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THE HONG KONG POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Department of Industrial and Systems Engineering

**A Narrative Approach to the Study of Service Quality
Performance: A Case Study in a Public Utility Company
in Hong Kong**

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**A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the Degree of Master of Philosophy**

July 2008

CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINALITY

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Abstract

The service industry now contributes to the largest percentage of the Gross National Products of most developed economies. The success of service sectors depends on the quality of the delivery process of their services and products. The study of service quality enhancement has received much attention. Most researches on service quality put more focus on the customer perspectives as how to meet or exceed their needs and expectations. Unlike the manufacturing of physical goods where the quality can be built in the production by adopting of various quality technologies and systems, the delivery of good quality service is much more human-centric and does not only rely on the skills and training of the employees but also on various hidden cultural, organizational, behavioural factors of the service organizations. How these human-centric data can be collected and analyzed to give a better understanding of the organizational factors involved in enhancing service quality forms the main theme of this study.

A study has been conducted in a public utility company in Hong Kong to identify the key elements affecting the quality of service performance among the front-line employees and to explore the relationships among the key elements affecting the quality of service performance. This project employs a mixed method approach which includes both narrative and pre-hypothesis research. A comparison between the findings from both sets of qualitative and quantitative data with the dimensions derived from the published models of service quality is also made so as to provide further insights on service quality improvements.

Organizations are complex systems and the interpretations of the complexity of its environment are best recorded by narratives. Anecdotes and stories were collected through group interviews with the front-line staff (the service technicians) on their daily encounters with their clients. These anecdotes were transcribed and codified to come up with various concepts which were then grouped into key elements of service quality which may affect the performance of the employees. The relevance of these key elements from the perspectives of the front-line staff (as opposed to those from the researcher) uncovered from the narratives was then tested in a pre-hypothesis. The stories collected were rated (indexed) in a scale by the service technicians against each of the key elements according to various indicators. The narrative patterns of the told stories were analyzed by a sense-making tool developed by Snowden based on the Cynefin Model of narratives as a sense making response to social complexity. The indexing of the key elements from the perspectives of the participants provides visualized images revealing the complex patterns, relevance and anomalies that would not be shown from conventional questionnaire survey analysis. This research study illustrates that narratives are useful to elicit the tacit knowledge of people and contexts embedded in a social phenomenon and can be used to form the base of a full-scale questionnaire survey study.

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Chapter One Introduction

1.1 Motivation for the Study

Service now makes an increasingly important contribution to the economy of developed countries. The service sectors in the industrialized economies have also recorded a higher percentage of GDP during the last twenty years; i.e. income from service industries accounts for 70% of the GDP in developed countries and service industries have taken over 75% of the economy in USA (IBM Research, 2005). This percentage is increasing rapidly. In Hong Kong, with the remarkable structural transformation that has taken place over the past decade, the services sector has gained considerable prominence. From the data published by the Hong Kong SAR Government (Hong Kong: The Facts, 2008), in 2006, the services sector constituted a share of 91.2 per cent of Hong Kong's GDP. Key service sub-sectors in Hong Kong include the wholesale, retail, import and export trades, restaurants and hotels (accounted for 27.9% of GDP in 2006), followed by financing, insurance, real estate and business services (25.0%), community, social and personal services (18.0%), and transport, storage and communications (9.6%). The services sector accounted for a share of 86.6 per cent of total employment in 2007.

The importance of service is not confined to the traditional service sectors, but penetrates into the primary and secondary industries as well. For example, the boundary between manufacturing and service is diminishing (Quinn, 1992). Products today have higher service components than those in previous decades. Most of the profit arises not only from the sales of the physical

goods and products, but from the service provided to the customers in the value chain. For example, IBM treats its business as a service business; although it still manufactures computers. In the past, most research on service quality focused mainly on the manufacturing sector. The research was more concerned with the development of processes (such as 6 Sigma) and systems (such as Total Quality Management) to achieve or exceed customer satisfaction. However, the factors that make a good physical product are very different from those which make a good service, and this area has become an important research topic for enterprises and organizations.

Research on improving service quality in the past put much effort into studying the difference between the expectations and the perceptions of customers (Parasuraman, et. al. 1985; Cronin and Taylor, 1992). These researchers developed some service quality models, such as The Gap Analysis Model (Parasuraman, et. al., 1985, 1988) and the Perceived Service Quality Model (Gronroos 1990). These kinds of studies on service quality are based on customer perspectives. The nature of “service”, however, is very different from the attributes of physical products which are designed primarily to satisfy some functional needs of the customers. As distinct from the provision of physical goods and products, the quality of the service is embedded in the human interactions between the employees delivering the service and the customers receiving it, and is an important component in the process of the transactions. Some characteristics of service include the following:-

- It is intangible;
- It is embedded in the transactions;
- The ownership of the service cannot be transferred;
- The know-how resides in the head of the employees

1.2 Research Objectives

As mentioned above, most studies focus on studying the customer's expectations, the customer's perceptions and the customer's experience with the aim of helping the marketing researchers or the service organization to understand what the customers are looking for and what they expect from the service. The ultimate focus of these types of studies is from the customer's perspective. The service organizations rely on assessing, measuring and evaluating the external service quality in order to modify its service specifications and upgrade the services it promises its customers.

In view of that, numerous service quality models and gap analysis models have been established to measure the various kinds of discrepancies, such as discrepancies between customers' expectation and perceptions, between management perceptions and customers' expectations, and between employees' perceptions and customers' expectations. Parasuraman et al. (1985) points out that good service quality is meeting or exceeding what the customers expect from the service. On the basis of this concept, many research studies on service quality have focused primarily on how to meet or exceed the external customers' expectations. They regard service quality as a measure of how the delivered service level matches customers' expectations; whereas little effort has been put into studying the interpretations and the perceptions of the employees, who are the service deliverers in service encounters. Front-line employees are the people who contact customers and interpret their feelings directly and they are the ones who have to deliver direct services to the customers on behalf of the service organizations.

In the study of service excellence, Heskett et al. (1997) points out that employee satisfaction is as important as customer satisfaction. Luk and Layton (2002) suggest applying the concept of measuring the difference between expectations and perceptions to the employees and management of a service firm. They identify two new gaps which have been added to the 5-gap model proposed by Parasuraman et al (1985). These new gaps are: gap 7 - the differences in the understanding of customer expectations by a manager and by front-line employees and gap 6 – the difference in customer expectations and employees' perception of such expectations. This has given us an insight into the importance of the employee’s perspectives. A diagram below showing the gap 7 reflects the differences in the understanding of customer expectations by a manager and by front-line employees.

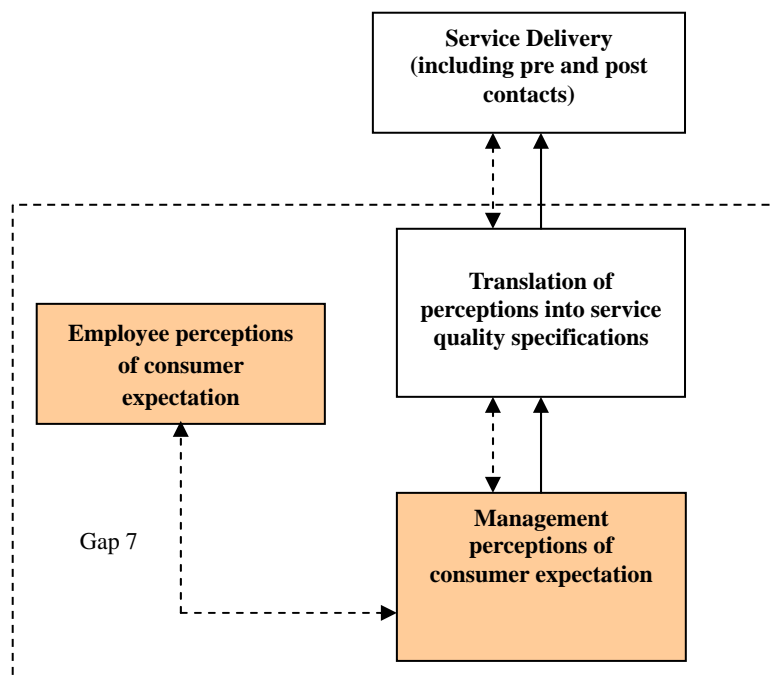


Figure 1.1 Extracted part from *The Gap Analysis Model*

Sometimes, when an organization wants to please their customers, the management may deploy policies or strategies which make the front-line employees feel uncomfortable, as they are not ready to adopt the changes. This may induce confrontations and conflicts with the front-line employees. Gaster (1995) comments that service provision is complex and it is not simply a matter of meeting expressed needs, but of finding out unexpressed needs, setting priorities, allocating resources and publicly justifying and accounting for what has been done. This implies that managers cannot just rely on measuring the external service quality through expressing the needs of the customers. Meanwhile, they have to get an understanding of what their employees perceive and how they interpret the needs, expectations and perceptions of the customers. This study aims to fill in this research gap by studying the perceptions, assumptions and values of the front-line employees of a local public utility company in the delivery of their service. A narrative approach is proposed to study the front-line employees who are the ones having direct interactions with the customers. The research objectives of this study are thus:-

- (i) To identify the key elements affecting the service quality performance from the perspectives of the employees;
- (ii) To explore the relationships among the key elements affecting the service quality performance based on pre-hypothesis research
- (iii) To compare the findings from the mixed methods approach to service quality performance with the dimensions derived from the published models of service quality.

1.3 Organization of Thesis

Following on from the motivation for and objectives of this study in Chapter One, a literature review on the service quality is presented in Chapter Two. The concepts of service quality from different researchers are compared. This includes the concept of service, the definition of service encounters and the development of service quality constructs. The dominant models of service quality, focusing on customer's perspectives, and the approaches to assessing service quality are addressed. The last part of this chapter presents the different approaches (rationalistic, interpretative) adopted by researchers in the collection of non-experimental data in service quality studies.

Chapter Three contains a discussion about the methodological issues which are used in this thesis. The differences in qualitative and quantitative research is firstly introduced, then an explanation of the various research paradigms, methods of narrative inquiry and the meaning of pre-hypothesis research is given. This then leads to the proposed mixed research framework based on a combination of qualitative (narrative inquiry) and quasi-quantitative methods (narrative pattern analysis).

Chapter Four provides details about the implementation of the research process in a public utility company and the methods adopted for data collection of narratives and narrative analysis. The ways of transcribing the narratives into meaningful contexts and the identification of the key elements affecting the service quality are described in detail. An introduction to a sense-making application tool for detecting narrative patterns in the stories told is incorporated.

Chapter Five presents the findings from the transcriptions of narratives, and the analysis carried out by the sense-making application tool. Examples of how to transform the qualitative data from the stories told are presented in a quantitative pattern. The discoveries from the narrative pattern of the overall perceptions of the front-line employees as well the relationships among the key elements affecting the service quality performance are illustrated.

Chapter Six provides a discussion of the implications of the findings for improvement to the quality of the service provided. The advantages of adopting a mixed methods approach to this research and the advantages of the use of narratives in this research study are discussed. The last chapter, Chapter Seven, then summarizes the contributions of this research study to the study of service quality and suggestions on future work that can be built upon the current study are given.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.1 Conceptualizations of Service Quality

Parasuraman et al. (1985) and Carmen (1990) have conducted research into the quality of service. They have studied the perceptions and experiences of customers, how to evaluate the customer's satisfaction and what constitutes good service. Some of them (Czepiel, J. A. 1990, Svensson, G., 2001) focus more on studying how the service providers and the service receivers interact with each other and interpret their understandings of the meaning of service quality, based on interaction. In the following sections, service quality is defined and service encounters are examined. This is followed by a comparison of various service quality models.

2.1.1 Definition of Service and Service Encounter

2.1.1.1 The Concept of "Service"

How "Service" is defined is important as this will determine how service performance should be evaluated. The concept of "Service" has been studied by different groups of service quality researchers during the past twenty years. Following is a Table listing some definitions quoted from various sources:-

Table 1.1 Definition quoted from service quality researchers

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| Gronroos, 1990, p. 27 | "A service is an activity or series of activities of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, take place in interaction between the customer and service employees and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems" |
| Zeithaml & Bitner (1996) | Service is a series of transactions involving deeds, processes and performances |
| Ramaswamy (1996) | Service is defined as a business transaction that takes place between service provider and service receiver in order to produce an outcome that satisfies the customer. |

In addition, Parasuraman et al. (1985) identify service as intangible and heterogeneous. They say that production of service and consumption of service are inseparable. This aims at differentiating services from goods in order to obtain a rather good understanding of service quality. Another group of researchers, such as Gronroos (1990) and Ramaswamy (1996), consider service from the perspective of service customers – they focus on the utility and total value that the service provides for the consumers. They point out that service combines tangible and intangible aspects to satisfy customers during the business transactions.

According to the above definition of “service”, Parasuraman et al. (1985) point out firstly that service quality is more difficult for the consumer to evaluate than goods’ quality; secondly the perceptions of service quality depends on the comparison of consumer’s expectations with the actual service performance; and thirdly quality evaluations are not only made from the outcome of a service, it also considers the evaluations of the process of service delivery. They further explain that service quality is the difference between customers’ expectations of service and perceived service; service quality depends on the identification of the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers’ service perceptions and expectations. This has become a common definition is the traditional notion that views quality as the customer's perception of service excellence. That is to say, quality is defined by the customer's impression of the service provided. The assumption behind this definition is that customers form the perception of service quality according to the kind of service performance they experienced in the past. Many researchers define service quality as a comparison of consumer expectations with actual performance (Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman et al., 1985).

2.1.1.2 Definition of Service Encounters

When customers are going to consume a kind of service, they will have interactions with the service providers and based on their experience of those interactions they will form their perception of service quality. The interactive process involving both the service provider (frontline personnel) and service receiver (customer) during the service delivery can be classified as a service encounter.

Lockwood (1994) claim that the service encounter not only includes the interactions between the system of delivering service and the service receivers, but also includes some other elements, such as the personalities of service employees, the service environments, intangible elements, which should not be neglected. Solomon et al. (1985) concludes that service encounters are dyadic, human interactions and role performances. Some form of human interaction between the two major parties, service providers and the service receivers, takes place during the service delivery. In order to understand the service delivery, it is necessary to observe or investigate both parties involved in the service encounter rather than only focus on one side as the fusion of two parties influences the overall service outcome is much greater than either party acting alone. They also point out that each of the transactions is purposive and task-oriented, whose outcome is dependent upon the coordinated actions of the dyadic interactions of both participants; one cannot predict the quality of outcomes with knowledge of only one participant's behaviour. These kinds of coordinated actions establish the service experiences of those in the role of a service provider or a service receiver.

Service encounters have been regarded as the core activities during the service delivery. Identifying the mutual satisfying factors in service encounters will be helpful in the design of services, in the setting of service level standards, in the design of service environments, in the selection, training and motivation of service providers and in guiding customer behaviour. Service marketing researchers have realized the importance of service quality in developing business performance. They also realize the importance of staff having a good relationship with customers, as well as the need for management to guide employees to perform in accordance with the expectations of the management (Cronin & Taylor, 1992).

2.1.2 Development of Service Quality Construct

Parasuraman et al. (1988) and Bitner (1990) describe service quality as a form of attitude related but not equivalent to satisfaction that results from the comparison of expectations with performance. These researchers suggest that perceived service quality and satisfaction are distinct constructs; in which, service quality is a form of attitude with a long-run overall evaluation, whereas satisfaction is a transaction-specific measure. They further conclude that the difference lies in the way of measuring these two items. They state that in measuring service quality the level of comparison is what a consumer should expect, whereas in measuring satisfaction the appropriate comparison is what a consumer *would* expect. Distinguishing these two objectives would help service providers to know whether their objective should be to have consumers who are “satisfied” with their performance, or to deliver the maximum level of “perceived service quality”.

From the development of the conceptualization of service quality, the most common definition is the traditional notion that views quality as the customer's perception of service excellence. Parasuraman et al. (1985) defines quality by the customer's impression of the service provided during service encounters. The assumption behind this definition is that customers form their perception of service quality by comparing the service performance they experience now, with the service performance they received in the past. Three important constructs have been identified from forming the concept of service quality; they are Expectations, Perceived Performance (Perceptions) and Disconfirmation. Expectations are beliefs about the level of service that will be delivered by a service provider and they are assumed to provide standards of reference against which the delivered service is compared (Zeithaml et al., 1993). Perceived Performance represents consumers' subjective views of the level of service they receive in service encounters. It has been found to be positively related to service evaluations. Disconfirmation represents the relationship between expectations and perceived performance and it involves a comparison of expectation with performance (Parasuraman et al. 1985). If perceived performance exceeds expectations, disconfirmation is said to be positive. If perceived performance falls short of expectations, disconfirmation is said to be negative.

2.2 Dominant Models of Service Quality

Throughout the past two decades, there has been a distinct devotion to service quality research, on measuring, analyzing and closing the identified gaps between customers' expectations, management's perceptions and the service providers' perceptions.

Parasuraman et al. (1985) viewed quality as "the degree and direction of discrepancy between customers' service perception and expectations". Additionally, as the disconfirmation paradigm states, service quality is a comparison between consumers' expectations and their perceptions of the service they actually receive. Based on this disconfirmation paradigm and in line with this way of thinking, several service quality models have been developed. These include the Perceived Service Quality Model (Gronroos, 1984), the Gap Analysis Model (Parasuraman et al., 1985), the Dynamic Process Model (Boulding et al., 1993). All of these models focused on evaluating the quality of service from the customer's expectations and perceptions.

2.2.1 Perceived Service Quality (PSQ)

Schembri and Sandberg (2002) mentions that Perceived Service Quality (PSQ) developed by Gronroos (1984) focuses on modeling the total perceived service quality, as shown in Figure 2.1 below.

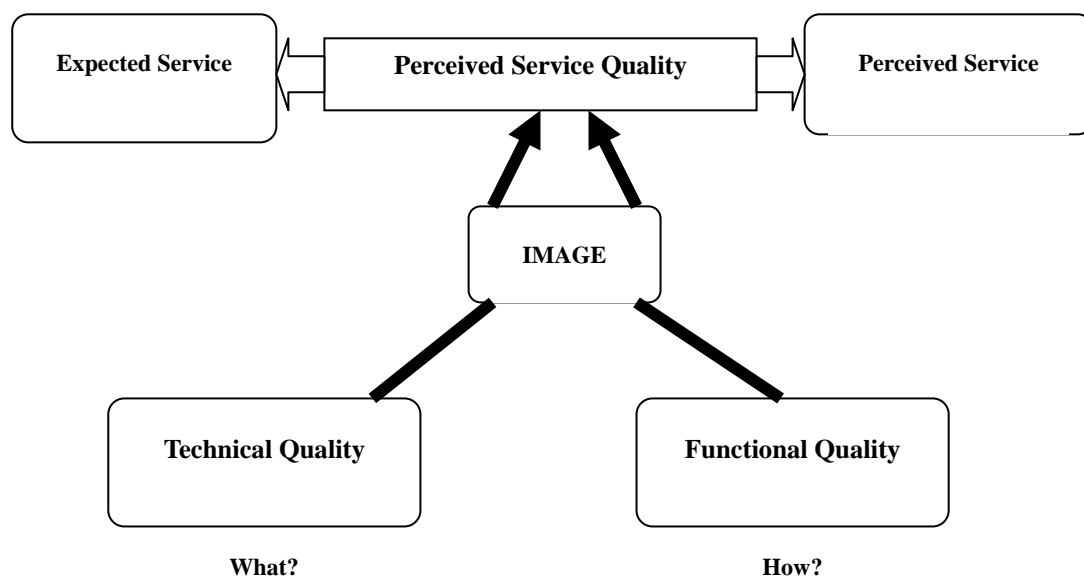


Figure 2.1 The Perceived Service Quality Model (Gronroos, 1984)

Gronroos (1984) emphasizes the importance of understanding what consumers are really looking for and what they value. This model uses two dimensions to construct the service delivery, the Technical Quality and the Functional Quality. Technical Quality refers to the outcome of the service performance or what the consumer receives in the service encounter; Functional Quality refers to the subjective perception of how the service is delivered. It defines customer's perceptions of the interactions that take place during the service encounter. This model is the reflection of the consumer's perception of the interactions between consumers and service providers.

In his model, these two dimensions of service performance are compared to the customer's expectations. McDougall and Levesque (1994) introduce the third dimension - physical environment to Gronroos's (1984) model and propose the Three Factor Model of Service Quality. It consists of service outcome, service process and physical environment. Rust and Oliver (1994) also consider the service environment is one of the key components for constructing the structure of service quality. A Three-Component Model is introduced, as shown in Figure 2.2 on the following page, which is based on the same line of thinking as Gronroos's Perceived Service Model for contributing one more dimension for evaluating the service quality.

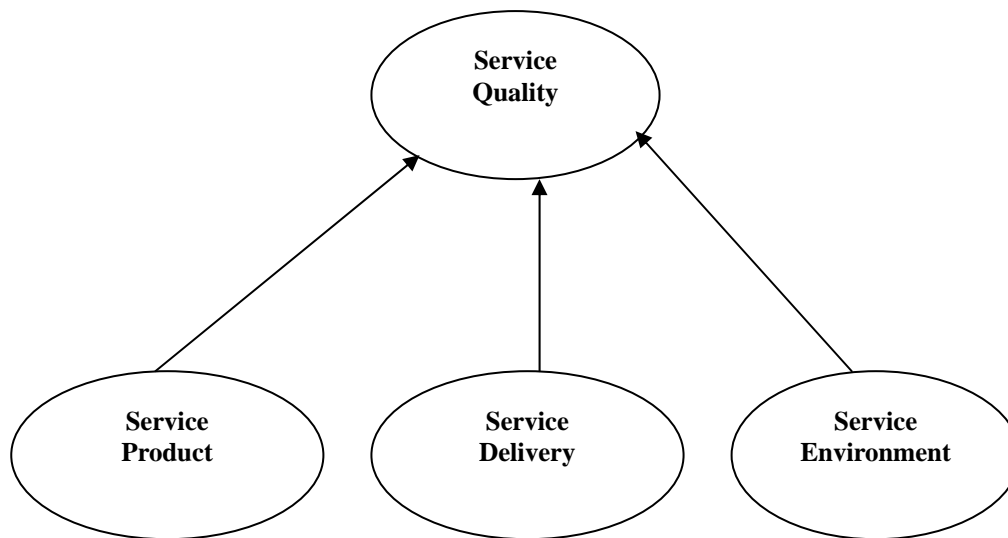


Figure 2.2 The Three-Component Model (Rust and Oliver, 1994)

2.2.2 Gap Analysis Model

Although researchers have studied the concept of service for over two decades, there is no consensus about the conceptualization of service quality (Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Rust & Oliver, 1994). Different researchers focused on different aspects of service quality. The most common definition is the traditional notion that views quality as the customer's perception of service excellence. That is to say, quality is defined by the customer's impression of the service provided (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The assumption behind this definition is that customers form their perception of service quality according to the service performance they experienced during their past encounters with service performance. It is therefore the customer's perception that categorizes service quality. Additionally, as the disconfirmation paradigm states, service quality is a comparison between consumers' expectations and their perceptions of the service they actually receive. Based on this traditional definition of service

quality, Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed the "Gap Analysis Model" of perceived service quality.

There are five gaps in the model: Gap 1 - the gap between management perceptions of consumer's expectations and expected service, Gap 2 - the gap between management perceptions of consumer's expectations and the translation of perceptions into service quality specifications, Gap 3 - the gap between translation of perceptions of service quality specification and service delivery, Gap 4 - the gap between service delivery and external communications to consumers, and Gap 5 - the gap between the customer's expected level of service and the actual service performance, i.e. Perceived Service. Figure 2.3 shows the construct of the Gap Analysis Model. A modified Gap Analysis Model is introduced by Luk and Layton (2002) by adding two new gaps to the original Gap Analysis Model, for evaluating and measuring the gap reflecting the differences in the understanding of customer's expectations, through studying the employee's and management's perceptions. These new gaps reflect: Gap 6 - between customer expectations and employees' perception of such expectations, Gap 7 - the differences in the understanding of customer expectations by the manager and front-line employees. They conclude that the gap between customer expectations and managers' perception of such expectations is much larger than the gap between customer expectations and service providers' understanding of such expectations.

In order to operate this model as an assessing instrument, Parasuraman et al. (1985) further develops a measuring instrument named SERVQUAL for assessing service quality that empirically relies on the difference in scores between expectations and

perceived performance. The SERVQUAL instrument provides a comprehensive conceptualization of service quality to measure perceived service quality for the first time in service quality research studies. It has gradually become very popular among service quality and marketing researchers.

