
Developing a Customer-Oriented Service Evaluation System (COSES) for the Public Sector

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to develop a customer-oriented service evaluation system (COSES) for the public sector. In our opinion, although customer orientation has become popular in the last decade, both researchers and practitioners still place too much emphasis on the operational management of the service system. In particular, we found that most models are designed for private sector use only. In this paper, we propose a comprehensive model for the public sector, which employs two dimensions: (1) customer-oriented service system design and management; and (2) organizational culture fostering. In addition, based on the proposed model and a multi-case empirical study, we develop a checklist for public agencies to assess their implementation of this concept.

Keywords: public management, public service, customer-orientation, service system

Introduction

Customer orientation has become a popular slogan, taking pride of place in the strategic statements of many public and private sector organizations. In the UK, for example, an increasing number of public-sector organizations are demonstrating that customer orientation is no longer the exclusive preserve of the private sector (Nwankwo and Richardson, 1994). It is the same situation in US. This concept was strongly emphasized in the section of the *National Performance Review Project* entitled 'Putting Customers First' (Gore, 1993). The terminology of customer orientation is usually described as an organizational culture that stresses the customer as the focal point of strategic planning and execution (Deshpande, Farley, and Webster 1993; Jaworski, Kohli, and Sahay, 2000; Steinman, Deshpande, and Farley, 2000).

Despite the importance of customer orientation in service industries, studies on this topic were either related to customer's evaluations of employee service performance and physical goods, or examined the effects of organizational quality, customer satisfaction, value attribution and outcome behaviors (Brady and Cronin, 2001). There were few

studies dealing with how to develop such an orientation, either through general description or through case-study illustrations (Payne, 1988).

On the other hand, we found most models were designed for the private rather than the public sector. From a scientific standpoint, further exploration of the content of customer orientation and its influence for the public sector is necessary. In other word, it needs to be sure that the customer's demands are really satisfied or that customer satisfaction is really improved in a so-called customer-oriented organization.

We argue that a comprehensive service system management should not only focus on operational management, but also trace its original core concept to precede management from a systematic viewpoint. In this study, we intend to employ a two-dimensional approach: (1) system design and management; and (2) organizational culture fostering. We conduct a multi-case empirical study and content analysis to develop a customer-oriented service evaluation system (COSES) for public sector organizations.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, we review and summarize the literature related to this topic, in order to develop our research framework. Table I presents a summary of the relevant literature.

Concepts of customer-oriented service

The terminology of customer-orientation originated from Total Quality Management (TQM). This means that satisfying customer needs is a high level organizational objective (Oakland, 1993; Price, 1991). Customer orientation has been defined in different ways (e.g., Kohli and Jaworski, 1990; Narver and Slater, 1990; Webster, 1988). It is usually associated with many other terminologies, such as market orientation, customer focus, customer driven, and customer centered. According to Webster's definition (1994), customer orientation is the business of putting the customer first in everything the company does and organizing all activities around the basic objective of delivering superior value. Beyond this, some authors assert that the center of strategic focus remains putting customers first, a major plank of marketing (e.g., Felton, 1959; McGee and Spiro, 1988). It has also become a generally acceptable concept that organizations should be more customer orientated to deliver better service quality and enhance customer satisfaction (Hartline et al., 2000; Solimine, 1995, p. 40).

Models of customer-oriented service management

Based on the relevant literature published in the last decade, we found there were a couple of models and instruments, proposed either by academic researchers or by practitioners, trying to deliver this concept. In the following, we summarize these models into three types: (1) a conceptual model; (2) a scale construct model; and (3) a cause-effect model.

