

Treat Employees like Customers for an Achievement Culture: An Intrinsic Service Quality Perspective from Indian SMEs

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Abstract

The purpose of the current study is to identify the factors of service quality from the point of view of employees working in Indian small-medium manufacturing enterprises. A set of 5 major determinants with 21 sub-items of intrinsic service quality to improve the manufacturing unit's working towards employees' facilitation and welfare is proposed in this context. 144 shop-floor executives working in different small-medium manufacturing units of north India responded to a questionnaire survey. The respondents were asked to assess intrinsic service quality offered by their respective units on the 1-5 Likert scale based on perception. Construct validation using Exploratory Factor Analysis produced an interpretable latent structure with parameters suitable for benchmarking in Indian SMEs. The study, thus contributes to and understanding and evaluation of determinants of organizational service quality towards employees in a relatively less-explored sector.

Keywords: *Employees; Intrinsic Service quality; small-medium sized enterprises (SMEs); Human Resource (HR); Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA).*

INTRODUCTION

From the service-profit chain perspective, service quality needs to be ascertained in an integrated manner along the value chain extending from the supplier to the end consumer, including employees of the organization. The manufacturing unit's strategy must be able to fulfill the expectations of and offer complete satisfaction to its employees and win their loyalty (Tenner and DeToro, 1992). For this to be accomplished, a manufacturing unit must treat its employees like customers, as the linkage for consumers is through the greater value delivered by enthusiastic, involved, and loyal employees (Hartog and Verburg, 2002). It has been argued that by thinking about expectations of employees and actually caring for them, making their safety a personal fetish – a higher priority than profits, a strong culture intended to strengthen internal relationships and using enlightened workplace policies result in

higher level of employee satisfaction, increased performance, lower departure rate, lower waste, lower costs, thereby resulting in improved productivity (Hart, 1995; Heskett *et al.*, 1994; Varey, 1995).

Pfeffer (1998) stresses the strong relationship between managerial practices and employees performance in service firms. Borucki and Burke (1999) noted, "If the organization is to deliver service along dimensions that customers perceive as important, then its internal environment and subsystems must be coordinated and managed to facilitate the attainment of the desired level of service. More specifically, managerial and HR practices need to be developed to deliver the desired level of service". In line with these assumptions, Schneider *et al.* (1998) propose that workplace climate rests on two categories of foundation issues: the quality of internal service received from other departments, and general facilitative

conditions. These include efforts toward removing obstacles from work, supervisory behaviour (e.g. giving feedback and sharing information), and HR policies.

Small and medium enterprises (SMEs) occupy a place of strategic importance in the economic growth of India. With globalization, domestic and economic liberalization and sector-specific reforms, these enterprises are finding themselves in an intensely competitive environment. To remain competitive, the need for such units is to develop into a relationship-focused bond with employees (Prakash, 2011). The importance of the internal environment and meeting employees' expectations through service quality approach is however a relatively new idea for these units. It is thus realized that such units need a reliable tool, which can enable them to recognize attributes of a manufacturing unit's working towards its employees. To meet these objectives, a focused review of literature was made; this formed the basis for subsequent development of an instrument for conducting a questionnaire survey. Various tests for validation were performed to examine these dimensions. In order to gain the insights of relative importance of these dimensions contributing to overall service quality, regression analysis was conducted. Finally, some limitations, which may become future research directives along with the concluding remarks, are presented in the final section of the paper.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The value delivered to the customers is first provided by the employees. A high value "delivery" comes from loyal and productive employees, which results, in turn, from a function of satisfaction of the employee, which relates to intrinsic quality (Heskett and Sasser 2010). According to Maister (2001), the quality and customer

relationship is driven by the employee's satisfaction. Pfau *et al.* (1991) indicate that extrinsic customer satisfaction is really the outcome of meeting employees' expectations. In reality, most employees do not interact with external customers but rather support a company's ability to satisfy external customers.

Maister (2001) in his work, "*Practice what you preach: What Managers must do to create a high achievement culture*" found some remarkably consistent patterns of behaviour among managers and those who work with them that contrast sharply with those in "merely good" organizations. Employees, usually have following expectations from their organizations:

1. Appropriate compensation i.e. sufficient income, now and in the future.
2. Recognition for right behaviour, accomplishment, contributions and capability.
3. The "fairness" of manager in hires, promotions, rewards, and dismissals.
4. Working with "winners"- preference of working with high capability firms.
5. The opportunity to solve problems for customers- both internal and external.
6. Opportunities for personal development- both job and career related.