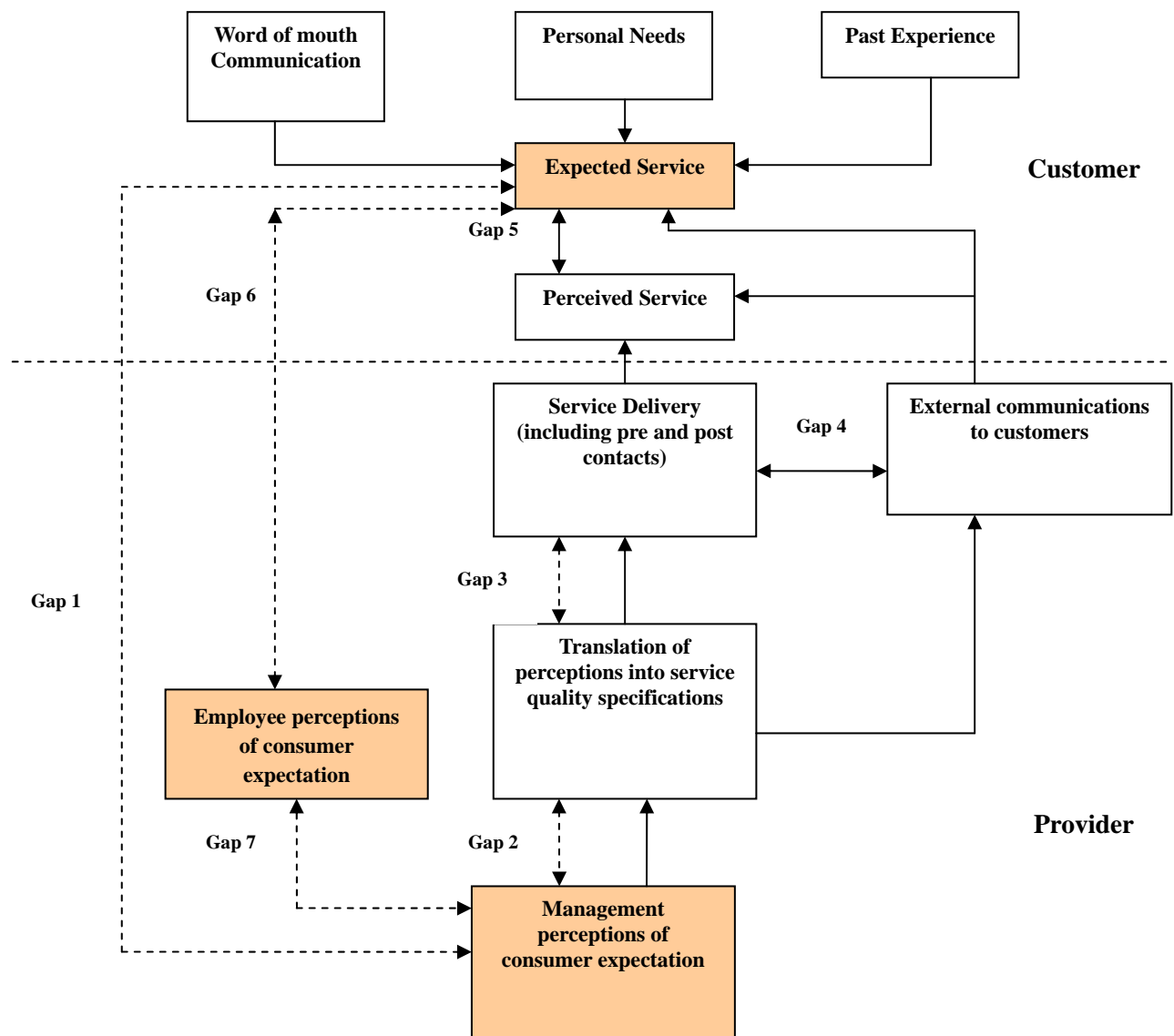


Figure 2.3 The Gap Analysis Model (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Luk and Layton, 2002)

This instrument consists of 22 items divided along the 10 second-order dimensions previously listed, with a seven-point answer scale accompanying each statement to test the strength of the relationships. These 22 items were used to represent five dimensions: Reliability, Responsiveness, Tangibles, Assurance, and Empathy. Tangible refers to the appearance of the physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication material. Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately. Responsiveness reflects the willingness to help a customer and provide prompt service. Assurance refers to competence, courtesy and credibility of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence. Empathy refers to caring, individualized attention the firm provides to its customers.

SERVQUAL's shortcomings result from the weakness of the traditional definition that it applies. First, customers' needs are not always easy to identify. If their needs are not correctly identified, conformance to a specification is not appropriate. Schneider and Bowen (1995) claims that "customers bring a complex and multidimensional set of expectations to the service encounter. Customers come with expectations for more than a smile and handshake. Second, the traditional definition fails to provide a way to measure customers' expectations which can determine the level of service quality. Customer's expectations may fluctuate greatly over time (Reeves & Bednar, 1994). Oliver (1997) also points out the traditional model's shortcomings by distinguishing quality from satisfaction. First, while quality perceptions could come from external mediation instead of experience of service, satisfaction has to be experienced by consumers in person. Second, quality judgment standards are based on ideals or perceptions of excellence, while satisfaction judgments include predictive expectations, needs, product category norms, and even expectations of service quality.

Third, service quality is influenced by very few variables such as external cues like price, reputation, and various communication sources, while satisfaction is more vulnerable to cognitive and affective processes such as equity, attribution, and emotion. Fourth, quality is primarily long-term while satisfaction is primarily short-term.

Brown et al (1993) argue that using the different scores may cause a number of problems in such areas as reliability, discriminate validity, spurious correlations, and variance restriction. Cronin and Taylor (1992) claim that the disconfirmation paradigm that SERVQUAL applies is inappropriate for measuring perceived service quality. They point out that the disconfirmation paradigm measures customer satisfaction instead of service quality. Asubonteng et al. (1996) points out that this model neglects contextual, dimensional and empirical correctness considerations. Carman (1990) comments that the SERVQUAL needs to be customized by adding items or changing the wording of items in some situations, though it was originally designed to be a generic instrument for measuring service quality in any sector.

2.2.3 Dynamic Process Model

The Dynamic Process Model (Boulding et al., 1993) suggests that perceptions are a function of what the consumer expects will occur, and what should occur, during the service encounter. It emphasizes that service quality is performance-based and takes perceptions as the key consideration, rather than expectations. By differentiating these two aspects, it will develop a dynamic process model for measuring the service quality and put more emphasis on allowing changes in service quality assessment

from one service encounter to another.

Boulding et al. (1993) also assume service quality is perceived with respect to Parasuraman et al.'s (1988) five dimensions. The Perceived Service Quality (PSQ) and Gap Analysis Model are rather static models. They do not include the complex dimension of the service quality concept as they are deliberately generic and present a simplified picture of a complex phenomenon. The dynamic process model is also considered to be a static representation of service quality because it depicts a series of distinct encounters where changing perceptions are accounted for, but not the inherent dynamism that is involved in the service quality experience (Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). They suggest research studies on service quality have achieved an initial understanding of service quality with benefits for both research and industry, but a continuous effort to capture the dynamic experience of service quality is essential.

One of the recently developed service quality models – the Hierarchical and Multidimensional Model, representing the complexity of the construct of service quality perception, is introduced (Brady and Cronin, 2001). This model suggests that service quality is a multi-level and multi-dimensional construct which is totally different from the construct of service quality perceived by the traditional models. This model tries to fill-in the shortcomings resulting from the weakness of the traditional definition of service quality.

The Hierarchical and Multi-dimensional Model consists of three dimensions: 1) interaction quality, 2) outcome quality, and 3) quality of the physical environment.

This hierarchical and multidimensional approach is believed to better explain the complexity of human perceptions than the conceptualizations currently offered in the literature (Dabholkar et al. 1995). This model offers a new concept, one that introduces a multidimensional and hierarchical construct of service quality and the above mentioned three primary dimensions reflect the influence of the service environment on quality perceptions, which has not been fully studied in the previously developed models of service quality.

2.3 Approaches to studying Service Quality

There are different approaches to the study of service quality, namely, rationalistic approaches and interpretive approaches. The characteristics of these two approaches will now be discussed.

2.3.1 Rationalistic Approach

With the traditional rationalistic approach, i.e. inherently positivistic, service quality is pre-defined as a super ordinate attitudinal construct made up of a number of dimensions, each comprising of a number of attributes. The basic assumption is that the reality and the subject are independent entities. The assumption implies that research objects are divided into two main separate entities: a subject in itself and a world in itself (Sandberg and Targama, 2007). Pre-definition of a concept is a necessary part of a rationalistic research approach – a hypothesis is formulated, tested and proven or not (Sandberg, 2000; Schembri and Sandberg, 2002). According to this traditional approach, service quality is something that can be objectively constructed and considered to be separate from its research subjects, let them be employees or consumers. In separating the subject and object, researchers are

effectively taking an objective view of the consumer's perspective through a dualistic ontological position.

Many service quality models, especially the Gap Analysis Model by Parasuraman et al. (1985), identify dimensions with attributes for evaluating the performances which are experienced by customers, and these models generally view service quality as the degree of discrepancy between customers' service perceptions and their expectations. Service quality consists of an identifiable list of service attributes. Understanding service quality in this way has given service providers and managers a practical and useful focus. However, there are several shortcomings of the rationalistic approach.

Cronin and Taylor (1992) argue from the disconfirmation paradigm that SERVQUAL is inappropriate for measuring perceived service quality. They point out that the disconfirmation paradigm measures customer satisfaction instead of service quality. The traditional definitions fail to provide a way to measure those customers' expectations which determine the level of service quality. Customer's expectations may fluctuate greatly over time. In view of the shortcomings of the traditional rationalistic approach, another group of service marketing researchers suggest that an interpretive approach be adopted in order to understand how people make sense of their consumption experience in relation to their life circumstances.

2.3.2 Interpretive Approach

Schembri and Sandberg (2002) point out that focusing on service attributes external to the consumer's perspective illustrates the inherent third-person perspective. They

maintain that the service quality models are unable to comprehend the service quality concept in terms of a list of service aspects, or attributes. In separating subject and object, researchers are taking an objective view of the consumer's perspective through a dualistic ontological position. This is not a reflection of the consumer's perspective, but rather a third-person perspective of the consumer's view – the researcher's perspective.

Given the limitations of a traditional rationalistic approach, contemporary service quality research is argued not be able to adequately capture consumer evaluations of service quality. Schembri and Sandberg (2002) comment that services is a living process that cannot be disassembled for analytical purposes and suggest an alternative research approach could be considered for studying service quality. They present an idea from Arnold and Fischer (1984); the idea is that the general phenomenon of interest without a distinct delimitation of object boundaries should be studied in order to gain a genuine understanding of the consumer's perspective. This indicates that an interpretive approach for studying the customer's experience of service quality may be fruitful.

Thompson (1997) and Edvardsson and Mattsson (1993) adopt an interpretive approach to the study of service quality in which a closer appreciation of the consumer's experience of service quality is potentially enabled, and a useful basis for understanding the contextual and dynamic nature of service quality is brought one step closer. Sandberg (2000) suggests that an interpretive research approach is based on phenomenological principles where subject and object are considered as being related to each other and experience is taken as the point of departure.

Schembri and Sandberg (2002) say that the main feature of the interpretive approach is its phenomenological base and this concept assumes person and world to be internally related via the individual's lived experience – a non-dualistic ontological position. The concept of a non-dualistic ontology means that the world is not distinct and separate but rather the world is considered as a world of experience, where individuals are actively involved in making sense of the world they are experiencing. They have illustrated that some researchers have adopted the interpretive approach and the concept of phenomenology for the study of consumer research and consumer experience. The hermeneutic framework of Thompson (1997) on consumer perceptions seeks to provide a means of managing the complexities and heterogeneity of consumers' experiences. According to Marton (1986), phenomenography is a research approach adopted for mapping the qualitatively different ways in which people experience, conceptualize, perceive and understand various aspects of and the phenomena in the world around them.

Schembri and Sandberg (2002) describe how phenomenography was developed within Swedish education research during the 1970s as a way to better understand learning, by studying people's ways of experiencing specific aspects of reality. Marton (1986) offered a comprehensive overview of how this approach had been developed and used in education, as well as other areas within the social sciences. They also propose using a phenomenographic approach to study the variations in how service quality appears to individuals and the different ways service quality is perceived and experienced. The main purpose of this is to study how consumers conceive of service quality, and arrive at the widest variation of service quality

conceptions. For example, he has demonstrated that workers' conceptions of their work define the way they perform their work. Schembri and Sandberg (2002) suggests an alternative service quality framework derived from a phenomenographic study of service quality offering service providers the opportunity to deliver more accurately what consumers are looking for and therefore further improve the services offered.

Marton (1986) suggests using individual interview as the major instrument for collecting data in this research approach. This will help the researcher to assist respondents to give rich accounts of their particular experiences and enable them to give a holistic explanation of the whole experience associated with the service context being studied. As phenomenography is an empirical research tool, the researcher (interviewer) is not studying his or her own awareness and reflections, but that of their subjects. The ultimate goal of this research approach is to arrive at the widest variation of conceptions of a particular experience. Hence, individual interviews are the preferred instrument for capturing the contextual meaning of experience of service quality. Another important reason for adopting an interpretive approach in service quality research is that it focuses on the meaning of service quality for consumers and on understanding how consumers make sense of what service quality is. According to Schembri and Sandberg (2002), the variations in how service quality is experienced must be investigated, as different people in different contexts may hold different meanings for similar experiences. A wider range of understanding of the meaning of service quality can then be established.

However, some critics consider that the interviewing technique adopted in

phenomenographic research is a semi-structured interview technique. There may be some difficulty in developing a hermeneutical understanding of the meanings of the collected data. The second concern is the problem of validity and reliability of this approach. It is not easy to do the mapping of the meanings into different categorizations of the complexity of the categories based on the content and structure of the meanings elicited. It will be quite difficult for the researcher to ensure that there is adequate experience of particular phenomena that have been noted during the interviews. The authenticity of any account of the phenomena outside the interview is questioned. Hales and Watkins (2004) are of the opinion that cross-referenced questioning that elicits experiences will help to confirm the categorizing of meanings.

As discussed above, the two approaches are different from each other; the rationalistic approach focuses on the delineation of attributes comprising multiple service quality dimensions; the interpretive approach focuses on a dynamic understanding of service quality by identifying attributes or experience, which identifies the variations in how service quality is experienced by customers. Despite these differences, these two approaches used by various researchers for studying service quality consider only the consumers' perspective and assume that things are deemed to be known or knowable through proper investigation of the relationships between cause and effect.

In this study, a narrative inquiry approach is used to investigate service quality by focusing on the collection of sense-making items, such as stories, anecdotes and the re-telling of individual experiences, and by discussing the meaning of those experiences. The individual narrative inquiry is a good supplement to the

interpretive approach as it facilitates understanding how people make sense of something through stories or narratives. Snowden (2000) suggests that the story itself has the value of conveying the complex and multi-layered ideas in a simple and memorable form to culturally diverse audiences. It is believed that making use of narratives as a means of transferring and communicating knowledge within a team may help to get a closer appreciation of an individual's experience.

Greenhalgh et al. (2005) suggests that the defining characteristics of narrative are chronology (unfolding over time); emplotment (the literary juxtaposing of actions and events in an implicitly causal sequence); trouble (that is, harm or the risk of harm); and embeddedness (the personal story nests within a particular social, historical and organizational context). They review the use of narratives in the quality improvement research and conclude that stories are about purposeful action unfolding in the face of trouble and, as such, have much to offer quality improvement researchers. Despite this awareness of the potential use of narratives, there has been no published work on how narratives are applied in service quality studies. This research study aims to implement a narrative approach to the study of service quality from both the qualitative approach (interpretative based on narrative inquiry) and the quasi-quantitative approach (analysis of narrative patterns) from the employees' perspectives. The research methodology is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Chapter Three Research Methodology

Methodology denotes an overall approach within the research process and includes the paradigm choice of the researcher. It incorporates questions on why certain data is collected, when the data is collected, how and where the data is collected. Methods are linked to specific research techniques which are employed to collect the data (Meyer, 2004). Meyer (2004) quoted from Ray (1994), Russell (1996) and Guba (1994) stated that methods need to be consistent with the researchers' paradigm and the methods must be fitted to the methodology. Therefore, methods are the extension of the research objectives and the assumptions guiding the researchers. The research design and the methods adopted for data collection and analysis of this research study are presented in this chapter.

3.1 Introduction of Quantitative and Qualitative Research

There are two established techniques in management and social science research, i.e. quantitative research and qualitative research. In quantitative research, the researcher decides what to study; asks specific, narrow questions; collects quantifiable data from participants; analyzes these collected data by using statistics; and conducts the inquiry in a third person manner. The explanation of quantitative research quoted in Wikipedia is that "It is the systematic scientific investigation of quantitative properties and phenomena and their relationships." Qualitative research is a type of research in which the researcher relies on the views of participants; asks broad and open questions; constantly reviews the collected data and the research strategy, and

conducts the inquiry through the perspective of the participants involved in the study. In Wikipedia, qualitative research has been explained as “research that aims to acquire an in-depth understanding of human behavior and the reasons that govern human behavior”. It investigates the *why* and *how* of decision making, not just *what*, *where*, and *when*. A smaller sample size is focused on rather than employing a large random sample, as qualitative research categorizes data into patterns as the primary basis for organizing and reporting results. A comparison of the features of qualitative and quantitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1994) is given in Table 3.1

Table 3.1 Features of Quantitative and Qualitative Researches (quoted from Miles & Huberman (1994, p. 40). *Qualitative Data Analysis*)

| Qualitative | Quantitative |
|---|--|
| "All research ultimately has a qualitative grounding" - Donald Campbell | "There's no such thing as qualitative data. Everything is either 1 or 0" - Fred Kerlinger |
| The aim is a complete, detailed description. | The aim is to classify features, count them, and construct statistical models in an attempt to explain what is observed. |
| Researcher may only know roughly in advance what he/she is looking for. | Researcher knows clearly in advance what he/she is looking for. |
| Recommended during earlier phases of research projects. | Recommended during later phases of research projects. |
| The design emerges as the study unfolds. | All aspects of the study are carefully designed before data is collected. |
| Researcher is the data gathering instrument. | Researcher uses tools, such as questionnaires or equipment to collect numerical data. |
| Data is in the form of words, pictures or objects. | Data is in the form of numbers and statistics. |
| Subjective – individual’s interpretation of events is important, e.g., uses participant observation, in-depth interviews etc. | Objective – seeks precise measurement & analysis of target concepts, e.g., uses surveys, questionnaires etc. |
| Qualitative data is more 'rich', time consuming, and less able to be generalized. | Quantitative data is more efficient, able to test hypotheses, but may miss contextual detail. |
| Researcher tends to become subjectively immersed in the subject matter. | Researcher tends to remain objectively separated from the subject matter. |

3.1.1 Quantitative Research

Quantitative research originated from the success of physical science in the eighteenth century. Following this line of logic, quantitative researchers identify patterns or trends by assessing or measuring individual abilities, collecting numbers or scores from individuals based on experimental settings. In statistics, quantitative research has given rise to the idea of correlating two or more variables and further developing the techniques of comparing variables within a group of individuals. Gradually, these elementary ideas have grown into complex models inter-relating numerous variables and are used to test cause-and-effect or stimulus-response relationships (Creswell, 2008).

Quantitative Research tends to address research problems requiring a description of trends or an explanation of the relationship among variables. The literature review tends to play a major role through suggesting the research questions to be asked, justifying the research problem as well as creating the purpose statement and hypothesis of the research study. The purpose statement or hypothesis tends to be specific and narrow as it tries to seek measurable and repeatable data on variables. The researchers prefer to collect data by using instruments - some tool for measuring, observing or documenting qualitative data, e.g. questionnaire or survey, to gather numerical data which is quantifiable and to collect information from a large number of individuals. The process of analyzing and interpreting data tends to consist of i) statistical analysis,– which involves describing trends, comparing group differences or relating variables; ii) data interpretation – comparing results with prior predictions and past research. Researchers keep at a distance from the subjects or events being

studied and adopt a third person approach in the formulation of the problem and presentation of the findings.

3.1.2 Qualitative Research

Qualitative Research was developed due to its specific relevance to the study of social relations and complex human behaviour that is not amenable to quantitative techniques, as the nature of the data is non-experimental and often non-repeatable. This requires a new sensitivity to the empirical study of issues and to the patterns of interpretations. According to Flick (2002) rapid social change and the resulting diversification of 'life worlds' are increasingly confronting social researchers with new social contexts and perspectives, qualitative research tends to make use of inductive strategies, i.e., instead of starting from theories and then testing. The object under study is treated as the determining factor for choosing a method and the method is characterized by openness towards the objects. The goal of research is less to test the already known, on the contrary, it tends to discover the new, and to develop empirically grounded theories.

Qualitative research demonstrates a variety of perspectives on the object, i.e., not only the object under study, but also including those related parties which have been mentioned in the contexts. It analyses interactions about and ways of dealing with subjects in a particular field. Sometimes, some forms of qualitative research may include the subjectivity of the researchers when they take action and make observations in the field. For instance, the researchers' impressions, irritations, and feelings have been counted as data which forms part of the interpretation and are

documented in the researchers' diaries. To summarize, quantitative methods are those which focus on experimental data in the form of numbers and frequencies rather than on meaning and experience. Such methods provide information which can be analyzed statistically and reliably as it is associated with the natural scientific approach. Qualitative methods are more concerned with describing meaning, rather than with drawing statistical inferences, and provide a more in-depth and richer description of the contexts.

3.2 Mixed Methods Research

3.2.1 What is Mixed Methods Research?

Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) point out that quantitative purists put emphasis on the time-free and context-free generalizations which are desirable and possible. On the other hand, qualitative purists argue for the superiority of constructivism, idealism, relativism, humanism, hermeneutics and sometimes, post-modernism. They consider that it is impossible to differentiate fully causes and effects that logically flow from specific to general, i.e. explanations are generated inductively from the data. Guba (1990) claims that knower and known cannot be separated because the subjective knower is the only source of reality; that is why, qualitative and quantitative researches are often presented as two fundamentally different paradigms and they seem to be incompatible with each other

However, in recent developments of research methodologies, some researchers from the disciplines of educational researches and sociology (Creswell, 2003, Brannen, 1992) have tended to adopt a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, which allow statistically reliable information obtained from numerical measurement to be backed up by, and enriched, by information about the research participants' explanations. Also, quantitative methods have been used to expand qualitative results to advance study aims, for example, for the construction of questionnaires. One of the educationalists, Creswell (2003), claims that "A mixed methods study involves the collection or analysis of both quantitative and/or qualitative data in a single study." In this study the data collected concurrently or sequentially, are given a priority, and are integrated at one or more stages in the process of research. Mixed Methods Research tends to legitimize the use of multiple approaches in answering research questions, rather than restricting or constraining researchers' choices (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Researchers should take an eclectic approach to method selection and to thinking about and conducting research. Greene et al. (1989) highlight five major purposes or rationales for conducting Mixed Methods Research. These are listed below:

(i) *Triangulation* Its aim is to test the consistency of findings obtained through different instruments – seeking corroboration. Quantitative and qualitative data are collected at the same time to provide a more comprehensive and complete set of data

(ii) *Complementarity* It clarifies and illustrates results from one method with the use of the other method.

(iii) *Development* The results from one method shape subsequent methods or determine the next step in the research process.

(iv) *Initiation* It stimulates new research questions or challenges the results obtained through one of the methods.

(v) *Expansion* It provides richness and detail to the study, and explores specific features of each method.

3.2.2 Designs of Mixed Methods Research

According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), there are two main types of research designs in mixed methods research; (i) Mixed model - mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches within or across the stages of the research process; and (ii) Mixed method – the inclusion of a quantitative phase and a qualitative phase in an overall research study. Mixed model design has six possible research modes (Design 2-7 in figure 3.1) and they are called across-stage mixed model designs because the mixing takes place across the stages of the research process.

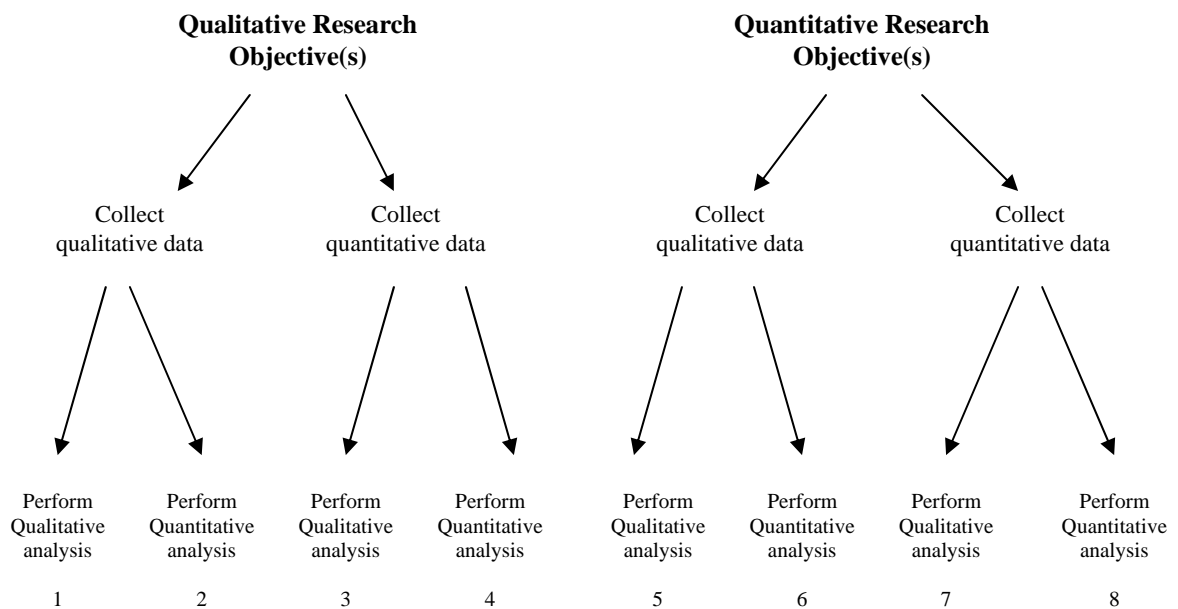


Figure 3.1 Mixed model designs (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004)

The mixed methods design requires the researchers to make two primary decisions: (i) whether the researcher wants to operate largely within one dominant paradigm or not, and (ii) whether the researcher wants to conduct the phases concurrently or sequentially. The mixed method design matrix with mixed method approaches is shown in Figure 3.2.

| | | Time Order Decision | |
|----------------------------|-----------------|--------------------------------|--|
| | | Concurrent | Sequential |
| Paradigm Emphasis Decision | Equal Status | QUAL + QUAN | QUAL → QUAN QUAN → QUAL |
| | Dominant Status | QUAL + qual QUAN + qual | QUAL → qual qual → QUAN QUAN → qual qual → QUAL |

Figure 3.2 Mixed method designs matrix (Johnson and Onwuegbuzie, 2004)

The above matrix shows the possible combinations of the mixed method designs. “qual” and “quan”, in lower case letters, denote lower priority or weight of combination; “QUAL” and “QUAN”, in capital letters, denotes high priority or greater weight of combinations. “+” stands for concurrent and “ →” stands for sequential time order. Creswell et al (2004) explain that priority is determined by the researcher, who places an emphasis on the quantitative data, qualitative data or an equal priority shared between the two forms of data. At the beginning of the study,

the degree of priority can be detected by noting the relative emphasis given to framing the research problem or by emphasising the subservient use of one form of data to the other, for instance, qualitative data helps to build an instrument. Alternatively, some researchers may give equal emphasis by providing both detailed quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The data analysis process of the current research study involved some of the data analysis processes that are used in mixed methods research; they were data reduction, data transformation, data correlation, and data integration. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) explains that data reduction involves reducing the dimensions of the qualitative data, e.g. concept coding, and quantitative data e.g. descriptive statistics; data transformation involves the process of converting the quantitative data into qualitative data that can be analyzed qualitatively; or converting the qualitative data into numeric codes or patterns that can be represented statistically; data correlation involves the quantitative data being correlated with the qualitized data or the qualitative data being correlated with the quantitized data; and data integration, which involves the process of integrating both sets of data collected quantitatively and qualitatively into a whole, or into two separate sets of coherent wholes.

