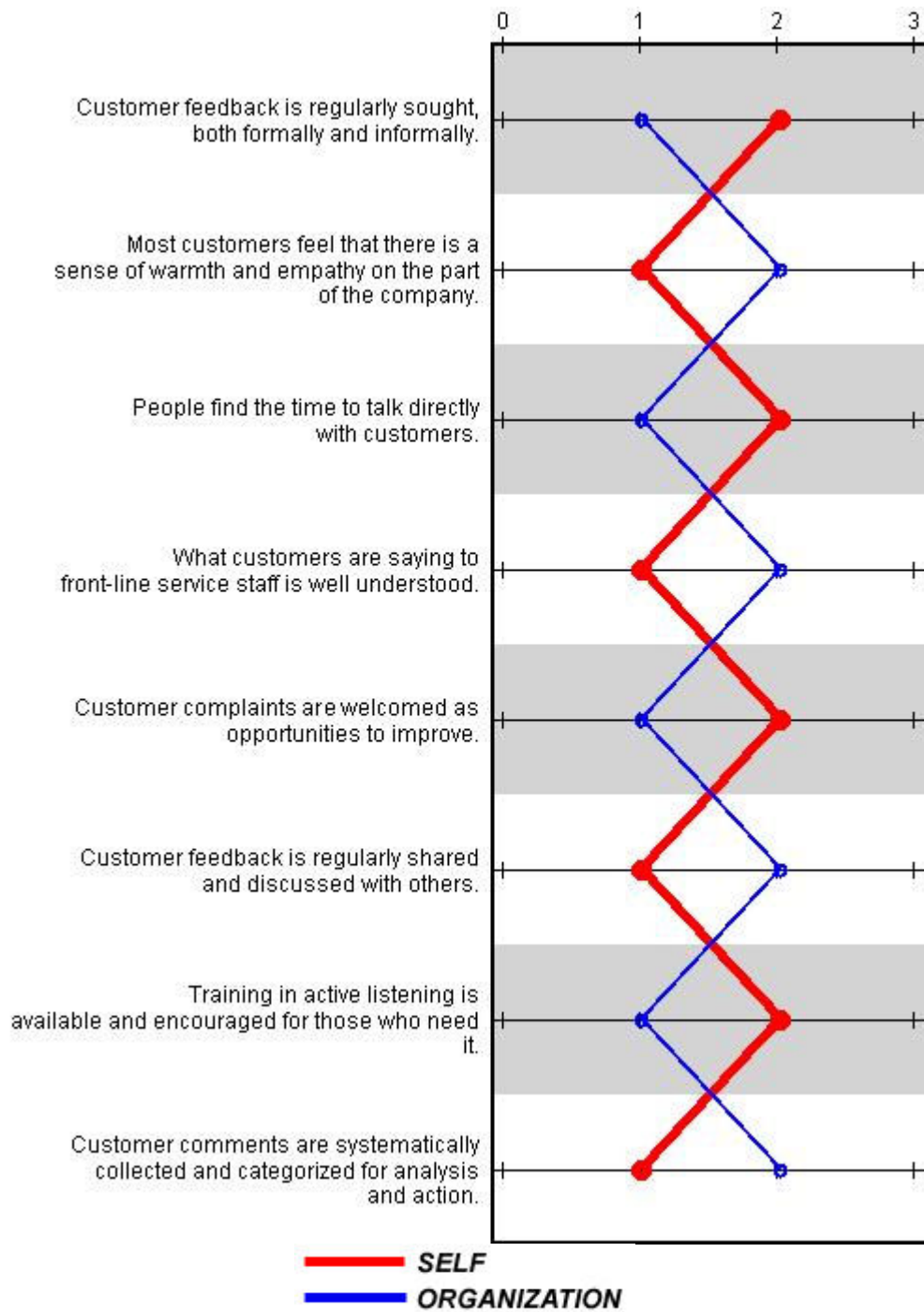
There is no one "best" way to listen to customers, and there is no such thing as paying too much attention to customers' ideas and opinions. The cardinal sin is to believe that there is nothing more to learn! Here are some variations on the listening theme, practiced by people who are known for their attention to quality and service.

- Formal research
- Comment and complaint analysis
- Front-line contact
- Consumer advisory panels
- Customer hotlines
- Mutual education

Try to develop several ways of continuously finding out about your customers and what's on their minds. It will provide the whole organization with ample opportunities to tap into their 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.

The ultimate key to your success: do something with what you learn. What good does it do us to codify our customers' moments of truth and chart their cycles 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 also the impact of what happens during those moments of truth.

**Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24**



## 2 Feedback and the Voice of the Customer

### Customer feedback is regularly shared and discussed with others

Even the best customer feedback systems (gathering information in a variety of ways and on a regular basis) are worth very little unless the data is seriously considered, and widely shared and discussed within the organization. In other words, customer feedback always needs to be carefully analyzed and appropriately fed into the enterprise-wide plans and programs to give better service in the future.