Organizations repeatedly identified by their employees as the best places to work have following characteristics (Heskett and Sasser, 2010):

- a. attract prospective employees into the organization
- b. set high standards and expect a lot
- c. go out of their way to encourage employees to listen, learn, train, and communicate
- d. make few promises and keep them all
- e. compensate fairly as part of a value package, and
- f. seek continuity in employment.

Organizations, which are becoming leaders in service quality, are characterized by the commitment of top management as also a corporate culture that encourages a focus on both, the customer and quality throughout the company (Albrecht and Zemke, 1985; Marshall, 1985). These are all aspects of an organization's core shared values, the core of its culture. Outstanding employers regard organization culture as their "brand". The communication of this brand to existing and prospective employees is regarded as a high-priority activity (Morgridge and Heskett, 2000). Recognizing the role of the employees in the service delivery process, Kelley *et al.* (1990) refer to what the employees contribute to the service encounter. A friendly, respectful, co-operative behavior with employees leads to a pleasant service experience. On the other hand aggressive, abusive, disrespectful behaviors will hamper the service quality.

The significance of the above discussion on service and service quality is that in attempting to manage service quality, it is utmost important to focus on service provider personnel; attention must be paid to their motivation and behavior. The performance of contact personnel and the personnel-customer interactions, which take place during service delivery, are deemed to be important indicators of service quality (Surprenant and Solomon, 1987). In this light, Cannon and Sheth (1994) stress the importance of building and maintaining relationship quality with the various stakeholder groups that interact with the organization but fewer studies are seen on the applicability of service quality attributes on the employee function.

The SERVQUAL pioneered by Parasuraman *et al.* (1988) is the most extensively used service quality measurement instrument because of the ease of use, possession of a simple structure and capability of generalization

(George and Shirley, 1997). Since the quality of services largely depends on the human behavior, the quality dimensions of the measuring instrument differ in different service settings. For example, "empathy" and "responsiveness" are more significant in health sector whereas "reliability" is important in transportation. Therefore, SERVQUAL dimensions need to be modified in order to suit the particular service settings. Thus, the numbers of dimensions have been changed or items under each dimension modified to suit the particular application (Weitzel *et al.*, 1989; Saleh and Ryan, 1991). Cronin and Taylor (1992) found that 5-dimension structure of SERVQUAL (as proposed by Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988) did not emerge in empirical examinations and proposed SERVPERF scale. They also argue that service quality dimensions differ from industry to industry and consequently, a service quality scale developed for one industry may not be valid for another. Thus, the literature on service quality leaves behind a debate on the appropriateness of quality scales such as SERVQUAL in measuring service quality across a wide range of industries (Carman, 1990; Finn and Lamb, 1991; Zhao *et al.*, 2002; Dabholkar *et al.*, 2000; Banwet and Datta, 2003; Cunningham and Young, 2002).

Carr (2007) proposed an important deficiency of SERVQUAL/SERVPERF scale by stating that it does not include equity theory as the basis for any of its scales, even if it is clear from previous experience that equity (fairness) is often evaluated in service encounters. The FAIRSERV model proposed by him posits that people do not only evaluate services against the five SERVQUAL dimensions (i.e. Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness), but also through comparisons with multidimensional norms of fairness (distributive, procedural, interpersonal,

informational and systemic fairness). This will affect satisfaction with the service received.

The FAIRSERV (Carr, 2007) instrument, in conjunction with SERVQUAL (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988), may be suitable for this study, due to its focus on satisfaction and loyalty intentions. The preliminary questionnaire is on five attributes of SERVQUAL scale (i.e. Reliability, Assurance, Tangibles, Empathy and Responsiveness-styled as RATER) and “Systematic Fairness” attribute of

FAIRSERV model. Taking cues from both existing scales to measure service quality using, we have made a modest attempt at designing a new scale based on the combination of the two metrics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Figure 1 shows the research methodology used for the development of the scale for offering *intrinsic service quality* (ISQ) to employees. The development of this scale followed a series of validated procedures as used by researchers for different applications.