3.3 The Research Design

3.3.1 Choice of Research Paradigms

Within the assumptions of an epistemological perspective, the researcher is faced with issues pertaining to the state of knowledge, i.e. what can be known and what may be regarded as the grounds of knowledge. (Meyer, 2004) mentions there are two main

standpoints, they are positivism and anti-positivism. The positivist assumes that objective knowledge exists, which can be easily transmitted value and context-free. The most traditional approaches dominating the natural sciences, which search for general laws, employ the concepts of falsification and verification to attain objective knowledge. The anti-positivist believes the nature of knowledge is more of a social, subjective and sometimes, even transcendental nature. Knowledge is based on individual and inter-subjective experiences and the belief is held that the world is not separate from the individual, but is essentially relativistic. There are two main types of paradigms: the functionalist or positivist paradigm and the interpretive or constructivist paradigm.

The positivist paradigm is usually associated with the natural sciences and its emphasis is on establishing general or universal laws based on the principle of hypothesis testing (Cassell and Symon, 1994). The implication of this view is that human behaviour is seen as deterministic and therefore reducible to some general laws. The relationship between the individual and the world is consequentially of no concern, as an individual is seen as a non-interactive entity; which means the world exists with or without the individual in it.

According to the beliefs of the interpretive paradigm, the social science researchers realize that human beings cannot be studied in the same manner as natural sciences are. The subjectivity of an object's experience is involved, so it will be difficult to develop any science with an objective orientation. It would be more concerned with the meaning of phenomena, which is to attempt to understand a particular event from the participant's own perspective. The method used in any research within this

paradigm needs to be inductive as the objective is to collect first hand knowledge of the phenomenon's meaning within its social context.

Meyer (2004) points out that the issue of capturing "first-hand" experiences is to understand the subjective meanings of social interactions. Investigating social phenomena is no longer about a limited set of pre-defined variables. It is attempting to understand what an individual's experience is and how an individual relates to his/her experiences; that is, to capture the context of the situation. As previously discussed in Chapter Two (Section 2.1.1), service encounters involves both the service receiver (customers) and service providers (front-line employees). They have human interactions as well as their own interpretations across the whole process of an interaction, i.e., their behaviors are context dependent and change according to the socio-contextual features of a situation in which they occur.

The study of the perceptions of customers in the marketing discipline has historically been approached from a rational paradigm, using a pre-defined set of variables. This type of quantitative research has the limitation that it is unable to extract meanings or interpretations from its context (Parasuraman et al. 1985, 1988). Some service quality researchers (Schembri and Sandbery, 2002) adopt the interpretive approach which focuses on the meaning of service quality to consumers, and on understanding how consumers make sense of what service quality is. It is believed that the variation in how service quality is experienced needs to be investigated because in different contexts different people may interpret similar experiences differently. The narrative paradigm was introduced by Fisher (1984). This paradigm emphasizes a certain theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have consequence and

meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. He also points out two relevant supporting arguments for this abstraction. The arguments are that humans are basically story-tellers but the rationalist considers humans are essentially rational beings, and the mode of human decision making varies in form depending on the nature of the communication situation and on the genres and media employed.

3.3.2 Narrative Inquiry

This research study adopts a narrative approach, an interpretative paradigm in which it emphasizes the use of narratives or stories collected from the participants to investigate the pattern of culture, behavior and understanding of factors affecting service quality. Narratives can be described as “speech, writing or images” or “story” that are going to reflect or reveal the personal experiences which are found in a single or multiple episodes or events. Riessman (1993) mentions that narratives can be stories about specific past events with clear beginnings and endings, as detachable from the surrounding discourse, rather than as situated events. He also states that not all narratives are stories in the linguistic sense of the term.

Narrative inquiry is the method of investigation and collection of data through storytelling. The researcher then writes a narrative of the experience. Connelly and Clandinin (1990) note that, "Humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead storied lives. Thus, the study of narrative is the study of the ways humans experience the world." In other words, people's lives consist of stories. The personal experience, including the individual and social experience, is treated as the central lens for understanding a person, finding out what the person perceives and

how the person acts in his daily life. The complexity of the issues the person is concerned with can also be illuminated from the stories. Flick (2002) suggests that a “generative narrative question” relating to the topic of the study be asked to stimulate the interviewee’s main story. Prompting questions should only be used to preserve the flow of the story during the process of narrative enquiries. The interviewer should avoid interrupting the narrative process through directive interventions or evaluation. Instead, the interviewer should let the narrator (the interviewee) see that the interviewer is trying to understand their experience from the perspective of the narrator. The interviewer should support and encourage the interviewee to continue his or her narrative or story as it unfolds.

3.3.3 Pre-hypothesis Research

In order to collect an overall perception of quality of service performance from a community level, i.e. among a group of front-line employees, this research study also includes the concept of pre-hypothesis research to enrich the depth of the collected data and to provide a closer interpretation of the data collected from the story-tellers before any hypothesis of the causal relationship of the phenomenon is drawn. The hypothesis-based method relies on questionnaires or focus groups and on statistical inference to derive the causal relationship of variables to be studied. Snowden (2006) points out that the questions used in the questionnaires developed from a hypothesis-based approach tend to constrain the nature of the materials that can be collected and the general questions are often linked to what the researcher thinks is most important. He points out that having a person telling a story about their experiences without having options suggested to them are far richer in nature than a set of framed feedback question collected from a standard questionnaire survey based

on a set of often unchecked assumptions of the researchers. According to Snowden (2006), the rule of creating a prompting question is to ask an indirect question which places people in a context that they can understand and which allows them to tell a story about themselves or someone they know. He suggests that this approach seeks to minimize or avoid pre-assumptions and prejudices with traditional qualitative and pseudo-quantitative techniques which are normally based on the use of direct questions.

3.4 The Research Framework

The purpose of the research study is to get a deeper understanding of the key elements affecting the quality of service performance from the employees' perspectives in order to improve the quality of the service. A single method, such as the quantitative method based on questionnaire survey, is not sufficient to perform a close evaluation for the above mentioned purposes. This research study has adopted the idea of a mixed methods approach involving both qualitative and quantitative methods. A research framework of the research study is shown in Figure 3.3 shown in next page, which explains how to mix the qualitative method, that is, the narrative approach for capturing the perceptions of the individuals' experiences during service encounters, with the quantitative methods, i.e. to index the collected stories which are linked to the identified key concepts of the service quality of the field being studied. This is done in order to form the basis of the hypothesis-based research and construct the dimensions of the service quality.

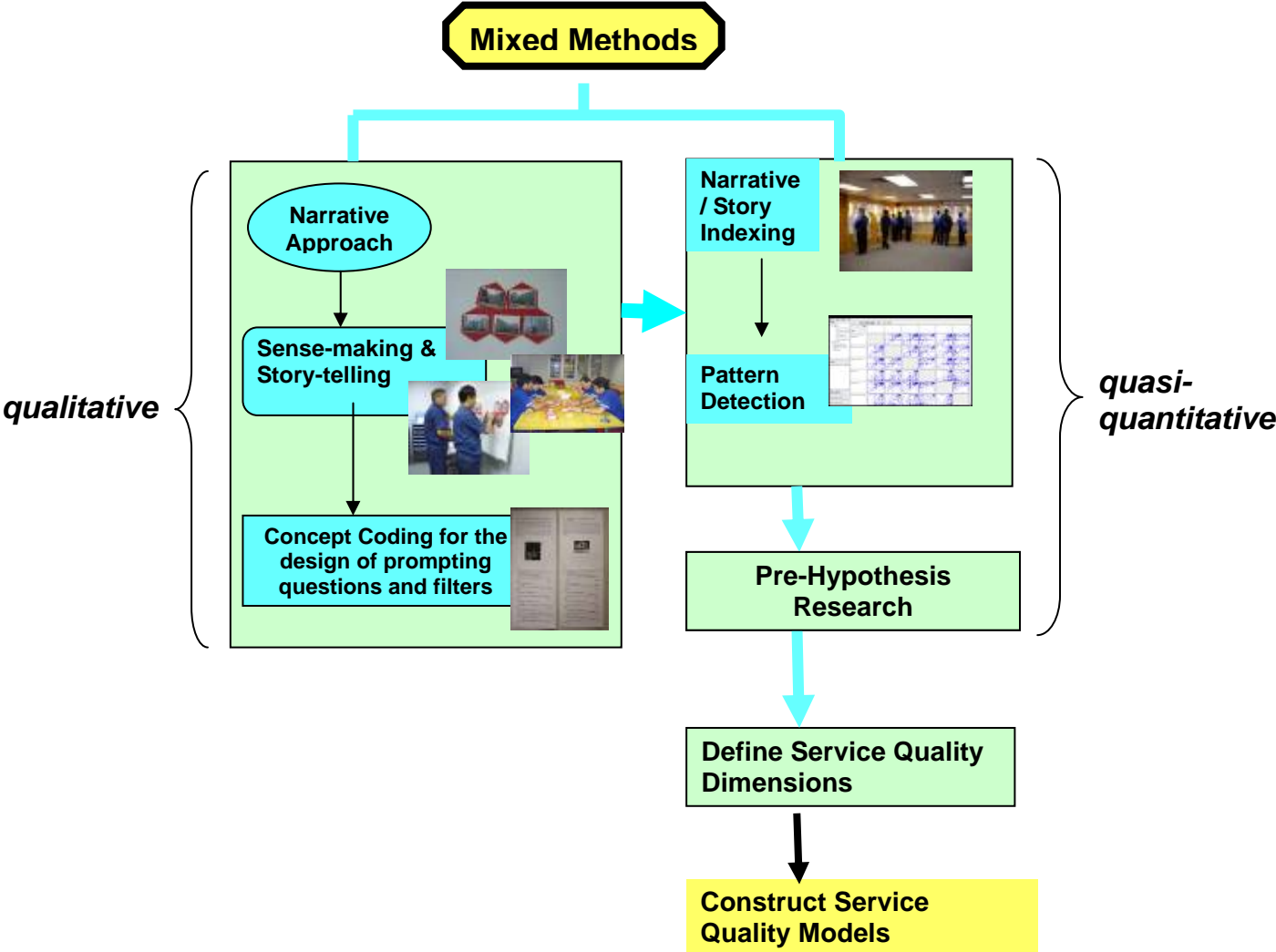


Figure 3.3 The Framework of the Research Study

Traditional service quality models show that the formation of the service quality's dimensions can be varied by using different service quality models or different research paradigms. The dimensions of the traditional service quality models which are used to evaluate service quality are mainly derived from the customers' perceptions of service quality, i.e. how service quality is perceived by the consumers (Gronroos, 1984, Parasuraman et al., 1985). The researchers of those traditional service quality models consider that service delivery occurs through human interactions and regard service as an art, a process and a performance that takes place during service encounters. One of them (Parasuraman et al., 1985) first adopts the qualitative methods, such as focus group interviews, in-depth interviews, etc. to collect the data from a group of customers and the major practitioners, for instance, executives, of the service industries in order to define the dimensions of service quality.

Some of the research is hypothesis-based (Gronroos, 1984) in which the researchers define the dimensions constructed by them and then perform an empirical test on their conceptual models. A service quality model can then be constructed based on these dimensions and the measurement scale for evaluating the service quality will also be designed. A research study of this type consists of six main processes: i) data (narratives) collection, ii) concepts coding, iii) prompting questions and design of filters, iv) indexing of narratives/stories, v) pattern detection and vi) identification of pre-hypothesis research results.

In the process of data collection, qualitative techniques, story-telling and sense-making, are used to collect the narratives or personal stories of employees who

have direct contact with the customers during the service encounters. The participants tell their stories to make sense of their experiences for constructing different meanings from the same situations. Dervin (2003) explains that human beings with different experience vary in their observations of the same situation and assumes that situations are always open to multiple interpretations due to changes in time and space as well as differences in people's perspectives and positions. However, the collected stories can only reflect an individual's own categories of meaning or understandings. They are useful in describing complex phenomena, but, they cannot be used to represent an overall interpretation of service quality performance of the front-line employees. Therefore, quantitative data are collected by asking the participants to review the stories told and answer the questionnaires in the second phase of data collection.

In the second phase of data collection, the participants will then be asked to index the stories using the various filters. These filters are produced from the analysis of the concept coding of a large number of narratives. This form of indexing can be treated as a type of quantitative method as it refers to the process of tagging a story to give it added layers of meaning by incorporating the perspectives of all the members of the group of participants. Later it will be used for subsequent analysis using a proprietary tool called SenseMaker™. That means, the different perspectives indexed to each story, from the views of each of the participants, will be collected during the process of narrative/story. Also, it can be regarded as an exploratory design as the researcher first collects the qualitative data, i.e. narratives and stories, in the phase of data collection; and then interprets the quantitative data, i.e., the visualized narrative patterns of the stories told with an explanation from the original

texts. This helps the research team to get a closer appreciation of the key elements affecting the quality of the service performance with elaboration, comments and illustration from the perceptions of all the employees.

3.5 Analysis of Stories

Human communication is regarded as a narration for describing human experience and purpose. Fisher (1984) emphasizes that human beings are essentially story-tellers. Bruner (1990) argues that one of the ways in which people understand their world is through the "narrative mode" of thought, which is concerned with human wants, needs, and goals. The narrative mode deals with the dynamics of human intentions by looking at how humans strive to do things over time. Based on this assumption, it is assumed that humans tend to tell stories in order to describe their behaviors and convey messages subject to their own experiences. In this study, the collected field stories are represented in different formats, such as anecdotes, stories, field notes, etc. The steps involved in the process of analysis are as follows:

- (i) transcribing raw data-the conversations that are recorded in the audiotapes,
- (ii) re-transcribing the texts by identifying the key elements of the quality of service performance by the researcher,
- (iii) identifying concrete stories related to the quality of service performance from the pool of collected narratives,
- (iv) coding the concepts from the collected narratives,
- (v) recognizing the narrative patterns of the stories told, by asking the participants to do indexing.

3.5.1 Analytical Framework

The aim of analyzing the narratives is to explore and interpret how the teller of the narratives makes sense of his world and situation within it through describing individual experiences. Two forms of texts, anecdotes and stories, are collected for the narrative analysis. Those texts or descriptions told by the participants with more details of the structure and plot of the whole incident can be classified as stories. The raw data from the audiotape is transcribed by identifying the key elements derived from the perceptions or values of the tellers. The idea of a Three Dimensional Space Approach (Clandinin and Connelly 1990) is adopted for re-transcribing the narratives in the research study.

Three aspects of dimensions are introduced from this approach to perform the re-transcription. These are: i) Interactions: it involves both the personal experiences and social experiences; ii) Continuity: it describes different stages of experience – past, present and future; iii) Situation or Place: the specific situations or places have been described by the storyteller. Bearing in mind these three aspects, the narratives collected from the group interviews are then transcribed into a structured format for ease of reference. Each of the stories told should have its own story title in order to help to draw the attention of the readers. In the second phase of the data analysis process of this research study these stories should be reviewed by the front-line employees so they can identify narrative patterns. Throughout the analyzing processes, one of the important tasks is to code the concepts that arise from the narratives as this helps to identify the critical elements describing the precise phenomena that typify the quality of the service performance.

In the second phase of the data analysis, identification of narrative patterns from the told stories will provide a deeper understanding of the meaning of the experiences of the employees engaged in service encounters, and a deeper understanding of their interpretations of the stories they tell. This may also help to clarify their understanding of the quality of service performance by providing a more direct and integrated description of what the front-line employees understand and interpret about the service performed by them. It will also give a more detailed description of their behaviors. This kind of interpretation and evaluation is slightly different from the way of interpreting the set of data which are collected from a survey.

In a survey, the participants express only their own understanding according to the pre-defined attributes. In those areas concerning complex environments or situations, for instance, social interactions, it is difficult to interpret a phenomenon without making sense of the reality of how an individual feels and how they take action towards a particular situation. To conclude, there are two main phases in analyzing the field text (raw data) from the narratives collected; one is focusing on the process of transcribing the texts and the identification of key concepts of the quality of service performance; the other emphasizes the need to obtain an understanding of the quality of service by indexing the narrative in order to identify patterns.

3.5.2 Narrative Analysis

The features of stories and the characteristics of narratives collected from the group interviews are discussed. Second, an explanation of how to make use of this re-telling technique by adopting some ideas from the Three-dimensional Space approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) for this research study is also given. Third,

the approach to identifying the perceptions of service quality from employees' perspectives is discussed. Lastly, the idea of recognizing the narrative patterns derived from stories is introduced.

3.5.2.1 Features of Narratives

According to Burke (Greenhalgh et al., 2005), a story is composed of five key elements: the act (what has been done); the scene (the context in which it is done); the agent or actor (who does it); the agency (how it is done) and the purpose (why it is done) (Burke, 1954, cited in). Snowden (1999, 2000) suggests that a story is purposely constructed, and anecdote is a naturally occurring story, like a short tale. He points out that a story has the ability to convey complex and multi layered ideas in a simple and memorable form to culturally diverse audiences; is a valuable tool to understand an individual situation, to anticipate possible futures and to prepare the organization for action. Even though it is an ancient way of conveying messages, especially for values and cultures, it has been recently re-discovered and is now widely recognized in various disciplines.

Snowden (1999) concludes that a well-constructed story is powerful in communicating complex meaning. Some of the context beneath the dialogues or descriptions can convey learning or metaphor without making it obvious. The proper use of a story will definitely increase its descriptive capability. Telling a good story will generate positive imitative examples which will lead to people to discover new knowledge and reveal abilities that people may possess but are not aware of. Sometimes, when a negative story is told, it may induce listeners to be aware of getting involved in a similar situation. Another insight highlighted by

Snowden (1999) is that story may help to identify common values and rules among a group of people who are in a similar situation. It may also reveal how people behave in a certain community. Therefore, collecting stories from individuals is one of the major tasks of the data collection of this research study. Each of the stories collected will be transcribed into texts which will become the major sources for identifying the narrative patterns in the second phase of this analytical process.

3.5.2.2 Re-telling Narratives from Transcriptions

Anecdotes and other forms of narrative may be useful and valuable in helping to elicit concepts and perceptions from an individual; this could be extended to a group of people. All collected anecdotes or expressions are analyzed using the three-dimensional space approach. The basis for this approach is Dewey's philosophy of experience, which is conceptualized as both personal and social (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000). The Three Dimensional Space Approach means that if you wish to understand a certain person then that individual's experiences as well as that individual's interactions with other people should be examined. It is also possible that the experiences of an individual can grow out of other experiences, so this could lead to a new experience. There would then be continuity along the experiences of an individual. Ollerenshaw (2002) concludes that the three-dimensional space approach highlights the experiences and interactions of the individual. Based on this concept, a set of elements which is suitable for representing the overall perceptions of quality of service performance from the employee's perspective are determined. The three-dimensional space narrative structure is shown in the Table 3.2 and the proposed narrative structure for transcribing the narratives of this research study is shown in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2 The Three Dimensional Space Approach (source: Adapted from Clandinin and Connelly (2000), cited at Ollerenshaw, 2002)

| Interaction | | Continuity | | | |
|---|--|---|--|---|---|
| Personal | Social | Past | Present | Future | Situation/Place |
| Look inward to internal conditions, feelings, hopes, aesthetic reactions, moral depositions | Look outward to existential conditions in the environment with other people and their intentions, purposes, assumptions and points of view | Look backward to remembered experiences, feelings, and stories from earlier times | Look at current experiences, feelings, and stories relating to actions of an event | Look forward to implied and possible experiences and plot lines | Look at context, time and place situated in a physical landscape or setting with topological and spatial boundaries with characters' intentions, purposes and different points of views |

Table 3.3 Proposed narrative structures for transcribing the collected narratives of the research study

| | Interactions (Personal and social) | Resolutions | Continuity (past and present experiences, feelings) |
|---|---|--------------------|--|
| Situations (Interact with customers; role of service provider; Company policies & Challenges) | | | |

3.5.2.3 Concept Coding

The process of coding a concept derived from the narratives is another important task in identifying the key elements related to the quality of service performance through this narrative approach. The aims of performing this coding is to find causal conditions about the phenomenon being studied, by segmenting information from the raw data collected from narrative interviews and then by generating some elements which explain the phenomenon being studied. Different types of coding can be used to develop a concept from the descriptions provided by the employees. A batch of concepts can also be defined as a discrete perceptions perceived by the employees. Relevant categories not only explain the phenomenon being studied, but also highlight those key elements for governing the quality of the service. The process of performing this task can be divided into several steps:

- (i) Open coding, deciding on the initial categories for classifying information collected from the narratives and identifying the causal factors governing these identified categories;
- (ii) Selecting key concepts as the center for exploration. It could be the core phenomenon which is then related to other concepts to explain the obvious phenomena;
- (iii) Identifying the key perceptions for explaining the quality of the performance of the service.

3.5.2.4 Narrative Patterns

Snowden (2001) points out that narrative is not just about telling, constructing or even eliciting stories, it is about allowing the patterns of culture, behavior and understanding that are revealed by stories to emerge. He emphasizes that there is

some danger in just telling a story as it does not focus only on relating some facts or even the truth of an event or issue; a wider perspective on narrative is involved and this should not be neglected. He also suggests that narrative or story can also act as a source of understanding by disrupting entrained thinking, and by providing a repository for learning. It can also replace user requirement specifications and enable confessions of failure without attributing of blame. This would be applicable for those areas which may be quite sensitive or in cases where the participants do not find it easy to express their feelings in front of others. In narrative or in the sense-making approach, once a pattern is identified through indexing the narratives, various other patterns can be explained by going directly to the narrative material that lies beneath. Thus, the key elements affecting service quality performance are identified. Also the possible relationships, linkages and correlations among the key elements of service quality can be brought to the surface.

The advantages of identifying the narrative patterns are that meaning is revealed and understanding on a common subject matter is enabled by the telling of stories which provide a direct focus on the subject matter. This will enable the reality to be measured which far less threatening than analysis and instructions. Also learning can take place through the creation of new response patterns and increased understanding both of which are self-activated, not imposed and as a result are more sustainable. Therefore, identifying the narrative patterns among a set of stories relating to the service quality performance will facilitate the analysis of the understanding of employee's perceptions and assumptions. The details of how to perform the narrative analysis of this research study are presented in Chapter Four.

Chapter Four Implementation

4.1 Background of the Chosen Company

Founded in 1862, the Hong Kong and China Gas Company Limited (Towngas) is the leading public utility company in Hong Kong producing and distributing gas for cooking and heating purposes. Currently, with more than 3,000 km of pipeline network, the Company supplies gas to over 1.5 million customers in the territory. Its business includes the marketing of gas and appliances, and a comprehensive after-sales service for its huge customer base. Recently, it has diversified into various green businesses such as Liquid petroleum Gas (LPG) filling stations and the utilization of landfill gas. The Company has also penetrated into the piped gas business in mainland China. Towngas is a large public utility company providing different kinds of gas related businesses in Hong Kong. Each of the business streams has its unique and different business features in production, marketing and customer services. In the gas supply and distribution industry, Towngas has to fulfil or comply with the internal and external safety standards; government regulations or ordinances. For example, in the Customer Service Department, the procedures and workflows for the maintenance of appliances have been in use for a long time and are well established.

Towngas has established a well-developed gas production and network system in the local gas production and supply business. It puts much effort and a lot of resources

into maintaining a high quality service in local gas production and provides a high standard of service to its customers. For example, eight years ago, the Company launched an ‘iCare portal’, which offers internet services to customers through personal computers. The iCare.com set-top box provided Hong Kong with its first Internet service accessible through home television screens. Apart from gas production and distribution, the marketing of gas appliances is another profitable growth area of their business. This includes the sale of residential, industrial and commercial gas appliances. Its market penetration in the sale of gas appliances in Hong Kong is large. This was reflected in 2003 when the company won the Asian Brand Marketing Effectiveness Award. The Company received the Gold Prize for Most Effective Use of Corporate Identity, Product Design and Packaging.

To remain competitive, they have to actively provide new models of gas appliances, such as gas heaters, 2-in-1 washing machine and dryer, etc. Each of its business streams, either retail or industrial and commercial, offers a comprehensive after-sales service, including installation, gas appliance maintenance, and safety inspections for its customers. In the retail business, customers can place orders, including requests for installation, repair and examination, through calling the Customer Services Hotline. The company officers will answer the enquiries and forward the orders to the department responsible. Over the years, due to the rapid growth of new family units from the late seventies to nineties in Hong Kong, the demand for a better lifestyle and better household consumer appliances has increased steadily. For the company to remain competitive in the consumer markets, the Company has implemented a customer relations management program and has created a customer service department to better serve its clients.