Best practice organizations ensure that the effort to gather, collate and analyze customer feedback is at least as great as the effort to ask for it in the first place. This means that every 'nugget' of information should be reviewed and discussed in order to determine its relevant and usefulness to make continuous or 'step-change' improvements to service. This may involve the discussion of complaints, questionnaire and survey data, formal or informal comments, product or service focus group feedback or information from customer visits, conferences and meetings. No one piece of data has more weight than another, but through broadly based discussion, patterns of feedback, can be seen and action plans can be evolved.

As the following questions

#### FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. To what extent do I get actively involved in regular discussion about the customer feedback that we received as an organization and debate what we might do about it?
2. How much of my time do I devote to talking about customer service feedback issue with my work colleagues on a casual or informal basis so that it can be fully debated and properly understood?
3. In what positive ways do I keep myself up to date and involved in the latest customer thinking and plans to lift service responses in the future?

#### FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. What systems and processes do we have for gathering and collating all the 'threads' and 'strands' of customer feedback and presenting it for debate or discussion across the whole enterprise?
2. What specific mechanisms have we designed to disseminate customer feedback efficiently and effectively so that information can be quickly shared, discussed, and understood?
3. Have we made sure that on-going customer comments and ideas are regularly on the table for discussion and the lead to the development of action plans at all levels of the organization?



### Training in active listening is available and promoted for those that need it.

Even if we have developed excellent customer feedback collection systems, they are only useful to an organization if people have the capability and the interest to listen to what is being said. In other words, even where the richest transmission of information occurs, the enterprise needs a highly effective receiving process in order to take full advantage of the data that is flowing to them.

In the final analysis, the only way in which we can be sure that the organization is listening to customer feedback properly and well is to ensure that people are able or trained to listen in the most attentive way possible. Of course, active listening is not easy at the best of times or when trying to do it on a one to one basis. However, the payoffs for the organization in overcoming this difficulty are enormous.

Best practice organizations ensure that all of its frontline people are coached and trained in active listening techniques and are given the opportunity to demonstrate their skills frequently. In addition, training is available to anyone else that is responsible to gathering customer feedback or managing customer relationship.

Ask the following questions

#### **FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

1. Am I an effective listener in my normal day to day conversations (e.g. am I patient, good at eye contact, do I let people completely finish what they are saying, read people's body language, paraphrase what I hear etc)?
2. Do I really listen to the feedback that I receive from customers (indirectly as well as directly) and have the capacity to hear the underlying messages and themes that are important?
3. Could I benefit some more training in active listening techniques to deepen or improve my overall skills?

#### **FOR THE ORGANIZATION**

1. Are our frontline staff competent or well trained in their ability to listen to our customers with high levels of attentiveness and empathy?
2. Are we known as an organization that is effective at listening and at understanding our customer needs or are there gaps that we need to specifically address and rectify?
3. Have we designed and made available an effective active listening skills course or workshop and made it widely available to any individual that would benefit from it?



**FVC-5**

#### **Customer complaints are welcomed as a chance to improve**

Customer complaints are never a welcome outcome from our genuine efforts to provide service, and we should obviously do everything that we can to stop them from occurring in the first place (and appease the customer as quickly as possible when they do complain). However, many organizations make the mistake of seeing complaints as something to be avoided at all costs by whatever means available, as opposed to working towards a long-term strategy to stop the problem occurring in the future.

Best practice organizations actually welcome customer complaints. This is not because they are masochistic or want them to occur. However, they see some mistakes as being inevitable and therefore consider it to be more important to be positive and take their rectification seriously, rather than to run and hide or to ignore the problem (in the hope that it will go away). As a result, they see complaints as providing the opportunity for improvement, effort to be made and to demonstrate both flexibility and responsiveness (not rigidity and defensiveness).

Ask the following questions

#### **FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

1. Is my personal attitude to customer complains (direct or indirect) positive and focused on improvement, rather

than resistant or defensive.

2. To what extent do I take an active and positive interest in complaints about factors and issues that could be eliminated with focus and effort in my own work area?
3. How up to date am I about the sort of complaints that customers tend to make and consequently focused upon what I might proactively do to stop them from arising again.

**FOR THE ORGANIZATION**

1. What is our stated policy and attitude to customer complaints as an organization (i.e. are we open, proactive, positive and responsive enough in our stated aims)?
2. How well do we engender a culture of welcoming complaints (when they cannot readily be avoided) in order to make strenuous effort to improve and stop similar problems occurring in the future?
3. Do we keep track of our complaints as an organization and systematically analyze them to see whether they are occurring in similar areas (and more improvement effort to eliminate the reason for the complaints is likely to be necessary).



