

Service Quality, Client Satisfaction and Client Personality in the Public Companies

Morad Rezaei D., Hamidreza Rezaei K., Hamidreza Alipour, Sajjad Salehi K.

Islamic Azad University, Rasht Branch, Iran

Abstract: The purpose of this paper is to explore the relationship between service quality, client satisfaction and personality in the public companies. Also, we examine service quality of public companies and clients satisfaction and client's personality. Based on Parasuraman *et al.*'s SERVQUAL variables, i.e. tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and assurance the authors tried to identify the effects of each dimensions to client satisfaction and personality. Data were collected through field research among 413 clients who have conferred to public companies. The results identified that between service quality of public companies and client satisfaction is a significant positive relationship, but moderating variable (personality) does not impact in relationship between independent variable and dependent variable. Also in this study it was found that service quality of public companies lower than the average expected and client satisfaction is the same and shows less than the expected average. In terms of client's satisfaction in dimensions of service quality scales clients have most satisfaction of empathy and from the responsiveness have the least satisfaction. A notable limitation of research is researchers used a single overall question to measure satisfaction. Other problem is clients don't motivate to participate in study. Companies providing hedonic services modify the content of their services or add novelty stimulus into their services from time to time in order to evoke the most desired client's emotions and enhance satisfaction. In this paper we use SERVQUAL model to measure the service quality of public companies. And the paper manages to identify the effects of SQ dimensions on client satisfaction and personality in the public companies.

Key words: Service quality, Client satisfaction, Personality, SERVQUAL, Iran

INTRODUCTION

The service sector plays an increasingly important role in today's worlds. Recent news indicates that attention is being focused more and more on this sector (Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2006). The shifting of the economy in industrialized countries from goods to services is considered one of the most important long-term trended in the business world today (Ueltschy *et al.*, 2007). Over the past two decades, researchers have devoted considerable attention to studying service quality as perceived by the consumer. Due to their intangible natures, services are more difficult to evaluate than products, which typically can be inspected and evaluated for quality before the purchase takes place (Pollack, 2009). In the modern world, one of the first strategies and priorities of prosper and success organizations is achieved the satisfaction of clients (Nezhad Hajaly Irani, 2008) and for successful companies and organizations offering high quality services is necessary (Ismail *et al.*, 2006). Client satisfaction or dissatisfaction results from experiencing a service and comparing that experience with the kind of quality of service that was expected (Oliver, 1980). Services play an important role in the competitive strategy definition and identification systems to perform the service management. In fact, researchers believe that high levels of quality and client satisfaction is necessary to maintain clients and customers loyalty, especially in services industry (Hossain and Leo, 2009). Most experts believe that the surest way to success is to remain in the minds of clients and this obtained only in the shadow of production or service quality (Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 2008). Client orientation in the public sector has been described as a cornerstone of the New Public Management approach (Wherli, 1996). In contrast with private service sector, citizen dissatisfaction with services offered by public organizations and this situation 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 (Korunka *et al.*, 2007). For public organizations client satisfaction is the new criteria in order to measuring the organizational performance (Nezhad Hajaly Irani, 2008). Furthermore, the literature tells us that the concept of satisfaction is complicated (Gill and White, 2009); however, for the client satisfaction several definitions are presented, one of them is as follows: Zeithaml and

Bitner defined client satisfaction as the "clients" evaluation of a product or service in terms of whether that product or service has met their needs and expectations (Jaiswal, 2008).

In this study, service quality and client satisfaction are considered as the independent variable and as the dependent variable. Client personality has been considered as moderating variable. This research also used SERVQUAL scale questionnaire.

In this context, this research aims to study the relationship between service quality, client satisfaction and client personality. Specifically, based on Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) SERVQUAL variables, the authors tried to identify the relationship between each variable on client satisfaction and personality in Iran.

To this end, in the first part of this paper, the literature relating to the client satisfaction, service quality and personality is reviewed. In the second part, the methodology of the research is described and the results from a survey questionnaire are presented. Finally, conclusions and limitations of the research are presented.

Problem Statement:

Since the governments in recent years to provide service quality to the people has been evident over the past, governments faced with the question of how services can be faster, better and less costly and provide higher quality (Alvani and Riahi, 2003).

State organizations are one of the centers provide services that all the people use them. Government usually offers quantitative services and evaluation and assessment of quality of these services is difficult and public organizations are not accountable like what the private sectors are. On the other hand, people as citizens are not satisfied from these services. In the today's world administrative reforms and bureaucratic reforms have been introduced and all are looking for service quality. This issue in Iran in 2002 (1381) was considered and will be citizens be viewed as a client. According to research conducted by the State Planning Organization concerning the appraisal performance of government organizations, 98 percent of the people are dissatisfied with the quality of service (Khalili Iraqi *et al.*, 2003). Therefore, public companies should tries to provide the better services and pay attention to clients' desires. Now the question is whether there is a significant relationship between service quality provided by public companies and client satisfaction with mediates client personality?