4.1.1 Entering into the Research Field

The author has met the Corporate Head of the Human Resources Department. He introduced the on-going quality improvement programme of the organization and also indicated their interest in starting a knowledge management project. The selection of an appropriate division or unit of the Company for this study needs the support of its senior management. It took nearly six months to establish the appropriate contacts and to obtain the commitment of the Company to launch this project. To gain the support and trust of the Company, the author had to minimize the interruption that the project would have on the daily work of the company's employees. In addition, the author had to make sure that any sensitive data that may affect the image of the Company was kept absolutely confidential. Finally, a reference site, the Customer Service Department, was selected which offered the opportunity for the author to investigate the quality of their service performance.

4.1.2 The Customer Service Department

The Customer Service Department provides maintenance services for residential households, a proactive regular safety inspection service, riser inspection and emergency handling in Hong Kong. It offers customers various forms of after-sales service, including preventive maintenance and corrective maintenance of the above ground installations. There are three sections in the Customer Service Department; they are i) Regular Service Inspection Section, ii) Emergency Operation Service, iii) Maintenance (Residential Section).

Over three hundred employees are working in the Customer Service Department. The customer service manager is responsible for managing the overall operations of the Department with assistance from three other section managers who are responsible for the different kinds of customer service. Each section has at least one senior engineer for assisting the section manager to ensure the policies are well enacted and regulations are properly complied with. There are fourteen engineers/assistant engineers in the Department, responsible for performing daily operations and liaison work within other departments, serving customers and handling customer's complaints. Forty-five senior supervisors/supervisors are assigned to dispatch order works to the service technicians and to monitor their daily performance. Over two hundred service technicians are employed in the Department. They are the front-line staff responsible for performing the direct customer services, such as inspections, and maintenance services to individual customers. In other words, they are the service delivers of the Company, and carry with them the reputation and the image of the Company.

Regular Safety Inspection was launched in September 1995 to provide proactive maintenance service to Towngas customers in order to further enhance safety and ensure the reliability of the gas supply. Service technicians visit customers' premises at regular intervals of eighteen months to carry out safety inspections. This includes checking of all gas installations and inspecting of service risers to ensure that they are in a sound condition. Emergency Operation is responsible for providing emergency services for any incidents reported to the Police or Fire Services Communication Centre, such as incidents of uncontrolled gas leakages, injury to a person related to the usage of gas supply, explosions or fire damage to property, and gas supply

interruption. They need to carry out remedial action on site and help to restore the safety of the gas supply to the customers affected. The Planning Section of the Department focuses on generating monthly and regular reports for the department's management and has developed a computer system to streamline the reporting process. It is also responsible for identifying improvement initiatives in the area of cost savings and productivity enhancement as well as performing departmental administration.

In the operation of residential maintenance, each of the service technicians has to complete the order individually, that means, each service technician obtains orders which are dispatched from their team supervisors, and then goes to the household's living unit to check, examine and fix the gas appliances. The Maintenance Section has to provide services to 1.5 million the local residential customers upon service requests. The section needs to employ one hundred and thirty-two service technicians to serve such a large number of customers. Its target is to offer maintenance service within two working days of receiving a request. Therefore, it needs a large number of service technicians when compared with other sections. A set of workflows and maintenance procedures for dealing with customers has been in place for many years in this section of the Customer Service Department.

Despite the extent of standardization in procedures and training, each service encounter can be different. Each service technician may have to develop his own skill set for serving different types of customers, as well as develop the practical know-how in fixing the defective appliances effectively. Some of the technicians may complete the orders in a more efficient and effective way than others. Some of them may receive complaints or compliments from customers more than others.

Without a deeper analysis, such differential outcomes could have been easily attributed to their different skills or personalities. Although such differences are well-recognized, knowledge of them will be of help in improving the quality of the service quality provided, from a system perspective. That is, there may be some generic causes embedded in the company structure, operation and culture that may affect the performance of the front-line technicians that in turn produce an effect on customer satisfaction.

Most of the published research findings on the evaluation of the service quality focus on the needs and expectations of the customers; relatively little attention has been paid to understanding the feelings and emotions of the employees who are the crucial agents in delivering the service. The process of data collection for this research study will be outlined and discussed in this section. Observations and data were collected from i) work attachment of the author to the front-line staff, ii) group interviews and, iii) narrative workshops.

4.1.3 Work Familiarization and Front-line Attachment

In order to have a preliminary concept of the practices of the service technicians, the company documents, such as organizational charts, maintenance workflow and dispatch order instructions, departmental newsletters, customer's compliment and complaint letters, were all reviewed by the author. This enabled the author to have an understanding of what duties the technicians were performing and of the common issues they came across with the customers during the service encounters. Some stories of success or failure were also identified from the compliment and complaint

letters. The author then modified these stories as real-life examples for stimulating the memories and reactions of the service technicians during the group interviews.

Arrangement was also made for the author to follow a service technician to observe his one-day maintenance works at local residential households. This gave the author a valuable opportunity to observe how these technicians performed their daily tasks and how they dealt with the customers. This then helped the author to draw up a practical schedule of activities for this research study and then seek the endorsement of the management staff of the Customer Service Department. The technicians explained to the author the process flows, such as order dispatch, the normal practices for handling complaints, the credit-based incentive program for the service technicians, etc. This helped the author to frame the research direction and the scale of the investigation.

4.2 Narrative-based Group Interviews

The method chosen by which to collect the narrative data is the focus group interview. There are a number of ways of collecting verbal data, such as by a semi-structured interview or through an open interview. These types of method offer an environment in which the viewpoints of the interviewees are more likely to be expressed than in a standard interview or through a questionnaire (Flick, 2002) because of the relatively openly designed interview situation.

The Customer Service Department, arranged for fifty-seven service technicians to

attend eighteen sessions of group interview during a period between April to November 2006. All of these group interviews were conducted on the premises of Towngas, such as in the main office and in the depots at different locations. The purpose of conducting these group interviews was to collect personal stories or experiences as well as the perceptions of service quality of the front-line employees during service encounters. Each group interview consisted of three to four participants and all group interviews were facilitated by the authors. Each group interview lasted two hours. The number of attendees and the schedule of the group interviews are shown in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Details of Arrangement of Group Interviews with Service Technicians of the Maintenance Section of the Customer Service Department

| Group | Date | Venue (District) | No. of technicians attended |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1 | 11/4/2006 | North Point Building (NPB) | 4 |
| 2 | 25/4/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 4 |
| 3 | 27/4/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 4 |
| 4 | 3/5/2006 | Shek Mun, Shatin | 3 |
| 5 | 11/5/2006 | Tuen Mun | 2 |
| 6 | 15/9/2006 | North Point Building (NPB) | 3 |
| 7 | 22/9/2006 | North Point Building (NPB) | 3 |
| 8 | 26/9/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 4 |
| 9 | 5/10/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 4 |
| 10 | 12/10/2006 | Shek Mun, Shatin | 4 |
| 11 | 19/10/2006 | Shek Mun, Shatin | 3 |
| 12 | 3/11/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 2 |
| 13 | 7/11/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 2 |
| 14 | 10/11/2006 | North Point Building (NPB) | 3 |
| 15 | 14/11/2006 | North Point Building (NPB) | 3 |
| 16 | 17/11/2006 | Shek Mun, Shatin | 3 |
| 17 | 21/11/2006 | Ma Tau Kok | 3 |
| 18 | 23/11/2006 | Tuen Mun | 3 |
| | | | 57 |

Each narrative-based group interview was divided into two main sessions. In the first part, each of the group members was asked to group the pictures of local residential housing estates according to the types of customers that they had served (see Figure 4.1). This stimulated their memories about their own personal experiences or about the characteristics of each type of customers. Each group of service technicians used their own ideas when grouping the pictures. This is a technique of using prompting questions, according to the explanation of Snowden (2006) for placing the interviewee in a context they understand and by asking indirect questions to elicit a story or an experience relating to their working field. During the process, the participants found this exercise did stimulate them to recall how they performed in their maintenance work during the service encounters. The examples of the clusters of the residential housing are shown in Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3 on next page.



Figure 4.1 Participants were sorting and grouping the pictures into different clusters of residential housing.



Figure 4.2a and Figure 4.2b The examples of the clusters grouped by the participants in the narrative-based group interviews.

In the second part of the first session, the participants were first asked to group in pairs and to read two short cases pertaining to their maintenance work (see Figure 4.4). Then, the participants were asked to share their feelings and interpretations of these two short cases. These cases were related to the situation of repairing water heaters. These cases gave them an example of what their counterparts had encountered during service encounters. This helped the participants to recall their own memories and to understand how to present their experience or to tell their stories in the group interviews.



Figure 4.3 Participants are grouped in pairs to read a sample case of maintenance service of a local residential household.

In the second session of the narrative-based group interview, the participants were invited to tell a story of their own or of someone else's that they had heard before, in order to elaborate a situation or event that they might have come across. This would reveal the meaning of what the teller wants to express, stimulate a response, reveal the hidden issues which are not easy to reveal through direct inquiry, and enhance the understanding of complex issues. The author observed that many of the participants were willing to express what they had come across with their customers and shared many of their own experiences as well as their opinions on the company's policy, arrangements made by and support from the management. In some of the narrative-based group interviews, while listening to someone sharing their experience, some of the technicians, one after the other interrupted the narrator and immediately mentioned similar experiences they had had. This greatly stimulated others to share their own opinions or feelings on similar situations, and was one of the major

characteristics of the group interview, one which could not have been achieved in single standard interview. However, the author had to work hard to steer the conversations and keep them within the boundary of the area targeted for discussion. A group of photos showing the activity of clustering pictures into different groups during the narrative-based group interviews are shown in Figure 4.5.



Figure 4.4a, 4.4b & 4.4c Use of Pictures: Service Technicians were grouping hexagon-shaped photos into different clusters.

4.3 Transcribing Narratives and Stories

A total of twenty-six stories were collected from the group interview (see Appendix III). The author was responsible for transcribing the narrative contents into meaningful transcripts from the conversations that were captured on audiotape. Traditionally, re-storying is the process of gathering stories, analyzing them to find key elements of the story, for instance, time, place, plot and scene, and then rewriting the story to place it in a chronological sequence (Ollerenshaw, 2002). The technique of re-storying from the Three Dimensional Space Approach (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) for identifying the features of the stories and describing them under a proposed narrative structure was adopted (see Table 4.2). A narrative structure is constructed to classify the narratives into a meaningful format for interpretation of the meanings. This helps to explore the key issues or elements derived from the narratives so that the key concepts can be identified. The three aspects, Interaction, Continuity and Situation/Place were adopted in explaining the experiences gained by the front-line employee. One additional dimension, i.e., Handling Strategies or Techniques, was also derived from the narratives provided by the participants.

Four major areas were derived from the narratives collected from the group interviews. These areas are the sources of influences on the performance of the front-line employees during the service encounters and comprise i) Customers, ii) Role of Service Provider (the one offering services directly to customers), iii) Company Policies and iv) Challenges. Having done this transcription from a large quantity of narratives, a clear picture of the key areas which concern the front-line employees most was derived. The sort of factors that affect the performance of the service

technicians, as well as their perceptions of service quality and their perceptions of the service encounters were also identified. All of the transcribed narratives were done in the Chinese language as this was the language spoken by the service technicians. A full record of the transcriptions, in Chinese, is shown in Appendix I. The format of the proposed narrative structure of the experiences shared by the front-line employees of the research study is shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2 A format of the proposed narrative structure for transcribing the narratives

| Key Areas | Perceptions of Service Quality (Concerning the individual's feelings) | Handling Strategies and Techniques | Related Past Experiences. Examples or Stories |
|--|--|---|--|
| Customers | | | |
| Role of Service Provider (Front-line Employees) | | | |
| Company Policies | | | |
| Challenges and Difficulties | | | |

4.4 Conducting Narrative Workshop

A narrative workshop was conducted in order to capture the perceptions of the service technicians of the shortlisted meaningful and concrete stories generated from the narrative-based group interviews. Twenty service technicians participated in the two narrative workshops. All of the participating service technicians had previously attended the narrative-based group interviews, and they were randomly selected by their supervisors. These three workshops were conducted at the main office and the Towngas depot office at Shatin and Ma Tau Kok. The workshops were arranged in the early morning before they started their daily work. Each of the narrative

workshops lasted for one and a half hours. The details of the arrangement for the narrative workshops are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3 Details of the Arrangement of the Narrative Workshop

| Group | Date | Venue | Total number of participants |
|--------------|-------------|----------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| 1 | 11/03/2007 | Ma Tau Kok | 6 |
| 2 | 12/03/2007 | North Point Building (NPB) | 8 |
| 3 | 13/03/2007 | Shek Mun, Shatin | 6 |

The setting of the narrative workshop was simple. It took place in the conference room as it required only an open space for the participants to walk around freely and read the twenty–six stories which were posted on the wall (See Figure 4.5). A questionnaire was put under each of the stories for their ease of reference (see Figure 4.6). The participants were asked to read through these twenty-six stories and to answer each questionnaire which was right underneath each story. The questionnaire was marked with a label. Two sets of photos taken at different places where the narrative workshops were held are shown in Figure 4.7 and 4.8. They answered the questionnaire by focusing on the contents of each story and expressed their perceptions by indexing the stories according to the sets of filters provided (see Section 4.5a on indexing and filters).



Figure 4.5 The layout of the narrative workshop.



Figure 4.6 The questionnaires were stuck below each of the stories on the wall.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4.7a & 4.7b This group of service technicians was attending the narrative workshop in one of the conference rooms of the Main Office at North Point.



(a)



(b)

Figure 4.8a and 4.8b This group of service technicians was attending the narrative workshop at a depot at Ma Tau Kok.

The questionnaire consisted of six prompting questions relating to the quality of service. The design of those prompting questions was based on the concept developed by Snowden (2006) as introduced in Section 3.3 of Chapter Three. Six questions were constructed based on the six key elements affecting service quality. These prompting questions helped to find out what sense the participants made of the stories and how they interpreted them. Each participant was requested to give a rating (such as from totally disagree to totally agree, etc.) to each question by putting on a sticker (i.e. a red dot label), along a scale provided under each prompting question (See Figure 4.9). They gave their own interpretations of each story by choosing on of two opposing endings or contrasting scenarios of each question. This rating process is regarded as a kind of indexing. Indexing refers to the process of tagging a sense making item (or SMI), such as a story, to give it added layers of meaning for subsequent analysis.

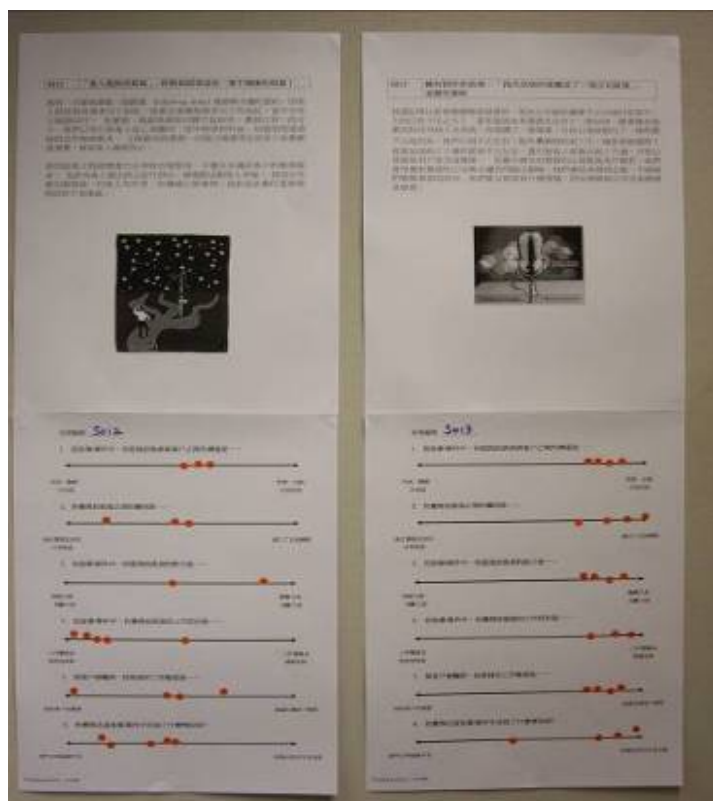


Figure 4.9 Examples of the answered questionnaire

4.5 Detecting the narrative patterns

The detecting of the narrative patterns from the indexing of the stories was done by the author with a sense-making software tool - SenseMaker™, developed by The Cognitive Edge¹. The process of applying the sense-making software tool for detecting the narrative patterns from the captured stories is as below:

Each of the participants of the workshop was asked to index the story according to the filters. These will represent what they think or how they interpret the story. A filter is typically a 10 point scale (or a continuous scale as adopted in this study) asking a respondent to identify the strength of certain defined properties (emergent or analytical) that are occurring in or are reflected by the sense making item, (e.g. narratives). Snowden (2006) mentions that there are two set of filters suggested: Emergent filters measure the presence of archetypes, values and/or themes (e.g. Mother Teresa). Analytical filters are defined as two opposing positive or negative properties (e.g. too much and too little information for decision making).

In this research study, those filters were derived from the identified concepts and key elements derived from the narrative contents. The filters were mainly related to the factors affecting the service quality of the front-line-employees in the case being studied. Snowden (2006) suggests that self-indexing by the originator telling the story is important to get the most relevant and indexed data from an individual; this is

¹ Cognitive Edge is focused on rejuvenating management practices to better equip organizations when addressing intractable problems or seizing new opportunities in uncertain and complex situations. Cognitive Edge was launched in 2005 and focused on developing new methods and tools to assist organizations with truly complex problems and opportunities.

treated as originator indexing. All the indexed data collecting from the workshop was input into a sense-making software application - SenseMaker™ Collector, which is a software tool developed for leveraging unstructured data, complexity and networks to provide early detection of patterns and associated weak signals, thus improving anticipation and responsiveness to change. Data collection consists of three modules; they are a) SenseMaker™ Seeker, b) SenseMaker™ Classifier and c) SenseMaker™ Collector. Sense Making and Analysis is composed of two modules; they are a) SenseMaker™ Explorer and b) SenseMaker™ Modeler. Once the indexed data has been collected, all data as well as the Sense-Making Items are saved in a single file for downloading into the user's own machine. (Snowden, 2006). The basic components of the SenseMaker™ tool are described in Appendix V. The analysis and interpretation of the collected data is given in Chapter Five.

Chapter Five Findings and Analysis

The approach and methods to integrate various research methods and the way the data were collected in Towngas, the reference site for this project, have been described in the previous chapters. This chapter illustrates how these data are processed, and analyzed. Also, the findings are presented. The findings can be classified into two main groups. The first group of findings consists of derivation of the key elements affecting the quality of the service performance from the front-line employees' perspective. The findings were all elicited from the collected narratives during the narrative-based group interviews. Since all the transcripts are presented in the Chinese language, the transcribed narratives describing the perceptions of the quality of the service performance are shown in Chinese (see Appendix I). The second group of findings pertains to the analyzed results obtained from the sense-making application from the SenseMaker™ Explorer. These findings consist of capturing stories unearthed by indexing the unstructured data–narratives; the analysis of the stories clustered around the filters; the relationships among the filters (key elements affecting service quality) and the revelations from divergences from the narrative patterns. The divergences from the narrative patterns mean when the narrator diverges from the usual narrative pattern he/she may reveal issues that otherwise would have remained hidden.

5.1 Extraction of Key Elements of Service Quality

5.1.1 Elicitation of Concepts of Service Quality

When service technicians perform their work tasks or deliver services to their customers, various factors can come into play affecting the service quality. All

perceptions of the quality of their service performance described by the employees were based on their direct feelings and personal experiences during the service transactions. In the process of transcribing the narratives, the contents of the narratives were transcribed in a format suggested by the author. The participants said that many cases or situations encountered by them were mainly related to the customers' concerns and how the customers expressed their concerns pertaining to the customer service, the role of the service technicians, the company's customer service policies and the challenges and difficulties of the front-line employees. Some examples pertaining to the above mentioned conditions are quoted and stated in the following Table 5.1

Table 5.1 Examples of the areas concerning the above four conditions quoted from the narratives.

| | |
|--|---|
| Customers' Concerns | Working attitude of the service provider, customer's enquiries, customer's needs and rights, customer's requests, customer's comments on charging for parts |
| Service Technicians' role | Concept of service performance, attitude of the service provider, role of service providers, skill sets |
| Company's customer service strategies | Customer service, internal communication, work motivation, handling customers' complaints |
| Challenges and Difficulties of the front-line employees | Work pressures, skills for dispatching orders and handling complaints, how to make customers feel satisfied, |

Also, they went on to say how they felt when they came across different types of situations, how they dealt with demanding customers and what type of handling strategies or techniques had been used during the service encounters. Service technicians pointed out the various techniques which were required for tackling different problems or handling different situations effectively. They shared their own stories or experiences on different scenarios to give a clear picture of how to handle the cases in various ways by adopting special skills. The examples of the cases relating to various situations are shown in Table 5.2. The details of the transcribed narratives are contained in Appendix I.

Table 5.2 Examples quoted from the transcribed narratives for illustrating the format of elicitations

| | Perceptions obtained during service encounter | Handling Strategies and Techniques | Examples of Personal Experiences and stories |
|--|--|---|--|
| Customers' concerns <i>Example : Meeting with an angry customer</i> | The customer had made the same complaint several times concerning the removal of the water heater. But, he was still not satisfied with the service provided. He blamed this on the service technicians. Service technicians might be aware of the possibility of this happening, but they didn't know when this would happen to them. | Service technicians should keep calm and listen to the customer first and then try to explain the possible solutions to them. They should also try to respond to their requests and get support from supervisors. | Story (S001) - Keep Calm, Customer's flue box fell to the ground! |
| Service Provider's Technician's role <i>Example: Establishing good personal network</i> | It was important to establish a mutual help network among the group of service technicians. This stimulated them to learn from each other. | But, it highly depended on the actual situation of the service encounter, e.g. if there was a colleague around in the same district; if the person was a nice guy with close relationship with others. | Story (S010) - It is not just the repair of a water heater, but the mutual assistance between technicians that matters. |
| Company's customer service strategies <i>Example: How does the company deal with unreasonable complaints made by customers?</i> | Service Technicians thought that the management would try to appease the customers but not consider the actual availability of the technicians; e.g. longer working hours, more spare parts of the appliances to be carried by the service technicians so their carrying bags would be so heavy; but no further support given by the management. | They realized that the company regarded its corporate image was the top priority, so it wanted to minimize complaints from customers. So, the front-line employees would be the ones to endure the unreasonable complaints from the customers. They felt it was hard to face it, but they have to keep calm when encountering such customers. | Story (012) - Many customers make complaints intentionally in order to further recompense from the company. |
| Challenges and Difficulties of the front-line employees <i>Example: It's not easy to find the suitable parts of the gas appliances if the appliance is out of stock.</i> | Sometimes the customers would not have much patience to wait for the supply for the appliance parts. If the appliance is rather old fashioned, the stock would not be available anymore. The technicians felt that this was difficult to explain. They felt embarrassed as it was out of their control. | They would try their best to find the parts from other units, such as the installation section or product development department, to see if any remaining parts were there. It was not easy as this was so time-consuming and relied much on the personal network of the technician | Story (S025) – Searching for suitable and available parts for the range hood from other internal departments. |

Table 5.3 Examples of the concepts elicited from the coding of perceptions of the quality of service performance

| <u>Concepts elicited from the narratives</u> | <u>Coding</u> |
|--|---|
| Self protection & Self-recognition | Self motivation and keeping calm. Minimize the chance of being complained about by the customers. Be relaxed and keep healthy. Derive satisfaction from the work done. Develop a sense of humor and Good communication skills. Develop skills for handling tricky questions and extra requests from the customers. Make good judgments in dealing with contingencies. |
| Positive working attitude and good skill set development | Show courtesy. Be patient when answering customer's questions. Develop skills in explaining advantages and disadvantages of the service outcome to the customers. Develop observation skills on the environments and be aware of customers' needs. Think Positive: Customer's benefit is the first priority. Develop risk evaluation skills and proficient technical skill sets. Have a good knowledge of the gas appliances. |
| Recognition of the function of the Customer Service Department | The function of customer service is not only for performing maintenance works. It has to satisfy customer needs and serve as the front desk to contact the customers directly. It also needs to provide solutions to the customers in order to help them to solve the problem related to the gas appliances or the gas supply. |
| Company's customer service strategies | Front-line employees feel confused if the company always concedes when it come across customers' complaints. |
| Insufficient knowledge of new gas appliances; | Insufficient training is provided; only introductory leaflets are provided. Aggressive promotion of new appliances; insufficient time to digest the information. Inadequate supply of spare parts for new appliances. |
| Shifting responsibilities from department to department; | Each department focuses only on its own mission or function but neglects the correlations among different front-line departments. An excessive number of orders was accepted from the customer hotline service. |
| Customers' complaints | It would be difficult to evaluate what is right or wrong if the complaints are related to the technicians' attitude. Some complaints are unreasonable but the technicians should not argue with the customers. Service Technicians should try their best to prevent customers' complaints. |

| | |
|---|---|
| Customers attitudes | <p>Some customers are so cool and serious that they are not willing to communicate with the technicians.</p> <p>Some customers are so demanding and ask so many questions when the technicians are performing maintenance works.</p> <p>Some customers are so sensitive to the charges for additional spare parts or for changing spare parts.</p> |
| Work pressures | <p>Pressure comes from customers, e.g. Some customers make complaints intentionally in order to get more remedies from the company.</p> <p>Technicians feel pressures because of their needs to develop good communication skills.</p> <p>Pressure comes from the company, e.g. high pressure of keeping up the company's image, overtime work and heavy workloads.</p> |
| Job nature: piecemeal Heavy workload | <p>Long working hours and heavy workloads.</p> <p>Technicians get hurts, e.g. strain of muscles.</p> <p>Spend time to wait for the customers to go back home.</p> <p>Time is tight for completing many orders within the allocated time slot.</p> |
| Lack of management support; | <p>Insufficient support is provided by the department.</p> <p>Management doesn't know the actual situation of the maintenance works performed by the technicians.</p> <p>Low recognition is given by the management.</p> <p>Technicians need to sell gas appliances as the management wants to increase the sales volume.</p> <p>When the department receives customers' complaints, the management may blame the technicians for being so careless or for not comforting the customers properly.</p> |
| Care for customers' needs | <p>Service Technicians should be able to detect or sense the emotions of customers. They should possess good observation and communication skills.</p> |
| Rely on personal network | <p>They have to build trust and to encourage mutual help networks by themselves</p> |
| Insufficient communication channel | <p>Insufficient internal communication among inter-departments and employees, e.g. no regular sharing sessions.</p> |
| Difficult to control time on each order | <p>If a technician stays in a household longer than the regular duration, this would also affect the arrival time at the next destination.</p> <p>More time is needed to fix some complicated gas appliances.</p> <p>More time is required to find and replace those gas appliances which are installed in the hidden area of the kitchen cabinet.</p> |

5.1.2 Design of the filters for indexing stories

Some of the examples of the concepts elicited from the perceptions of the quality service performance are summarized in Table 5.3. The details of the elicited concepts from the narratives are contained in Appendix II. Based on the concepts identified, major perceptions (i.e. their judgment of the situation, the degree of urgency of the issue of concern) of service quality have been extracted as the fundamental indication affecting the service technicians' overall performance. The six major perceptions are listed in Table 5.4.