## **ESTABLISHING SERVICE STANDARDS**

When it comes to evaluating whether or not superior service has been provided, the discussion begins and ends with the customer's assessment. Superior service is there if the customer says it is. It isn't there if the customer says that it isn't or votes with their feet and goes to a competitor. The only true and reliable way to measure the quality of service that has been delivered is to find out about the customer's most recent experiences and how satisfied they are with those experiences.

Companies known for providing distinctive service consistently meet their customers' expectations. Far from leaving anything to chance, they establish consistently clear, customer-oriented performance standards throughout their organizations, and then constantly and meticulously measure performance against those standards. They do this by establishing standards of service and then putting these in policies, procedures, work instructions, job descriptions, etc. to ensure that tangible standards are written into the culture.

Dynamic, information-based customer-service processes that can be fine-tuned and adjusted to changing customer expectations are based on standards everyone is committed to, as well as on information about how well those standards are being met.

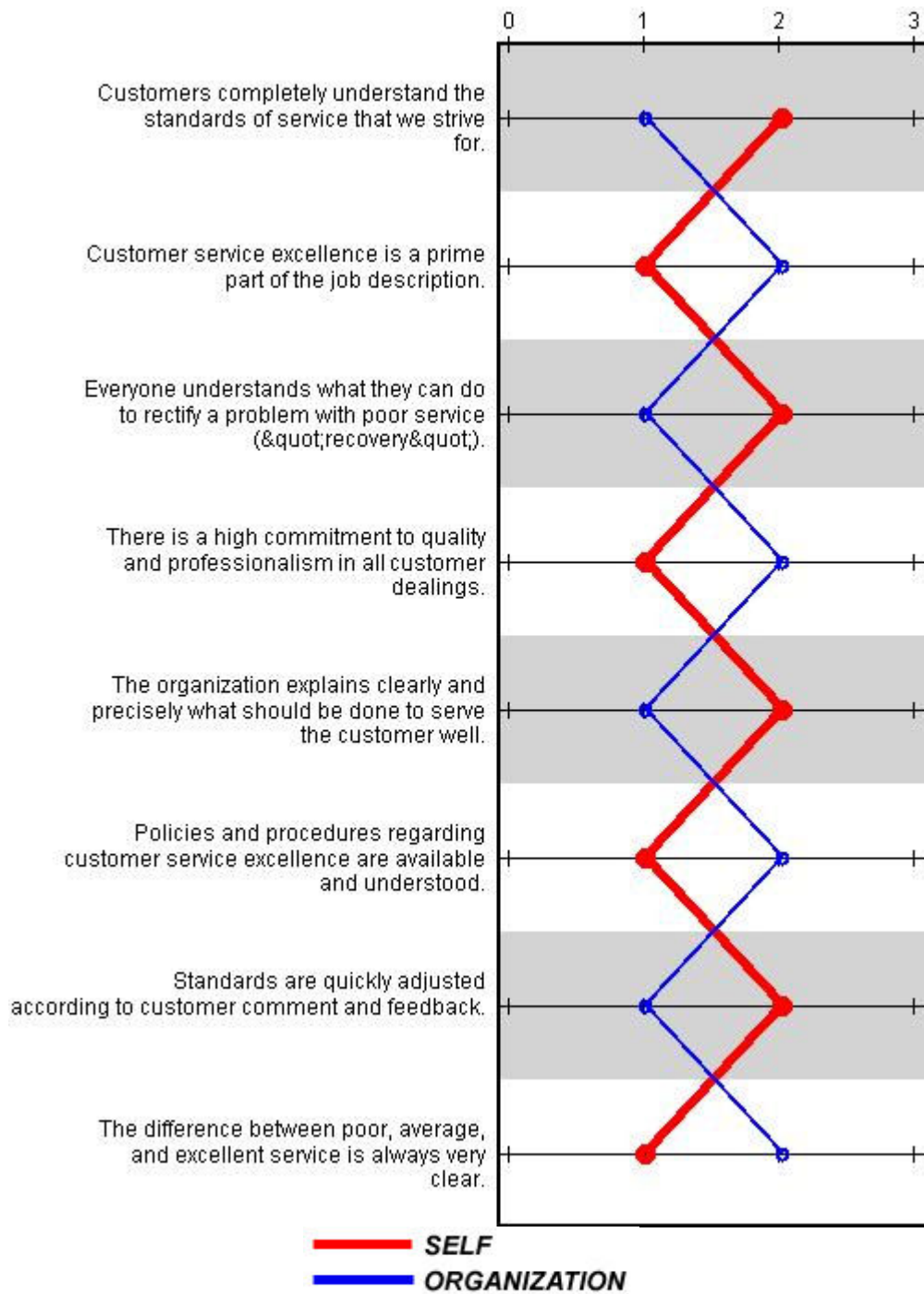
Organizations that set the benchmarks for customer service are 100% committed to measuring customer satisfaction and using the results to guide delivery processes. They measure formally. They measure frequently (usually weekly, but the really good companies measure daily). Then they attach important individual, work-group, and organizational outcomes to the results.