Literature review:

Client satisfaction:

Satisfaction is defined as "pleasurable fulfillment" (Oliver, 1999). Customer and client satisfaction is an output, resulting from the customer's and client's pre-purchase comparison of expected performance with perceived actual performance and incurred cost (Aydin *et al.*, 2005). Satisfaction is dependent on the ability of the supplier to meet the customer's norms and expectations. According to Kotler (1991), satisfaction is the post-purchase evaluation of services or products given the expectations before purchase. Commitment to client satisfaction is an on-going process. This is because no matter how good the services are, customers will continually expect better services (Ting, 2004). In the current study, customer's and client's overall satisfaction, which is distinguished from transaction-specific clients satisfaction, is an immediate post-purchase evaluative judgment or an affective reaction to the most recent transactional experience (Chiou *et al.*, 2009). Customer and client satisfaction should be the ultimate goal of all firms because both theoretical and empirical research links a firm's business performance to the satisfaction of its clients (Morgan *et al.*, 2005). Both the service management and the marketing literatures suggest that there is strong theoretical underpinning among customer and client satisfaction, and profitability (Hollowell, 1996).

Due to the specific character of services, the development of customer relationships is important in a range of service markets. Factors other than the obvious interactive elements of the offering should be included in the relationship equation. In this way, relationships may be managed and developed in order to achieve higher customer and client satisfaction. Customer and client satisfaction is recognized as a key intermediary objective in service operations representing an affective self-evaluation based on price and quality trade offs (Pantouvakis and Lymperopoulos, 2008). Customer satisfaction thus depends on a variety of factors, including perceived service quality, customers' mood, emotions, social interactions, and other experience-specific subjective factors (Saha and Theingi, 2009). Several studies seem to conclude that satisfaction is an affective construct rather than a cognitive construct (Oliver, 1997; Olsen, 2002). In this study, satisfaction will be viewed as a separate construct from service quality and will be restricted to transaction-specific judgments (Ueltschy *et al.* 2007).

Service Quality:

The first task is to distinguish between service quality and customer and client satisfaction. To do this, we adopt the accepted proposition that service quality is primarily a cognitive concept, while customer and client satisfaction is more affective in nature (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988; Bolton and Drew, 1991a, b; Boulding *et al.*, 1993; Yi, 1990., Spreng *et al.*, 2009). Most commonly, the nature of this service quality and satisfaction link is viewed as linear, indicating that higher levels of service quality lead to higher levels of satisfaction (Pollack, 2008).

Research has indicated that service quality has been increasingly recognized as a critical factor in the success of any business (Hossain and Leo, 2009). Service quality is “the delivery of excellent or superior service relative to customer expectations” (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996). Service quality is recognized as a multi-dimensional construct. While the number of dimensions often varies from researcher to researcher, there is some consensus that service quality consists of three primary aspects: outcome quality, interaction quality, and physical service environment quality (Brady and Cronin, 2001; Pollack, 2008).

Various scholars have suggested a number of dimensions of quality service. Sasser *et al.* (1978) listed seven service attributes, namely (1) security; (2) consistency; (3) attitude; (4) completeness; (5) condition; (6) availability and (7) training (Thai, 2008). Gronroos (1978) suggested that service quality comprises of three dimensions, namely the technical quality of the outcome of the service encounter, the functional quality of the process itself and the corporate image. Following this, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) defined service quality as a three-dimensional construct consisting of interactive, physical and corporate quality dimensions which are quite similar to Gronroos’s view. A number of detailed classifications of service quality dimensions have also been suggested by other researchers, e.g. the work of Parasuraman, *et al.* (1985, 1988) with their gap (PZB) model and later developed into SERVQUAL. While Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) claim that their five service quality dimensions are generic, it has been illustrated that this is not the case, and that the definition and number of service quality dimensions may vary depending on the context. While the SERVQUAL instrument has been accepted by many studies, there have been arguments that it only reflects the service delivery process (Thai, 2008). SERVQUAL has five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, and tangibility (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). The tangibles dimension correspond to the aforementioned physical environment aspect, the reliability dimensions corresponds to the service outcome aspect, and the remaining three represent aspects of interaction quality (Pollack, 2008).