Table 5.4 Major perceptions of the quality of service performance derived from the narratives

| <u>Major perceptions of the quality of service performance</u> | <u>Concepts elicited from the narratives</u> |
|---|--|
| High Self-esteem because of Professional Ability & Self-Recognition | Self protection & Self-recognition Positive working attitude and good development is technical skill sets Recognition of the function of the Customer Service Department |
| Lack of Internal Communication | Company's customer service strategies are not understood by technicians Insufficient sharing among technicians Insufficient knowledge of new gas appliances |
| Insufficient Internal Supports from other departments | Shifting responsibilities one department to another Technicians need to rely on personal network Heavy workload |
| Work Pressures from Customers | Customers' complaints Misunderstandings made by the customers Unreasonable requests made by the customers |
| Good Provision of Customer Service and Care | Good observation and communication skills Good care for customers' needs Good listening skills and work patiently |
| Low Morale | Job nature: piecemeal Difficult to control time on each order Lack of Management support Insufficient communication channels |

These major perceptions are then refined to become the key elements of service quality which affect the performance of the service technicians. The design of the filter used in the questionnaire is based on these six key elements of service quality which may affect the technicians' performances. The detailed descriptions are listed in Table 5.5.

Table 5.5 An integrated table showing the linkage of the majors perceptions, the key elements of service quality and their respective filters in the setting of the questionnaire

| <u><i>Major perceptions</i></u> | <u><i>Key elements of service quality</i></u> | <u><i>Filters used in the questionnaire (contrasting filters)</i></u> | |
|---|---|---|--|
| Work Pressures from Customers | Communication with customers | Coldness, Seriousness, No Communication | Harmonious, Voluntarily, Good Communication |
| Lack of Internal Communication | Internal Communication | Insufficient communication and No channel for sharing | A mutual help network among service technicians has been established |
| High self-esteem because of Professional Ability & Self-Recognition | Professional Ability | Not clear headed; not knowledgeable poor judgment | Strong ability in dealing with an emergency and good determination |
| Low Morale | Staff Morale | Heavy workload & no recognition | Work smoothly & facing the reality with positive mindsets |
| Good Provision of Customer Service and Care | Customer Care | Customers' needs are ignored by the technicians | Do not ignore Customers' needs by the technicians |
| Insufficient Internal Support from other departments | Coordination and Support | Insufficient cooperation among departments | Good cooperation and full support from peers |

The technicians shared how they make use of the skill sets they had developed by themselves and the knowledge they had acquired, and the experience they had gained which helped them to handle difficult situations. Each of the service technicians has to deal with the customer independently, to make quick responses, to make accurate

decisions, and take appropriate action. They also have to know how to communicate with the customers tactfully so as to prevent customers' complaints. So it is necessary to capture, systematically all the perceptions the service technicians have of their performance. In order to obtain quantifiable data showing the overall perceptions of a group of front-line employees, it is necessary to first define the key elements affecting the quality of the service they perform that they concerned most with as the fundamental indications for story indexing. This data will help to highlight any weak signals found during the analysis of the narrative patterns of the stories told and will help to clarify the conditions under which the service took place.

5.2 Distribution of Perspectives Linked to Stories Linked by each Participant

The analytical process involves interpreting visualizations of the indexing patterns of the perspectives of the front-line staff attached to each filter derived from the stories. In this way, various responses to the qualitative data (from the stories) can be expressed in quantitative format (i.e., the frequency of the response and the value they attach to each response). Weak signals (i.e., the inter-relationship among different indexes (responses), filters (questions) and stories that may not be obvious from a traditional statistical analysis may surface, as humans are better at capturing small differences in patterns rather than in numbers.

The analysis conducted was based on the SenseMaker™ Explorer. It contains a range of analytical and interrogation tools that allow both recall and interpretation of Sense Making Items (SMIs), such as stories, pictures, etc. This module makes

extensive use of visualization to allow complex patterns and exceptions to be discovered. It combines the information processing capability of computers with the pattern based intelligence of human beings. It consists of several viewers. These are Glance, Browse, Compare, Range, Distribute, Cluster and Graph. In the following section, the function of each viewer inside the SenseMaker™ Explorer is introduced, and the patterns of narratives as displayed by the two major viewers, the Cluster viewer and the Graph viewer, are also presented in detail.

Instead of giving a numerical rating on the feedback from 1 to 10 for each filter (question) set for the six key elements of the service performance under each of the stories posted, the participants were requested to place a dot label along a line scale for each question on the questionnaires to indicate their preferences towards the two ends - negative / positive side of the filters (questions). Since each filter was represented by a single value, the ultimate aim was to measure the low to high presence of that value of the key elements for a particular story. In other words, the views of the service technicians on service quality performance were elicited based on the context of the narrative data.

5.2.1 Glance Viewer

This Glance Viewer shows all the indexes defined by the researcher in a single screen which displays the all the perspectives that the participants linked to that filter. In this case study, a total of twenty participants were invited to do the indexing. They were free to pick up or reject any story and its associated questions to index (giving a rating along a scale). The filters (or the associated question) with the highest

frequency of being indexed is “Communication with Customers” and “Staff Morale”, shown in the third column - “Default”. The filter of “Internal Communication.” is least indexed. Figure 5.1 shows the layout of this Glance Viewer. The shaded bar indicates the number of perspectives linked to each of the 6 filters defined in this case study.



Figure 5.1 Glance viewer showing an overall view of the total number of perspectives linked to each of the filters.

5.2.2 Browse Viewer

The Browse Viewer works like a web browser and provides a quick way to navigate around the indexed data among the filters. The total number of perspectives linked to each filter is indicated in the first page of this Browser viewer, (Figure 5.2a). The total number of perspectives linked to the filter “Communication with Customers” and “Staff Morale” is 384 and 389 respectively. When compared with the other filters these two topics were two most frequently linked to those. There are 306 perspectives linked to the filter of “Internal Communication”. This data provides a preliminary idea of the distributions of the perspectives from the front-line employees’ point of view in this case study.

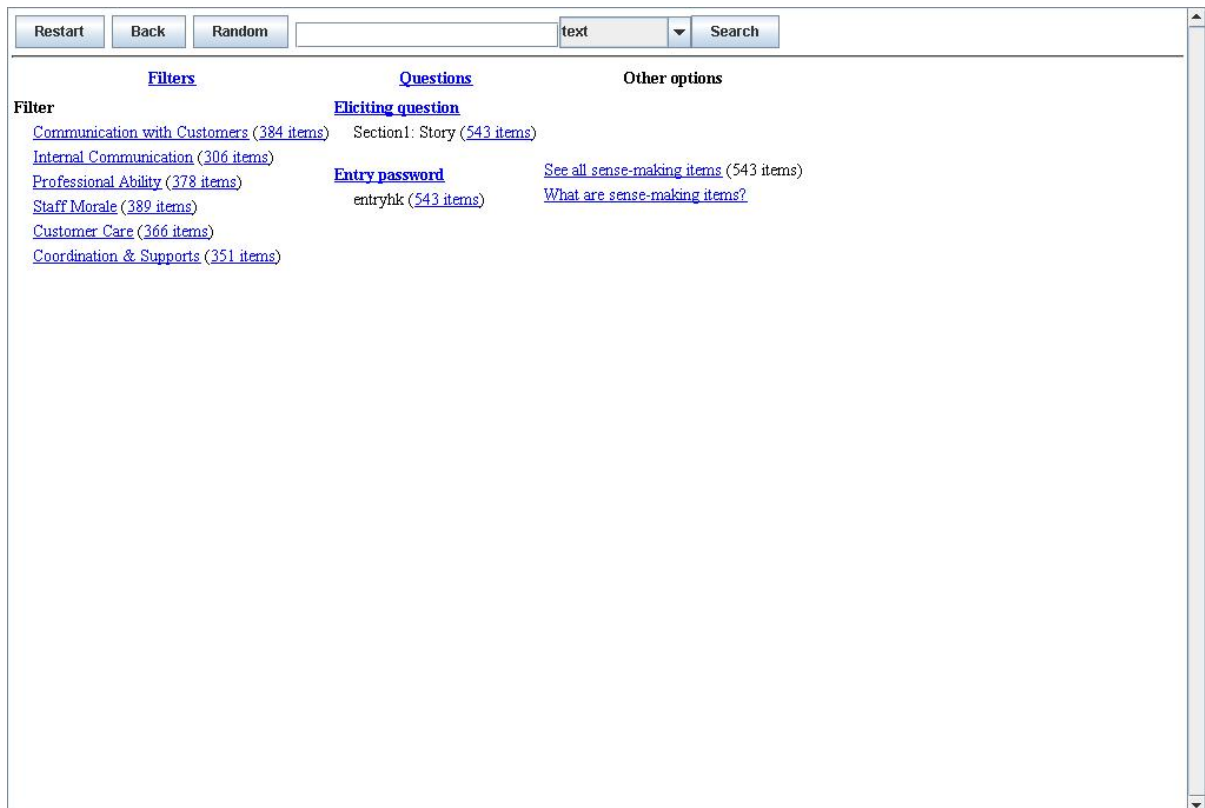


Figure 5.2a Browse viewer – showing a list of filters and the total number of perspectives linked to each filter

The details of the original texts of each story are linked to each filter. These details will be shown as soon as this link is clicked. This viewer displays various categories: these are (i) shows all items linked to the filter, (ii) show only those items directly linked to this filter with strength greater than 50% and (iii) show only those items directly linked with strength greater than 75%. These choices enable the participants to bring up the descriptions of each story that they prefer and provide the context in which the stories occur. This facilitates a proper understanding of the items which the participants think are of the greatest importance. Based on the indexed results, this method offers an opportunity to move away from the quantitative measure to investigate the stories in depth, with the aim of finding further explanations. Figures 5.2b shows the layouts of category selections and 5.2c illustrates the items related to each of the selected categories. A full version of the story that was told is shown separately in the Browser viewer (see Figure 5.2d).

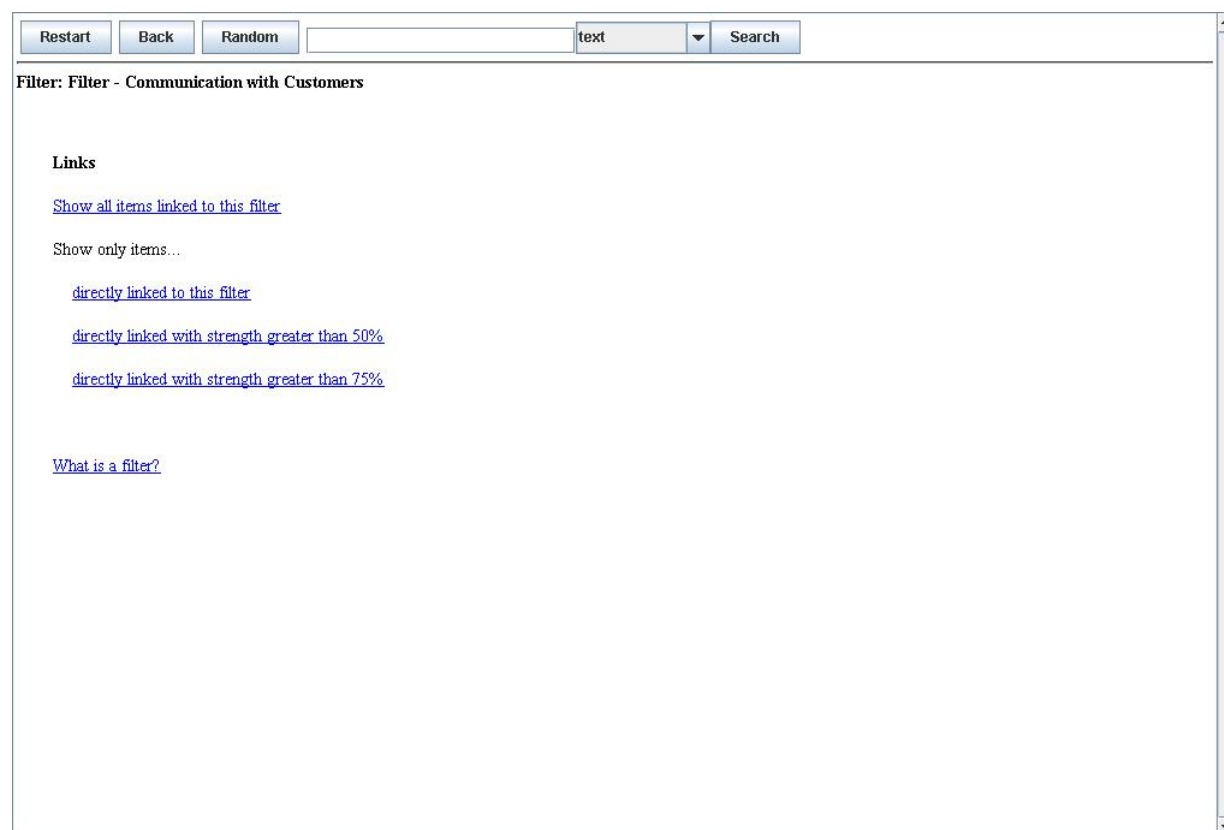


Figure 5.2b Browse viewer – showing category of indexed data for each of the filters



Figure 5.2c Browse viewer – displaying the category of “show all items directly linked to Communication with Customers”.



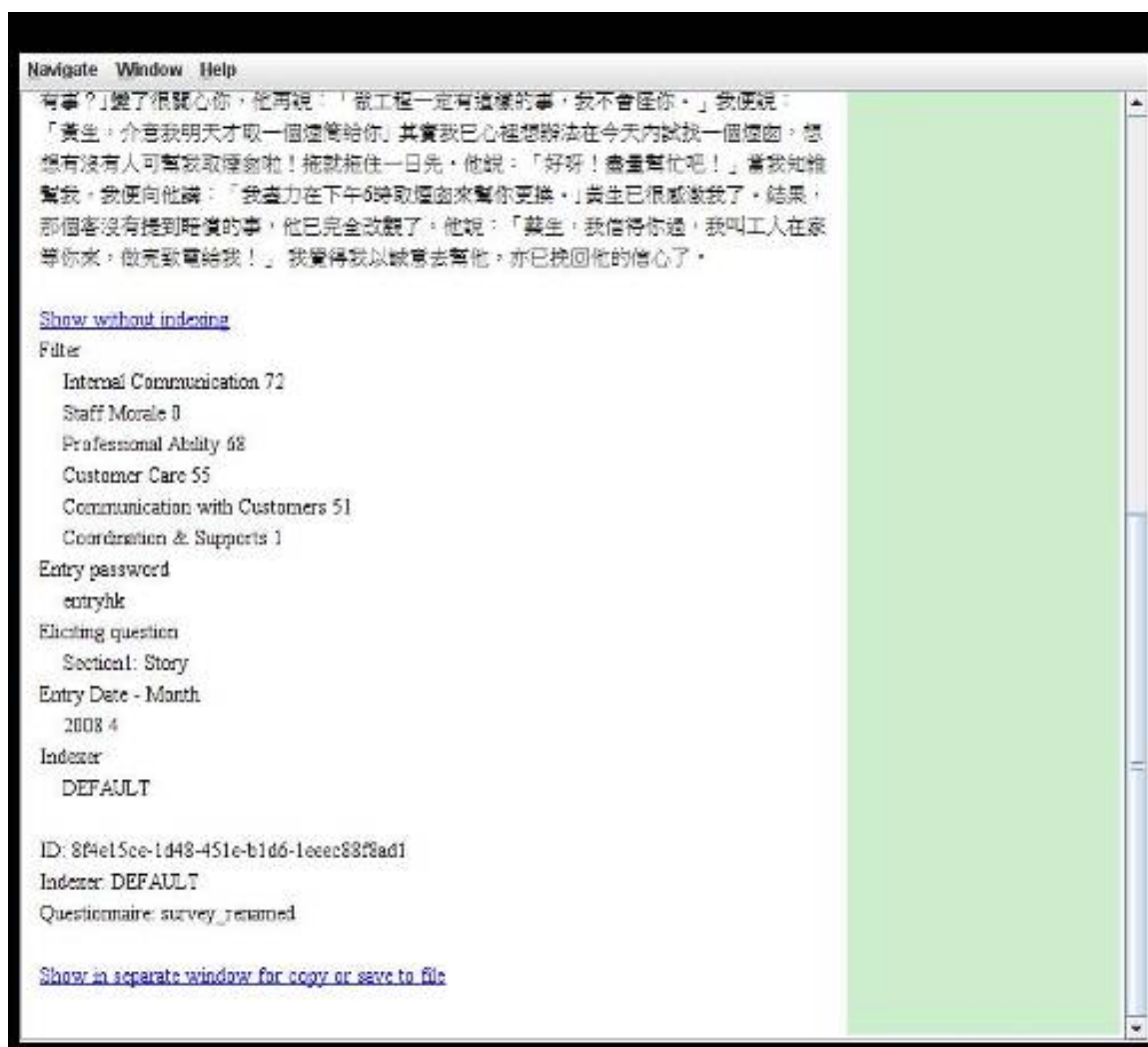


Figure 5.2d Browser viewer – displaying the full version of a story told.

5.2.3 Compare Viewer

The Compare viewer is a simple query engine showing the query results side by side. In order to view the details of each story the appropriate filter in each column must be clicked. In each of the vertical panels, a tree list of the filters, and a set of perspectives that match the selection in the tree list of the selected item, can be seen. This shows all the linkages to each of the filters and the full version of the particular items representing the relevant perspectives in this example. That means, three different stories under the linkage of the same filter can be viewed at the same time. In the Figure 5.3, three different stories labeled at S013, S025 and S026 can be

reviewed at the same time. This gives an overall concept of why the indexers index them under the same filter.

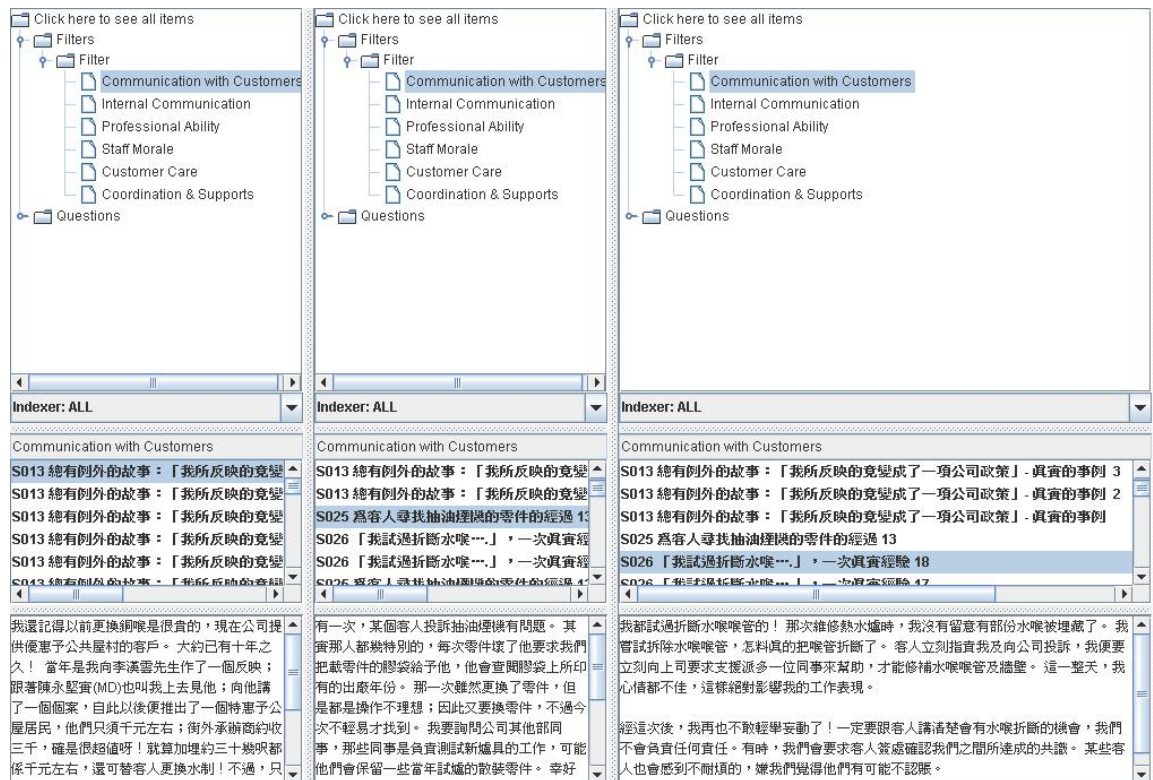


Figure 5.3 Compare viewer – showing a layout of the different stories under the same selected tree list of the filters.

5.2.4 Distribute Viewer

The Distribute Viewer draws histograms of perspectives according to the strength of their associations to filters, showing how filters were linked to perspectives (Figure 5.4). This viewer consists of two main columns; one is the Tree List (left-hand side) and the other is the Header (right-hand side). The user simply drags the selected filter from the tree list to fill the header, and then a histogram is shown in the header column on the right-hand side. This viewer offers several functions, counting the number of perspectives in different parts of the histogram, and showing the statistical values, such as mean (a red line), median (a green line), percentiles – the 25th and 75th percentiles (two purple lines), standard deviation (two orange lines) and normal curve overlay (black line for normal distribution; grey one for non-normal distribution).

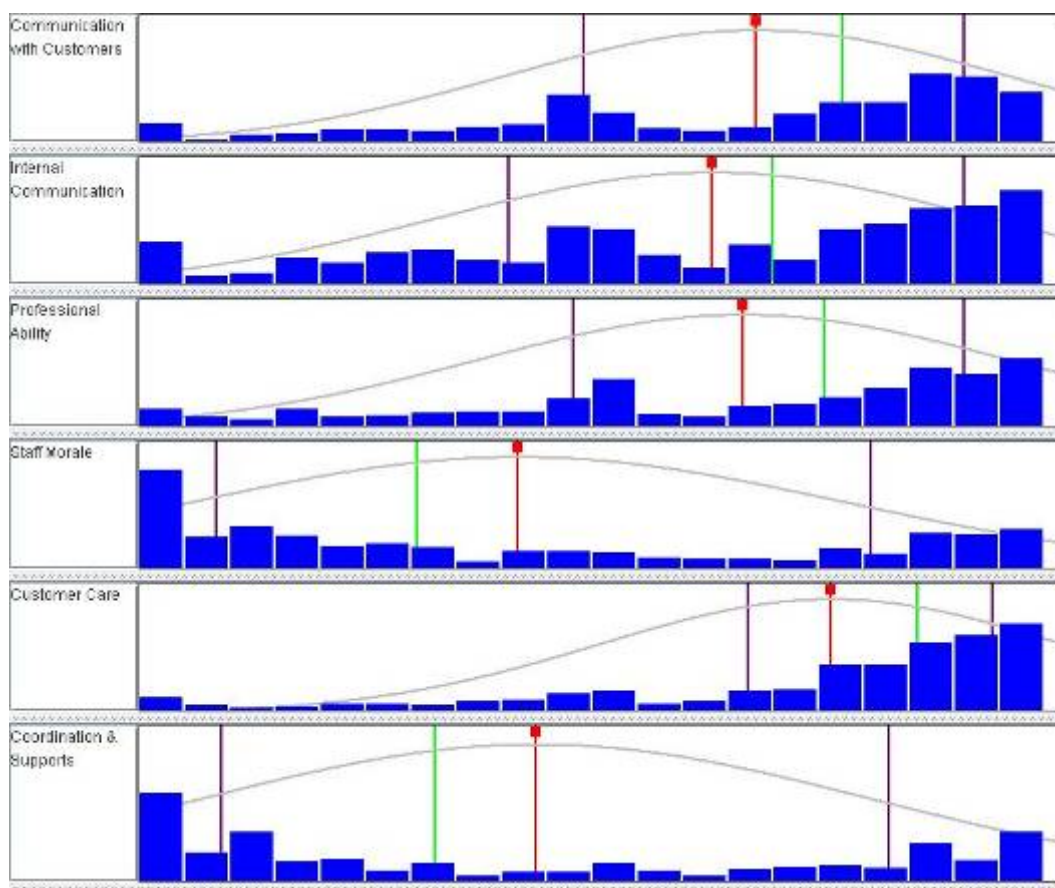


Figure 5.4 Distribute Viewer – showing the distributions of the perspectives linked to each filter in a histogram format.

