

Quality from the perspective of the internal customer

Internal service experience in a manufacturing industry company

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Preface

Stina Enblom holds a bachelor's degree in Swedish and worked with communication for a number of years, a couple of them in industrial companies. For the last year, Stina worked with quality. Silvia Padovan holds a bachelor's degree in Engineering - Innovative enterprising and process development, and has worked in the field for a number of years in the manufacturing industry and recently with quality assurance.

A small comment on the language of the essay - the business language of the studied organisation is English. For the results to be of interest to them on a larger scale than this essay's scope, it was written in English even though the interviews were conducted in Swedish.

Finally, we would like to extend our gratitude to our supervisor Christer Hedlund at Mid Sweden University for presenting encouraging, thoughtful and smart feedback. And for sometimes returning a question with another question to make us think a bit deeper. It has been developing and invaluable to have your support! A great thank you to all the participants who made this essay possible at all. It has been interesting to take a peek into your world. We are also very thankful to our supervisor at the studied organisation, who opened the door for us. This process would have taken much more time without your help. Our families deserve a special mention as well, for being patient with our endeavor, always being supportive and cheering us on, and telling us it is ok to take a break when it was most needed. Mattias, Lucas and Adam - Thank you! Jimmy, Emilio and little Ebbe - Thank you! We could not have done this without your love and support. Last but not least - we thank ourselves! There is always a risk when taking an academic leave of absence like we did in 2021, but we stuck to it and are really proud to have finished this during a period of new jobs, family life and for one of us - a new baby.

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Abstract

In order to improve service quality, mapping and measuring customer experience is a vital part of improvement efforts. This is however mostly studied from the external customers point of view, and studies on internal customer experience are scarce. The aim of this study was to explore the existence of different dimensions of internal customer experience within an organisation and examine their relationship to other measures of customer experience. In addition, the study aimed to explore the internal customers' perspectives on the quality of the service delivered. The focus of the study was the after sales department in the Swedish branch of a global manufacturing company. A qualitative method was used and the data was collected using semi-structured interviews and analysed by an inductive thematic approach. The result shows six dimensions that affect the internal customer experience: Communication, Behavior, System support, Personal contact, Technical competence and Functional processes. This study provides insight into significant factors in meeting internal customer needs and expectations. Although there are some differences, these dimensions compares with those found in other studies on customer experience and service quality. The results indicate that existing measurements of external customer experience should also be applicable to internal settings. This study contributes to expanding the limited knowledge of internal customer experience.

Keywords: customer experience, service quality, internal service quality, service profit chain, customer satisfaction, internal customer satisfaction, customer perceived value

Sammanfattning

För att förbättra servicekvaliteten är kartläggning och mätning av kundupplevelse en viktig del av förbättringsarbetet. Detta är mestadels studerat ur den externa kundens perspektiv, och inte lika ofta ur den interna kundens. Syftet med denna studie var att utforska förekomsten av olika dimensioner av intern kundupplevelse inom en organisation och undersöka deras relation till andra mått på kundupplevelse. Dessutom syftade studien till att utforska de interna kundernas perspektiv på kvaliteten på den levererade servicen. Fokus för studien var eftermarknadsavdelningen i den svenska delen av ett globalt företag inom tillverkande industri. En kvalitativ metod användes och data samlades in med hjälp av semistrukturerade intervjuer och analyserades med en induktiv tematisk ansats. Resultatet visar sex dimensioner som påverkar den interna kundupplevelsen: *Kommunikation, Beteende, Systemstöd, Personlig kontakt, Teknisk kompetens* och *Fungerande processer*. Denna studie ger insikt i viktiga faktorer för att möta interna kunders behov och förväntningar. Även om det finns vissa skillnader, kan dessa dimensioner jämföras med andra dimensioner av kundupplevelse och servicekvalitet. Resultaten indikerar att befintliga mätverktyg utformade för extern kundupplevelse också bör kunna tillämpas i interna sammanhang. Denna studie bidrar till att utöka den begränsade kunskapen om intern kundupplevelse.

Nyckelord: customer experience, service quality, internal service quality, service profit chain, customer satisfaction, internal customer satisfaction, customer perceived value

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1 Introduction

In this chapter the background of the study is presented, followed by the purpose, research questions and delimitation.

1.1 Background

Customer needs and expectations are central aspects within the study of quality, as they influence and guide the development and achievement of high quality in products and services (Sörqvist, 2004; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Total quality management (TQM) is a proactive approach aimed at improving customer satisfaction, increasing efficiency, improving employee satisfaction, improving decision making and increasing competitiveness. It provides a framework for improving the quality of products and services and creating a culture of continuous improvement (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

As companies are getting more competition for customers they are putting more emphasis on service as their unique selling proposition (Gilbert, 2000; Grönroos, 2015). This is true, not only in the retail sector but also in industry (Brax, 2005). According to a longitudinal study in Sweden, service quality exceeded product quality as the driver of customer satisfaction in the last decade, (Halléncreutz & Parmler, 2021; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Customer satisfaction in turn has a positive outcome on customer loyalty, financial results and minor customer complaints (Halléncreutz & Parmler, 2021; Linder et. al., 2014; Zairi, 2000). And customer satisfaction relies on good customer experiences (Laura Warick, 2019), therefore, mapping and measuring customer service experience is a vital part of continuously improving service quality (Halléncreutz & Parmler, 2021; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). This is however mostly studied from the external customers point of view (Parasuraman et al., 1988; Zeithaml et al., 1996; Walter et. al., 2010; Bueno et. al, 2019; Bascur & Rusu, 2020). Internal customers are individuals or departments within the same organisation, who receive goods or services from other departments or individuals within that organisation. An example might be a department that receives PR and interview training from the communication department, or a manager that receives help in recruiting from the HR department. When it comes to internal suppliers and customers it may not be about the risk of losing customers to competitors,

but rather a question of every process in a company being the supplier to another process - each must satisfy the next one which ultimately leads to the satisfaction of the external customer's needs (Deming, 1986; Schmalensee, 2007). However, studies on internal customer experience are scarce (Lo Iacono, 2017; Grace & Lo Iacono, 2015; Waqas, Hamza & Salleh, 2021; Lee & Lee, 2022). Previous research has shown dimensions of external customer experience (Walter et. al., 2010; Bueno et. al., 2019; Bascur & Rusu, 2020), and some say that external and internal customers share common ground (Grace & Lo Iacono, 2015), but it is argued by some that dimensions of internal customers' experience are unique to those of external customers (Finn et. al., 1996).

To achieve consistent and outstanding customer service for external customers, it is necessary to have internal systems that are aligned to serve the needs of external customers (Deming 1986). Despite extensive searches, very little research on internal customer experience has been found, and that sparked the interest to examine quality from the perspective of the internal customers and hopefully contribute to the subject of internal customer experience being more researched.

1.2 Purpose

The aim of this study is to examine what dimensions of internal customer experience exist within a company and how they relate to other measures of customer experiences. And also, to explore the internal customer's view on the service quality delivered. From a research point of view, this study may contribute to the limited research on internal customer experience.

1.3 Research questions

R1. What are the dimensions of internal customer experience?

R2. To what extent can dimensions of internal customer experience be compared with other measures of customer experiences?

R3. What are the internal customers' view on the service delivered?

1.4 Delimitation

Given the broad scope of the purpose and questions, this study focuses on internal customer experience in an after sales department in the Swedish branch of an international manufacturing company.

2 Theory

The theoretical framework has its starting point in Quality and Total Quality Management, moving on to service and ends with customer experience

2.1 Quality

There are several definitions of quality. According to ISO 9000:2005 quality is “the degree to which inherent characteristics fulfil the requirements, i.e., need or expectation that is stated, generally implied or mandatory”.

Grönroos' (2015) definition is “quality is what the customer experiences” (p. 93). Others define quality as the absence of quality in products (Taguchi & Wu, 1979), “conformance to requirements” (Crosby, 1979), “fitness for use” (Juran, J.M. (red.), 1951) and “quality should be aimed at the needs of the customer, present and future” (Deming, 1986). Bergman and Klefsjö (2012, p. 23) describes how quality rather should be described as “the quality of a product is its ability to satisfy, and preferably surpass, the customers’ needs and expectations”. Lack of quality in goods and services affects an organisation's profitability, in most cases in the form of complaints, increasing costs, longer lead times, smaller profit margins and tied capital. (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2007).

As presented, quality can be defined in many ways, but in the end, quality is decided by the degree of customer satisfaction at the touch points between the customer and the company. (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). According to Deming (1993), fundamental aspects of improvement knowledge are; system thinking, knowledge about variation, knowledge, psychology. To better understand how to improve quality, one can study the field of Total Quality Management, as briefly described below.