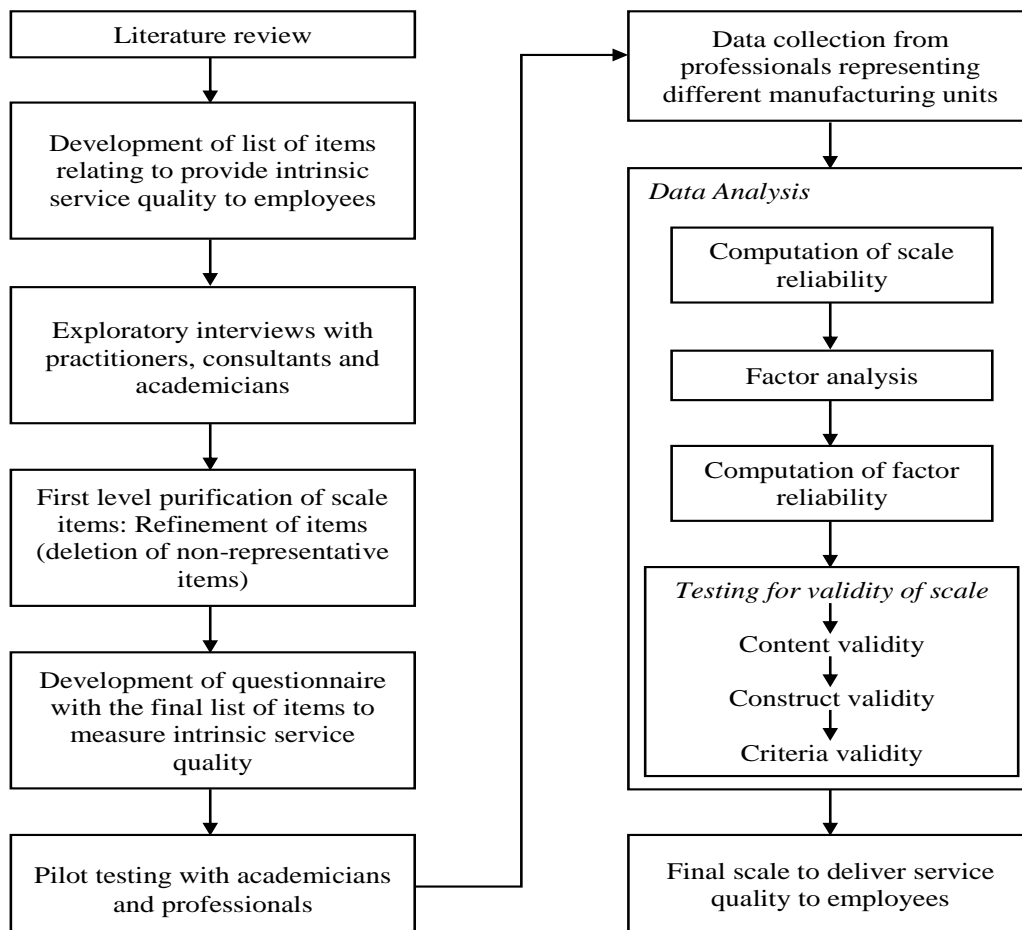


Fig 1: Research methodology for development of scale to offer service quality to employees

A survey questionnaire comprising of two sections was developed based on an extensive review of literature on different aspects of service quality measurement with a focus on employees using RATERF (RATER plus FAIRSERV) scale. The first section consists of 21 items related to

intrinsic service quality towards employees and 1 item measuring overall service quality whereas the second section focused on gathering the demographic information. Prior to circulation, the questionnaire was authenticated through a pilot survey (Robson, 2002). The pilot

survey was carried out by discussing the questionnaire with a pool of five executives from the industry and academicians. This was done to know any discrepancies, duplicity or lack of understanding of the questionnaire by the respondents. Their suggestions were incorporated and questionnaire was revised.