According to the analyzed outcome, most perspectives were linked to the filters of “Communication with Customers”, “Internal Communication”, “Professional Ability” and “Customer Care” with high values. On the other hand, the number of perspectives on “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support” is low. The distributions of the linked perspectives of the first three filters - “Communication with Customers”, “Internal Communication” and “Professional Ability” were not normally distributed, but their overall distributions were similar, showing similar preferences from the front-line employees while they were reviewing the stories told. In the histogram of “Customer Care”, more perspectives were indexed in the higher value region - the median is placed at this region. This reflects that most employees thought they demonstrated good performance in the area of customer care. In the histograms of

“Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support”, more perspectives were indexed in the lower value region. A rather diverse distribution is displayed throughout the histograms under each of the above two filters. This implies that some of the employees perceived a rather low morale among themselves and that insufficient coordination and support were received from the management. The above viewers give the overall distributions of the perspectives linked to each of the stories told. A deeper interpretation of the narrative patterns is reflected in the next two viewers – the Cluster and Graph viewers. Details are discussed in the next Section.

5.3 Discoveries from the Narrative Patterns

The narrative patterns of the stories told are drawn from two viewers, the Cluster viewer and the Graph viewer. According to the previous discussion Section 5.2.1, a broad distribution of perspectives linked to the told stories has been identified. This indicates that the perceptions of service quality as seen from the perspective of the employees are not normally distributed. This implies that the narrative patterns of the stories told are an anomaly. The Cluster Viewer and Graph Viewer are able to visualize in more details this anomalistic pattern.

5.3.1 Cluster Viewer

The Cluster viewer provides a visualized presentation of the relationships among filters based on linkages to the same sense making item, i.e. story. This viewer offers an insight into how people index the items using different filters at the same time. As discussed in Chapter Three, visualizations provide an alternative way of

interpreting the identified narrative patterns by identifying the weak signals (i.e., weak correlation) from a bulk volume of data. Numerous dots, representing the perspectives, can be found in the drawing space of the Cluster viewer when four filters have been dragged into the drawing space. This shows the connections of the perspectives linked to each of the dragged filters in this Cluster viewer. This is one of the visualized patterns of the perspectives linked to the filters for identifying the weak signals from the narrative patterns.

In the following series of diagrams (from Figure 5.5 to Figure 5.7) , three basic sets of diagrams have been drawn to explain how to interpret the relationships among filters based on the links they have to the same stories. Each set of diagrams contains four filters for seeing the visualized patterns of the distribution of the dots, representing the perspectives, and for grasping the ideas of how people interpret those stories. Each diagram shows the connections and relationships of items to each of the filters. This Cluster viewer also offers a function of counting how many items or perspectives are placed in different parts of the space. The obvious comparison between the number of dots placed in the middle region of the square with the number of dots placed around the diagonals and on the outside lines, is useful for analyzing the narrative patterns. Therefore, nine zones have been highlighted in each of the diagrams shown in the following section.

Diagram 1
Filters - Communication with Customers/Internal Communication/Professional Ability/Staff Morale

In Figure 5.5 the Cluster view is shown which consists of one set of diagrams. The overall distribution of dots derived from the three diagrams is shown in the drawing space. They fall into 9 Zones. Zone 1 is in the middle of the square. It has been

identified by a red circle. Others zone areas are marked by a square or a vertical rectangle for ease of reference. Zone 2 is above the middle region; Zone 3 is in the Top-left corner of the drawing space; Zone 4 is in the mid-right region of the drawing space; Zone 5 is located at the bottom-left of the drawing space; Zone 6 is located below the middle region; Zone 7 is located at the bottom-left of the drawing space; Zone 8 is placed on the mid-right part of the drawing space and Zone 9 is located at the top-right corner of this drawing space. Different numbers of dots can be found in these zones; each dot represents a perspective linked to each story which can also be identified directly from the Cluster viewer. It can easily be seen that there are dense connections to all the dragged filters in the drawing space, as many dots have been placed the middle region of the diagram shown. Those dots located away from the middle region means that those perspectives linked to the stories are indexed towards a particular filter or fall in between the filters. The connections among dots, other than those located at the middle region, are becoming fragmented in the diagram.

The purpose of highlighting various zone areas is to make a comparison between the filters. This is shown by comparing how many items are in the middle of the square as opposed to being on the diagonals and outside the lines. A pop-up diagram has been shown which lists the details of dots relating to the story that is represented. This enables the number of perspectives inside each highlighted region to be counted and provides the detailed descriptions of each of the stories inside the zone areas. More dots are located at the left-hand side of the square in Figure 5.5. than in the other rectangles. This means that more perspectives linked to the stories feature in the filter of “Communication with Customers” and “Professional Ability” than in the filters of “Internal Communication” and “Staff Morale”.

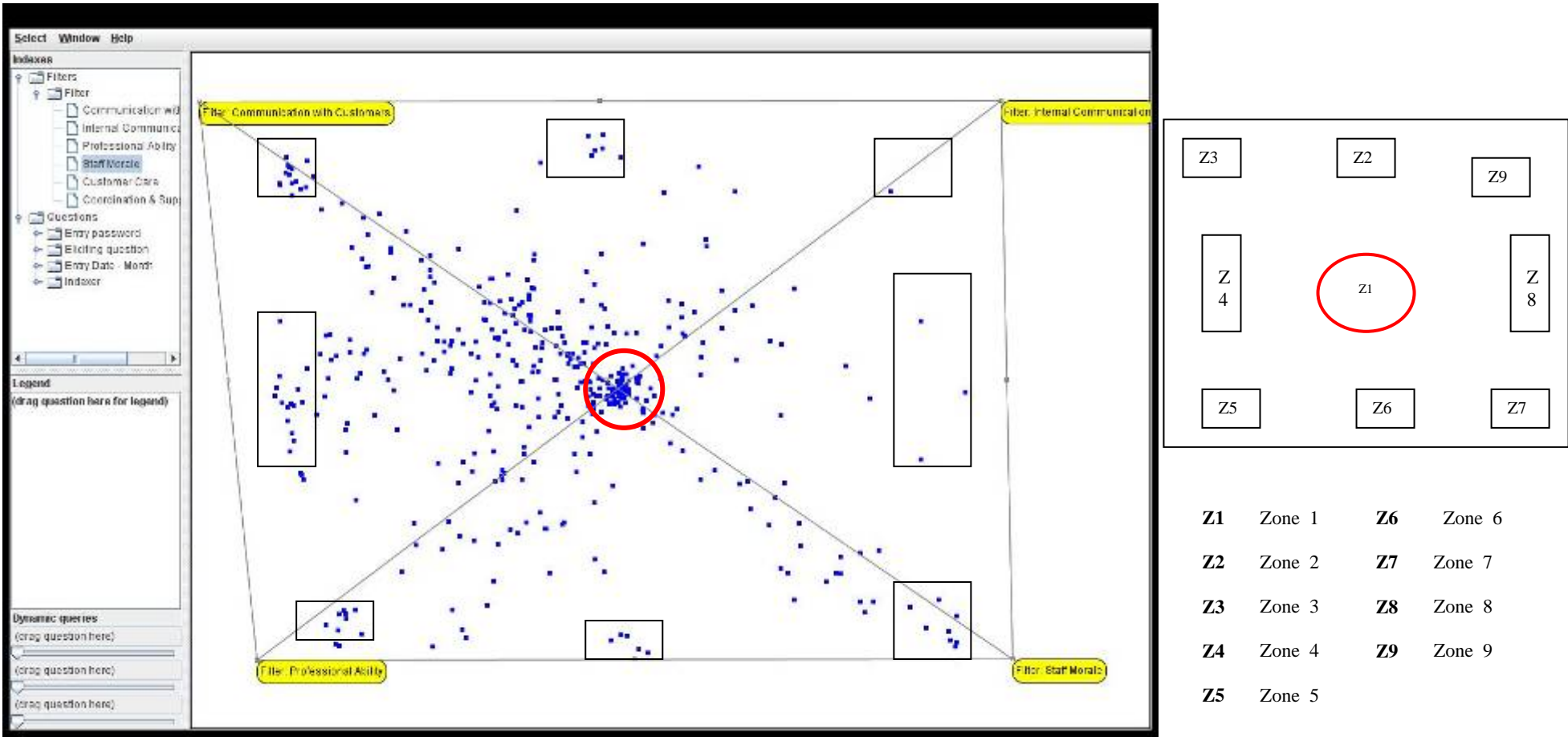


Figure 5.5 Diagram 1 Filters - Communication with Customers/Internal Communication/Professional Ability/Staff Morale

In Zone 1, a large number of perspectives linked to different stories have been indicated. The cluster of dots represents the perspectives; in the middle are the stories which are featured equally by all four filters. This shows a strong pattern when compared with the patterns in the other zone areas. There are several strong patterns linked to the highlighted story S007 (surrounded by a blue circle), S010 (contained within a blue circle), S011, S012, S013 and S014 (indicated by a blue circle) in the middle region. To identify weak signals, the numbers of perspectives linked to these highlighted stories in the middle region are compared with the number of perspectives linked to these stories appearing in other zones. For example, in Zone 2, a cluster of four perspectives linked to S010 appears. This may indicate a divergence from the perspectives linked to S010 from the employees' perspective. Figure 5.5b reveals the total number of perspectives that has been counted, and four perspectives linked to S010 have been listed.

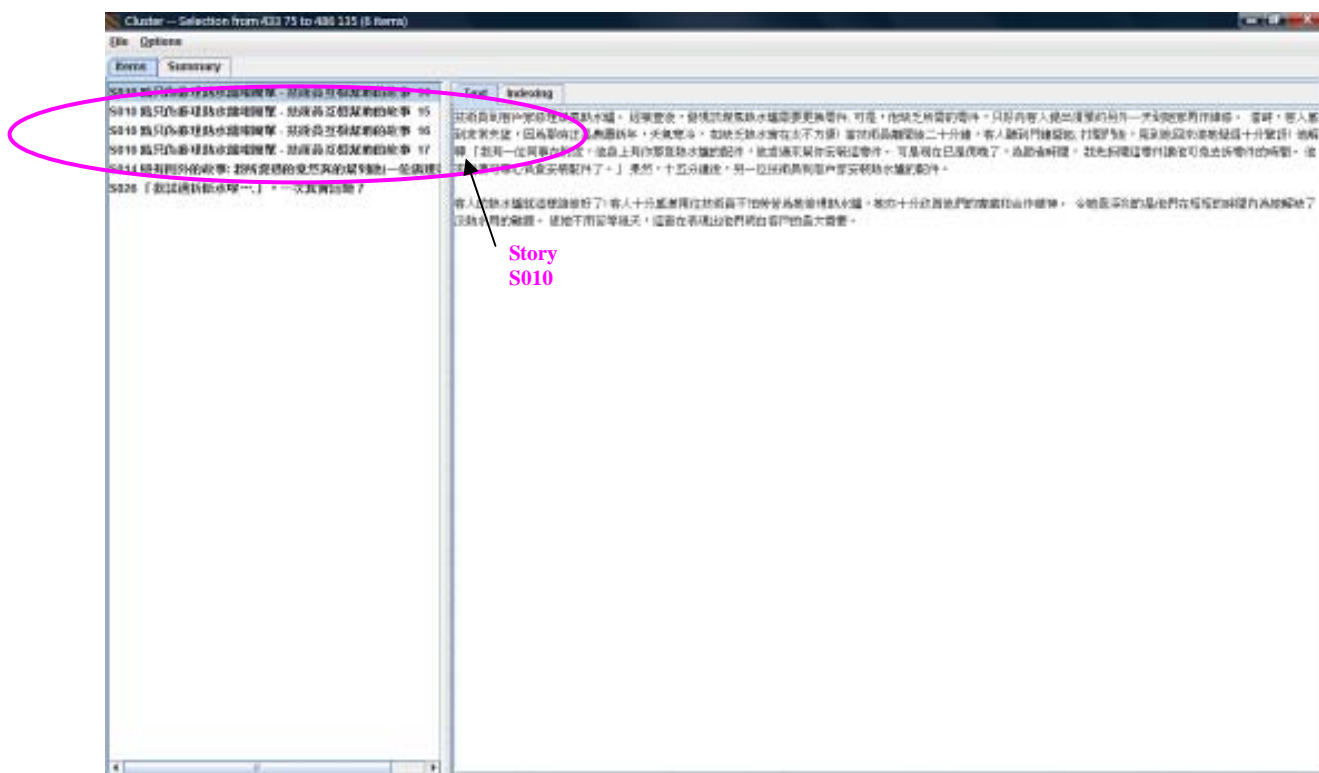


Figure 5.5b Zone 2 – Description of the perspective shown in the Mid-top region

In Zone 3, two perspectives linked to story S014 have been listed in the print screen (Figure 5.5c). A significant cluster of perspectives (i.e., twelve) has been noted at the middle region, Zone 1 (shown in Figure 5.5) when compared with only two listed in Zone 3.

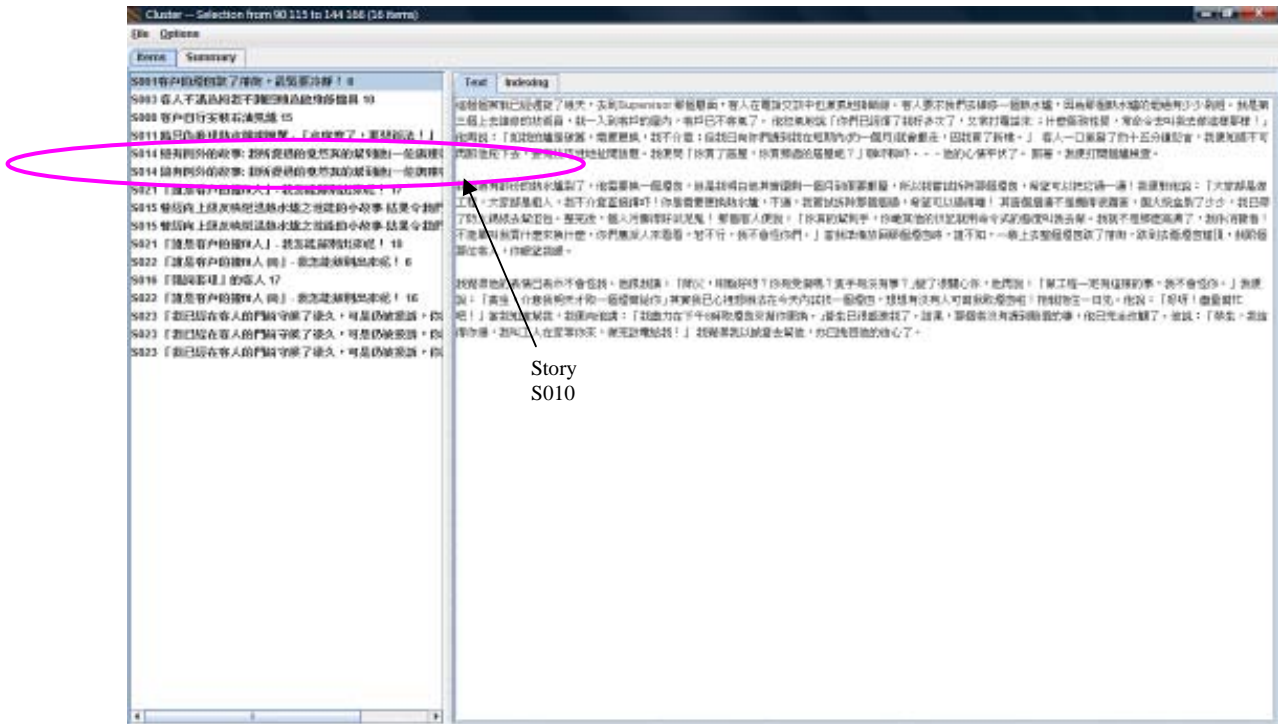


Figure 5.5c Zone 3 – Descriptions of the perspective shown in the Top-left region

In Zone 5, a cluster of seven perspectives linked to story S007 is contained within the oval pink circle (Figure 5.5d). However, there are only three perspectives linked to story S007 in Zone 1. This may draw attention to the question of why some employees indexed the story S007 as being closer to the filter of “Customer Care” rather than to any of the other four filters.

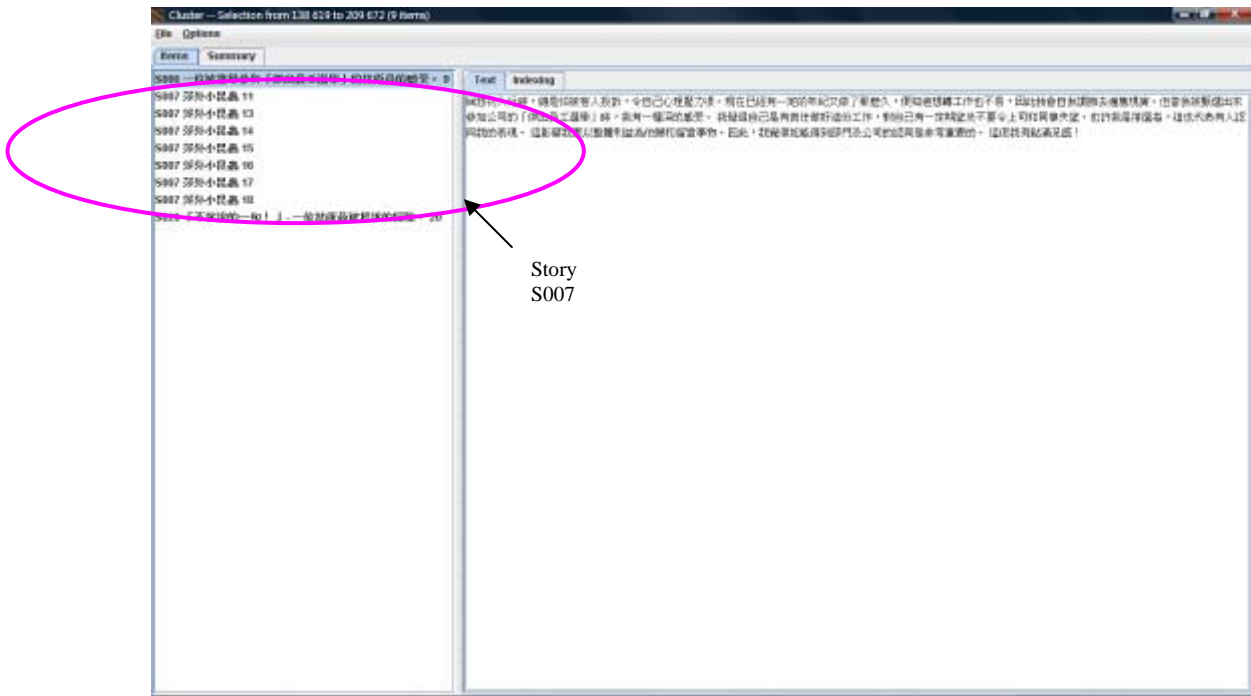


Figure 5.5d Zone 5- Descriptions of perspective shown in the Bottom-left region

Diagram 2

Filter - Professional Ability/Staff Morale/Customer Care/Coordination and Support

In Diagram 2 (Figure 5.6), the perspectives linked to stories have denser connections on the right-hand side, i.e. they feature stronger links to the filter of “Professional Ability” and “Customer Care” when compared with the links to the other two filters “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support”. In Zone 1, a number of perspectives linked to different stories have been indicated in Figure 5.6a. The cluster of dots in the middle, represent the perspectives on stories which are featured by all four filters equally. There are several strong patterns linked to the highlighted story of S007 (surrounded by a blue circle), S010 (surrounded by a blue circle), S012, S013, and S014 (surrounded by a blue circle) in the middle region.

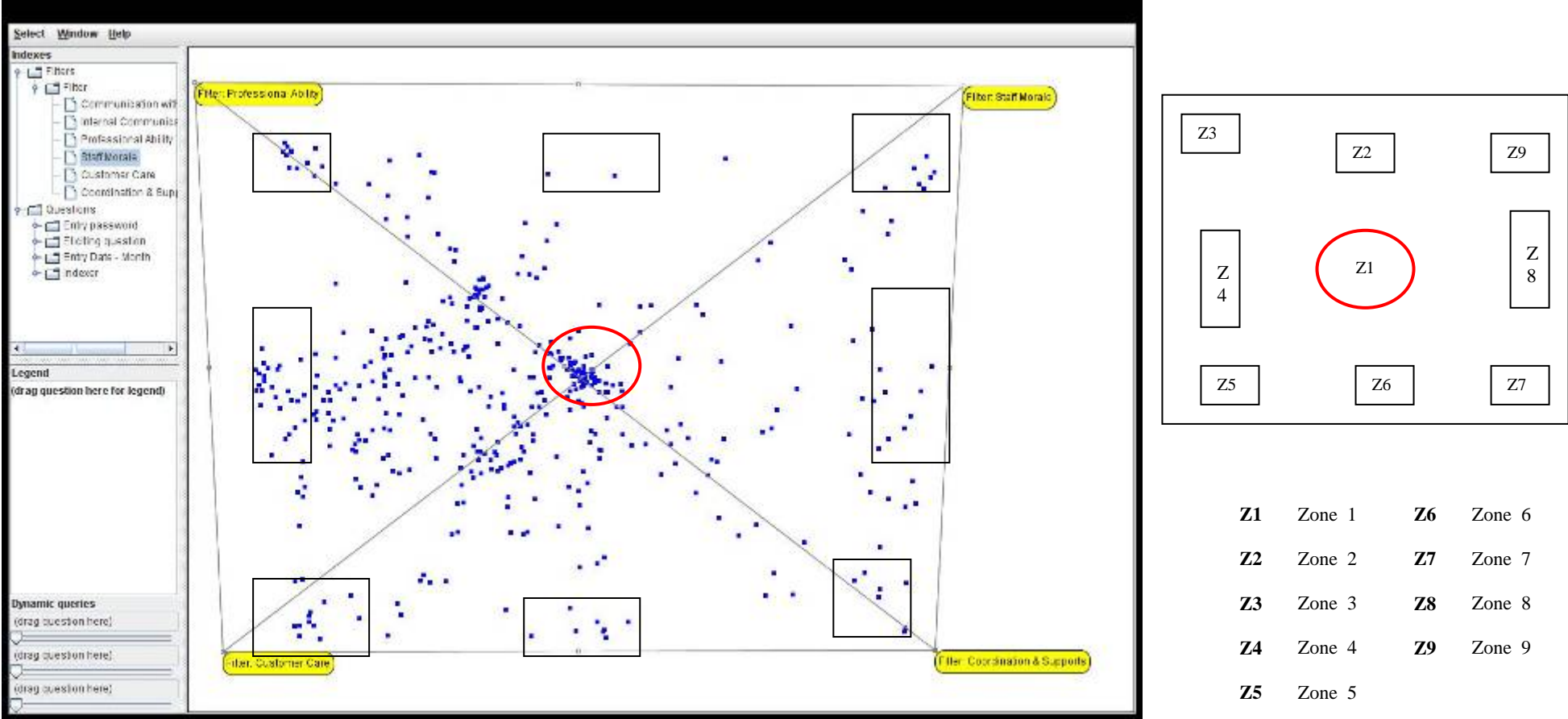


Figure 5.6 Diagram 2 Filters - Professional Ability/Staff Morale/Customer Care/Coordination and Support

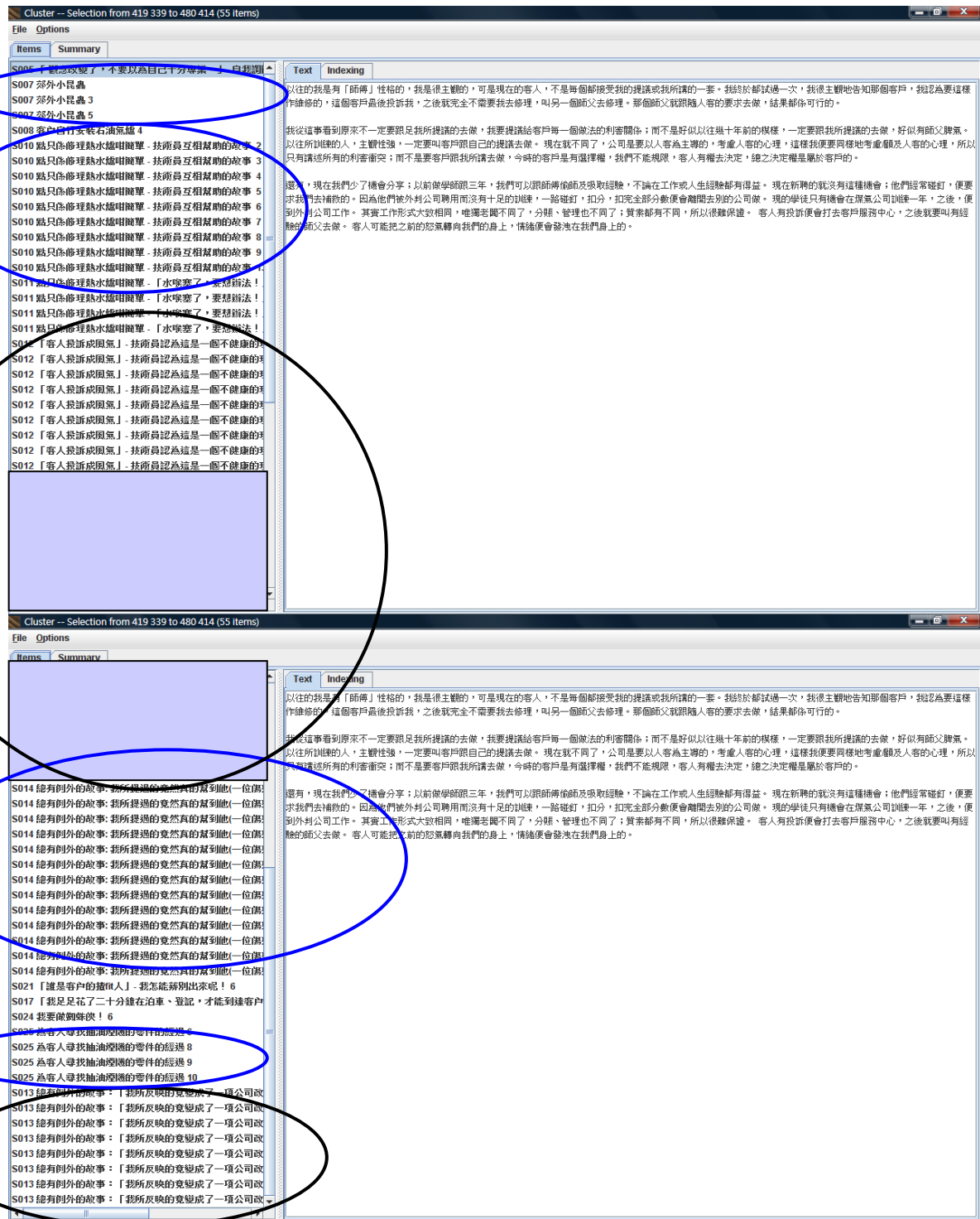


Figure 5.6a Zone 1- Descriptions of perspectives shown in the middle region

In Zone 3, a cluster of eight perspectives linked to story S007 have been listed in Figure 5.6b. Only three perspectives have been shown in Figure 5.6a, a much smaller number than the number of perspectives that appear in the middle region. This implies that story S007 is featured as being close to the filter “Professional Ability” by the employees and is treated as a unique story demonstrating an individual’s abilities.