Their ways of asking the questions vary, but the questions asked are very specific to their particular customer profile. If there is nothing immediately useful to be learned from an open-ended, global query, they will instead develop a series of questions about all aspects of the customer's encounter with the company: speed, accuracy, cordiality, helpfulness, completeness of information, response to inquiries, and any other moments of truth that build the overall impression of quality.

The results of these measurement efforts typically become the focus of subsequent internal dialogue and problem-solving efforts. After all, an organization's system for measuring the quality of its service is only as good as the follow up-the efforts it makes to effect those improvements.

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: 12 out of a possible 24**



### 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?



## **EMPOWERING PEOPLE TO SERVE THE CUSTOMER**

The interactions between front-line employees and customers make or break the enterprise at every moment of truth. Meet customers' expectations and 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.

Front-line 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 so you can 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 this kind of stress and pressure, customer service people need to be able to continue to perform capably and willingly without withdrawing into robotic, detached behavior or becoming aggressive and hostile.

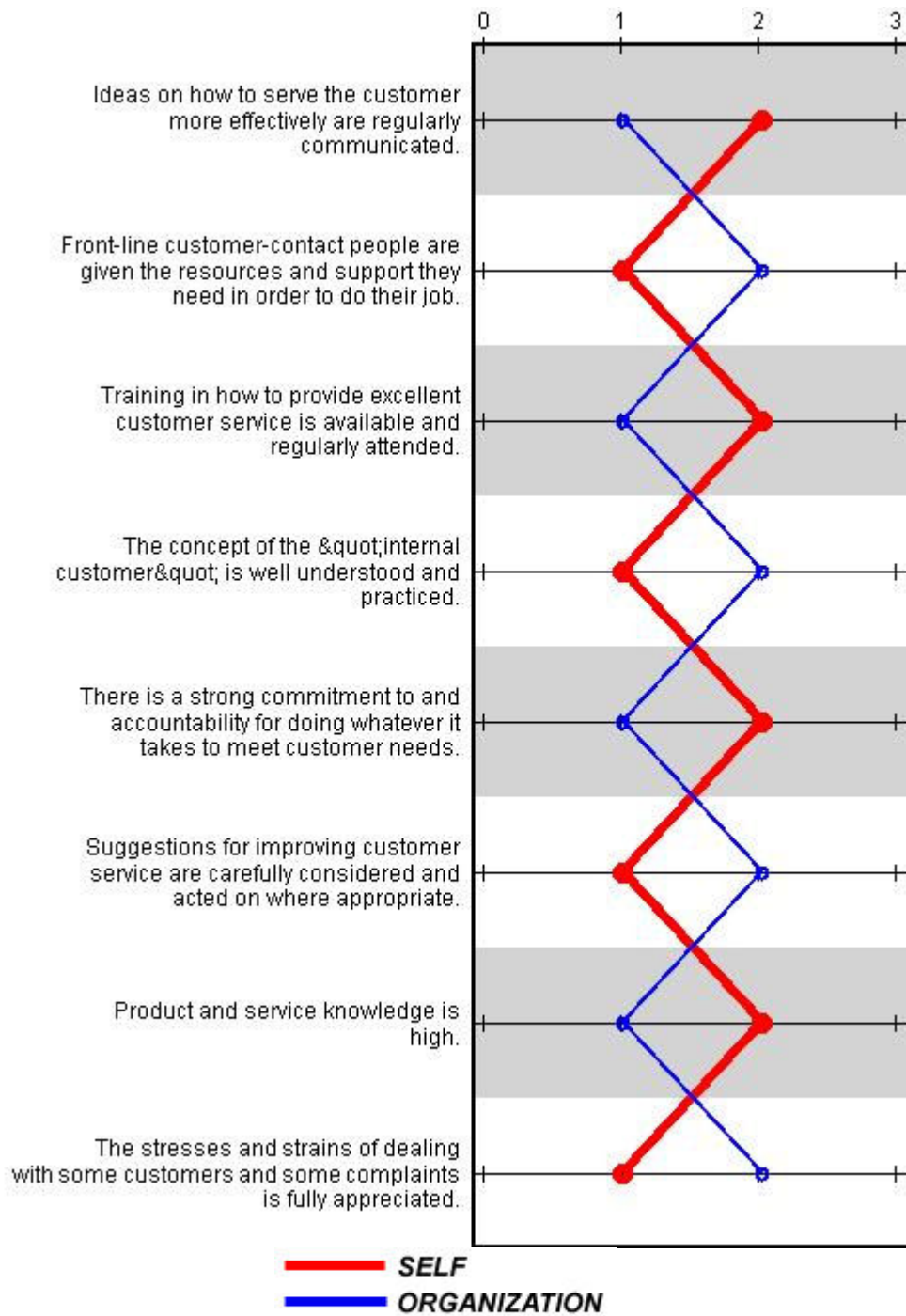
Empowerment means encouraging every individual to make that extra effort- and to use their imagination and initiative. It also means accepting mistakes when well-intentioned efforts fail to work out exactly as planned. The goal is that best-of all-worlds where empowered employees confidently and capably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

When employees are satisfied with the way they are treated, satisfied with the availability of the right tools to do the job, and satisfied 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. And when a mistake is made, they'll be much more understanding and forgiving!