Data was collected by personally visiting the respective units. The method of snowball sampling (Nargundkar, 2004) was used to execute this survey. All respondents were shop floor executives working in different small-medium manufacturing units spread all over north

India. Respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of service quality that was being offered to them by their immediate supervisors and also their perceptions of the overall service quality of the unit on 5-point Likert scale. The researcher approached 165 respondents serving in different small-medium manufacturing units and was able to elicit data from 144 respondents, thus fetching a response rate of 87% which was quite encouraging. This high rate of response may be attributed to personal visits by the researcher to collect data. The type of manufacturing activity being carried by the respondent units is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Type of product being manufactured by respondent SMEs units (N = 144)

Type of Manufacturing Unit	Small Scale	Medium Scale
Number & Percentage	103 (72%)	41 (28%)
Type of Product		
Auto Parts	30 (≈21%)	13 (≈9%)
Hand Tools	18 (≈13%)	7 (≈5%)
Casting Components	12 (≈8%)	5 (≈3%)
Valve manufacturing/Casting	10 (≈7%)	4 (≈3%)
Rolled Products	9 (≈6%)	4 (≈3%)
Machine Tools	8 (≈6%)	3 (≈2%)
Sheet Metal Components	6 (≈4%)	3 (≈2%)
Fasteners	6 (≈4%)	2 (≈1%)
Multi Products	4 (≈3%)	Nil

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Since all the 21 questions to measure intrinsic service quality are synthesized from the literature; the imperative is first to assess this scale through reliability analysis, followed by EFA.

Reliability Analysis

The reliability of the employees’ perception of organization’s service quality towards them was analyzed using

Cronbach alpha coefficient. In this analysis, Reliability is assessed by internal consistency method which reflects equivalence, homogeneity and inter-correlation of the items used in a measure. Output of this analysis is provided by IBM SPSS v21 and indicates significantly high reliability of data (Cronin and Taylor 1992; Lee *et al.*, 2000) and has been depicted in the table-2 given below.

Table 2: Reliability Analysis of Internal Service Quality scale (21 items)

Service Quality Measurement	Employees’ perception of manufacturing unit’s working towards them
Value of α	0.877
Finding	Quite Good (Nunnally, 1978).

Factor Analysis

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of the data is carried out through a sequence of steps. First, Bartlett test of sphericity is

used to verify appropriateness of factor analysis by analyzing correlation matrix of the data (Hair *et al.*, 2005). Simultaneously, assessment of sampling

adequacy (N= 144, in this case) is judged by Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) statistic which ranges from 0 to 1. The KMO value of above 0.6 is considered significant and indicates suitability of factor analysis. The score of Bartlett test of sphericity and the

KMO value is provided by SPSS v21 and is depicted in table 3. The results are significant, thus, providing indication of suitability for factor analysis (Hair *et al.*, 2005).

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test of sphericity

KMO Measure for Sampling Adequacy		.819
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	2221
	df	231
	Sig.	.000

EFA is conducted using the Principle Component Analysis (PCA) with Kaiser Normalization (Eigen values greater than 1) and varimax rotation procedure. The objective is to summarize the information asked in the 21 questions into a smaller set of new attributes that attempt to bring out the constructs for measurement of service quality offered to employees by the manufacturing unit. This resulted in the

extraction of five factors, explaining 78.239 per cent of the variance. The individual factors explained 18.625, 16.173, 16.138, 14.279 and 13.023 percent of the variance respectively. These factor loadings are consistent with the suggested factor structure of the scale. Output of exploratory factor analysis using SPSS v21 is presented in table 4.

**Table 4: Communalities, Factor Structure and Loadings for Items of ISQ
Principal Components Method with Varimax Rotation Loading $\geq .56^*$**

S. No.	Factors and Associated Items	Communalities	Factor Structure & loadings				
			F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Credibility (F1)							
	The unit welcomes employees' involvement	.616	.714				
	Delegates responsibility to employees	.815	.861				
	Keeps faith and trust in employees	.826	.868				
	Honest in dealings with employees	.820	.868				
	Can be easily contacted	.625	.748				
Servicescape (F2)							
	Provides adequate resources & equipment	.755		.864			
	Pays individual attention to employees	.857		.925			
	Provides a pleasant work environment	.859		.919			
	Provides protection to employees	.882		.927			
Friendliness (F3)							
	Supportive supervision & behaviour	.815			.866		
	Fair and impartial treatment	.839			.897		
	Shows willingness to help employees	.837			.897		
	Promptly solves employees' problems	.842			.894		
Competence (F4)							
	Has knowledge & expertise to run the unit	.802				.871	
	Provides training to employees	.765				.835	
	Provides useful information & feedback	.726				.843	
	Employees are accepted by all in the unit	.661				.797	
Compensation (F5)							
	Excellent compensation to employees	.716					.788
	Excellent service terms & conditions	.814					.816
	Manufacturer works for employee welfare	.829					.802
	Has a positive attitude towards employees	.731					.700
Reliability (Cronbach Alpha[#] Value) of identified factors			.904	.806	.863	.875	.879

*Cutoff point for loadings is 99 percent significant and is calculated by $2.58/\sqrt{n}$ (Pitt *et al.*, 1995) where $n (=21)$ is the number of items in the scale. # α values ≥ 0.70 are acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

Based upon subjective opinion of the researcher in consultation with a group of experts, the factors were named as Credibility, Servicescape, Friendliness, Competence, and Compensation.