The conceptual model

This model attempts to develop a conceptual framework to deliver customer orientation. For example, Nwankwo (1995) provided a framework to guide organizational management through the process of building a customer-driven philosophy. It contained four elements: (1) definition; (2) sensitivity; (3) measurement; and (4) implementation. Yasin and Yavas (1999) proposed a practical framework that integrated some tools to enhance the efficiency and customer orientation of service delivery systems. It consisted of: (1) root cause analysis; (2) benchmarking; (3) process reengineering; and (4) continuous improvement. Jiang and Chen (2002) proposed a customer-oriented service model for the public sector. It contains a five-step sequence of system design and management: (1) customer identification; (2) customer needs survey; (3) service system design; (4) service delivery; and (5) service recovery. They suggested that the model can be used to examine the strategic planning, system design and operational management for promoting organizational customer-oriented services.

The scale construct model

The scale construct model attempts to measure customer orientation directly at the individual level. For instance, Saxe and Weitz (1982) proposed a 24-item scale that was designed to measure how a salesperson seeks to increase long-term customer satisfaction. The other example of this type, proposed by Lozano (2000), is a checklist to measure the level of a library's orientation toward its market.

The cause-effect model

The scale cause-effect model attempts to investigate influential factors and their relationships to customer orientation. For example, Brady and Cronin (2001) investigated the effects of being customer oriented on service performance perceptions and outcome

behaviors. Responses from 649 consumers indicated that customer orientation was directly related to customers' evaluations of employee service performance, physical goods, and servicescapes. Indirect effects included organizational quality, customer satisfaction, value attributions, and outcome behaviors. Brown et al. (2002) investigated the mediatory role of customer orientation in a hierarchical model of the influence of personality traits on self-rated and supervisor-rated performance. The results support a partially mediated hierarchical model.

Determinants of a customer-oriented service system

Except the development of customer-oriented service models being the focal point, we found investigating the determinants from a successful service organization are also the main research theme in this field. We reviewed 13 studies published in the last decade. Fifteen determinants of a successful customer-oriented service system are summarized in Table I.

Table I Summary of determinants for a customer-oriented service system

Determinants	The relevant literature
Teamwork and empowerment	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Whiteley (1991); Lozano (2000); Bowen and Lawler (1992)
Customer's benefit first	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Whiteley (1991); Webster (1994); Lozano (2000)
Customer needs survey	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Whiteley (1991); Webster (1994); Lozano (2000)
Customer definition	Gore (1993); Juran (1992); Lozano (2000); Crego and Schiffrin (1995)
Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning.	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)
Developing standard customer complaints procedure	Brady and Cronin (2001); Lozano (2000)
Customer needs recognition	Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)
Design service items according to customer needs	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Whiteley (1991); Lozano (2000); Alam and Perry (2002)
Customer classification	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)
Providing multiple communication channels	Jiang and Chen (2002); Nwankwo (1995); Gore (1993); Whiteley (1991)
Benchmark learning	Gore (1993); Nwankwo (1995); Whiteley (1991); Yasin and Yavas (1999)
Willingness to resolve customers' questions	Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)
Service standard fit customers' needs.	Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)
Cross-functional cooperation	Jiang and Chen (2002); Carr and Littman (1991); Lozano (2000)
Employee education	Nwankwo (1995); Lozano (2000)

The 15 determinants cover various aspects of service system design and management. For example, the concept of customer's benefit first was often raised in both service system design and service recovery (e.g., Jiang and Chen, 2002; Nwankwo, 1995;

Whiteley, 1991; Webster, 1994; Lozano, 2000). Service standards are usually set in the early stages of service system design (e.g., Nwankwo, 1995; Lozano, 2000). Teamwork and empowerment are always emphasized in service delivery problem solving (e.g., Jiang and Chen, 2002; Nwankwo, 1995; Whiteley, 1991; Lozano, 2000; Bowen and Lawler, 1992). Offering multiple communication channels is crucial whenever a successful service organization is eager to hear customers' views and complaints (e.g., Jiang and Chen, 2002; Nwankwo, 1995; Gore, 1993; Whiteley, 1991).