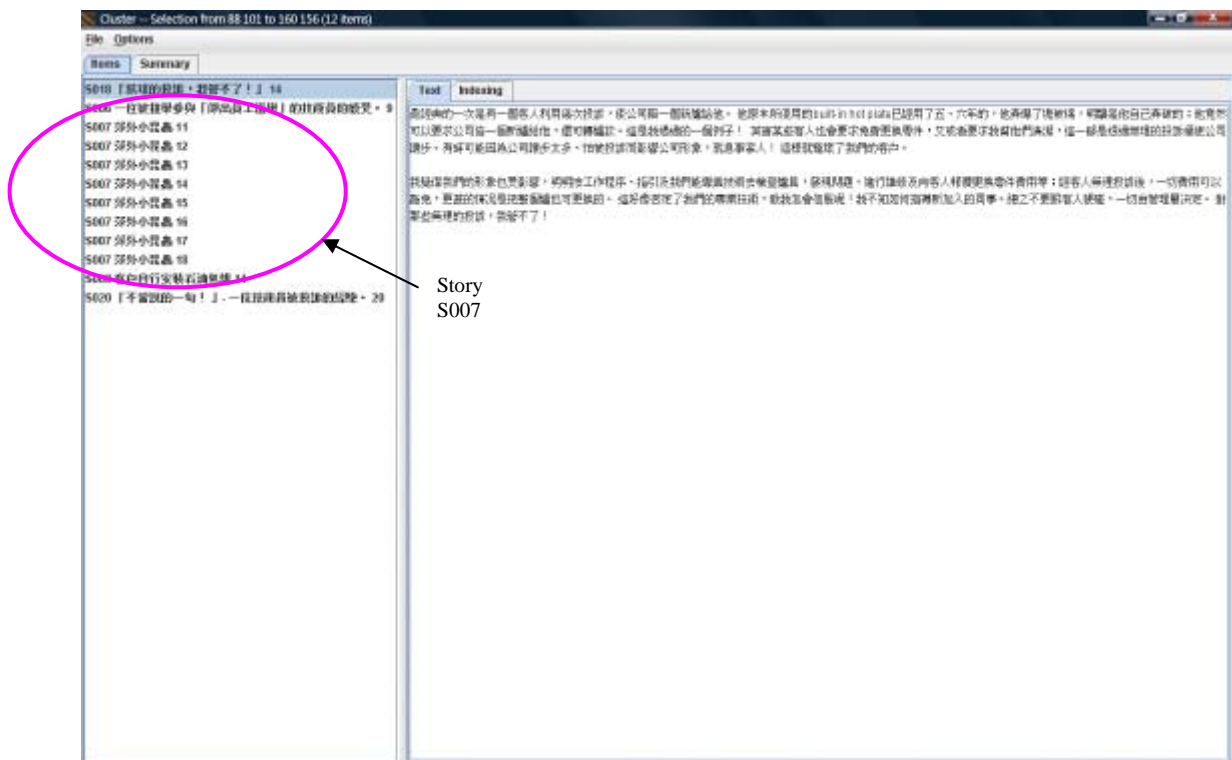


Figure 5.6b Zone 3 – Descriptions of perspectives shown in the top-left region

In Zone 5, only two perspectives linked to story S014 have been highlighted in the oval pink circle (Figure 5.6c). This shows alternative views from some of the employees, which can be treated as divergence from the norm. This may make people ask why some employees indexed the story S014 closer to the filter of “Customer Care” than to the other filters.

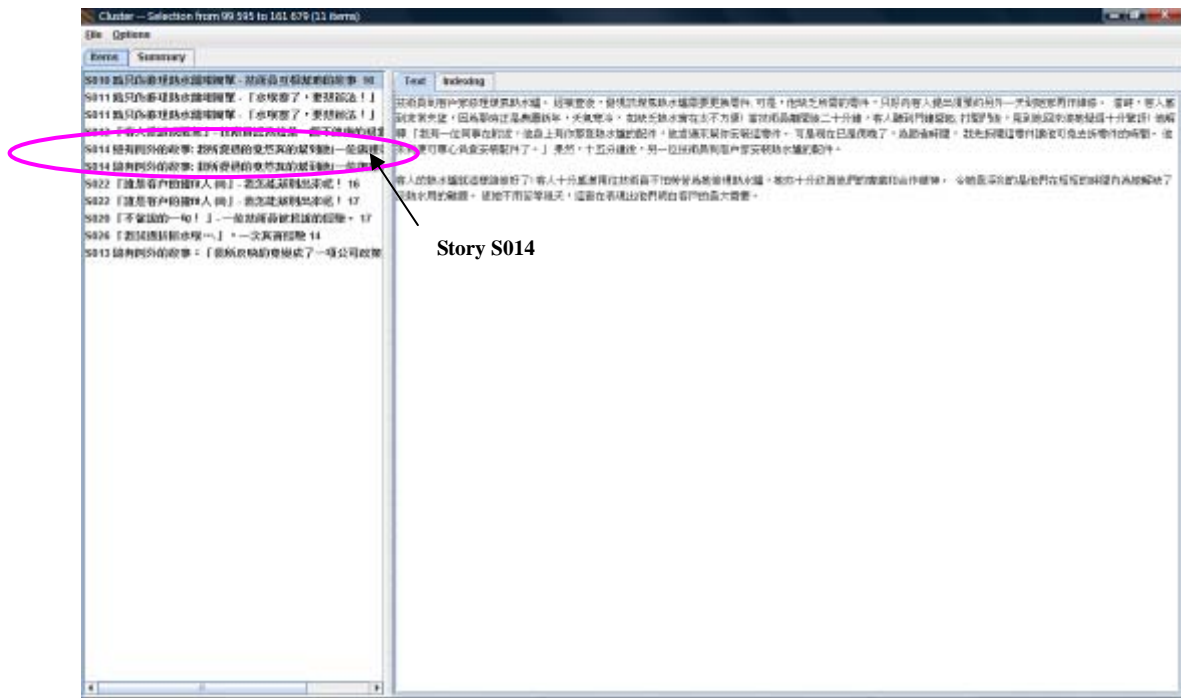


Figure 5.6c Zone 5 – Descriptions of perspective shown in Bottom-left region

In Zone 6, two perspectives linked to story S010 have been highlighted in the oval pink circle (Figure 5.6d) which is a small number when compared with those in Zone 1- the middle region. This shows that alternative views of the story S010 are held by some of the employees. Also, there are nine perspectives linked to story S0104 in Zone 1. This may invite curiosity as to why some employees indexed the story S0104 in between the filter of “Customer Care” and “Coordination and Support” instead of featuring it as being equally close to all four filters.

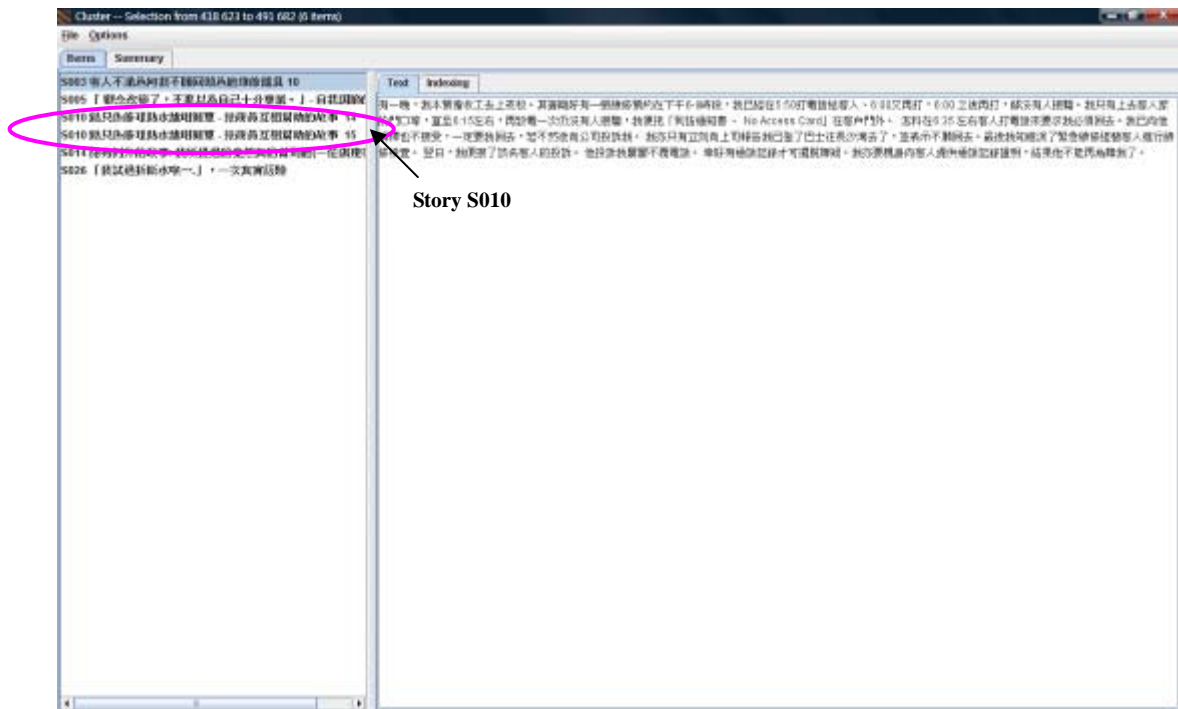


Figure 5.6d Zone 6 – Description of perspectives shown in the mid-bottom region

Diagram 3

Filters - Communication with Customers/Internal Communication/Customer Care/Coordination and Support

In Figure 5.7, we can see those perspectives that are linked to stories that have denser connections to the right-hand side of the lower part of the drawing space in the Cluster viewer, i.e. they feature stronger links to the filter of “Customer Care” and “Coordination and Support”. In Zone 1, a number of perspectives are linked to different stories as indicated in Figure 5.7a. As in the pattern shown in the last two diagrams, there is a strong pattern of linking to the highlighted stories of S007, S010 (surrounded by a blue circle), S012 (surrounded by a blue circle), S013, S014 (surrounded by a blue circle) and S019 (surrounded by a blue circle) in the middle region.

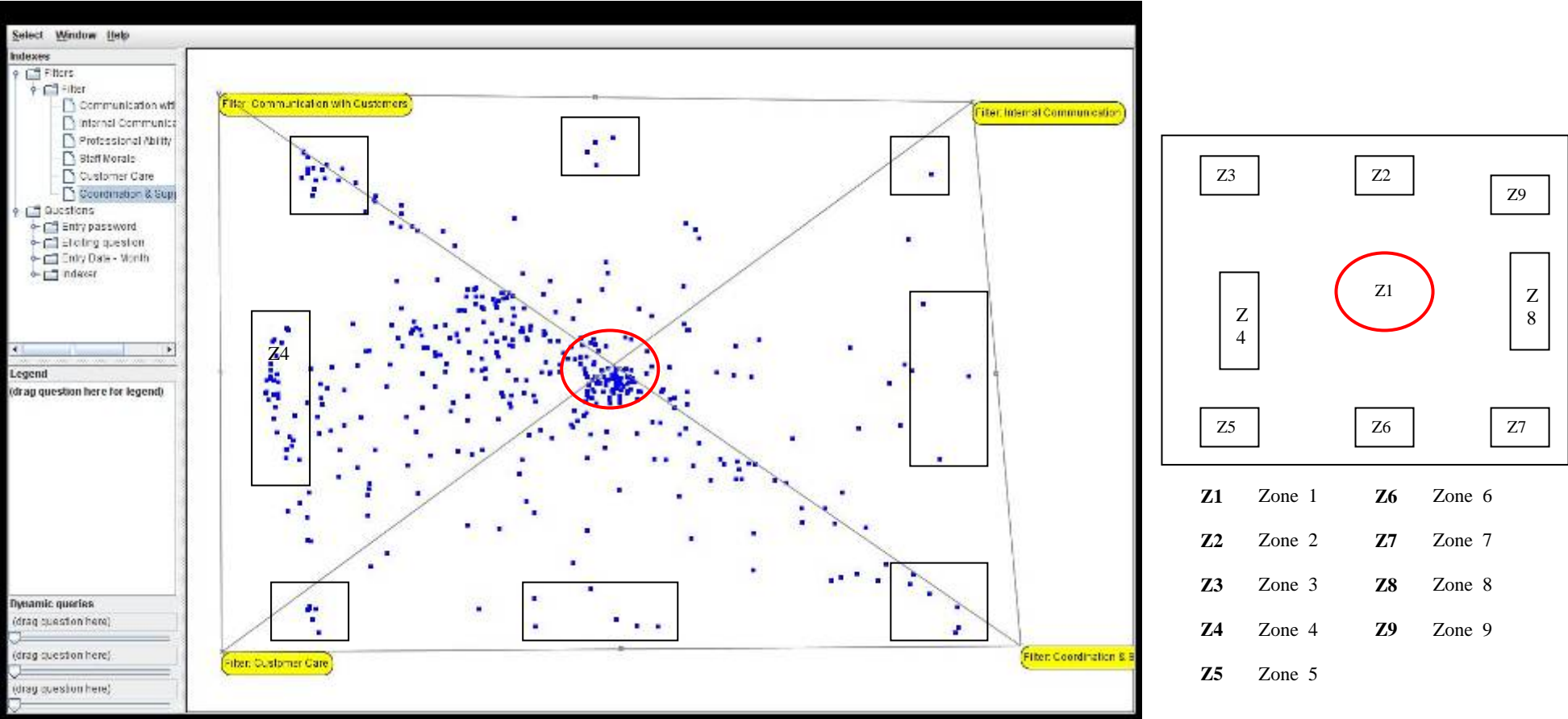


Figure 5.7 Diagram 3 Filters – Communication with Customers/Internal Communication/Customer Care/Coordination and Support

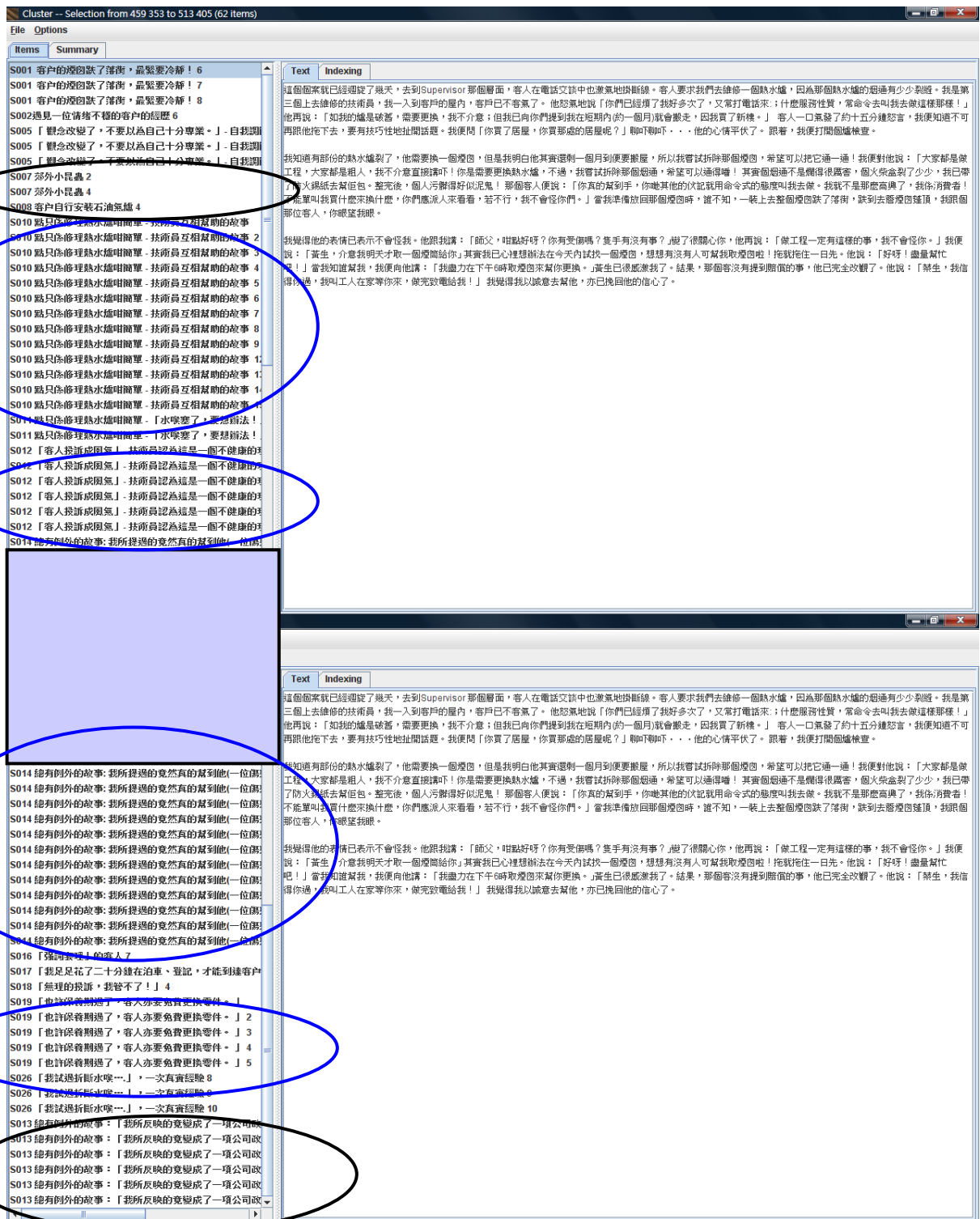


Figure 5.7a Zone 1 – Descriptions of perspectives shown in the middle region

In Zone 4, a cluster of four perspectives linked to story S011 are listed in Figure 5.7b. Only two perspectives have been shown. This implies that this story has been featured as being close to the filter “Professional Ability”. A cluster of fourteen perspectives linked to story S014 have also been shown in this zone area which is in strong contrast to other zones regarding the same story, S014.

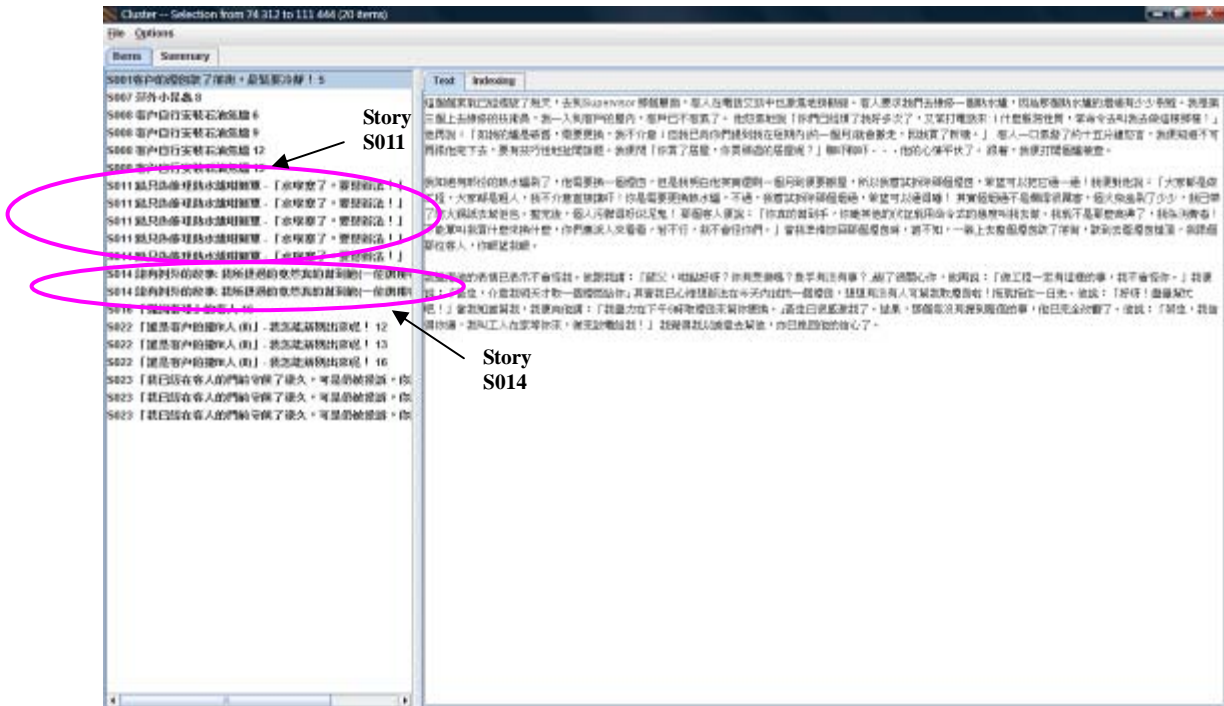


Figure 5.7b Zone 4 - Descriptions of perspectives shown in the mid-left region.

In Zone 7, two perspectives linked to story S012 have been highlighted in an oval pink circle and one perspective linked to story S019 has also been highlighted in an oval pink circle (Figure 5.7c). There are six perspectives linked to story S010, five of which are shown. Albeit small in numbers, different views of story S012 and S019 from some of the employees have been noted and can be treated as a divergence from the norm. This may cause the management to ask why some employees indexed the stories of S012 and S019 to the filter of “Staff Morale”.

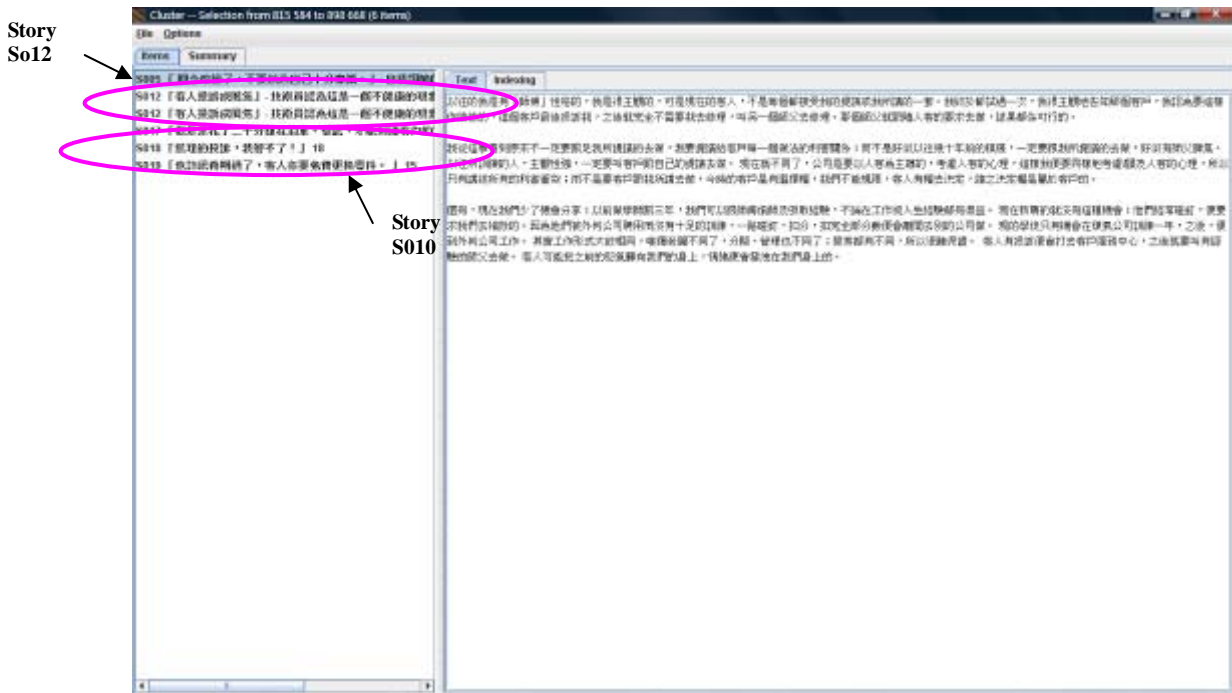


Figure 5.7c Zone 7 – Descriptions of perspectives shown in the Bottom-right region.

From the demonstration of the above three diagrams, it can be seen that weak signals can be revealed from the visualized narrative pattern of the collected stories. By reviewing the original texts the author is able to have a deeper understanding of how the perspectives from the employees have been linked to each story. Nine out of twenty-six stories collected from the narrative-based group interviews are regarded as the outstanding stories which have been featured with all the six key elements affecting the quality of service performance and some of them are strongly linked to a particular key filter, i.e. a story presents more descriptions on the area pertaining to a particular key filter.