There are two dimensions to empowerment-one is 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 necessary organizational tactics that help us convince our front-line workers that they really are empowered to work for the customer. These responses recognize that empowerment isn't something given; it is instead 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 potential must be there, but it also must be nurtured and developed. Finding people with the ability to handle empowerment is a selection issue. Developing that potential is the coaching side of the coin. Neither, however, creates total customer commitment. That will come from the breadth and depth of experience that empowered employees amass and continually reinvest on behalf of the customer-to the benefit of the organization as well as to themselves.

**Summary Scores - Individual: 12 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?



## CUSTOMER-SERVING PROCESSES AND SYSTEMS

It is widely believed that most large businesses are made up of hundreds of individual processes, but only about 20-30 are considered to be important to the customer. The simpler and better managed they are for consistency and reliability, the more likely that they will satisfy the customer. Unfortunately, processes almost always flow across the organization, not up and down. When the process breaks down and causes customers to complain, no one is in place to take responsibility for fixing the problem. Yet when it is repeated or magnified, it can impact every level.

There are three major global customer-serving processes in most every organization. These are:

- Demand generation-creating demand from the customer for products and services. Functions such as research, sales, and marketing use demand-generation processes.
- Demand fulfillment-fulfilling customer orders created by the demand generators. Functions such as production, logistics, and distribution use demand-fulfillment processes.
- Cash generation-funding the business or collecting the money from customers who have purchased products or services. Financial functions use cash-generation processes.

If this model holds true, it will be relatively easy to describe the sub-processes that "sit" under each of these headings. Once this has been done, you can introduce a robust mechanism to manage these processes and begin acting on your commitment to satisfy customers through process improvement and quality methods.

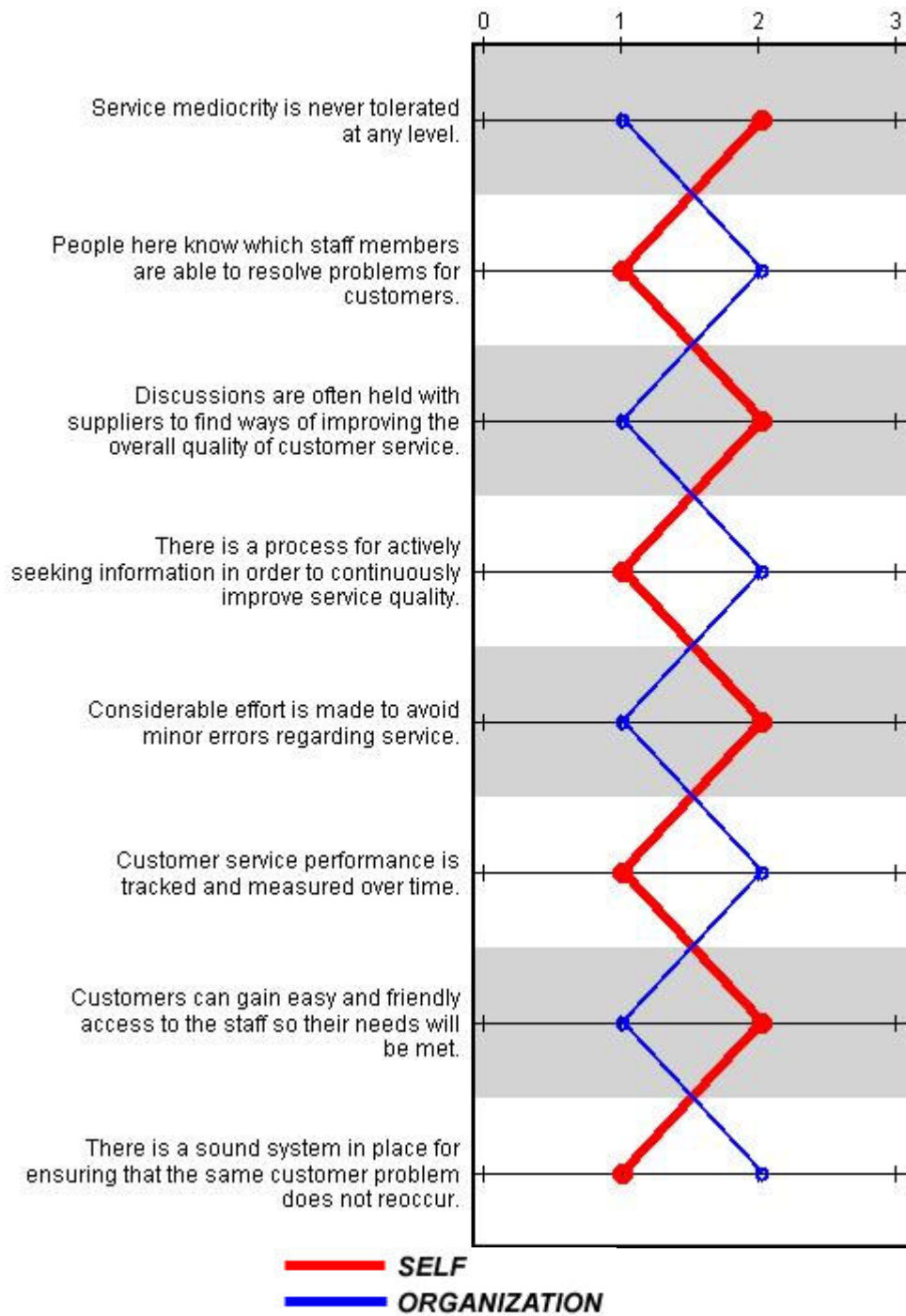
Senior managers need to be part of all these processes and act in custodial roles. The primary mechanism for improvement in "excellent service" companies is the extensive use of well-trained and focused teams. Such teams are skilled in sound fact-based problem-solving techniques and coached by trained facilitators and team leaders. This allows the whole organization to potentially work on process improvement toward greater customer satisfaction.