The communalities express the proportion of the variance of the 21 items extracted by the five factors of the scale. All the items have significant communalities (not less than 0.50) (Hair *et al.*, 2005). The factor-item loadings represent the correlations between each item with their underlying factors. All the items have significant factor loadings (not less than 0.55) (Pitt *et al.*, 1995). Internal reliability of the items of the various factors of the scale is examined using the Cronbach alpha coefficients. This approach is in line with that of Bagozzi and Yi (1988). In this

analysis, reliability score for each factor ranges from 80.6% to 90.4% as shown in table 4 and hence is acceptable (Nunnally, 1978).

Relative importance of factors of scale for ISQ

In order to bring out the order of importance of four dimensions viz. Credibility, Compensation, Servicescape and Friendliness comprising the scale for ISQ, regression analysis was conducted by taking the overall intrinsic service quality ratings as dependent variable and the mean scores on the four factors as independent variables. The standardized coefficient beta (β) of the individual dimension represented their importance (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985, 1988) as presented in table 5 given below:

Table 5: Regression results for relative importance of Intrinsic Service Quality dimensions

Independent variables	R ² /Sig.	Beta (β)	Sig.	Order of importance
Compensation	0.686/0.000	0.455	0.000	1
Friendliness		0.394	0.000	2
Credibility		0.263	0.000	3
Servicescape		0.227	0.000	4
Competence		0.173	0.000	5

Constant: 0.012, $t = 0.046$ (Sig. = 0.964); Dependent variable: overall intrinsic service quality

The factor ‘Compensation’ emerges to be the most important dimension, with β coefficient = 0.455 followed by ‘Friendliness’ ($\beta = 0.394$), ‘Credibility’ ($\beta = 0.263$), ‘Servicescape’ ($\beta = 0.227$), with ‘Competence’ to be least important ($\beta = 0.173$).

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESULTS

This study has proposed the determinants for measuring *Intrinsic Service Quality* and expressed its usefulness for the managers of small-medium manufacturing units. Once developed, the scale could be used by managers in several ways as:

1. The insights provided by this study can help managers and researchers in further understanding the service quality issues relating to the expectations of employees in small-medium manufacturing units.
2. The scale yields five useful determinants to measure intrinsic

service quality of a manufacturing unit’s working towards employees.

3. Based on assessment of employee perceptions, a corrective system can be set up to address employee grievances, quickness in resolving complaints, providing employees with information and a supportive behaviour, to influence employee service behaviour and attitudes.

CONCLUSIONS

This research has highlighted the role of organizational service quality towards employees and has identified the service

quality dimensions to facilitate the workforce. This study has revealed five factors namely *Credibility, Compensation, Competence, Servicescape, and Friendliness* to measure organizational service quality towards employees working in small-medium manufacturing enterprises. The factors obtained in this study differ from the most popular service quality measurement tools, i.e. SERVQUAL/SERVPERF as well as FAIRSERV scale used in this particular study. Thus, the study has proposed new insights, using inputs from literature and practitioners of small-medium manufacturing enterprises. The methodology followed in the research was very similar to the one adopted by Prakash (2011).

The results of this study must be interpreted by bearing in mind certain limitations. The questionnaire survey was administered on the shop-floor executives serving in manufacturing units in northern India, which forms a limited geographical spread. In this study, it was not possible to derive a linkage between employee performance/attitude and the factors deriving the *Intrinsic Service Quality*. Once developed, the tool can be used by practitioners to assess the organizational service quality across at various echelons in supply chain.

Specifically, SME managers should appreciate relationships with employees and take necessary actions to improve communications, and solve employee-related problems. Though, a strong need is realized for the empirical research linking this to the employee performance. Finally, this study is an attempt to understand *Intrinsic Service Quality* and highlight the potential area for future research.

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