

5.1.13: Gap 2- Management Perception vs. Quality Specifications

Learning Objectives

- Outline how a retailer can close the management perceptions and quality specs gap

Gap between management perception and service quality specification: This is when the management or service provider might correctly perceive what the customer wants, but may not set a performance standard. An example here would be that hospital administrators may tell the nurse to respond to a request ‘fast’, but may not specify ‘how fast’.

The second gap in the service quality framework in the policy gap, reflecting the difference between management’s perception of customer expectations and actual customer service specifications. In this scenario, management may have an accurate understanding of customer expectations but that understanding hasn’t been effectively implemented as operating policy. Specificity is the key here. For example, an expectation that voicemails will answered in a timely manner is open to interpretation. Does “timely” mean within 24 hours? Does “timely” within the hour?

What if service personnel are already working with customers?

For clarity and operational effectiveness, policies should be developed with the SMART goal-setting acronym in mind.

SMART stands for the following:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Actionable
- Relevant
- Timely

Note, however, that situational factors can complicate matters. Policy that is actionable when things go according to plan may not work when staff calls in sick or if there is an unexpected influx of customers or a power outage or [fill in the blank]. SMART goals can work well in most situations. Hiring employees who are able – and empowered – to improvise to achieve the overall customer satisfaction objective is best.

Consider whether you should factor in Nordstrom’s Rule #1: “Use best judgment in all situations.”^[1] It’s not appropriate for all circumstances, but if so, by all means factor in a personal judgement override.

In order to address the policy-practice gap, companies should clarify, train on, measure and reward performance relative to customer service standards.

To be specific, think about the following when you are creating policies:

- Articulate service levels and business (i.e., budget) assumptions
- Develop, communicate, and train to specific customer service standards
- Factor service level performance into evaluations for all related personnel
- Measure performance and adjust resources as required to meet service level objectives
- Monitor industry service level standards and update policy as appropriate

practice questions

<https://assessments.lumenlearning.co...essments/9320>

1. <https://www.shopify.com/retail/119531651-how-nordstrom-made-its-brand-synonymous-with-customer-service-and-how-you-can-too> ↩

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