Following our literature review, several findings can be summarized: (1) customer orientation has become a customer-centered philosophy for an excellent organization; (2) customer-oriented service can positively influence organizational performance, service quality, and customer satisfaction; (3) customer-oriented service concepts are suitable not only for the private sector but also for the public sector; (4) although it is easy to have a well-defined customer-oriented service policy statement in place, or have it eloquently articulated on paper, it is difficult to transform it into an action; (5) commitment to organizational common values is required to implement a customer-oriented action plan.

RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

From this literature review, we realized that customer orientation has been highlighted, since everyone knows that this approach is crucial for a service organization to be successful. However, we remain doubtful about whether this concept has been well delivered. For example, we found many organizations that are complained by customers

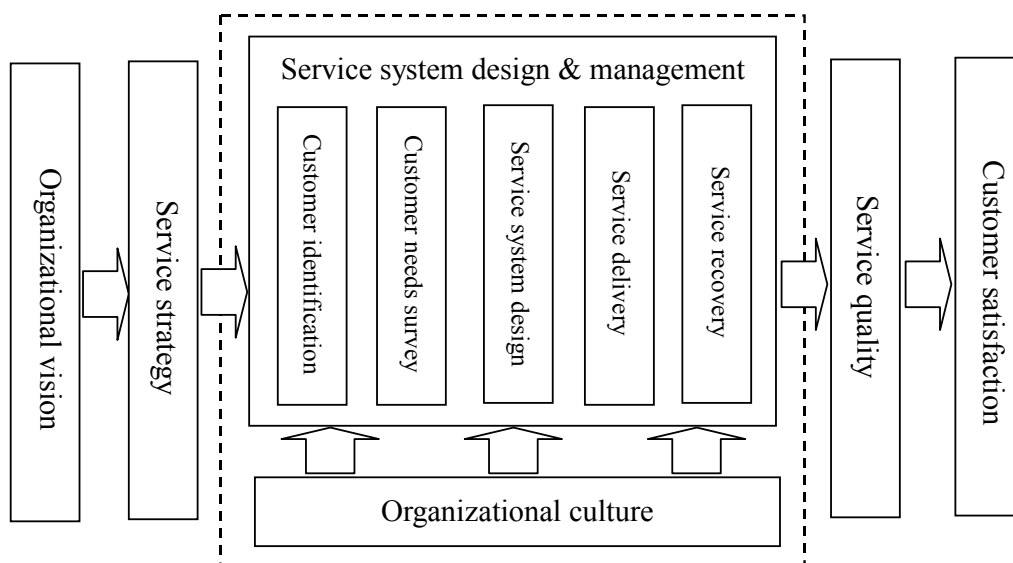


Figure 1 Conceptual research framework

are unsure of where and how to look for remedies. In this study, we develop a more comprehensive model specifically designed for public sector organizations (see Figure 1).

Instead of the single-dimension models proposed in previous studies, we employ a dual-dimension approach to develop a customer-oriented service evaluation system. The two dimensions are: (1) system design and management; and (2) fostering organizational culture. This model is intended to help executives in public agencies to diagnose the status of their customer-oriented service implementation. Here, we take the acronym of customer-oriented service evaluation system as COSES. COSES indicates ‘coze’ or ‘cose’, which implies to treat, or to talk with, customers in a warm and cozy manner.

The reason we employ the additional dimension is that it has been widely acknowledged in the literature that a successful organization always has an embedded customer-oriented organizational culture (e.g., Athanassopoulos, 2000; Deshpande, Farley, and Webster, 1993; Houston, 1986; Parasuraman, 1987; Shapiro, 1988; Webster, 1988). This should be pervasive throughout an organization, such that employees consistently exhibit customer-oriented behaviors, and consumers thereby become accustomed to this philosophy (Dobni, Ritchie, and Zerbe, 2000). Maull et al. (2001) identified four main themes in organizational culture: (1) culture as a learned entity (e.g., Schein, 1984); (2) culture as a belief system (e.g., Davis, 1984); (3) culture as a strategy (e.g., Bate, 1995); (4) culture as mental programming (e.g., Hofstede, 1980; Hofstede et al., 1990).