Personality:

A number of attempts have been made to investigate putative links between people personality and satisfaction (Fenlon *et al.*, 2007) and researchers have used various paradigms to examine the relationship between the personality dimensions and satisfaction (Malouff *et al.*, 2010). Many researchers agree that a link exists between personality and emotions (Gountas and Gountas, 2007). O'Brien (1982) considers satisfaction as an emotion, whilst other researchers have stated that satisfaction is an expressed emotional reaction to a service context (Havlena and Holbrook, 1986). Preis (2003) suggests that the relationship between a service provider and the consumer has a positive impact on whether repurchase will occur. Therefore, personality as the antecedent influence of the interactions between consumers-and-service providers may affect both the level of consumer satisfaction evaluation and the intention to repurchase.

In this study personality is a moderator and we survey the impact of this variable on relationship between service quality and client satisfaction.

Theoretical Framework and Hypothesis:

We postulate a relationship between service quality, client satisfaction and client personality. We contend that client personality mediates the dependent variable. To assess the current public companies service quality, we adopted the service quality dimensions of Parasuraman *et al.* (1988). Figure 1 shows the conceptual structure of the study. The framework illustrate the following basic sequence: public companies service quality leads to client satisfaction and client personality is a moderator. Previous studies provide evidence of relationship between service quality and client satisfaction (Ismail *et al.*, 2006; Ueltschy *et al.*, 2007; Pollack, 2008; Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulos, 2009).

DeRuyter *et al.* (1998) found that poorly perceived service quality may also result in high service satisfaction for those customers who may not necessarily buy the highest quality service. Such customers may view convenience, price and availability as more important variables affecting overall service quality. However, Behn *et al.* (1997) and GAO (2003) found that attributes of audit quality are positively associated with client satisfaction (Ismail *et al.*, 2006). Therefore, our hypothesis is follows:

H. There is a significant relationship between service quality provided by public companies and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.

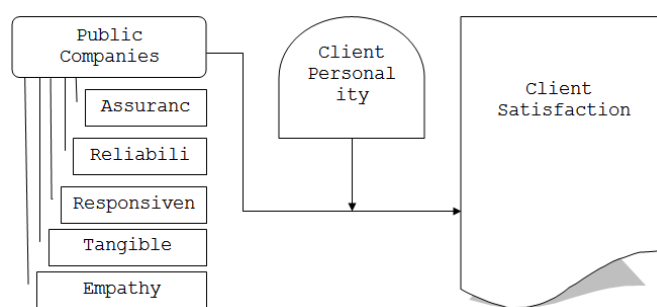


Fig. 1: Schematic diagram of the research model

Specifically, our hypotheses are:

- Ha. There is a significant relationship between assurance and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.
- Hb. There is a significant relationship between reliability and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.
- Hc. There is a significant relationship between responsiveness and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.
- Hd. There is a significant relationship between tangible and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.
- He. There is a significant relationship between empathy and client satisfaction with mediates client personality.

Methodology:

Sample:

The data for this study (n=413) was collected from population that patronized and received public companies services. Questionnaires were distributed to 430 respondents (Client) and 413 responses were received, a response rate of 96 percent.

Measures:

Service Quality:

In the proposed model, based on the work of Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) related to the SERVQUAL model for the evaluation of service quality. Service quality measured by five variables, namely assurance, reliability, responsiveness, tangibles and empathy. Table 1 shows the five dimensions of service quality of public companies considered in this study. To capture public service quality, we adopt the five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

Client Satisfaction:

Several studies seem to conclude that satisfaction is an affective construct rather than a cognitive construct (Oliver, 1997; Olsen, 2002, Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2006). Rust and Oliver (1994) further defined satisfaction as the "customer's fulfillment response," which is an evaluation as well as an emotion-based response to a service (Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2006). Studies on customer and client satisfaction with services have traditionally measured the construct with single item measures (Bitner, 1990; Bolton and Drew, 1991 b; Caruana *et al.*, 2000; Sivadas and Baker-perwitt, 2000; Theodorakis *et al.*, 2001; Imai *et al.*, 2006). In this study, clients' satisfaction is measured by using one item that captured overall satisfaction of clients on the service offered by public companies. In this scale we adopt the five-point Likert scale (1-strongly disagree to 5-strongly agree).