2.2 Total Quality Management (TQM)

TQM is a continuous effort to exceed and meet the needs of customers through continuous improvement work (Izvercian et al., 2014; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). The philosophy focuses on avoiding errors and promoting quality, minimising losses and variations in products and services (Ho, 1994). Bergman and Klefsjö, (2010, p.37), describes the cornerstones of TQM as committed leadership, focus on customers, base decisions on facts,

focus on processes, improve continuously and let everybody be committed. These are described in more detail below.

2.2.1 Focus on customers

Customer focus is central in TQM, and highlights the importance of understanding one's customer and trying to meet and exceed their expectations (Bergman & Klefsö, 2012; Sörqvist, 2004). Zairi (2000, p.395) states that "being customer focused does mean having a clear service strategy which is deployed with vision, purpose and some goal and targets". Customer focus is achieved by applying a customer perspective to the development of products and services. Ljungberg and Larsson (2012) argues that to be customer focused you need to listen to the customers, which is done through relationship building processes, for example observations, questionnaires and interviews. For this to be successful the organisation needs to be susceptible to the voice of the customer.

Some say that a customer is the receiver of a product or service, the ones that the organisation exists for and someone who has some sort of expectation on a company and its products and services (ISO 9000:2000, SIQ, Bloch & Elmgart, 2017; Runebjörk & Wendelby, 2013). Infact, the term customer is vital to TQM, and wider terms are offered by both Bergman and Klefsjö (2012) and Sörqvist (2004) who indicates that a customer is someone that the organisation creates value for, and someone that is affected by the company, products or services. A customer can therefore be internal, e.g. "anyone in an organisation who is supplied with products or services by others in the organisation" (Gremler et al., 1994, p. 34). A similar perspective comes from Strauss (1995) who defines it as organisational units or individuals working within the same organisation, who interact with and provide services to other sections or individuals within that organisation. Bergman and Klefsjö, (2012) and Slack et al. (2007) increases the definition of internal customer to include all processes and individuals within the organisation that are the result of other internal processes, customers or individuals. Bruhn (2003), Swinehart and Smith, (2005) claims that an internal customer is also an internal supplier. Quality of service provided by those who interact directly with external customers is dependent on the efficiency and effectiveness of internal customer/supplier relationship (Swinehart & Smith, 2005).

Finn et. al. (1996) describes three unique aspects of internal customers. Firstly, they are mostly consuming services, rather than products. Secondly, unlike external customers, internal customers have little choice of what supplier they can use. Thirdly, internal customers are experienced professional users of the service, and are therefore experts of it (Davis, 1993; Finn et. al., 1996).

2.2.2 Base decisions on facts

It is important that decisions are not based on assumptions and coincidences but rather from analysing facts by using a number of quality management tools that provide insight into variation and statistics. There needs to be a constant collecting of information related to the production or service process. (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012; Sörqvist, 2004). This means that conclusions are based on data analysis, which leads to decisions about change and a commitment to continuous improvement (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Sörqvist (2004) states that as the organisation gets better at the information collecting and analysing procedure, more sophisticated methods and tools will be required.

2.2.3 Focus on processes

A lot of the activities done in a company are to be considered as processes, i.e. “a network of activities that are connected and repeated over time” (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012, p. 44). There are three types of processes, management processes, main processes and support processes. The goal of the first is to determine the overall goals and strategies. These processes have internal customers. The second one is the company's main business, creating value for external customers. The last one supports the main processes, hence these processes also have internal customers (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Accordingly, the purpose of a process is to satisfy the customer with as few resources as possible. To achieve that, there needs to be a constant exchange of information and feedback between the supplier, the process and the customer, says Bergman and Klefsjö (2012). From a quality perspective, Kaoru Ishikawa said "the next process is our customer." This means that focus should be on meeting the requirements of the next step in the process (Ishikawa, 1985). Essentially, the people, processes, products or brands that add value (tangible or intangible) to a product or service form a value chain (Mascarenhas, Kesavan & Bernacchi, 2004; Finn et. al., 1996).

2.2.4 Improve continuously

There is an ongoing race for customers, and therefore a company must continuously improve their own processes, products and services to keep their competitive advantage (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). There is always a way to achieve better output with lesser resources (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). One method for continuous improvements is the PDSA-cycle - Plan, Do, Study, Act.

2.2.5 Let everybody be committed

This cornerstone of TQM emphasises the importance of encouraging the participation of all employees, influencing decision making and giving them the opportunity to participate in improvement activities (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012), since delegated responsibility and authority boosts participation and engagement (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

2.2.6 Committed Leadership

The base of the TQM-model is committed leadership, there to support and enable the continuous work on quality. Good leadership makes employees feel safe at work and increases their self-esteem and self-confidence. From a TQM perspective, leadership should be visible clearly within their organisation and show personal commitment. It should also enable the development of employees, eliminate fear of change, and eliminate silos between departments (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

2.3 Learning organisations

Senge (1990) describes five disciplines that are important for a company to be able to learn and adapt to change. System thinking is the ability to see context and understand how different interactions affect each other, the connection between different processes. Having personal mastering means striving for personal development and continuous learning. It is important that all individuals within an organisation have the opportunity to develop and achieve their full potential as people. Our mental models control what we see and therefore determine our behavior in different situations. Team learning is a process that develops the group's ability to work towards a common goal of achieving the results the group wants. Shared visions, means having common visions that contribute to commonality and cohesion with the organisation where activities are linked to having a common goal. It's about visions coming from people caring and wanting to be part of

something bigger, it stimulates new ways of thinking, acting and wanting to learn more.

2.4 Service

“Service is a large field of research with many definitions” (Rytilahti, 2019, p. 11).

A service has at least three distinguishable features, it's a process with repeated activities, it is produced and consumed at the same time and the customer is co-creator in the service process (Grönroos, 2015, p.54). The nature of a service and the fact that the result is in the customer experience makes it difficult to control if it meets requirements and to advocate for it (Grönroos, 2015; Meredith & Shafer, 2002; Gupta et al., 2005). Therefore quality control and promotion needs to take place at the moment of service consumption (Grönroos, 2015). Contrary to production processes, the service process is hard to standardise due to the interactions that take place and form the process. It is important that service processes are flexible and adaptable to changing situations, but it is equally important that they are planned to handle moments-of-truth and avoid quality issues (Grönroos, 2015, p. 98). There are two dimensions of service: a technical one, which is what the customer receives. This dimension must live up to the customers' needs and expectations. There is also a functional dimension, which is how the customer receives the service. This is where competitive advantage lies (Grönroos, 2015).

2.5 Quality in service

2.5.1 Service quality

According to Hallencreutz and Parmler (2021), service quality exceeded product quality as the driver of customer satisfaction in the last decade, and even when you buy a product, you buy a function. Therefore, it is important to prioritise development of the service quality, but there is a need for new approaches and tools to improve customer orientation within the company, and increase customer satisfaction (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012).

Measuring the quality of service is evident in the efforts of continuous improvements. The most frequently used instruments of measurement are models based on attributes and qualitative models. The first group consists of attributes of a service, graded by respondents, for example the Net Promoter Score (NPS) (Grönroos, 2015) or Customer Satisfaction Score (CSAT) (Offsey, S. 2022). The less frequently used qualitative models on the other hand are based on participants' experience of a service, for example critical events or critical incidents (Grönroos, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2017; Flanagan, 1954). In these models the participants are asked to recollect situations where the service was considerably better or worse than the average, then describe what happened and why they are considered critical events (Grönroos, 2015, p.102). The answers are then categorised and analysed to understand quality issues. Attribute based models need to be complemented with measures of perception and interaction to identify root causes of service quality issues and to avoid sub-optimisation (Offsey, 2022). Offsey (2022) advocates customer journey measurement, which means mapping and measuring all customer goals. Finn et. al. (1996) describes how the ratings from the attribute models are the customer's perception of the service. Therefore, bad ratings are due to "incorrect perceptions, actual poor performance or unreasonable expectations" (p. 47). Measures to improve should then focus on communication and relations, process improvements or management of expectations. A term worth knowing is perceived service quality, which is explained as the difference between the customer's expectations and what they received (Grönroos 1984). Perceived service quality is part of customer satisfaction (see figure 2.2); described in the next section. Grönroos (2015) offers seven criteria for good perceived service quality, based on empirical and theoretical evidence (see figure 2.1).

