Chapter 6

6. SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

This final chapter wraps up the study by giving an overview of the study, short discussion on the research results obtained and implication of the results. Limitations of the study and recommendations for future research are also presented in here.

6.2. OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted on a sample of 500 undergraduates who were enrolled in University of Malaya Session 2001/2002. Only 102 replied.

The purpose of the survey was to understand the students' perception of customer service provided by Student Affairs Department. The variables contain respondents' ratings on the overall customer service provided by Student Affairs Department. These 5 major variables are combined into a single table for purposes of comparison to show the highest and lowest ratings for different variables.

The small sample size in this study resulted to some departures from a normal distribution for some variables. Therefore nonparametric test is applied here to overcome the normality assumptions required by the parametric test. Kruskal-Wallis test was applied to determine whether there is any differences in populations location. If there is, then Spearman's rank coefficient is employed to gauge the strength of the relationship.

Apart from that, this study also used factor analysis to ascertain the key attributes that determine customer preferences for quality customer service. Lastly, cluster analysis is run to see if the factors obtained from factor analysis will help to classify our sample into different segment who care for different customer service attributes.

6.3. SUMMARY OF THE RESEARCH RESULT

From the univariate analysis, we can say that the students claimed to have closer relationship with HEP personnel than college personnel. One of the main reasons is that most students have contact with HEP at least once each semester either to settle matters regarding their scholarship, school fees or administrative matters. Interaction and communication between students and college personnel is another factor of concern. Communication via memo or letter pasted on the bulletin board might be viewed as lacked of personal touch hence could be cause of lower rating for the college personnel. Ratio of

college personnel to the students residing in respective college could be another area to be explored. Although relationship and cooperation of HEP personnel scored the highest rating among 5 attributes tested, result indicated that there is room for improvement for HEP department. A score of 21% on relationship aspect and 16% on cooperation aspect based on the top 2 boxes (i.e. "very satisfied" and "quite satisfied") is still low. HEP could look into strategies to continuously maintain and improve their relationship and cooperation with the students.

The survey found that technical knowledge of the HEP personnel and service extended by HEP personnel is perceived to be satisfactory by the students. However, students would like to experience better quality service in terms of friendliness, helpfulness towards one another and shown more interest in their daily work. The result indicates that students enjoy face-to-face interaction with HEP personnel. This is supported by past studies. Employee-customer interface is considered to be a key component of customers' perceptions of service quality (Hartline and Ferrell, 1996; Babin and Boles, 1998) in the delivery of service, faculty should understand their role as relationship managers (Crosby et al., 1990); and by continuously focusing on the importance of strong relationship marketing, management should increase the probability of student satisfaction with services (Swartz and Brown, 1989).

Spearman's rank coefficient indicated that there is sufficient evidence for us to say that higher interactions with College Head and Co-curriculum enthusiast may have a better perception on HEP services. We also can say that higher interactions with College Head and Course supervisor will indicate a better understanding on the instruction given by HEP personnel. There is a positive relationship between number of interaction with College Head and Course supervisor will help to increase a better scoring on the perception of HEP services. We can also say that people who are co-curriculum enthusiast have better tolerance level and more understanding towards other people. They have better ability to engage in teamwork and develop better social skills through participation in sports or society activities. Thus, because of their tolerance and understanding nature, they tend to rate customer service more optimistically.

Using multivariate analysis, we are able to extract 5 factors that determine customer service attributes in this study. These factors are "College Personnel", "HEP Personnel", "Staff Characteristics", "Interaction with Student Affairs Personnel" and "Co-Curriculum Participation". These 5 factors are viewed to be a good summary of the service attributes in this study as they explained 79.8% of the variance. The 5 factors retained from factor analysis were used to group the observation to identify segment markets with similar behaviour. Unfortunately, the result of the cluster analysis was

disregard for further analysis as there are too many missing variables and sample was too small. As a result, cluster 1 has only 5 cases and that is too small for us to meaningfully segment the market.