Effective process and systems design for the customer means:

- Teams need to be made up of people who work with the process that is 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; where implemented, they must be standardized across the process.

This all sounds just like good common sense, but you would be surprised at how quickly we ignore some or all of these factors. Excellent-service companies manage their process improvement teams well, and delight their customers in the process!

Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24



## 5 Customer Serving Processes and Systems

### There is a process for actively seeking information to help continually improve service quality

During the course of any concerted effort to improve or streamline organizational processes to increase customer satisfaction, circumstances will change. The changes will result from a number of very normal situations. Suppliers will change, customers will change their minds, employees will transfer to different teams and even technology will offer new options (to name but a few). Teams therefore needs to constantly review the processes under their control (or partly under their control) and look for new and different ways to continually improve.

To take a particular example, a team of people working in a retail store may survey their customers and find that they should improve the time it takes to pay at the till. In these circumstances, the team may focus on putting on more cashiers or checkout counters, or look at making available better technology such as bar coding to speed up the payment process (as well as deliver some other benefits at the same time). However, not only will customer expectations alter from time to time, but they will have other expectations that may often assume a greater importance to their 'Better store' product choice or more special offers for example, may become the new priority. Best practice organizations therefore look to stay constantly abreast of these potential changes (many of which will only be subtle shifts in emphasis) and keep seeking new information.

Ask the following questions

#### FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I always know where to go or to whom I could speak to get the information that I need to help improve overall service quality in some fashion or form?
2. Is useful information on current service performance available, simple to interpret and easily accessible?
3. Is customer research and data (from surveys, complaints and other sources) widely circulated and made available in order to provide useful information to help improve future service quality?

#### FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. To what extent has a clear process been designed to make information of all sorts available to employees to help them to improve service quality (based on facts and data about performance not guesses and assumptions)?
2. Is a structured communication process in place to help individuals and teams to put forward ideas about how service quality may be lifted or improved?
3. Have we designed efficient and effective feedback processes and systems to ensure that customer service performance data is widely understood and action to correct any shortfalls can take place as often as necessary?



### Considerable effort is made to avoid small service errors

Small service errors may not amount to significant problems for customers in themselves but they can be both an irritation over time and collectively can create major performance shortfalls, ultimately leading to high levels of overall dissatisfaction. As a result, even the smallest service problems or errors need to be taken seriously and

considerable effort should be taken to eliminate them whenever possible.

Small service errors will vary greatly from one organization to the next. However, some of the common problems might be that the products or services could be late, slightly off specification, poorly packaged etc. Equally, customer phone calls may not be answered quickly, people may give out misleading information or they are often poor at listening to customer concerns. Problems such as these indicate a lack of concern and respect for the customer and often cause them to think that more serious performance shortfalls may be possible.

Best practice organizations ensure that every employee clearly understands that good service starts with ensuring that care is taken with small service goals and working hard to eliminate any errors that may be irritating to customers. For example, many airlines ensure that every member of the crew cleans up passenger tray tables where necessary. If staff take care to keep tables clean, the passenger feels that the much more important cleanliness and maintenance of the engine is also going to be done properly.

Ask the following questions

#### **FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

1. Am I sufficiently focused and careful in checking my work to ensure that custom problems and errors do not occur in the first place?
2. Have I worked with my colleagues and close team members to ensure that we work out how to help one another to help eliminate service errors in all the major processes for which we are responsible?
3. Do I spend quality time in reviewing commonly occurring service errors and mistakes and look to find better work methods and approaches that will create a better result for customers?

#### **FOR THE ORGANIZATION**

1. Do we take small service errors and problems seriously and make sure that the commonly occurring issues are quickly addressed?
2. Have we consciously thought to create a culture in which good service starts with the small beginnings of what employees do to get it right for the customers each and every time?
3. Are commonly occurring small service problems tracked regularly, analyzed and discussed ahead of serious process improvement effort being planned and action taken?



**CSP-3**

#### **Discussions are often held with suppliers to find ways of improving overall service quality for customers**

Because suppliers inevitably provide inputs at the beginning or the earliest stages of any process, their impact on the final service that is delivered to the customer is significant. Unfortunately, few organizations sufficiently recognize this influence and proceed to pursue improved customer service, without any reference and what a supplier might think or be able to do.

Any supplier can be asked to provide their input on how better service may be given in at least two ways. Firstly, the supplier can be asked how they could improve their service to the intermediate organization (between them and the final customer). This may mean that the goals and ambitions of the intermediate organization are such that the supplier better understands how their product or service is used and how this might change in the future. Secondly, the intermediate organization can give its suppliers direct feedback from the ultimate customer and ask

whether these service expectations can be met or exceeded. For instance, in a hamburger restaurant for example, a consumer may ask for smaller tomatoes in their "Big Burger". Whilst the restaurant may just slice tomatoes to be smaller, if this information was shared directly with a supplier, they may be in a position to grow a more appropriate tomatoes that saves on extra cutting or slicing.

The simple principle in aiming to improve customer service is to invite everyone's input. Suppliers have a key role in providing much of the creative input that can really make a difference.

Ask the following questions

#### **FOR THE INDIVIDUAL**

1. To what extent have I made contact with my suppliers (either internal or external) and shared the future goals and vision of my team to give them clarity about future direction?
2. Have I actively sought supplier opinion and suggestions on ways in which we may improve customers' service quality in direct response to our customers' needs and expectations?
3. To what extent am I open to direct supplier participation in service strategy or quality improvement teams (in order to gain a new and different perspectives where appropriate)?

#### **FOR THE ORGANIZATION**

1. Do we regard suppliers as open, collaborative and participative partners in the goal to lift service quality (or do we have a mainly uninvolved and transactional relationship with them)?
2. Do we effectively promote the importance of inviting supplier input on service goals or targets before making any changes or introducing new approaches?
3. Are suppliers involved formally or informally in the major service decisions that are made in the organization (e.g., through one to one relationships or regular supplier meetings or conferences, etc)?



## REWARDS AND RECOGNITION FOR SERVICE EXCELLENCE

Managers in exemplary-service organizations 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 the extra step for the customer 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.

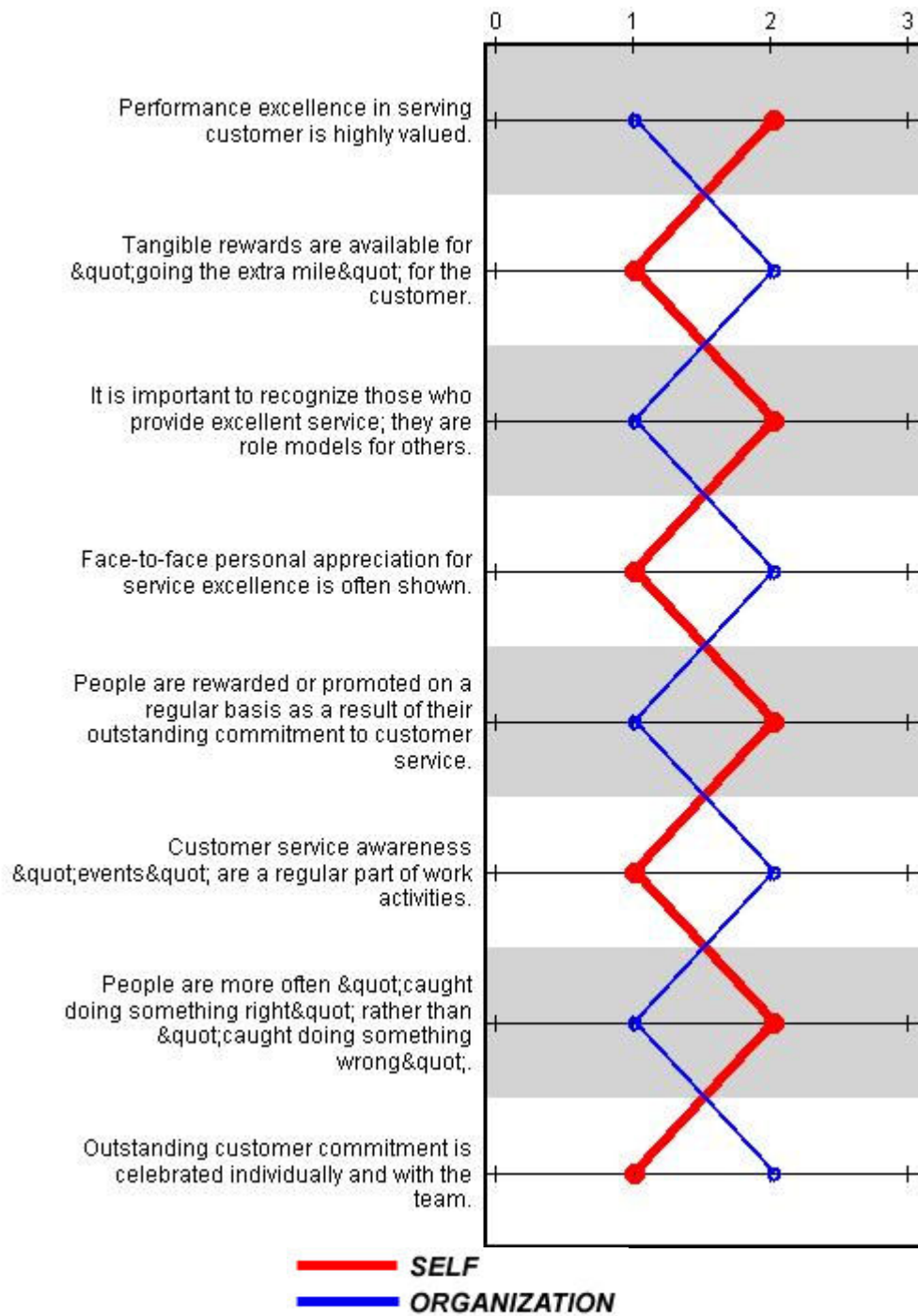
If people are a resource, they can and should be developed in order to increase their ultimate value. The never-ending process includes formal on-the-job training, guided experience, effective coaching and monitoring, performance reviews, organizational support, and general service awareness training.