Table 1: Service quality dimensions and definition

V	Definition	Indicators
Assurance	The ability to convey trust and confidence.	The indicators of this variable, which is related to (1) the knowledge and courtesy of staff and their ability to convey trust and confidence, incorporated the "knowledge and experienced staff", (2) the friendly and courteous staff, (3) the "treatment with dignity and respect", and (4) "staff explains thoroughly medical condition".
Reliability	The ability of employees to perform the promised service timely and accurately.	The indicators of this variable, which is related to (1) perform the promised service dependably, (2) perform the promised service accurately, and (3) the "reliability of the public companies", (4) as well as the "Kept promises", (5) and the "right way to carry out services".
Responsiveness	The willingness of the employees to assist clients and provide prompt service.	The indicators of this variable, which is related to (1) help clients and provide prompt service, incorporated the "service availability", (2) the "staff willing to respond to any need", (3) the "staff spend time with each one in order to answer their questions", and (4) the "staff responds quickly".

Table 1: Continue

Tangibles	The physical appearance of the public companies, inclusive of the available facilities.	The indicators of this variable, which is related to (1) facilities and equipment of the public companies, incorporated the "physical facilities are visually appealing", (2) the "appearance of the physical facilities of public companies are in keeping with the type of service provided", (3) the "up-to-date equipment", and (4) the "employees are well dressed and appear neat".
Empathy	The caring, individualized attention that the employee of the public companies staff provides to clients.	The indicators of this variable, which is related to (1) the caring and individualized attention the organization provides to its clients incorporated the "staff understand specific needs of clients", (2) the "staff show sincere interest", (3) the "staff offers personalized attention", (4) the "staff looks for the best for the clients' interests", and (5) the "public companies have operating hours convenient to all their clients".

Personality:

Studies on customer and client satisfaction with services due attention to personality have measured the construct with personality factors and characteristics (Sawyer *et al.*, 2009; Fenlon *et al.*, 2007; Malouff *et al.*, 2010) and personality traits (Lin, 2009). In this study we used the type A and type B of personality measure that provided by Fridman and Rosenman. For appointment the client personality based on type A and type B we used the Spensera questionnaire.

Analysis:

Then, the research questionnaire, which was in Iran and in Guilan province, was finally administered by clients to 413 participants, representing different age groups. Non-probability sampling and convenience sampling was implemented due to time and budget restrictions. Table 2 summarizes the profile of interviewees. Table 2 shows general characteristics of clients that referred to public companies in Guilan province. The tables and descriptive statistics related to demographic variables of gender shows that %49.4 of the sample male and %50.6 is female and these statistics indicate that there is a relatively good distribution of the population between men and women. Demographic variables related to the age of the respondents indicated that %56.5 sample had over 30 years old and age distribution of respondents indicate that a significant number of respondents faced with various governmental issues during his/her life and this shows their ability to judgments on the topic and organizational issues. Demographic variables related to education shows that %61.2 samples had university education and this indicates that most members of this sample with the power of thought and have rational judgments about the topics have been questioned.

The internal consistencies of the five dimensions in the research instrument were analyzed using Cronbach's α scores for each dimension as shown in Table 3. The reliability scores were high. Thus, the SERVQUAL instrument is reasonably satisfactory to be used for perception of clients of public companies services. The result of Cronbach's α values ranging from 0.6 to 0.93 fulfill the minimum requirement level of reliability. The values of Cronbach's α show that these measures are reliable.

Table 2: General data of samples in the study

Feature of population		Sample demographics	
		Frequency	Percent
Sex	Male	204	49.4
	Female	209	50.6
Age	Up to 20	24	5.8
	21-30	156	37.8
	31-40	144	34.9
	41-50	64	15.5
	51 and over	25	6.1
	School or below	25	6.1
Education	Diploma	135	37.2
	College	64	15.5
	University	169	40.9
	Postgraduate	20	4.8

Table 3: Cronbach's α Scores

Variables	Dimensions	Number of items	Statements	Cronbach α
Service quality	Assurance	4	Items 14-17	0.89
	Reliability	5	Items 5-9	0.86
	Responsiveness	4	Items 10-13	0.95
	Tangible	4	Items 1-4	0.79
	Empathy	2	Items 18-22	0.85
	Total Dimensions	22	Items 1-22	0.89
Customer satisfaction		1	Item 23	0.83
Customer personality		25	Items 1-25 b	0.78

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Service Quality and Client Satisfaction:

Table 4 presents the regression results. This table shows that there is the positive correlation for the dimensions of service quality with client satisfaction. In the other words, higher amount of dimensions of service quality are increasing client satisfaction. Hence, the first part of hypotheses H, Ha, Hb, Hc, Hd and He are supported. Overall, this study concluded that public company service quality affects client satisfaction. This finding is related to previous studies provide evidence of relationship between service quality and client satisfaction (Ranjbariyan *et al.*, 2002; Memar Jafari *et al.*, 2007; Bamdad and Rafiei Mehrabadi, 2007; Zahedi and Biniyaz, 2008; Hosseini Hashemzade, 2009; Caruana *et al.*, 2000; Sivadas and Backer-Perwit, 2000; Theodorakis *et al.*, 2001; Io and Wang, 2002; Bigne *et al.*, 2003; Ting, 2004; Choi *et al.*, 2005; Dabholkar and Overby, 2005; Ismail *et al.*, 2006; Olorunniwo *et al.*, 2006; Jiang and Wang, 2006; Ueltschy *et al.*, 2007; Pollack, 2008; Jaiswal, 2008; Chaniotakis and Lymperopoulos, 2009; Ladhari, 2009; Spreng *et al.*, 2009; Saha and Theingi, 2009).

Table 4: Correlations of client satisfaction with service quality and its dimensions

	Service quality	Assurance	Empathy	Responsiveness	Tangible	Reliability
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Client satisfaction	0.76**	0.68**	0.65**	0.62**	0.64**	0.74**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Service Quality, Client Satisfaction and Client Personality:

Table 5 shows that there is not a relationship between service quality, client satisfaction and client personality. In the other words, client personality dose not impact o relationship between service quality and client satisfaction. Hence, the second part of hypotheses H, Ha, Hb, Hc, Hd and He are rejected. Overall, this study concluded that public company service quality affects client satisfaction and client personality dose not effect in this relationship.

Table 5: Correlations of client satisfaction with service quality and its dimensions due attention to client personality

	Service quality	Assurance	Empathy	Responsiveness	Tangible	Reliability
Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000
Client satisfaction	0.76**	0.68**	0.65**	0.62**	0.64**	0.74**

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Client Personality and Service Quality:

Table 6 indicates that there is not a relationship between service quality and its dimensions with client personality. In the other words, client personality dose not impact on clients perception of service quality.

Table 6: Correlations of service quality and its dimensions with client personality

	Service quality	Assurance	Empathy	Responsiveness	Tangible	Reliability
Sig. (2-tailed)	0.62	0.15	0.90	0.96	0.41	0.83
Client personality	0.24	-0.7	-0.06	-0.02	0.41	-0.10

Client Personality and Client Satisfaction:

Table 7 indicates that there is not a relationship between client satisfaction and client personality. In the other words, client personality dose not impact on client satisfaction. This finding is related to previous studies provide evidence that shows there is no relationships between client service quality and client satisfaction (Fenlon *et al.*, 2007).

Table 7: Correlations of client satisfaction and client personality

Client personality	
Sig. (2-tailed)	-0.14
Client satisfaction	0.76

Conclusion:

This research targeted to study the effect of service quality dimensions on client satisfaction due attention to client personality in Iran. In addition, this study examined the interrelationships among these variables and provided statistical evidence for their significance. In service quality dimensions in this research, "Empathy" appears to be more satisfied from the other dimensions. Table 8 presents the mean rank of dimensions of service quality. "Responsiveness" appears less satisfied and it is more important for public company to achieve the client satisfaction. Public companies should be attention that the appearance physical facilities are not as important when delivering the services or tasks. Therefore, in order to fulfill the needs of clients, public companies must make sure that services delivered are reliable at all times.

Table 8: Mean rank of dimensions of service quality

	Empathy	Assurance	Tangible	Reliability	Responsiveness
Mean Rank	4.23	3.87	2.59	2.51	1.81

The overall SERVQUAL score for the public companies in perception of clients were 0.65, indicating that performance of the public companies do not the meet the expectation score. Also, client satisfaction score were 2.9, shows the client satisfaction score do not the meet the expectation score. In other words, clients are dissatisfied from service quality of public companies. Findings revealed clients expect the public companies to be more caring, able to give individualized attention and more reliable service, more willing to deliver prompt service, more knowledgeable and also able to inspire more trust and confidence in their clients. In this study, the responsiveness dimension seemed to be the critical unsatisfactory dimension as it has the fewer score. Respondents have indicated though the findings that they would like to see an improvement in this dimension and reliability and tangibles.

Moreover at the end in order to implement and verify the findings of this study with the clients' real viewpoint we select 20 people randomly from the clients and were conducted face to face interview with them. The interviews indicate that the results of this study were completely aligned with the views of clients and express their true feelings.

Limitations and Directions for Further Research:

This study has attempted to examine the relationship between service quality, client satisfaction and client personality in public companies. This study same to other studies had several limitations. In the present study, researchers used a single overall question to measure client satisfaction. Next, the findings are based on study conducted in one country and hence, they may not necessarily be generalizable for public companies in other countries.

For future research, it would be beneficial if users re-evaluate the proposed model variables and their relationships with a sample from other country with different mediate variable (e.g. education, sex, etc.).

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