6.4. IMPLICATION OF THE STUDY

The overall level of satisfaction services perceived by undergraduates of University of Malaya was rated satisfactory. Further investigation revealed that the satisfaction rating differ by different units in Students Affair Department. The unit that needed improvement the most was the college personnel and College Head. University management could brainstorm and look into this area to improve the relationship and co-operation of the college management staff and personnel with the students. The students were not interested in the university organizational hierarchies and as the result indicated, they expect all the university staff to work together. Clearly co-ordination and communication between university staff should be encouraged among the university staff. One sure way to do so is to maintain good working relationship inter and intra department. However, we need to be aware of barriers that could affect communication such as lack of trust, problems of interdependence among persons and problems of distribution of rewards unfairly. If one of these problems should arise, university management should be rectified as soon as possible.

It is also important for the university management to note all the attributes derived from factor analysis that were deemed to be important to the undergraduates. These findings would be discussed and examined by the top management and a special task force could be established to tackle major problems areas or goals. Efforts of building and solidify good working relationship and customer service should be put in place to improve the existing service as shown from the study. Continuous similar study should be carried out to compare results with the initial study and steps could be identified to ensure the targets are met. Top management could also look into identifying major attributes to measure level of customer service and incorporate them as part of the corporate values to be uphold by the staff. These attributes could be drawn as a key performance index of each individual staff of the department and be benchmarked from time to time. These will ensure that excellent customer service continuously maintained.

The analysis also found that about 2/3 of the students feel that there is lack of communication with the administrative staff of HEP. This may affect their overall rating on their perception of customer service provided by Student Affair Department. The top management could look into giving training in interpersonal skills to the HEP personnel so that they could learn the basic skills on how to communicate more effectively with students.

Sharing of the research result with the staff could also help the staff to understand student expectation of customer service attribute. Past research has shown that there are significant differences in the factors determining perceived quality among internal and external customers. One research suggested that the differences arise from the degree of dependence and frequency/length of contact between the service and customer and that this might be more general phenomenon related not only to the internal/external divide but to other customer characteristics in both public and private sectors (Galloway, 1998).

6.5. LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

The sample size for the survey was too small. Data was not normally distributed so we had to use nonparametric test. The disadvantage of these tests is that they are less likely to find a true difference when it exists than the tests based on normal assumption. Small size data also limit the analysis as the sample size is too small for detailed analysis such as cross tabulation to look at different variables like gender, ethnic group and other demographic variables of interest with level of satisfaction service perceived by students.

Past studies have shown that gender is found to be significantly different in their perception of customer service. However, in our study, gender did not show any evidence for us to conclude that there is significant

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difference in their perception of customer service. This is due to the sample size of female students is more by 5 times of the male students. The sample size of the male students is too small. There is no comparison done on first year and final year students due to insufficient sample to perform the required analysis. Past studies have shown that is significant different among these two categories of students as final year students will have more interaction with support staff.

The quality of service measurement did not include the physical attribute. Previous research has shown that physical evidence in which the service is delivered does influence customer perception of service quality. Parasuraman's 5 dimensions by which customers evaluate service quality also include tangibles such as physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications material.

However, despite the shortcoming, the research revealed several service attributes that influence perceived level of customer service and is consistent with previous research. It also open up some areas to explore and the result of this study will act as useful starting point for such research.

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6.6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The survey in this paper is quite limited. About 99% the respondents interviewed unfortunately, were undergraduates staying in the residential halls. The attitudes reflected by this group are not necessarily those of the entire undergraduates of University of Malaya. An additional study that takes into account of other Student Affairs Department in other local universities could be carried out to benchmark us with the other universities. In addition, variables like physical appearance of the HEP/college personnel as well as the HEP/college facilities could be incorporate in the subsequent study. HEP/college personnel views on what are students' expectations should be studied as well to synchronize the expectations of students with the university personnel to eliminate gaps and needs.

There are also some interesting variables to be explored further this study. The differences between the perception of older students and younger students may be one area to explore further. Another area would be the differences perception between gender and among different age groups. The research may also look into difference of perception between different level of education, for example between undergraduates, Master and PhD Students. Other than that, we can also look into areas like residual effects of sservice experience on perceptions of future service events.

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We recognized that this survey is only a beginning and further exploration on this subject could be developed on a later stage. Therefore, further studies on the attitudes regarding the undergraduates' satisfaction on HEP Student Affairs Department services are recommended. The university should create a research unit to study the quality of the service level provided by all the university personnel and to set a standard norm for all the personnel to adhere to ensure standard service are met.