Some general training can be very effective, but there is usually not enough emphasis on improving behavior (as opposed to improving skills or knowledge). Most enterprises need an integrated approach with 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 recognize these different levels of ability, and programs should be designed accordingly. Training, however, 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 openly providing plenty of support and encouragement as often as possible.

Effective incentive and reward programs can be created using a combination of paid trips (such as cruises), merchandise, and purely "feel good" mental pay-offs. Many organizations make only minimal or sporadic use of such recognition. They'll have to use a structured approach in order to make it a widespread part of the way business is done. The key to this culture change is to start in small ways: Immediately identify and publicize any examples of customer-service excellence. Little by little, the whole organization learns that certain behavior yields the most recognition.

Often linked with recognition and reward is creating a sense of celebration. The significance of being a part of something important cannot be overstated. In fact, it might be the most important operating principle of all. A strong culture of celebration needs to be developed in order to lift and sustain the highest possible employee morale.

**Summary Scores - Individual: 12 out of a possible 24**



## 6 Rewards and Recognition for Service Excellence

### It is important to point out excellent service givers as role models for others

Whether individuals have the innate or natural ability to provide excellent service on most occasions, or they have learned these skills over time, such people are all too few in most enterprises (or at least every enterprise seems to complain that they would like many more than they have got).

Despite their potential minority status in the organization, excellent service givers are worth their weight in gold as role models to others. This is simply because, people can learn more by watching and working with outstanding service givers than they can be reading books or attending training workshops on customer service.

Best practice organizations quickly identify their best service givers and make sure that their skills and abilities are widely praised and pointed out to others to emulate. In addition, excellent service givers are asked to operate in a coaching mode where they can (and are even given formal roles as coaches or mentors to less experienced or skilled people that are in service giving positions).

Ask the following questions

#### FOR THE INDIVIDUAL

1. Do I know who the excellent service givers are in my team or in the wider organization around me?
2. Do I spend quality time trying to learn from the behavior or actions of the excellent service givers in the enterprise and aim to try new and different approaches in my own work?
3. Do I look for excellent service givers to act as a coach or a mentor (to myself or others) or at least be a role model to help lift overall service skills?

#### FOR THE ORGANIZATION

1. Do we know for sure who the excellent service givers are in our enterprise and what it is that makes them special?
2. Have we talked with our excellent service givers to encourage them to act as role models, coaches and mentors to other people as much as they can (or even utilize their skills in more formal training interventions)?
3. Are excellent service givers clearly identified so that they are widely recognized and known for their abilities (and can be sought out for their help and assistance when needed)?



## 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?



## 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 organizational level. It has been suggested that this needs to occur at six levels. These are:

1. Service leadership and vision
2. Ability to capture the "voice" of customer feedback
3. Ability to develop and adhere to service standards
4. Capacity to empower employees to offer service excellence
5. Control of internal customer serving processes and systems
6. 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 will 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 rewarding. This often entails a significant shift in traditional organizational systems and structures, ideally a metaphorical inverting of the organizational pyramid so that everyone serves the customer. 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, but while 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 Contact 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** \_\_\_\_\_