Figure 1 presents the conceptual research framework of this study. First, the organizational vision and service strategy are placed on the left-hand side of Figure 1. It indicates the driven force to promote the organizational customer orientation. Second, the kernel of this study, which is in the dot-line box, indicates that a customer-oriented service evaluation system (COSES) for public sector organizations will be developed systematically. Following the customer-oriented service model for the public sector proposed by Jiang and Chen (2002), we develop a five-step sequence of system design and management. These comprise: (1) customer identification – the public agency recognizes its different customers; (2) customer needs survey – the public agency focuses on customers’ needs and how to listen to them; (3) service system design – the public agency puts the customer-oriented strategies into service system and process design; (4) service delivery – the public agency uses customer- oriented strategies to deliver service to

customers; and (5) service recovery – the public agency has good communications with their internal and external customers. Third, service quality and customer satisfaction are placed on the right-hand side of Figure 1, which indicate the outcomes of service.

The dimension of organizational culture is at the bottom of the dot-line box in Figure 1. Instead of the five-level model of fostering an organizational culture proposed by Hofstede et al. in 1990, we propose a three-level model to deal with this dimension. The levels are (1) basic assumptions – employees recognize the importance of public service; (2) organizational values – provision of high quality public services has become the common belief of all members of an organization; (3) system and behavior – the organizational structure, system, regulation, standard operation process, and other visible behaviors have been well established.

RESEARCH DESIGN

To fulfill the research goal, a qualitative research methodology are used. We conducted an empirical study by deep interviewing with three public agencies. This section presents research subject selection, interview outline design and interview procedure, and data analysis, respectively.

Research subject selection

In regard to the appropriateness of research subject selection, Markus (1989) suggested two principles: (1) subjects should include important and crucial cases; (2) subjects should include typical and representative cases. Following these two principles, we chose three public agencies. They received National Public Service Awards of Taiwan in 2002. The three public agencies are the Land Department of Taipei County (Case I), the Health Department of Taipei County (Case II), and the Social Affairs Bureau of Kaohsiung City (Case III). Table II presents the three public agencies, the interviewee, and their representative customer-oriented service activities.

Table II Research subjects

Case No.	Public agency	Interviewee	Customer-oriented service activities
I	Land Department of Taipei County	Director	Service process reengineering
II	Health Department of Taipei County	Director	Comprehensive citizen's needs survey
III	Social Affairs Bureau of Kaohsiung City	Chief of staff	Total quality management project

Interview outline design and interview procedure

In order to look for the critical factors that result in public agencies being successful in service delivery, we first developed an interview outline. The outline is primarily designed as quasi-structured and open-ended to allow the respondents to respond more freely. We asked for volunteers for pilot testing before the formal interviews were conducted. The interview outline is shown in Table III.

Before the interview was conducted, we made an appointment by phone and then faxed the interview outline to the interviewee. The interviews began with a general introduction to make the interviewees aware of the purposes of the study and the interview agenda. To increase reliability and validity, we used some principles proposed by Goetz and Lecompte (1984): (1) we chose research subjects in accordance with research objective and criteria; (2) two graduate students participated in the cross-analysis of interview data; (3) we encoded the interview data and checked these data by multiple sources, such as the interview tape, document and observation; (4) the research objective was well understood by the interviewee; (5) the interviewer kept a neutral stance during the interview; (6) the data were analyzed according to the facts only.

Table III Interview outline

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1. Would you feel free to talk about the process and experiences when you promote service quality?
 2. How did you convince your employee to accept customer-oriented service concepts and for it to become a culture in your organization?
 3. What did you think the key factors for facilitating service quality?
 4. Were there any difficulties in carrying out the service quality improvement project?
 5. How do you think about internal and external customers in your organization?
 6. How did you determine the needs of internal and external customers in your organization?
 7. Have you ever learned about any innovative service from other private or public sector agencies? If yes, what is your experience?
 8. How did you develop and implement an innovative service?
 9. Is there any cross-functional teamwork in your organization?
 10. Is there employee education and training in your organization?
 11. How are complaints from either internal or external customers dealt with in your organization?
 12. Are there communication channels for internal and external customers in your organization?
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Each interview took about 2–3 hours. The interviews were taped, and then the interview content, observational records and documents were encoded into manuscript files.

Data analysis scheme

Since this is a qualitative study, we used content analysis in our data analysis. Two phases of content analysis were employed. In the first phase, the whole interviews were

decomposed into units. A unit represents a complete activity in relation to customer-oriented service. The units were then placed into the appropriate cell of the five-stage service system design and management schema (see the horizontal dimension of Table IV). Third, we tried to match each unit to the corresponding determinants, which we summarized from the past literature (see Table I). The frequency of determinants appearing in each cell was counted.

Table IV Data analysis scheme

Public Service Mgt. Organ. Culture	Customer identification	Customer needs survey	Service system design	Service delivery	Service recovery
Basic assumptions	The second phase	[] []	The first phase of content analysis		
Organizational values					
System and behavior					

In the second phase of content analysis, we tried to place all analyzing units into the appropriate cell in accordance with the three levels of organizational culture (see the vertical dimension of Table IV). The corresponding determinants were placed into the appropriate cell accordingly. The determinants that appear in the three cases were chosen for model development. The COSES model was finally developed from the results of the two phases of content analysis.

Reliability analysis

For the purpose of measuring the reliability of the two phases of content analysis, except the researcher, we invited two additional coders to engage in this part of data analysis. In the first phase of content analysis, the two coders were asked to place the 19 determinants into one of the five stages service system design and management. Their results are then compared with that of researcher. The degree of mutual agreement with the researcher¹ and the reliability² are computed to examine whether both indices are beyond 0.70.

¹ Degree of mutual agreement = $\frac{2 \times \text{number of items completely agreed by two parties}}{\text{number agreed by Party A} + \text{number agreed by Party B}}$

² Reliability = $\frac{2 \times \text{Degree of average mutual agreement}}{1 + [(2 - 1) \times \text{Degree of average mutual agreement}]}$

In the second phase of content analysis, the two coders are asked to perform the same task as researcher. The degree of mutual agreement with the researcher and the reliability are also computed to examine whether both indices are beyond 0.70.

DATA ANALYSIS

The first phase of content analysis

In the first phase of content analysis, the complete interview manuscripts were broken down into analyzing units. After finishing the interview decomposition, 55 units were totally decomposed from the three interview manuscripts. Then, we placed these units into the corresponding stage-of-service system design and management. In other words, these units were categorized into one of customer identification, customer needs survey, service system design, service delivery, and service recovery stages. Finally, we categorized 9, 9, 15, 13, and 9 units to each stage, respectively. Table V shows three examples of the unitizing process.

Then, we tried to match each unit with the corresponding determinants, which were summarized from the past literature. As well as the 15 determinants, we found four additional determinants from this phase of analysis. They are incentives, the uses of ICTs, job rotation, and service quality audit system. We then further examined the frequency of each of the 19 determinants. If the determinants are found in all of the three cases, we then choose it for COSES model development. The numbers of chosen determinants in each stage are 3, 3, 5, 5, 3, respectively (see Table VI).

Table V Examples of the unitizing process

No.	Unit analysis	Corresponding Determinants	Stage
1	First, we have to understand the citizen's needs in each group, and the employees' needs. We then investigate, analyze, plan, and execute. Execution includes a pilot run, to spread around completely, back to review, and then to reform (Case I).	Customer needs recognition	Customer needs survey
		Customer classification	Customer identification
2	We search and collect the media information and civil suggestions actively, and integrate them into our strategic planning of various innovative service programs (Case II).	Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning	Customer needs survey
3	Besides the public agency, employee visits to other excellent businesses are encouraged. These visits are followed by a conference to discuss learning from those excellent business units about customer-oriented service (Case III).	Benchmark learning	Customer identification

Table VI The summary of the first phase of content analysis

Public service management	Customer identification	Customer needs survey	Service system design	Service delivery	Service recovery
Determinants	A-1(3)	B-1(3)	C-1(3)	D-1(3)	E-1(3)
	A-2(3)	B-2(3)	C-2(3)	D-2(3)	E-2(3)
	A-3(3)	B-3(3)	C-3(3)	D-3(1)	E-3(3)
			C-4(3)	D-4(3)	
			C-5(3)	D-5(3)	
<p>Note 1: A: Customer identification; B: Customer needs survey; C: Service system design; D: Service delivery; E: Service recovery A-1: Customer classification; A-2: Benchmark learning; A-3: Customer definition B-1: Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning; B-2: Survey customer needs periodically; B-3: Customer needs recognition C-1: Service standard fit customer needs; C-2: Incentive system; C-3: Employee education; C-4: Service quality audit system(ISO system); C-5: Designing service items in accordance with customer needs D-1: Teamwork and empowerment D-2: Cross-functional cooperation D-3: Job rotation; D-4: Willingness to help customers deliver their requests; D-5: The use of ICTs E-1: Building customers' complaints procedures; E-2: Multiple channels for good communication; E-4: Customers' benefit first Note 2: Numbers in brackets represent the frequency Note 3: Bold type indicates the newly discovered determinants</p>					

Although job rotation was found only once in case I, we thought it important to the delivery of customer-orientated services. Research indicates that organizations benefit from job rotation (Robbins, 1992). Table VII presents the reliability of the first phase of content analysis. We found the two indices of the degree of mutual agreement with the research are 0.789 and 0.842, respectively. The reliability is 0.899. The three indices satisfy the criterion, beyond 0.70. It indicates the researcher's classification shown in Table VI is appropriate.

Table VII Reliability of the first phase of content analysis

Determinants	Researcher's classification	Coders' classification	
	X	Y	Z
Teamwork and empowerment	D	B	D
Customer's benefit first	E	E	B
Survey customer needs periodically	B	B	B
Customer definition	A	A	A
Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning	B	C	C
Building customers' complaints procedures	E	E	E
Customer needs recognition	B	B	B
Designing service items in accordance with customer needs	C	C	C
Customer classification	A	A	A
Multiple channels for good communication	E	E	E
Benchmark learning	A	A	A
Willingness to help customers deliver their requests	D	D	E
Service standard fit customer needs	C	C	C
Cross-functional cooperation	D	D	D
Employee education	C	D	C
Service quality audit system (ISO system)	C	C	C
Incentive system	C	D	C
The use of ICTs	D	D	D
Job rotation	D	D	D
The degree of mutual agreement with the researcher		0.789	0.842
Reliability	0.899		

The second phase of content analysis

In this second phase, the determinants in each stage are allocated to the appropriate level of the organizational culture dimension (see Table VIII).

Table VIII The second phase of content analysis

Public Service Mgt. Organ. Culture	Customer identification	Customer needs survey	Service system design	Service delivery	Service recovery
Basic assumptions	A-a-1	B-a-1	C-a-1	D-a-1	E-a-1
Organizational values	A-b-1	B-b-1	C-b-1	D-b-1	E-b-1
System and behavior	A-c-1	B-c-1	C-c-1 C-c-2 C-c-3	D-c-1 D-c-2 D-c-3	E-c-1
A: Customer identification; B: Customer needs survey; C: Service system design; D: Service delivery; E: Service recovery a: Basic assumptions; b: Organizational values; c: System and behavior A-a-1: Customer definition; A-b-1: Customer classification; A-c-1: Benchmark learning B-a-1: Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning; B-b-1: Customer needs recognition; B-c-1: Survey customer needs periodically C-a-1: Designing service items in accordance with customer needs; C-b-1: Service standard fit customers' needs; C-c-1: Service quality audit system (ISO system); C-c-2: Employee education; C-c-3: Incentive system D-a-1: Willingness to help customers deliver their requests; D-b-1: Cross-functional cooperation; D-c-1: The use of ICTs; D-c-2: Teamwork and empowerment; D-c-3: Job rotation E-a-1: Customers' benefit first; E-b-1: Multiple channels for good communication; E-c-1: Building customers' complaints procedures					

Table IX presents the reliability of the second phase of content analysis. All the three indices are beyond 0.70. It implies the researcher's classification shown in Table VIII is appropriate.

Table IX Reliability of the second phase of content analysis

Stages	Determinants	Researcher's classification	Coders' classification	
		X	Y	Z
A	Customer classification	A-b	A-b	A-b
	Benchmark learning	A-c	A-c	A-c
	Customer definition	A-a	A-a	A-a
B	Consideration of environmental change in strategic planning	B-a	C-a	C-a
	Survey customer needs periodically	B-c	B-c	B-c
	Customer needs recognition	B-b	B-b	B-b
C	Service standard fit customer needs	C-b	C-b	C-b
	Incentive system	C-c	D-b	C-c
	Employee education	C-c	D-b	C-c
	Service quality audit system (ISO system)	C-c	C-c	C-c
	Designing service items in accordance with customer needs	C-a	C-b	C-b
D	Teamwork and empowerment	D-c	B-a	D-a
	Cross-functional cooperation	D-b	D-b	D-b
	Job rotation	D-c	D-c	D-c
	Willingness to help customers deliver their requests	D-a	D-a	E-a
	The use of ICTs	D-c	D-c	D-c
E	Building customers' complaints procedures	E-c	E-c	E-c
	Multiple channels for good communication	E-b	E-b	E-b
	Customer's benefit first	E-a	E-a	B-a
The degree of mutual agreement with the researcher			0.737	0.789
Reliability		0.866		

DEVELOPMENT OF COSES MODEL

Based on the results of the two phases of content analyses, a comprehensive dual-dimensional customer-oriented service evaluation system (COSES) for the public sector is developed (see Figure 2).

First, service system design and management consists of customer identification, customer needs survey, service system design, service delivery, and service recovery. We found that they develop sequentially. In other words, it begins with recognizing their customers (including internal and external customers). Understanding of different customer's needs then develops, which leads to the design of related services in accordance with those needs. Finally, the organization becomes able to deliver public services, using teamwork, and dealing with customers' complaints sincerely.

Second, fostering organizational culture includes basic assumptions, organizational values, and system and behavior. Based on the analytic results of deep interviews, we found that the model has different levels of activities in relation to customer-oriented services. The first level of organizational culture was the basic assumption, which indicates that employees recognize the importance of public services. The second level is

organizational values, which indicates that all members have a common belief in the organizational values of public services. The third level is system and behavior, which indicates that the customer-oriented organizational system has been built, and that customer-oriented behaviors have become part of employees' lives.

Figure 2 presents the COSES construct and the required customer-oriented elements of each cell. Instead of the existing models that focus only on operational management (e.g., replacing physical facilities or smile training), COSES pays more attention to the issues of system design, management and fostering organizational culture.

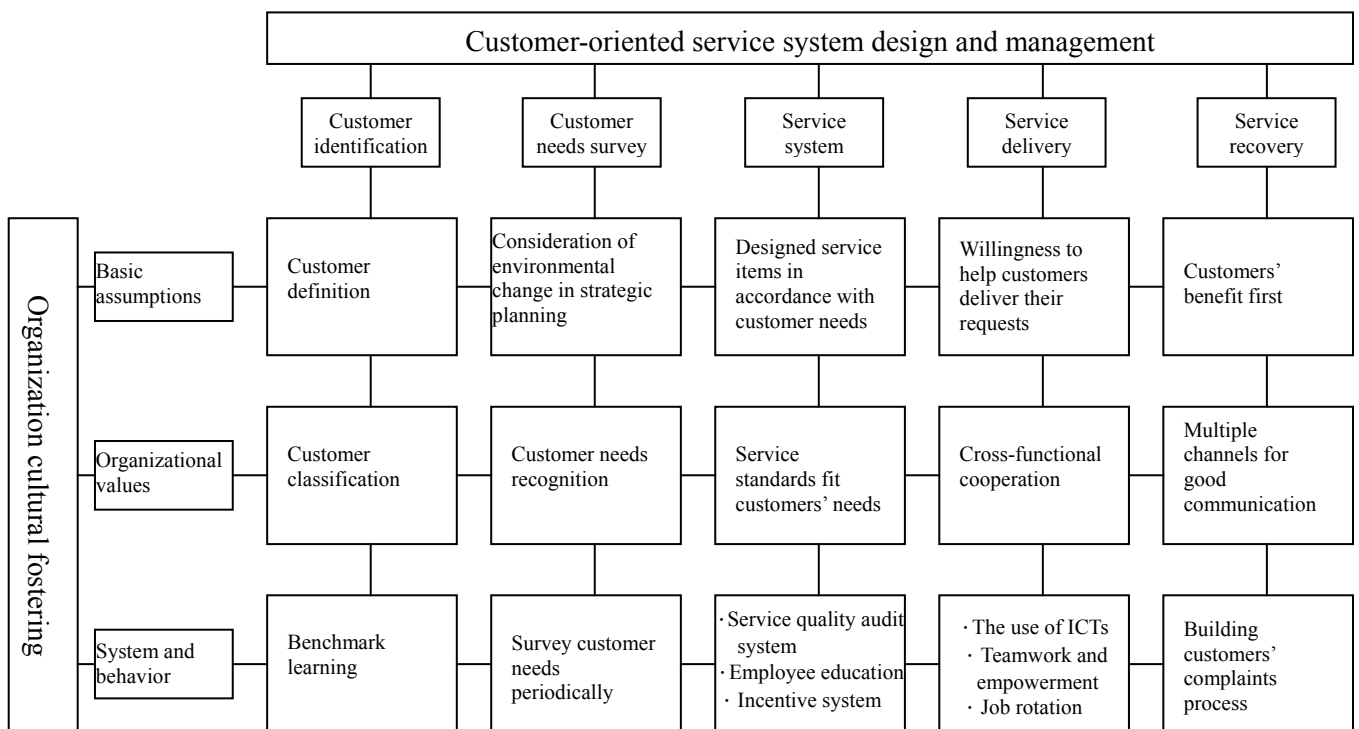


Figure 2 COSES model for public sector

CONCLUSIONS

The objective of this paper was to develop a generalized model for public sector organizations to evaluate what customer-oriented services have been implemented and how this was done. To this purpose, we used deep interviews and qualitative content analysis to study three public agencies that represent best practice in public services. The model we proposed in this paper, which is called COSES, consisted of two dimensions: (1) customer-oriented service system design and management, and (2) organizational culture

fostering. COSES, which focuses on the systematic analysis of customer-oriented services, is intended to remedy the weaknesses of existing models.

Although the contributions of this paper are significant, there remain some issues that are worth further study: (1) as only three public agencies are examined in this paper, it is still an exploratory study. A large-scale quantitative survey or a longitudinal study can be conducted to further verify the validity and reliability of COSES. (2) to examine the different patterns of how a public agency develops its customer-oriented service system is another interesting subject. (3) A comprehensive cause-effect study is also necessary to further explore the relationship between customer-oriented services and the other organizational management determinants, such as internal marketing, organizational commitment, job satisfaction, service quality, and customer satisfaction for the public sector.

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