

Customer orientation among employees in public administration: A transnational, longitudinal study

Christian Korunka^{a,*}, Dieter Scharitzer^b, Pascale Carayon^c, Peter Hoonakker^c,
Angelika Sonnek^b, Francois Sainfort^d

^aFaculty of Psychology, University of Vienna, Universitätsstraße 7, A-1010 Vienna, Austria

^bDepartment of Marketing, Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration, Austria

^cCenter for Quality and Productivity Improvement, University of Wisconsin-Madison, USA

^dSchool of Industrial and Systems Engineering, Georgia Institute of Technology, Atlanta, USA

Received 14 December 2005; accepted 10 April 2006

Abstract

The relation between ergonomic principles and quality management initiatives, both, in the private and public sector, has received increasing attention in the recent years.

Customer orientation among employees is not only an important quality principle, but also an essential prerequisite for customer satisfaction, especially in service organizations. In this context, the objective of introducing *new public management* (NPM) in public-service organizations is to increase customer orientation among employees who are at the forefront of service providing.

In this study, we developed a short scale to measure perceived customer orientation. In two separate longitudinal studies carried out in Austria and the US, we analyzed changes in customer orientation resulting from the introduction of NPM. In both organizations, we observed a significant increase in customer orientation. Perceived customer orientation was related to job characteristics, organizational characteristics and employee quality of working life. Creating positive influences on these characteristics within the framework of an organizational change process has positive effects on employee customer orientation.

© 2006 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Macroergonomics; TQM; New public management

1. Introduction

When the concept of total quality management (TQM) is transposed from the private sector to the public sector, new approaches to improving service quality and more efficient and effective service production can be expected (Bernhart, 1996). The application of TQM principles to the public sector is also known as *new public management* (NPM; Budäus and Grüning, 1998; Rago, 1994; Swiss, 2001). An essential component of redesigning public administration on the basis of NPM principles is the idea that citizens are *customers* of the administration. Customer orientation of employees in the public sector has been

described as a cornerstone of the NPM approach (Wherli, 1996).

Customer orientation is also part of the broader construct “service quality”, which could be directly influenced by human factor dimensions (Drury, 2000). Until recently service quality is a somehow neglected concept from a macroergonomic perspective (Drury, 1997, 2000; Eklund, 1997, 2000; Taveira et al., 2003).

Measuring the construct of customer orientation of employees has largely been neglected in research in both the private sector and the public sector. One objective of this study is to develop a short scale for measuring perceived customer orientation (from the employees point of view). Two longitudinal studies conducted in two public organizations allowed us to analyze changes in perceived customer orientation in the process of implementing NPM

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +43 1 4277 47881; fax: +43 1 4277 47889.
E-mail address: christian.korunka@univie.ac.at (C. Korunka).

and the influence of job and organizational factors on perceived customer orientation. Knowledge of the factors that affect customer orientation can provide insight on how to improve the implementation of NPM.

1.1. Customer orientation in public administration

In the context of quality improvement in the private service sector, citizen dissatisfaction with services offered by public organizations has grown in recent years. The demands of citizens have risen: they are less likely to accept suboptimal quality, even in public services. This situation can be exacerbated by bureaucratic and political sluggishness, which may be related to a loss of credibility of political and administrative officials. Moreover, administrations are confronted with all kinds of social transformation. They are no longer accepted as the “authority,” as citizens have become more critical and assertive (Hopp and Göbel, 1999).

1.2. A definition of “customer orientation”

In both research and practice, the concept of customer orientation is often used as a synonym of market orientation (Brady and Cronin, 2001), or is a central part of a broader definition of market orientation (Kohli and Jaworski, 1990). On the other hand, Bruhn (1999) describes the differences between market and customer orientation: market orientation refers to the focus of an organization’s activities on all market participants and interest groups, while customer orientation is characterized by a bilateral relationship between the customer and the organization. Market orientation thus focuses on creating a general competitive edge, while the primary objective of customer orientation is to fulfill individual customer expectations and needs.

Bruhn (1999) distinguishes among three forms of customer orientation, ranging from a very narrow to a broad, situation-based interpretation. The *information-based interpretation* defines customer orientation in terms of the availability of customer information, i.e. the extent to which information on customer needs is collected and analyzed, and the extent to which this information is available in a company or public organization. The *culture- and philosophy-based interpretation* goes beyond the first interpretation: it defines a company’s customer orientation through the presence of certain elements in its general corporate philosophy, such as values, norms and convictions (see also Deshpande et al., 1993; Homburg and Pflesser, 2000). Thus, customer orientation is part of corporate culture and characterizes not only the company’s opinions but also its employees’ behavior in dealing with customers. The third form of customer orientation is *service- and interaction-based* customer orientation, which is mainly determined by the quality of the services provided. This view diverges from the first two forms of customer orientation. While the first two conceptualiza-

tions address customer orientation from the standpoint of the organization, the service- and interaction-based conceptualization considers the customer’s perspective.

On the basis of these differing interpretations, it is important to adopt a broad definition of customer orientation that takes into account all three interpretations introduced by Bruhn (1999, p. 10), “Customer orientation is the comprehensive, continuous collection and analysis of customer expectations as well as their internal and external implementation in an organization’s services and interactions, with the objective of establishing stable and economically advantageous customer relationships on the long term.”

The specific characteristic of customer orientation in public organizations as compared to the private sector is expressed in Schedler’s definition (Schedler, 1995, p. 37):

The increased focus on the concrete and existing needs of customers (e.g. residents) brings about profound shifts in public administration. Naturally, laws still do have to be followed, procedures have to be carried out properly, and uncomfortable decisions and demands have to be made, if necessary in an authoritarian manner. Customer orientation in this context does not mean making the customer the measure of all things. Rather, it means providing a necessary service in such a way that it meets the customer’s needs in the optimum manner.

1.3. Measuring customer orientation

When measuring customer orientation, it is necessary to distinguish between *institutional-* and *employee-related* constructs. In the former case, one needs to analyze company documents and measure the extent to which the organization acts in a customer-oriented manner. Employee-related customer orientation, on the other hand, describes an employee’s ability (or perceived ability) to act in a customer-oriented manner and to meet customer expectations. A human factor perspective focuses therefore on employee-related customer orientation.

Approaches for measuring customer orientation have been proposed in the field of institutional customer or market orientation. The MARKOR scale (Market Orientation scale) focuses on the aspect of customer information and uses 32 items on information collection and dissemination as well as reactions to customer information (Bruhn, 1999; Kohli et al., 1993).

A scale developed by Narver and Slater (1990) takes the cultural aspect into consideration. Customer orientation is described as a facet of corporate culture that increases customer benefits and thus the success of the company. The so-called MKTOR scale (again, Market Orientation scale) consists of 14 individual items on the dimensions of customer orientation, competitive orientation and inter-functional coordination.

Homburg and Werner (1998) take the service and interaction process as a basis for measuring customer

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات