

Contribution and Significance of Research: Measuring customer satisfaction is an important component of both public and private organizations in today's world of accountability and performance measurement. The technological revolution has led to a much greater need for organizations to maintain the loyalty of current customers and to recruit new customers. This paper focuses on the efforts of an agricultural and food products center to measure customer satisfaction, and the effectiveness and impact of the center. The design of the study focuses on the use of qualitative data to provide evidence.

The authors do an excellent job of describing the purpose and background for the research. They define 'customer satisfaction' and provide the theoretical basis for their work. The objectives of the study are stated and it is interpreted that this is not a final product, but the beginning of a "...systematic and continuous evaluation of center activities...".

Questions for Consideration: The data in this research is well presented and appears to provide valuable information. However, several questions can be asked on various aspects of the study. The first of these deals with the selection of study participants. A randomization procedure was used to select 45 (25%) of the 180 companies identified as having contact with the organization in question. After randomization, 24 companies were excluded based on their degree of participation. This procedure brings up 2 questions. First, why not exclude prior to the initial randomization? If degree of contact is important, then set exclusion criteria prior to randomization and proceed. Second, why exclude anyone at all? Degree of participation might be a major factor in the level of satisfaction. A richer data set might come from including all and analyzing the data based on this factor.

The second area of questions concerns the sole use of qualitative data and the interview scheme. Why only the use of qualitative data? Were there any thoughts about using quantitative data or a combination? Some areas of satisfaction are better suited for quantitative measures. While there is a strong potential for sound results from qualitative data, it appears that a stronger data set may be produced using a mixed strategy. In addition, was there a core set of questions asked of all respondents? Areas of the paper suggest that not every respondent was asked the same questions. A set protocol for questions would increase the reliability and validity of the data.

Finally, the last questions refer to the interpretation of the results. It appears that no criteria were set prior to the study to accept or reject a claim. For example, some claims are based on 17 or 18 of the 21 respondent statements, while others are based on as few as 8 to 12 statements. One claim is based on 'several customers'. Using a predetermined acceptance level would add strength to the results. As it is written, almost every construct is considered positive regardless of the level of agreement by the respondents. I think that a more stringent set of guidelines would actually provide the organization a more realistic set of data to evaluate their effectiveness.

Final Thoughts: This paper is well written and presents valuable information. The questions posed above are intended as recommendations for future studies. I commend

the authors for undertaking this effort. It has a high degree of usability and is an important issue facing public organizations.