Criteria	Description
Professionalism and skills	Customers know their service providers have the resources, knowledge, and skills to professionally solve their problems.
Attitudes and behavior	Customers feel that the service providers are interested in solving problems, are friendly and spontaneous.
Accessibility and flexibility	Customer feels that the service provider is willing to be flexible and adapt to the customers' demands and wishes
Reliability and trustworthiness	Customers can trust the service provider to keep promises and act in their best interest.
Service recovery	Customers know that service providers will immediately take active measures to ensure that the customers have control over the situation and find a new acceptable solution.
Servicescape and reputation	Customers feel the physical surroundings and other aspects of the service encounter environment promote a positive experience of the service process.
Credibility	Customers believe that the brand image represents superior performance and acceptable value.

Figure 2.1. Seven criteria of good perceived service quality according to Grönroos (2015, p. 104)

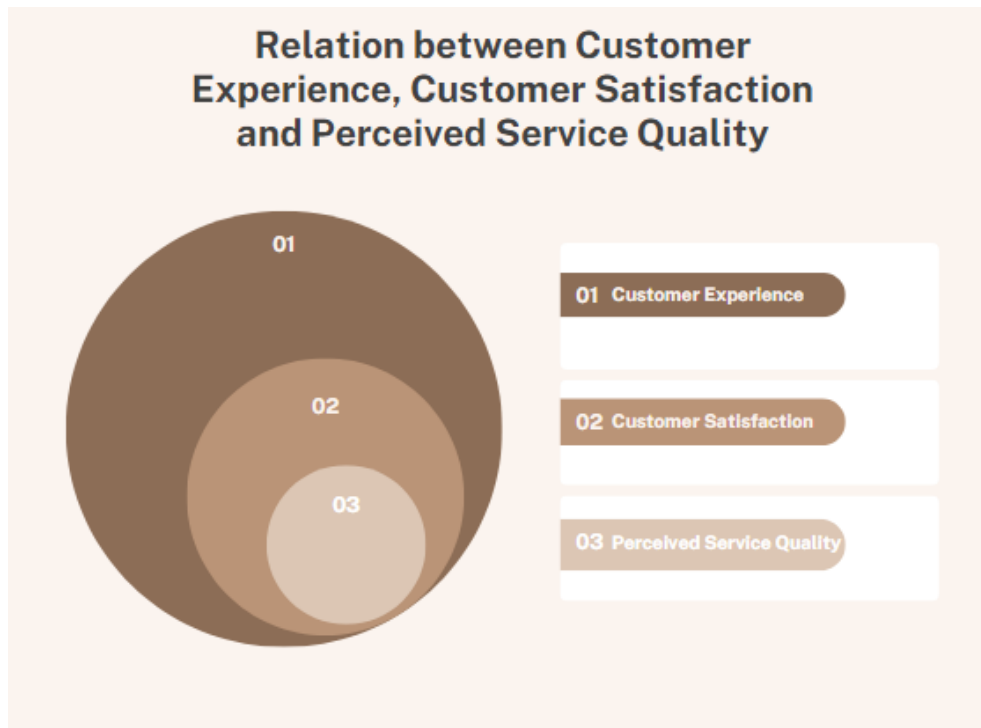


Figure 2.2. The relation between customer experience, customer satisfaction and perceived service quality. (the size of the circles are not representative of their ratio)

Studies on service quality have shown that the supplier's responsiveness has a great impact on service quality. Other important factors have shown to be competence, reliability and having access to a contact person (Westbrook & Peterson, 1998; Frost & Kumar, 2001).

Another common term when discussing service quality is value, or value in use/ value in context (Medberg & Grönroos, 2020; Vargo & Lush, 2004, Vargo & Lusch, 2008). It means that value is always determined by the customer during the use of products or services (Sandström et. al., 2008; Vargo & Akaka, 2009), just as the level of service quality is decided in the moment where the service provider meets the customer, i.e., the moment of truth (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Medberg and Grönroos (2020) study on value in use and service quality showed that even though these two concepts derive from different theoretical traditions, the dimensions of them overlap.

2.5.2 Customer satisfaction

Though the focus of research in this essay is customer experience, it might be useful with a brief description of customer satisfaction. Research shows

that customer satisfaction is related to service quality, and high levels of customer satisfaction have a positive outcome on financial results, service quality and minor customer complaints (Hallencreutz & Johan Parmler, 2021; Linder et. al., 2014; Zairi, 2000; Nagel & Santos, 2017; Narteh, 2018). And customer satisfaction in turn relies on good customer experiences (Laura Warick, 2019). Bergman and Klefsjö (2012) even go as far as stating that “the degree of customer satisfaction is the ultimate measure of quality” (p. 319).

Customer satisfaction is the “degree to which a customer is happy with a product, service, or experience related to your business” (Bernazzani, Sophia. 2022). It is derived from how well the customer's needs and expectations are met and shows the satisfaction of the most recent experience the customer had with the company (Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012; Sörqvist, 2004; Zairi, 2000; Parasuraman, et al., 1988).

2.5.3 Customer experience (CX)

If Customer Satisfaction is derived from the most recent experience that the customer had with the company, Customer Experience (CX) is the sum of all the interactions and experiences between the company and the customer (Sörqvist, 2004). Sörqvist (2004) describes it as “accumulated customer satisfaction” and “global customer satisfaction” (p.90-91).

Some researchers argue that there are differences between internal service, customers and customer experience and the external counterpart, and that they need to be treated as different occurrences (Rytilahti, 2019; Finn et. al., 1996). Because of these aspects, Finn et. al. (1996) believe that the dimensions of internal customers' perceived service quality are unique. Since internal customers most likely only have one supplier, they might not have a reference point to internal service which can influence their rating on their received service. Others say that “while internal customers and external customers are often viewed from a polarised perspective, fundamentally the two groups share considerable common ground” (Grace & Lo Iacono, 2015).

De Keyser et. al. (2020) argues that the field of customer experience is broad and intangible which might lead to ambiguity and misunderstanding among researchers and companies. By breaking down and categorising

components of customer experience, it is possible to bring clarity to the definition.

In their study, Finn et. al. (1996) found six dimensions of internal customer experience. These are as follows: Tender Loving Care that shows the customers’ desire to be treated friendly and service minded. Delivering Value is a dimension specific to the purchasing department's customers. It concerns finding the best price for the customer. Order Processing refers to service being provided rapidly and correctly and getting help even when the usual contact person is not available. Vendor Management is also a dimension strongly associated with the customers of the purchasing department and concerns the management of vendors. Knowledge concerns the supplier's competence. No surprise is about communication, wanting to be informed.

Klaus and Maklan (2012) developed a Customer Experience Quality scale, EXQ that concretises what service experience is. Their study focused on the service setting of mortgage buyers (B2C), with data collected through interviews. The EXQ scale consists of 19 items in four dimensions, as presented below in figure 2.3. The scale shows the drivers for customer experience.

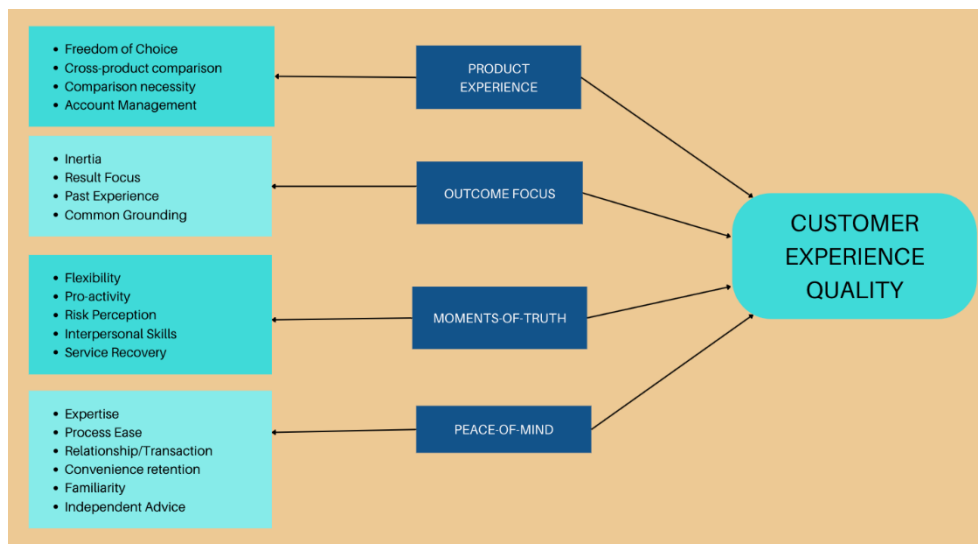


Fig. 2.3. Conceptual framework showing the drivers of customer experience. (Klaus & Maklan., 2012, p.21)

Product experience concerns having a choice in the offering but also to have a personal contact at the supplier. Outcome focus concerns “reducing

customers' transaction cost, such as seeking out and qualifying new providers" (Klaus & Maklan, 2012. p. 18). Moments-of-truth refers to the supplier's ability to be flexible and recover from unexpected situations, and their professionalism and social skills. The Peace-of-mind dimension consists of the customer's relationship with the supplier, and how the customer perceives the supplier's competence. Klaus and Maklan (2012) describes how this dimension is "associated with the emotional aspects of service" (p. 19).

3 Method

This chapter outlines the study's research approach and design, as well as the method for data collection. The chapter is followed by an overview of reliability and validity considerations.

This study is based on a phenomenological approach, exploring the experiences from the participants perspective (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The method is qualitative, aiming to make a theoretical analysis - a theoretical generalisation, as described by Bryman (2018).

3.1 Literature search and previous research

In a narrative literature review, theory and research linked to the current research area are reviewed to give a background of what is already known on the subject (Bryman, 2018). It acts as the foundation and justification for the current research questions as well as analysis and conclusions (Bryman, 2018). There is no single method for conducting literature searches according to Creswell and Creswell (2018), but they recommend a systematic approach. The literature search process for this study is inspired by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p.29) (see figure 3.1).

The purpose of the literature review was to obtain existing research on customer experience and service to build a theoretical framework for the study. Data was extracted from non-fictional literature as well as from electronic scientific articles using Mid Sweden University library search - Discovery, Mälardalen University library search - Primo, DivaPortal and Google Scholar. The search terms used were internal customer experience, customer experience, service quality, internal service quality, service profit chain, customer satisfaction, internal customer satisfaction and customer perceived value.



Figure 3.1. Flowchart of literature review, reading from left to right.

Based on the method and the search terms, not very much research was found. For example, in Discovery search the term “internal customer experience” resulted in six hits compared to “customer experience” that gave 37 086 hits. By using the snowball method it opened up opportunities to find other literature of interest by examining the reference list of the relevant articles (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) . This gave the opportunity to further increase our knowledge.

3.2 Validity and reliability

Quality in research is often described by the terms *validity* and *reliability*. Validity concerns if the study measures what it claims to measure while reliability concerns the consistency and accuracy of the study. It is expected that if another researcher conducts the study, they should be able to reach the same conclusion without a large variation in the results. (Bryman, 2018; Wallén, 1996; Yin, 2007).

Even so, it is argued that the concept of reliability and validity, which have their roots in quantitative research, fits badly with qualitative research that in its nature is interpretative, and that these concepts suggest that there is an absolute truth about the world (Alvehus,2019; Lincoln & Guba,1985;

Eneroth, 1987). Qualitative research is sometimes criticised for being unsystematic, subjective and obscure and therefore hard to replicate (Bryman & Bell, 2017). On the other hand, it can give an insight into things that are not discovered by other research methods, it offers a deeper understanding of phenomena and it might uncover topics that could be interesting to study further using quantitative methods (Tracy, 2013). Having said that, external reliability and validity in qualitative research is hard to achieve because of the use of limited data samples and because social environments are hard to replicate (Eneroth, 1987). Eneroth (1987) even suggests that in qualitative research it is eligible to have low reliability since it is desired to discover new data if the procedure is repeated.

To achieve reliability and validity in qualitative research, researchers need to get as deep of an understanding as possible about a phenomenon. This can be achieved by having a maximum of different situations to collect data from. Researchers also need to consider the fact that questions can be interpreted differently depending on the participant. This could be solved by paying attention to when this might have happened and going back for complementary data by asking questions differently. It is also important to describe the theoretical background of the research (Eneroth, 1987). Lincoln and Guba (1985) describes another approach to reach validity - to use a critical iterative approach to one's analysis, checking and double checking to question the reasonability, and to argue for the method used.

The critique concerning validity and reliability in case study research was considered, whilst bearing in mind Eneroth's (1987) argument about the desire for low reliability. This study aims to make a theoretical generalisation of the results, making the criticism of case study research less applicable (Bryman, 2018; Alvehus, 2019). The study object and research process were thoroughly described. The researchers aimed to make a clear agreement between theory and data and further agreed upon the interpretations of the data, checking the transcripts several times, and cross-checking codes from the transcripts (Bryman & Bell, 2017). During two of the interviews, the researchers noticed that it was suitable to ask a question in a slightly different way due to very short answers.

The transcribed interviews are omitted from the essay as a whole because of their extent. The transcripts are however available to the tutor, examiner and opponents of this essay upon request.

3.3 Data collection

3.3.1 Interviews

Interviews are good for collecting personal views and perceptions and are “one of the most important sources of case study evidence” (Yin, 2018, p. 118). On the other hand, there is also a risk of deviations in results and conclusions due to different biases (Yin, 2018, p. 114, 121). An interview is an active process where meaning is created between the participants (Tracy, 2013). Therefore the interviewer should reflect on their role and how they might influence the interviewee and their response, not just by what they are saying, but also by their appearance, gender, culture or socioeconomic origin (Tracy, 2013; Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A semi structured interview has a predetermined battery of questions as a basis from which the interviewer can change the order of the questions asked, and give follow-up questions (Bryman, 2016; Alvehus, 2019).

As mentioned in the section Service Quality, the Critical Incident Technique is a flexible tool for inquiry, used for capturing the participants' experiences and requirements, and can be adapted to fit the current situation. Participants are asked to recall situations that had a positive or negative impact (Flanagan, 1954; Rosala, 2020).

A generative method for inquiry and transformation is Appreciative Inquiry (AI). AI is focusing on what already works, with the notion that what you pay attention to is what will be realised. An organisation that focuses on problem-solving, becomes experts at the problems, while AI makes the organisation grow by studying the best of what is (Cooperrider et. al., 2008, p. 33). In 2008, Cooperrider et. al stated that “AI is more about learning and understanding something and thereby valuing it— than it is about expressions of appreciation” (pp. 8). Positive questions are however argued to be the best way to discover people's stories of best practices and success, and to spark creativity (Diana Whitney, 2010).

The AI 4-D cycle (see figure 3.2) is a process of change, where the D's stand for Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny. The Discovery phase is about asking strength-based questions. This phase consists of identifying the participants, composing the questions, developing an interview guide,

gathering data and analysing the data (Cooperrider et. al., 2008). Cooperrider et. al. (2008) explains how the questions asked should be composed in two stages. The first builds on individual experiences - positive memories. The second is about imagining a potential future state (Cooperrider center, 2021). Potential negative data can be collected by asking if there is anything the interviewee would want to change. The Dream phase is about imagining, sharing and expanding on the best possible future. The Design phase is about identifying the steps for starting to make the dream come to life. And the last step of the cycle is the Destiny phase in which planning how to embed what was identified in the previous step into the organisation (Cooperrider center, 2021).



Figure 3.2. The 4-d cycle of AI (Cooperrider et. al., 2008)

This study used semi structured interviews, and the questions were based on a mix of the AI-method and the Critical Incident technique to also uncover the negative experiences (Flanagan, 1954). Since the purpose of the study is to explore, rather than transform, only the first D (Discovery) from the AI-model is implemented. The interview method is therefore not constant to either of the two techniques, but customised to fit the purpose of the study.

The interviews were conducted in Swedish since it is the mother tongue of the participants. The researchers made the assessment that this would make them prone to give more detailed descriptions of their experiences. An interview guide was developed (appendix 1), based on AI (Cooperrider et. al., 2008) and the interview protocol by Creswell and Creswell (2018). The guide consists of an introduction, presenting the purpose of the interview followed by introductory-, subject- and follow up questions. The guide ends with closing information on how names will be anonymised and that the essay will be sent to the participants upon completion. During the interviews one researcher asked the questions and the other was taking notes as a failsafe measure (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). There are limits to how much information we can receive and understand during interviews or conversations, and then we interpret what is said in a natural, instinctive and sometimes unconscious way without consciously thinking about it (Bryman & Bell, 2017). The interviews were therefore recorded and then transcribed to prevent possible misinterpretation of respondents and ensure that crucial statements were not missed. The subsequent analysis procedure is described in the section Data analysis.

3.3.2 Selection of interviewees

The selection process in this study was a purposive sampling, meaning that the participants were chosen out of their relevance for the study and research question (Bryman & Bell, 2017; Alvehus, 2019).

The researchers chose to interview the managers for Front End and Back End Service, to obtain an understanding of the organisation and the processes. Six interviews were conducted, three with Back End Service employees (the supplier), and three with Front End Service employees (the customer). The interviewees are throughout the essay referred to using gender neutral assumed names:

Alex worked in Back End Service for two years.

Agne worked in Back End Service for ten years.

Jamie, worked in Back End service for just over 20 years.

Mika, worked in Front End Service for the last six years.

Chris worked in Front End Service for the last nine years.

Kim worked in Front End Service for three years.

3.4 Data analysis

The data analysis and other phases of the study were simultaneous processes, a common approach in qualitative research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). This study used inductive thematic analysis due to its flexibility. It is used to identify and interpret patterns by coding, without relying on any theoretical ground (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The analysis procedure largely follows the description of Braun and Clarke (2006).

In the study of conversation analysis, every sound, sigh, pause or hesitation holds communicative meaning and importance (Hutchby & Wooffitt, 2008). The purpose of the transcriptions in this case was to reproduce the conversations colloquially. Therefore, the interviews were transcribed roughly, since the purpose was to examine the content and what was said, rather than how it was said (Alvehus, 2019). The latter requires a whole other detailed kind of transcription (Norrby, 2004). The transcription function in Microsoft Word online was used to speed up the process, after which the researchers individually listened through the recordings and made adequate additions and changes. These were then compared with each other and agreed upon. The transcriptions were thereafter read by both researchers, each on their own, and things that might hold importance were written down and marked in the transcripts. Names and geographic information were omitted from the transcripts to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. A table was made (see figure 3.3) with data extracts of the marked text, and codes were assigned to those extracts. Many of the extracts were given more than one code. The codes were then grouped into themes using Google Jamboard (virtual post it notes) (see figure 3.4).

The researchers decided to make a translation to English during the coding of the data extracts. It felt important to keep the Swedish language in the extracts to get as close to the data as possible without any information getting lost in translation. Examples of codes in the theme Behavior are being nice and friendly, thinking the supplier could have made more of an effort and the supplier did their utmost. Their common denominator is the supplier's willingness to solve their problems and being service minded. Every theme was initially considered a code, but after thoughtful consideration they were estimated to be a good representation for their respective group.

Data extract	Coded for
F1. Då vi skriver ett <u>sub case</u> i Salesforce och då förväntar jag mig att få svara samma dag. (från BE)	Snabbt svar (<u>Qick</u> response)
F1. vi vill gärna ge bra service tillbaka ju så att, kan jag få svara samma dag så är allting lyckat. (svar till slutkund)	Service minded Snabbt svar (Quick response)
F1. Ja, det är, jag ställer höga krav på mig själv också. Ibland så kanske det kan gå 2, 3 dagar, men det känns inte bra då för att man tänker sig själv att man när man är kund så vill man gärna ha svar samma dag. Men egentligen vet jag inte om det finns något krav 2, 3 dagar kanske är okej.	Snabbt svar (Quick response)
F1. (BE) När de kanske personligen hör av sig på <u>teams</u> eller så att man får en personlig kontakt. Det kan väl vara bra. Att man har möjlighet att diskutera situationen	Service minded Personlig <u>kontakt</u> (<u>Personal</u> contact) Kommunikation (Communication)

Figure 3.3. Image shows the inductive matching of codes to data extracts.

Kommunikation/ Communication



Figure 3.4. Image shows the grouping of codes into themes.

3.5 Pre-understanding

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) the author's background, such as education or profession can influence the choice in research studies, including choice of method or scientific approach. The authors are both working with quality in industrial settings. One author previously worked in communication and the other author in industrial maintenance. None of the authors have any experience of measuring and improving internal customer experience. However, customer focus is an important factor in TQM, giving the authors a basic preunderstanding.

3.6 Ethical considerations

The interviewees were informed that participation was voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time without stating the reason. They were given a choice to consent to the recording of the interviews, and that the recordings would be deleted. The studied process is a vulnerable business process where sensitive information might have been revealed. It was therefore important to ensure the organisation's anonymity. The company is not mentioned by name and assumed gender neutral names have been assigned to the participants to maintain confidentiality and anonymity. One of the researchers worked for the company at which this study was conducted at one point in time. Due to traceability, the researchers decided to exclude more detailed information on this to be able to ensure the participants anonymity. Names, geographic information, niched system names and end customer company names are omitted from the transcripts to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Finally, to take part of the results, participants were sent a copy of the essay by mail after completion.

4 Empirical evidence and analysis

This chapter begins with a description of the studied organisation, followed by the empirical evidence along with the analysis and connection to relevant theory.

4.1 Presentation of the study object

The study object is the after sales organisation of one business area of a global manufacturing company. After sales consists of Back End Service (BE) and Front End Service (FE), both organised globally.

Front End Service (FE) are supporting end customers. The Swedish service organisation has three employees handling technical and spare parts requests. The case is first attempted to be solved by the Front End Service employees, and if unsuccessful they turn to Back End for support.

Communication is mainly done through different software systems. There are processes in place for how support errands are handled between Back End and Front End. If a case is critical it is possible to mark the case with high priority in the system but also by contacting Back End, asking for priority in the handling of the case. Feedback is given on an individual basis, however there is no established, structured feedback process between Back End and Front End. Front End uses NPS (Net Promoter Score) to assess the end customers satisfaction, and to some extent the result can be indicative of opportunities for improvement not only in Back Ends processes, but also in processes further back in the value chain.

Back End Service (BE) provides spare parts and logistics services to the Front End Service (FE) organisation. Three Back End employees work with order management and order support with divided responsibility for different countries. There is a customer service strategy that was deployed two years ago. BE receives feedback occasionally from FE, but nothing frequently. This is however under investigation and might be implemented soon.

4.2 Dimensions of internal customer experience

Six themes, or dimensions emerged during the thematic analysis in this study; Communication, Behavior, System support, Personal contact, Technical competence and Functioning processes (See figure 4.1). These are

the drivers of internal customer experience in this study. These dimensions will hereafter be referred to as ICXD.

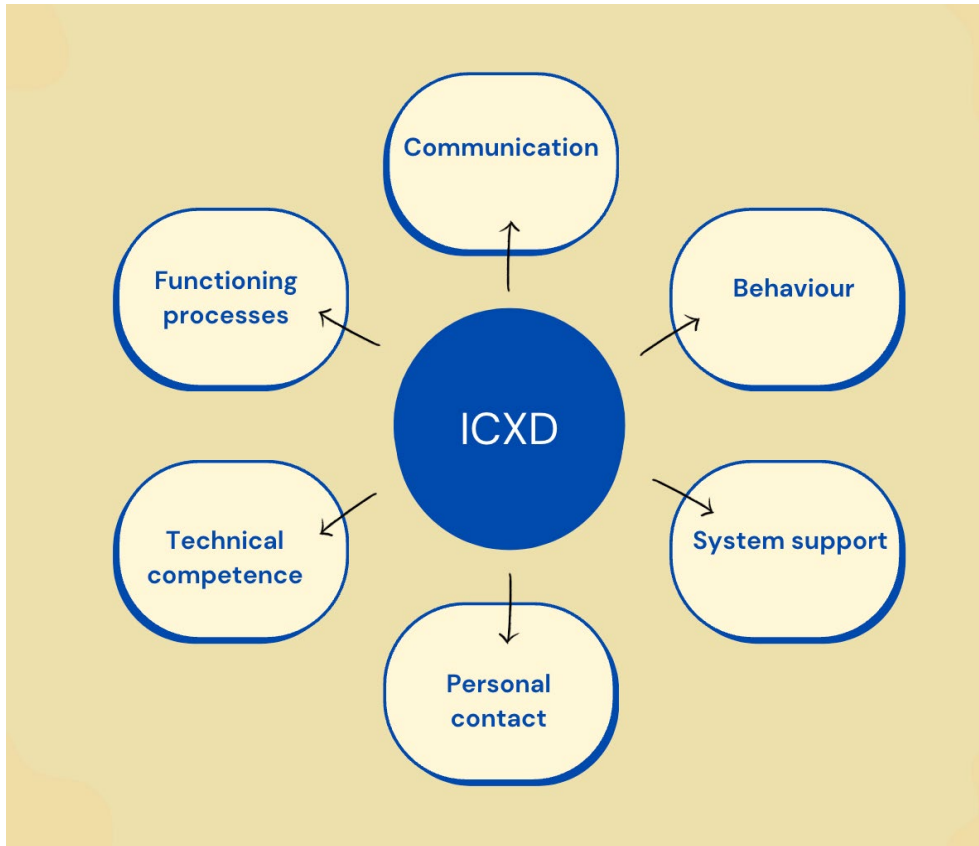


Figure 4.1. Dimensions of internal customer experience that emerged during the thematic analysis from this study.

4.3 Correspondence with the EXQ scale

Four of the ICXD correspond with three of the dimensions in the EXQ scale by Klaus and Maklan (2012) (See figure 4.2).

		Dimensions of internal customer experience					
		Communication	Behavior	System support	Personal contact	Technical competence	Functioning processes
Klaus and Maklan EXQ scale	Product experience	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence
	Outcome focus	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence
	Moments-of-truth	Correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence
	Peace-of-mind	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence

Figure 4.2. The correspondence between the dimensions of internal customer experience and the EXQ scale.

One of the ICXD is Personal contact. Part of the Product experience dimension in the EXQ-scale (Klaus & Maklan, 2012) concerns having a personal contact at the supplier. Front End employee Mika gave examples of this: “When they personally get in touch on Teams or so, that you get a personal contact. That is good. That you have the opportunity to discuss the situation over the phone or Teams” (On situations where the service was better than expected) and “We have very good contact with Back End as well, especially [name] who you may have talked to. Very helpful, so yes it works very well I think”.

Both the ICXD Behavior and Communication corresponds to the EXQ Moments-of-truth dimension which refers to the flexibility, professionalism and social skills of the supplier. Chris from Front End commented on the ultimate service experience: “I sit between the customer and Back End. So a good sensible answer, which will also be accepted by the end customer” and “if they are nice and friendly, I don’t want to feel like an idiot”.

The three ICXD Personal contact, Technical competence and Behavior correspond with the EXQ Peace-of-mind dimension which consists of the

customer's relationship with the supplier, and how the customer perceives the supplier's competence. Klaus and Maklan (2012) describes how this dimension is “associated with the emotional aspects of service” (p. 19). The following statement is an example of this. “I was quite new, and the technical competence was not as great as it is now [...]. I was still expected to get a good answer from Back End [...] and it happened both to me and other colleagues, that we got a very short answer back that wasn't really helpful” (Kim from Front End on a situation where the service was lower than expected).

From ICXD, System support and Functioning processes did not correspond to any of the EXQ dimensions (Klaus & Maklan, 2012), and no dimension could be matched to the dimension Outcome focus (Klaus & Maklan, 2012). Since Outcome focus concerns “reducing customers’ transaction cost, such as seeking out and qualifying new providers” (Klaus & Maklan, 2012. p. 18), it might be very specific to the setting of mortgages. It is also possible that the ICXD functioning processes did not have a counterpart in the EXQ scale, because functioning processes is such a basic thing, a hygiene factor, that it is actually incorporated in all the dimensions.

4.4 Correspondence with other internal customer experience dimensions

Five of the ICXD corresponds with four of the dimensions from Finn et. al. (1996) (See figure 4.3). Three corresponds clearly and two to some extent. Two of the dimensions from the study performed by Finn et. al. (1996) is not applicable to this study, since the authors describe how they seem to be unique to the customer/supplier relationship of the purchasing department. Therefore, it is only System support from the ICXD that does not correspond to any of the internal customer experience dimensions of Finn et. al. (1996). The ICXD Behavior corresponds with Tender Loving Care - it is the desire to be treated in a friendly manner. This can be exemplified by a quote by Chris from Front End service: “if they are nice and friendly, I don’t want to feel like an idiot”. ICXD Communication corresponds with Order Processing which concerns the service being provided correctly and in a timely manner. The following quote by Mika from Front End Service shows an example of this: “Sometimes it might take two, three days, but it doesn't feel good because you imagine if you were the customer, you would like to have an answer the same day”. ICXD Functioning processes correspond

with No Surprises that refers to communication and wanting to be informed. Kim From Front End explains: “It could be information that the end customer may have received before us, and that's not good”. ICXD Personal contact corresponds to some extent with Order processing since it concerns getting help even when the usual contact person is not available. ICXD Technical competence corresponds to some extent with Knowledge, since one of the Front End employees described how their own technical competence, and how they asked for help determined the level and quality of the answer they received.

		Dimensions of internal customer experience from this study					
		Comm- nication	Behaviour	System support	Personal contact	Technical compe- tence	Function- ing processes
Finn et. al. Dimensi- ons of internal customer exper- ience	Tender Loving Care	No corresponde nce	Correspond ence	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce
	Delivering Value	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Order processing	Correspond ence	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	Correspond ence to some extent	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce
	Vendor Manage- ment	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Knowledge	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	Correspond ence to some extent	No corresponde nce
	No Surprises	Correspond ence	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	No corresponde nce	Correspond ence

Figure 4.3. The correspondence between the dimensions of internal customer experience from Finn et. al. (1996) and from this study.

4.5 Correspondence with the seven criteria for good perceived service quality

As perceived service quality is part of customer satisfaction, which is part of customer experience, a connection can also be made to four of the seven criteria for perceived service quality Grönroos (2015) (See figure 4.4). The criteria being professionalism and skills, attitudes and behavior, accessibility and flexibility, reliability and trustworthiness, service recovery, servicescape and reputation and credibility (Grönroos, 2015).

		Internal customer experience dimensions					
		Communication	Behaviour	System support	Personal contact	Technical competence	Functioning processes
Grönroos seven criteria for perceived service quality	professionalism and skills	Correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence
	attitudes and behaviour	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence
	accessibility and flexibility	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence to some extent	No correspondence	No correspondence
	reliability and trustworthiness	Correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence to some extent
	service recovery	No correspondence	Correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	Correspondence to some extent
	servicescape	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence
	reputation and credibility	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence	No correspondence

Figure 4.4. The correspondence between the dimensions of internal customer experience and the criteria for good perceived service quality (Grönroos, 2015).

All of the ICXD could be matched to criteria of good perceived service quality (See figure 12). No dimension could however be matched with Servicescape or Reputation and credibility. These criteria are associated with brand image and physical surroundings impact on the perceived service, and might therefore be more reflective of external customers service experience.

It is only the dimension System support that seems to be unique to this study compared to the dimensions of both internal and external customer experience (Klaus & Maklan, 2012; Finn et. al., 1996).

4.6 What are the internal customers' view on the service delivered?

The analysis shows that Front End wants reliable and accurate information that will ultimately be accepted by the end customer. Another important

thing are quick responses, mentioned by all the respondents: “When we write a sub case in Salesforce, I expect to receive an answer the same day” (Mika, Front End). They also want good communication, system support, personal contact with Back End, good relations, functioning processes and a friendly, service minded behavior from Back End, here exemplified by Kim from Front End: “That you get the right help when you need it” and “that the supplier is doing their utmost to help me”. They also want technical competence for themselves, since how they ask for help determines the level and quality of the answer they receive.

4.6.1 Are they getting what they are expecting?

Generally, they describe how communication and contact with Back End are good, works well and that there have been situations where they felt Back End did their utmost to help them. However, they also describe situations where it takes a long time to receive an answer, where the information is vague and situations where information reaches the end customer before it reaches Front End. One of them could not think of one situation where the service was considered better than expected. They expressed that there is room for improvement when it comes to response time, communication, system support and end-customer focus. Keeping in mind that every process in a company is the supplier to another process, and that each must satisfy the next to be able to satisfy the external customer’s needs in the end (Deming, 1986; Schmalensee, 2007), the following quote by Chris from Front End shows that there is an understanding of this, at least by the ones having the end customer contact: “we should all remember that it is actually an external customer who is the end customer”. One employee said that even though it works well, some team building activities could contribute to strengthening the relationship between Back End and Front End. This reasoning is supported by Ljungberg and Larsson (2012) who argue that through relationship building processes it is possible to achieve customer focus. According to Zairi (2000) it is also important to have a clear service strategy to be able to achieve customer focus. And in fact, a customer service strategy was deployed two years ago, according to the manager of Back End service. The following quote is one example of a situation where a Front End employee felt the service was considerably lower than expected: “You received such a response that... you are almost embarrassed in front of the customer, that you have nothing more to say. Maybe the person who gave me that information didn’t feel like looking for more.”

(Chris, Front End). This situation was a missed opportunity to achieve service quality as quality control needs to take place in the moment of service consumption (Grönroos, 2015).

Just as in previous studies, the supplier's responsiveness, competence, reliability and having access to a contact person (Westbrook & Peterson, 1998; Frost & Kumar, 2001) also plays an important role in this study, as shown by the dimensions presented above. Two quotes to exemplify that are the following, said by Kim and Mika from Front End. "I can't think of anything that should change more than being even clearer in the communication. Help each other, even more or even faster, but I think it works great already", and:

"There was a lack of communication on both sides, maybe I was unclear when I asked the question and then I got an unclear answer back. I don't give up, I ask again, and ask and ask until I sort of feel that I have mastered the answer and that I can present it to the (end)customer".

The theory showed how measuring is an important part of improving service quality. This can be done using attribute based models such as NPS or CSAT (Grönroos, 2015; Offsey, S., 2022) or qualitative model based on participants' experience (Grönroos, 2015; Bryman & Bell, 2017; Flanagan, 1954). In the section about the studied organisation, it was described how BE receives feedback occasionally from FE, but nothing reoccurring but that it might be implemented soon. Attribute based models need to be complemented with measures of perception and interaction to identify root causes of service quality issues and to avoid sub-optimisation (Offsey, 2022).

4.7 What are the internal suppliers' view?

The Back End Service employees express that they have good cooperation overall with Front End Service. All three describe the cooperation and communication as straightforward, that there are very few times where there is friction and that problems arise when they themselves are dependent on other departments to be able to help Front End.

5 Conclusion

This chapter answers how the results relate to the research questions, and what the study has contributed to.

The purpose of this study was to explore the phenomenon of internal customer experience, by asking the following questions:

- What are the dimensions of internal customer experience?
- To what extent can dimensions of internal customer experience be compared with other measures of customer experiences?
- What is the internal customers' view on the service delivered?

5.1 What are the dimensions of internal customer experience?

The results show that there are six dimensions of internal customer experience in this study; Communication, Behavior, System support, Personal contact, Technical competence and Functioning processes.

5.2 To what extent can dimensions of internal customer experience be compared with other measures of customer experiences?

The ICXD were compared to two different studies on customer experience, one internal and one external, and to criteria of good perceived service quality. The conclusion is that the dimensions can be compared to a great extent as four of the ICXD correspond with three of the dimensions of external customer experience, five of the ICXD corresponds with four of the dimensions from the study on internal customer experience, and lastly, all of the ICXD could be matched to criteria of good perceived service quality. The fact that the dimensions correspond to such a great extent indicates that it is quite possible to use established ways of measuring customer experience, even if they are developed in the context of external customers. This is something that can be utilised both by the studied organisation and other companies. The findings in this study goes against the research that claims that internal and external customer experiences are so different that they need to be treated as different occurrences.

Despite the large correspondence, there were some differences. From ICXD, System support and Functioning processes did not correspond to any of the EXQ dimensions (Klaus & Maklan, 2012), and no dimension could be matched to the dimension Outcome focus. System support from ICXD does not correspond to any of the internal customer experience dimensions of Finn et. al. (1996). And no dimension from the ICXD could be matched with Servicescape or Reputation and Credibility from the criteria of good perceived service quality (Grönroos, 2015). These differences are discussed further in the section 6.1 Results Discussion.

The findings in this study goes against the research that claims that internal and external customer experience needs to be treated as different occurrences (Ryttilahti, 2019; Finn et. al., 1996). They share over half of the EXQ dimensions (Klaus & Maklan, 2012) and the perceived service quality criteria (Grönroos, 2015). Some of the dimensions seem to be unique to the internal setting, but as it is not all of them it cannot confirm the study by Finn. et. al (1996) that claims dimensions of internal customer perceived service quality are unique. System support and functioning processes do not have a counterpart in the EXQ scale (Klaus & Maklan, 2012), and personal contact and functioning processes can be matched to the criteria of good perceived service quality (Grönroos, 2015), though they only correspond to some extent. The findings in this study rather supports the statement of Grace and Lo Iacono (2015), saying that internal and external customers have a substantial amount in common.

5.3 What are the internal customers' view on the service delivered?

Front End wants reliable and accurate information, quick responses, good communication, system support, personal contact with Back End, good relations, functioning processes and a friendly, service minded behavior from Back End. They also want technical competence for themselves, since how they ask for help determines the level and quality of the answer they receive. Communication and contact with the supplier, Back End, is described as good on the whole even though there are situations that might not work optimally. Areas where Front End feel like their needs are not met are response time, communication, system support and end-customer focus (See figure 5.1). This is where improvement efforts should be focused. However, response time and system support might be exceptions since they

might be governed by decisions higher up in the organisation. Based on feedback from Front End, the company might consider team-building activities for Back and Front End. Back End might consider communicating more clearly on their KPI:s on response time, as the Front End employees seem uncertain to what response time is ok. Front and Back End might also consider having strategic meetings together to incorporate the end customer perspective and align their targets. This could improve the system view and also create an environment of collective learning.

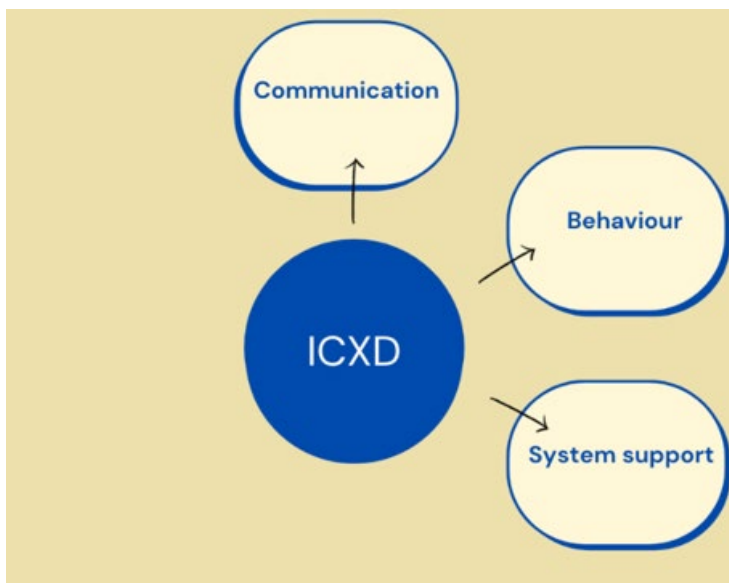


Figure 5.1. Focus areas for improvement based on the dimensions of internal customer experience.

The results from this study gives an insight to important factors to be able to fulfil customers' needs and expectations, and shows that existing measures of customer experience can be used for internal customer experience as well. We do however think that any company interested in improving customer experience should examine what drives the experience in their respective company since there are differences based on the service setting. We also think it would be suitable to incorporate customers' requirements and customer perspective in the service strategy. Finn et. al. has a good questionnaire that with some adjustments can be used for assessing from the customers point of view. This study has contributed to the understanding of what drives the customers' experience, the resemblance between internal and external customer experiences and that established measures can be used for internal settings.

5.4 Recommendations

- Measure internal customer experience by utilising both NPS and a qualitative model to be able to identify the root cause of the issues.
- Measure on a global scale to get a complete picture of what works and what can be improved in the different areas. In such an effort it would be important to take cultural differences into consideration.
- Team-building activities for the internal customer and internal supplier to strengthen the relationship and increase customer focus. This is suitable when there is frequent contact.
- Make an analysis of the discrepancy between the internal suppliers and internal customers' view on the service delivered. Alignment can contribute to service needs being met and avoid both under delivery and over delivery of service, which both lead to poor customer experience. This is suitable when there is frequent contact.
- Joint strategic meetings to align targets, improve system view, incorporate end customer perspective, and avoid sub-optimisation. This is suitable when there is frequent contact, and not with infrequent internal customers and suppliers.

6 Discussion

In this section the results and the method are discussed.

6.1 Results Discussion

This study resulted in six dimensions of internal customer experience; Communication, Behavior, System support, Personal contact, Technical competence and Functioning processes. Even though there are some differences, the dimensions can be compared with other dimensions of customer experience and service quality (Finn et. al., 1996; Klaus & Maklan, 2012; Grönroos, 2015). The differences seem to be related to the different service settings of the studies; the customer/supplier relationship of the purchasing department (Finn et. al., 1996), the banking setting with mortgage buyers (Klaus & Maklan, 2012), brand image and physical surroundings impact on the perceived service (Grönroos, 2015), and the use of system support for orders and communication in our study. It is also possible that functioning processes did not have a counterpart in the EXQ scale, because functioning processes are a hygiene factor, and are actually incorporated in all the dimensions. We decided to compare the result of this study with Klaus and Maklan's (2012) study in the interest of the differences in both the service setting and the method; it was intriguing to see if the dimensions would correlate regardless. The findings in this study goes against the research that claims that internal and external customer experience needs to be treated as different occurrences (Rytilahti, 2019; Finn et. al., 1996). The findings rather support the statement of Grace and Lo Iacono (2015), saying that internal and external customers have a lot in common. Just as in previous studies, the supplier's responsiveness, competence, reliability and having access to a contact person (Westbrook & Peterson, 1998; Frost & Kumar, 2001) also plays an important role in this study. The internal customers, Front End, describe the cooperation and communication as good on the whole, however they express how response time, communication, system support and end-customer focus are areas that can be improved upon. The results represent the experience of three people in contact with one of the Back End employees. Because of this, the result is not representative of the entire service delivery from Back End. The answers also represent events that might have happened years ago and might not be representative of how it works in the present. It should however still be considered, as they are things that dwell in the customers' memories.

Customer experience is after all the “accumulated customer satisfaction” (Sörqvist, 200. p.90-91) - the sum of all the interactions and experiences between the company and the customer (Sörqvist, 2004). Unlike the Front End employees, the Back End employees perceive the cooperation and communication as straightforward and without friction. This might indicate that there is a need for aligning goals and expectations. For a complete picture, a global study should be conducted.

This study has contributed to the understanding of what drives the internal customers’ experience, the resemblance between internal and external customer experiences and that established measures can be used for internal settings. As presented in the background and theory, service quality exceeded product quality as the driver of customer satisfaction in the last decade and it is important to prioritise development of the service quality (Hallencreutz & Parmler, 2021; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). It is necessary to have internal systems that are aligned to serve the needs of external customers (Deming 1986), and mapping and measuring customer service experience is a vital part of continuously improving service quality (Hallencreutz & Parmler, 2021; Bergman & Klefsjö, 2012). Based on that, we believe our study makes an important contribution, both to science and the development of organisations and society despite the limited scope - from acorns grow oak trees.

6.2 Method Discussion

Through the literature review, a potential research gap was discovered. Despite extensive searches, the literature review may however have missed relevant research that used different terms. In this study we chose to use semi-structured interviews with open questions, allowing the respondents’ personal opinions and perceptions, thus capturing reflections and broader responses that might otherwise have been lost. We believe this strengthened the validity as well. The interviews were conducted digitally one by one, which eliminated the risk of influence from other respondents. During two of the interviews, we had to ask a question a second time but phrased differently since the respondents seemed to misunderstand the question. The study could have gained a broader perspective by including a quantitative method and obtain more comprehensive data and thus increase the validity of this study.

We believe we described the theoretical background of the study as thoroughly as possible given the length restriction, and during the analysis we went back many times to review and discuss our findings, as suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). We consider the method to have been the best approach to answer the purpose and research questions, since we wanted to examine experiences. We do however see how multiple sources of data collection and a mixed method approach would have strengthened the validity and reliability.

6.3 Further Research

In the context of the studied organisation, it would be interesting to expand the study to include all Front End employees on a global scale, and combine a qualitative approach with a quantitative one for a more comprehensive picture. It would also be interesting to make a gap analysis between the suppliers and the customers view on the service delivered.

In a broader perspective, more studies on internal customer experience should be done to further support or oppose the statement that internal customer experience resembles external customer experience to the point that measures can be used interchangeably. More studies can also show potential differences based on the cultural setting.

We end this essay with an applicable quote from Finn et. al (1996. p. 38):
“Internal customers are professional consumers of the service they use. Thus, they are more knowledgeable about the service provided”

7 References

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Appendices

Appendice A. Interview guide/protocol

The following interview guide is written in Swedish since the interviews were conducted in Swedish.

Grundläggande information

Intervjuare – Stina

Antecknare – Silvia

Intervjuperson alias -

Plats – Teams

Tid för intervju - ca 20 minuter.

Introduktion

Som du också läste i informationsbrevet som vi skickade ut så är bakgrunden till den här intervjun den utbildning vi går i Kvalitets- och ledarskapsutveckling där vi nu skriver den avslutande uppsatsen. Ämnet vi har valt är intern kundupplevelse.

Vi kommer att börja intervjun med två inledande frågor för att öppna upp samtalet och därefter kommer frågor kopplade till ämnet kundupplevelse.

Har du några frågor till oss innan vi börjar?

Intervjufrågor

Inledande frågor.

Kan du beskriva din roll och vad du tycker är det mest givande med jobbet?

Kan du beskriva ett tillfälle som har varit en milstolpe i ditt liv, där du fick någon form av aha-upplevelse. Exempelvis en stor livshändelse, en social interaktion, eller en oväntad möjlighet, eller en svår utmaning.

Frågor chef Back End (BE) respektive Front End (FE)

Kan du beskriva hur ni är organiserade/Hur ser organisationen ut?

Kan du beskriva processen där back end och front end har kontakt med varandra? Finns det någon flexibilitet i processen för att kunna anpassa sig till kritiska situationer och för att kunna undvika kvalitetsbrister?

Vilka beröringspunkter finns det mellan back end och front end?

Får/lämnar ni någon form av återkoppling på servicen?

Har ni en servicestrategi med uppsatta mål? (BE)

Ämnesfrågor Back End

3-5 stycken

Kan du beskriva hur du tycker att den ultimata servicen skulle se ut i din arbetsroll. Hur vill du kunna hjälpa och bemöta de som kontaktar dig? Vad är viktigt för att du ska känna att du har gjort ett bra jobb?

Kan du beskriva en situation där samarbete och kommunikation med Front End fungerade riktigt bra?

Kan du beskriva en situation som inte riktigt fungerade i kontakten med Front End? Vad hände? Varför tror du att det blev så? Hur kändes det? Hur påverkade det dig och ditt arbete?

Är det något du skulle vilja ändra på i hur ni jobbar och interagerar med varandra? (FE & BE)

Ämnesfrågor front End

3–5 stycken

Kan du beskriva en situation där samarbete och kommunikation med back end fungerade bra?

Kan du beskriva hur du tycker att den ultimata serviceupplevelsen skulle se ut i din arbetsroll. Vad är viktigt för att du ska känna att servicen är bra?

Kan du beskriva en situation när servicen från back end var avsevärt högre än vad du förväntat dig. När var detta?

Kan du beskriva en situation där du upplevde att servicen inte levde upp till dina förväntningar. Varför tror du att det blev så? Hur kändes det? Hur påverkade det dig och ditt jobb?

Är det något du skulle vilja ändra på i hur ni jobbar och interagerar med varandra? (FE & BE)

Uppföljningsfrågor

Vad hände då?

Vilka var inblandade?

Berätta mer.

Vad betyder det?

Hur kände du då?

Vilka förutsättningar har du att...?

Avslutande information

Tack så hjärtligt för att du ville medverka. Precis som vi har berättat innan så kommer inspelningen av den här intervjun att raderas efter att vi är klara, och ditt namn kommer anonymiseras. Får vi höra av oss igen om vi skulle behöva klargöra några frågor?

När uppsatsen är examinerad och godkänd kommer vi skicka ut den till er så ni får ta del av resultatet.

Appendice B. Informationsbrev

Hej!

Som vi redan nämnt är vi två kvalitetsstudenter vid Mittuniversitetet, sista terminen. Syftet med vår magisteruppsats är att undersöka intern kundupplevelse - vilka mått av intern kundupplevelse som finns i ett företag, och om dessa går att jämföra med måtten av externa kundupplevelser.

Vi kommer att använda oss av en blandning av två intervjutekniker för att få fram hela spektrat av upplevelser, och inte vill begränsa det naturliga berättandet. Den första tekniken kallas Appreciative Inquiry (AI) som bygger på styrkebaserade och situationsbaserade frågor för att undersöka era upplevelser. AI använder positivt riktade frågor för att uppmärksamma och styrka sådant som redan fungerar bra. Den andra kallas Critical Incident och bygger på att fråga om kritiska händelser.

Efter ditt godkännande kommer vi att spela in intervjun för att underlätta analysfasen. Inspelningen kommer att raderas efter att uppsatsen är examinerad och godkänd.

Inspelningen kommer bara att användas för det vi avsett undersöka och förvaras på ett sådant sätt att den bara är tillgängligt för oss och vår handledare. Ditt deltagande kommer att vara anonymt och företagets namn kommer inte att nämnas i uppsatsen. Ditt deltagande är frivilligt och du kan avbryta intervjun när som helst utan att ange orsak. Vår uppsats kommer vid godkännande att publiceras på DIVA (digitala vetenskapliga arkivet) och därmed vara sökbar på internet.

Vi räknar med att intervjun kommer ta ca 20 minuter. Om du har några frågor så hör gärna av dig!

Kontaktuppgifter:

Stina Enblom - stina.enblom@outlook.com

Silvia Padovan - via_padovan@hotmail.com

Jag har läst informationen och förstått informationen och godkänner att intervjun spelas in.

Namn:

Datum:

Appendice C. Interviews

Manager Back End Service, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-20

Manager Front End Service, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-30

Back End 1, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-24

Back End 2, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-27

Back End 3, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-27

Front End 1, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-29

Front End 2, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-29

Front End 3, communication via Teams meeting. 2023-03-30