Table 5.6 Summary of representative stories featured with all six filters in the Cluster viewer

| Story # | Title of the story | Featured with all six filters | Strongly featured to Filter(s) of |
|---------|---|-------------------------------|---|
| S001 | Keep Calm, Customer's flue box fell to the ground! 客戶的煙筒跌了落街，最緊要冷靜！ | | Communication with Customers |
| S007 | Little insects from the country-side 郊外小昆蟲 | | Customers Care Professional Ability |
| S010 | It is not just the repair of a water heater, but the mutual support between technicians. 點只係修理熱水爐咁簡單 - 技術員互相幫助的故事 | ✓ | Communication with Customers; Internal Communication; Customers Care |
| S011 | Indoor water pipe was blocked, how to fix it! 點只係修理熱水爐咁簡單 - 「水喉塞了，要想辦法！」 | ✓ | Communication with Customers; Customers Care |
| S012 | Customers always make complaints – it's not healthy. 「客人投訴成風氣」 - 技術員認為這是一個不健康的現象！ | ✓ | Communication with Customers; Co-ordinations & Supports; Staff Morale |
| S013 | Exceptional story – What I suggested has become the company's customer service policy 總有例外的故事：「我所反映的竟變成了一項公司政策」 - 真實的事例 | ✓ | Communication with Customers; Customers Care |
| S014 | Exceptional story – I'm so pleased to help a customer with disabilities as part of my work 總有例外的故事：我所提過的竟然真的幫到他(一位傷殘客戶) | ✓ | Communication with Customers; Customers Care |
| S019 | Customer requested free of charge changing of the parts of the gas appliance even though the warranty period was expired 「也許保養期過了，客人亦要免費更換零件。」 | | Co-ordinations & Supports; |
| S025 | Experiences of searching for an appropriate part for the cooker hoods 為客人尋找抽油煙機的零件的經過 | | Internal Communication; Staff Morale |

5.3.2 Graph Viewer

The Graph Viewer presents a detailed analysis of the relationships among filters by reviewing all the patterns and correlations at the same time in the scatter graphs. A grid of scatter graphs is shown in the Graph Viewer. The row and column headers determine what shows in each scatter graph: columns for the X axis and rows for Y axis. The scatter graphs can be created by filling rows and column headers. An overall picture of all scatter graphs which have been filled with filters is shown in Figure 5.8. In each of the scatter graphs, there is a rectangular box with diagonals and crosses inside.

In the diagram below (Figure 5.8), each of the scatter graphs is filled with plenty of dots and each dot represents a single perspective linked to a particular story. Obviously, all the diagonals inside the rectangular box are climbing up from the bottom-left to top-right, this means that the two filters listed in row and column headers are all positively correlated, i.e. low-low to high-high value. Many dots are located at the top right-hand corners of the some grids, except those linked with the filters of “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support”. This means that many stories have been indexed as high on both filters labeled for the X-axis and Y-axis. The dots of those grids with “Customer Care” labeled on the Y-axis, are distributed along at the upper part of the scatter graphs (highlighted by a pink flat oval). This shows that a lot of stories have been indexed by the front-line employees as having a high value in this aspect. It is also noticed that the scatter graphs labeled for filters of “Staff Morale” or “Coordination and Support” have a different pattern of dot distribution; i.e., many dots are located at the lower part of the scatter graphs.

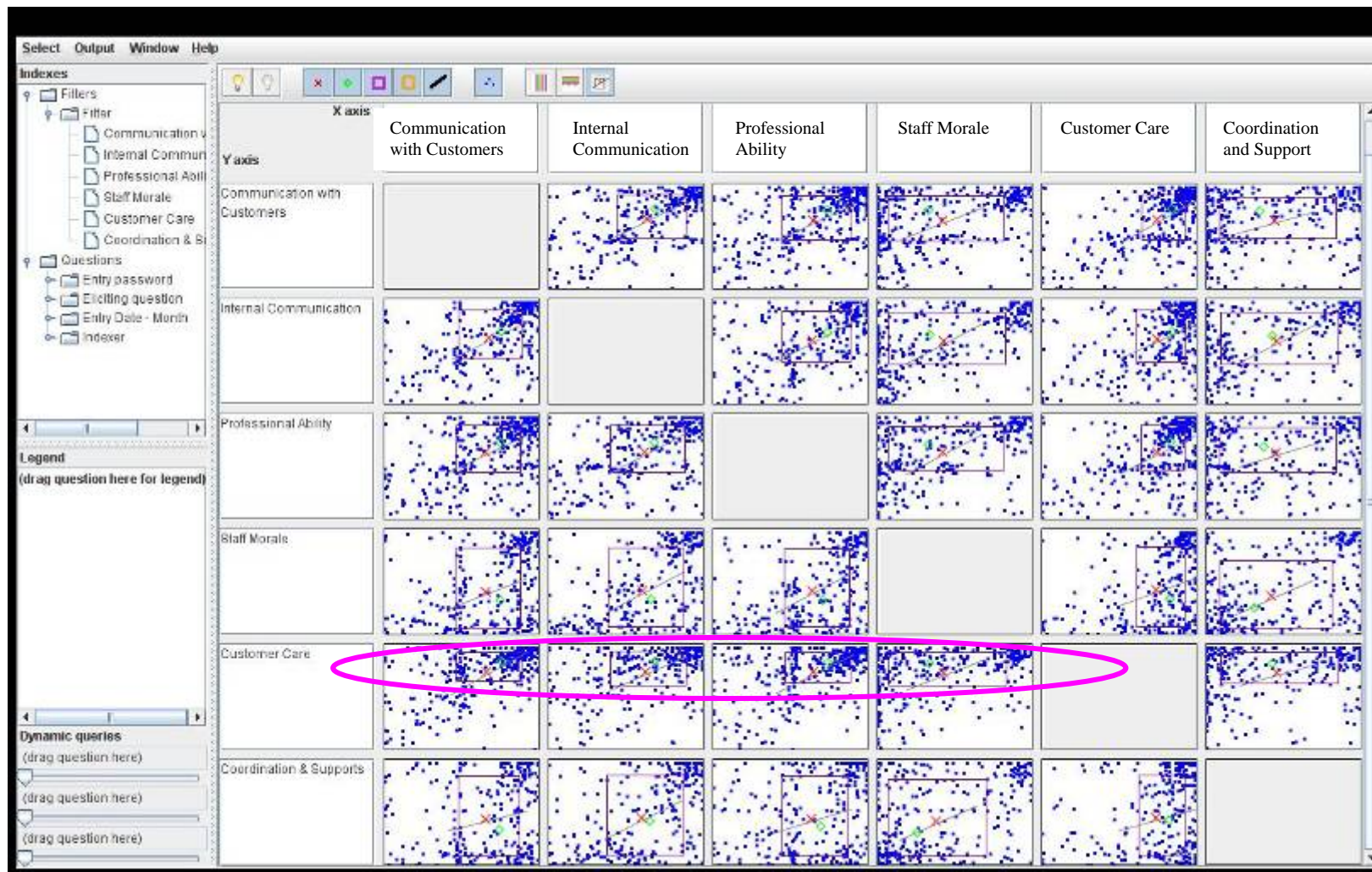


Figure 5.8 An integrated grid of scatter graphs showing the relationships and correlations among filters in the Graph viewer.

This can be interpreted as showing that many perspectives linked to different stories have also been indexed at a low value on the filters of “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support”. Conversely, many perspectives linked to different stories have been indexed at a high value on the filter of “Customer Care”. This indicates that employees generally consider that their morale is low and the coordination and support is not sufficient; while they think that they have performed well in the area of Customer Care.

Figure 5.9 shows anomalous patterns of dots in the scatter graphs labeled with the three filters Coordination & Support, Staff Morale and Customer Care. All of them are positively correlated with each other, but the diagonals are placed in different parts of the scatter graphs. In the scatter graph labeled “Staff Morale” and “Customer Care”, the diagonal is located at the upper part of that scatter graph – many perspectives linked to different stories have been indexed at a high value for the filter of “Customer Care”; but some of dots are located along or near to the X-axis, this means that at those perspectives are indexed at a rather low value of either 0, 1, or 2 at the filter of “Staff Morale” (see Scatter Graph – Figure 5.9).

Secondly, in the scatter graph labeled with “Coordination and Support” and “Customer Care”, the diagonal is located at the upper part of that scatter graph – many perspectives linked to different stories have been indexed at a high value at the filter of “Customer Care”. However, some dots are located along or near to the X-axis, this means that those perspectives are indexed at a rather low value of either 0, 1, or 2 at the filter of “Coordination and Support” (see Scatter Graph – B, Figure 5.9).

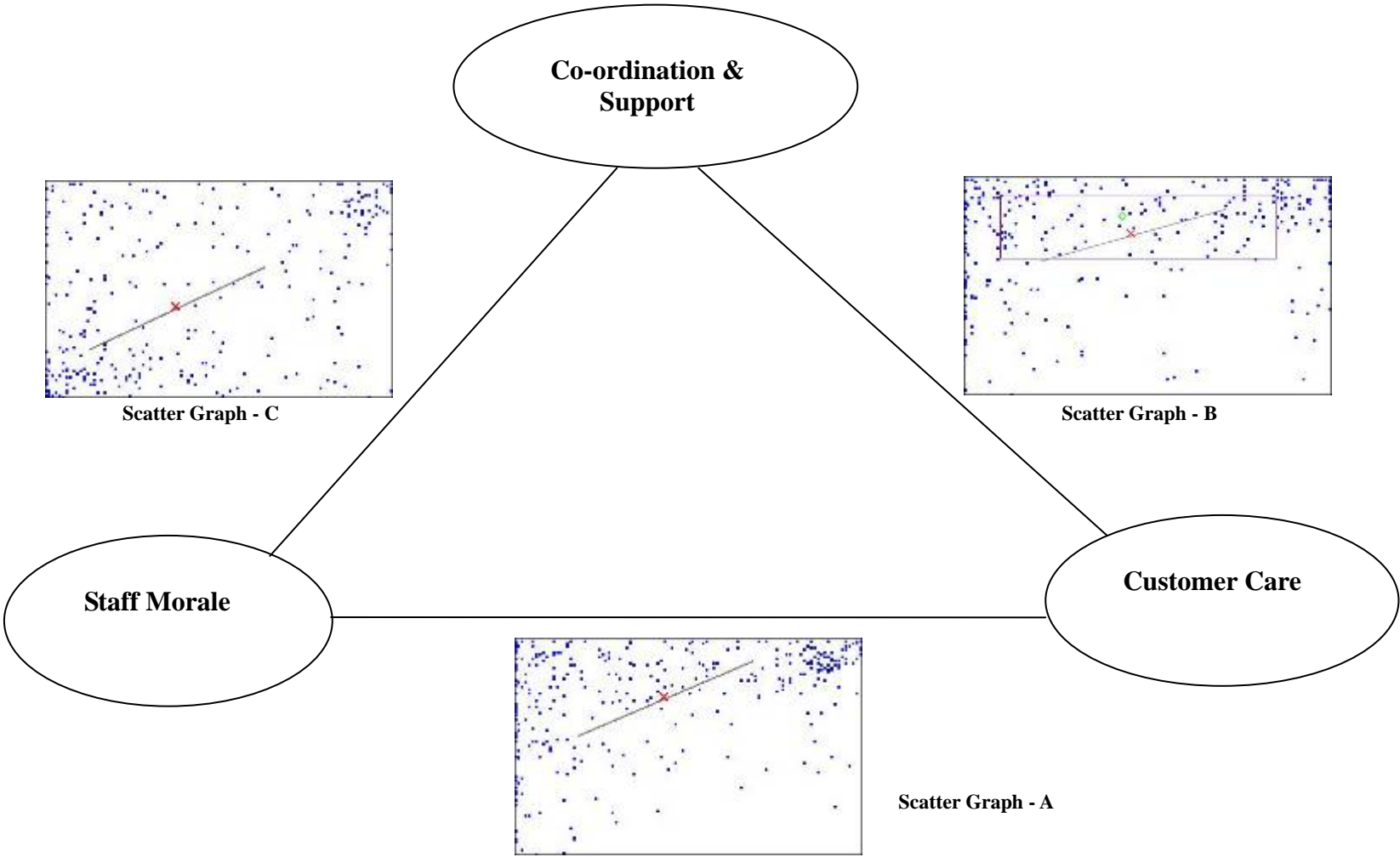


Figure 5.9 The relationships among the above three filters- "Staff Morale", "Coordination and Support" and "Customer Care"

Thirdly, in the scatter graph labeled “Coordination and Support” and “Staff Morale”, the diagonal is located at the lower part of that scatter graph. Two separate small clusters of dots located at the top-right corner and the bottom-left corner are shown in this scatter graph. This shows that some employees indexed some stories at a low value for the two filters (Bottom-left corner) and both at a high value for the two filters (Scatter Graph – C, Figure 5.9). The perspectives indexed at these two regions can be directly linked back to the stories for further explanation. This would provide a deeper insight into these stories.

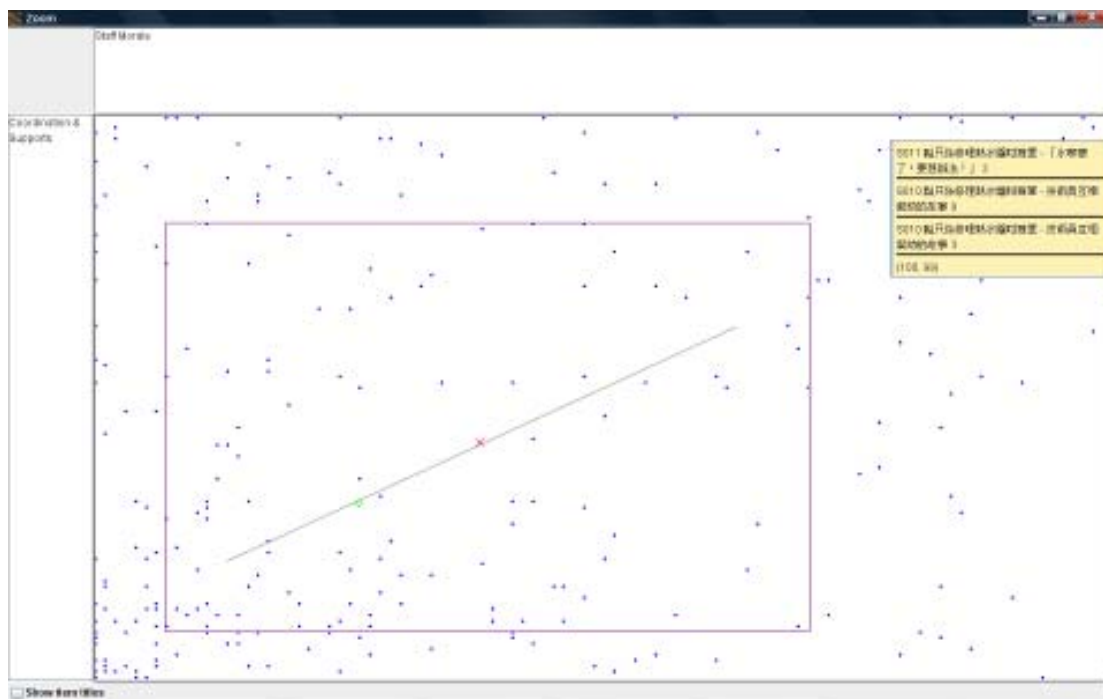


Figure 5.10 Relationship between “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support” – an example of perspectives indexed at high-high region

The author of this thesis can directly review the stories to see why some of the employees indexed both of them at high-high value and at low-low value. In Figure 5.10a an example of how the pop-up screen is shown. When a cursor is clicked on any area of that right-hand corner or placed at a particular dot at the zoom-in grid, a

pop-up screen labeled with two lists of S010 and a list of S011 appear. Some exceptional stories (may reflect some insights into the areas relating to “Coordination and Support” and “Customer Care”. These two stories may present a rather positive mind-set that shows that coordination and support is essential to support good customer care. Also, a click on any part of the low-low region will cause a pop-up screen with the list of story S017 and S024 to appear. The author of this thesis can have a richer understanding by referring back to the highlighted stories as these stories may describe a rather unfavorable outcome in relation to these two filters. The above analysis and findings demonstrate how additional information and insights can be obtained by combining the qualitative data from the transcribed stories and the quantitative narrative analysis. The significance of this approach to the study of service quality will be further discussed in Chapter Six.

Chapter Six Discussion

6.1 Comparison of different Models of Service Quality

The key elements that affect the quality of service performance noted in this study are derived from the narrative data collected from group interviews with front-line employees. First, a total of ninety-two codes were derived from the transcribed stories and narratives, and then these narrative data were then grouped into twenty concepts, which were categorized into six key elements affecting the quality of service performance, in a way similar to that used in the inductive approach used in Grounded Theory. The author became familiar with the work of the service technicians but no hypothesis on the factors affecting the quality of the service performed was made before the study. Story telling was the method chosen as it was thought to be the most non-intrusive way of collecting the experiences of the employees in their encounters with their customers.

As discussed in Section 2.2 of Chapter Two, one major difference between the work of other researchers and the work of the author of this study is that in the work of other researchers the elements, (sometimes called the dimensions or factors), that have an effect on the quality of the service performed, have been largely derived from the customers' perspectives. There are very few published works based on the perspectives of the front line staff, who in this author's view are the most critical agents in delivering the service.

The key elements defined from different service quality models based on the customer's perspectives and those based on the employees' perspectives of this research study are shown in Table 6.1. Although the choice of words and phrases are different, there are both similarities as well as differences in the key elements and factors from the various models. The one factor or element which all models tend to agree unanimously on is that the professional skills, ability and expertise of the employees in delivering the service are important factors. Key elements affecting quality of service performance, such as internal communication, communication with customers, coordination and support, are reflected in various models in their descriptions such as responsiveness, waiting time, flexibility, physical environment, etc.

Apart from Parasuraman et al. (1998), a significant difference between this study and the work of other researches is that the dimensions of staff morale and customer care that are missing from the work of others are unambiguously identified in this study. Both of these factors are related more to the human aspects rather than to the system aspects which deal with such elements as responsiveness and accessibility etc. Staff morale is becoming a critical factor which is attracting much attention in organizations and enterprises, as the performance of an organization is seen as being closely linked to the morale of its employees (McPherson, 2008). A happy workforce is indispensable to a healthy organization.

Table 6.1 A comparison of dimensions/key elements from different models of service quality

| Dimensions used in SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al 1998) | Criteria from Perceived Service Quality (Gronroos, 1990) | Hierarchical and Multi-dimensional Model (Brady, 1997) | Key elements identified from this research study (based on the employees' perspectives) |
|---|---|---|--|
| Tangibles | Professionalism and Skills | Interaction Quality- Attitude, Behavior, and Expertise, | Professional Ability |
| Reliability | Attitudes and Behaviors | Outcome Quality- Waiting Time, Tangibles and Valence | Internal Communication |
| Responsiveness | Accessibility and Flexibility | Physical Environment Quality- Ambient Conditions, Design, and Social Factors. | Communication with Customers |
| Assurance | Reliability | | Coordination and Support |
| Empathy | Service Dimensions | | Customer Care |
| | | | Staff Morale |

According to the results shown in the narrative patterns, “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support” have been indexed at lower values which imply that the front-line employees considered that those stories had reflected the phenomena of low morale among the employees. This result is not surprising as the perceptions obtained from the narrative-based group interviews had mentioned that they had heavy workload. They were of the view that apart from maintenance works, most of their time was spent on various piecemeal tasks such as dispatch of orders, re-arrangement of order appointments, handling of customer’s emotions and customer’s complaints etc. They were of the opinion that they did not receive sufficient support from the management and from other internal departments. On the other hand, they strongly considered that they had performed well in the area of

customer care as they believed that they had a positive working attitude. Therefore, the perspectives indexed to the filter of Customer Care were given high values.

6.2 Interpretation of Research Findings

A Mixed Research Method has been used in this project to study the factors affecting the quality of service performance from the perspectives of employees of a public utility company. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) point out that the findings from qualitative and quantitative data must be mixed or integrated at some points, or at least be integrated during the interpretation of the findings. Mixing of research methods can occur in different stages of an investigation. This study started as a qualitative study on the quality of service performance by collecting stories from the front-line staff. The key elements affecting the quality of service performance were abstracted from the codes and concepts, and derived from the transcriptions of the narrative data in the first phase of the study. These elements were then used in the design of the filters to gauge the opinions of the service technicians in the second phase of data collection, during which the front-line staff were asked to give a response (by assigning a value from low to high on a continuous scale) to each of the filters, taking into consideration the context of each of the stories.

The findings drawn from both sets, of qualitative data (from transcriptions of the stories) and of quantitative data (i.e. the frequency of the response and the value they attach to each response from each story to the questionnaire) are combined in the revelation of the overall narrative patterns drawn with the aid of a sense making

software (i.e. the scatter graphs as shown in Section 5.2.2). For example, stories of S010, S011, S012, S013 and S014 featured all the six key elements affecting the quality of service performance. By reviewing the contexts of these five stories, a good understanding of the overall perceptions among the front-line employees can emerge, and offer insight into areas that need improvement. The translated content of Story S010 is reproduced below as an example of showing the correlations between the stories and the defined key elements that affect the quality of service performance:

S010 - It is not just the repair of a water heater, but the mutual assistance between technicians.

A technician went to a customer's flat to repair the gas water heater. After inspection, he found that a spare part had to be replaced. However he did not have the spare part on hand and he booked an appointment with the customer on another day to have it replaced. At that time, the customer was very disappointed as it was Lunar New Year then and the weather was very cold. It would be very inconvenient without hot water.

20 minutes after the technician left, the customer's doorbell rang. When she opened the door, she was extremely shocked to see the technician back! The technician explained, "One of my colleagues is nearby. He has the spare part that you need and is willing to replace it for you. However, it is already late in the afternoon and in order to save time, I would like to remove the spare part first so that he would not waste time taking it down. When he comes, he can focus on the installing the new one." As promised, another technician showed up 15 minutes later and installed the new one. In this way, the customer's water heater was fixed! The customer was very satisfied with the hard work of the two technicians. She appreciated their professionalism and cooperation very much. What impressed her the most was their dedication to meet the customer's need by solving her hot water supply problem in such a short period of time, without making her wait for another few days. This clearly showed their understanding of the customers' need.

Some of the employees consider that Story S010 was strongly linked to filters of “Communication with Customers”, “Internal Communication” and “Customer Care”. The filter, in descending order of median frequency of high values attached, are “Customer Care”, “Communication with Customers” (e.g. the technician was empathetic with the customer in a cold Lunar New Year without hot water), “Professional Ability” (e.g. ability to indentify the problem), “Internal Communication” (e.g. know who had the spare part), “Coordination and Support” (e.g. to make the work of his colleague much easier by removing the defective part first to save the time his workmate would have to spend on installation).

The Distribute Viewer draws histograms of perspectives using the strength of their associations to filters, and shows how filters are linked to perspectives. “Communication with Customers”, “Internal Communication”, “Professional Ability” and “Customer Care” are given high values; “Staff Morale” and “Coordination and Support” are given low values in this case study. The visualizations of the narrative patterns from various viewers provide an alternative way of interpreting the identified narrative patterns, by identifying the weak signals from a bulk volume of data. Weak signals (i.e. the inter-relationship among different index, filters, and stories) that may not be obvious in traditional statistical analysis may surface, as humans are better at capturing small differences in patterns rather than in numbers. From an inspection of the pattern of the linkages between the stories and the filters, not only can strong relationships be easily visualized, but also less strong linkages, that is, the weak ones can also be indicated in the scatter graph (such as Figure 5.9) which shows the correlations among various filters. These weak correlations would easily have been neglected or have gone unnoticed in a traditional questionnaire.

The Cluster Viewer provides a visualized presentation of the relationships among filters based on the number of responses (dot labels) which the technicians placed under each sense making item, i.e. the story. Each diagram in the Viewer shows the correlation of two filters and their respective values (low or high along the scale in Scatter Graph – C, Figure 5.9). The perspectives indexed can be directly linked back to the stories for further explanations. This would provide more insights by directly referring to the contexts of the collected stories and to some reflections on these weak signals that might have been ignored without the visualization aid of the Cluster Viewer. This approach can overcome the weakness of the generalization of research findings in qualitative research in which different groups of populations need to be compared with each other.

6.3 Advantages of Adopting Mixed Methods Design and Pre-hypothesis Research

Qualitative research is being used more and more in different disciplines such as health science, sociology or educational research. This form of research involves more than simply collecting both quantitative and qualitative data. The data will be integrated, related, or mixed at some stage of the research process. The underlying logic of mixing is that neither quantitative nor qualitative methods are sufficient in themselves to capture the trends and details of the situation. When used in combination, both quantitative and qualitative data yield a more complete analysis, and they complement each other as demonstrated in this research. The integration of these two methods means that quantitative and qualitative data can be collected concurrently or in parallel or gathered sequentially during a single case study (Creswell et al., 2004). Following this line of thinking, the integration of these two

methods helps to shed light on how research approaches can be mixed fruitfully in order to offer the best opportunities for answering the research questions and generating richer understandings of the research outcomes.

The characteristics of Mixed Method Research, including the purpose of, the advantages and disadvantages of and the models used in the design of Mixed Method Research, have been discussed in Chapter Three. Adopting a mixed methods approach will bring together the benefit of both qualitative and quantitative approaches to research. One of the objectives of this research study is to explore the relationships among the key elements that affecting the quality of service performance. This is based on the concept of pre-hypothesis research in which the attributes which allow us to have a close appreciation of how the interviewees perceive their experience of a particular area of interest are identified. Therefore, a mixed methods approach is suitable for the research study and provides the best way to achieve the research objectives of this study. Caracelli and Greene (1997) points out that the degree of mixing of the qualitative and quantitative research depends on what is being mixed and how they are being mixed. The “mixing” can be a concurrent or sequential use of different methods or it may be that different methods are fully integrated in a single analysis.

The purpose of choosing a mixed method design in this study is to clarify and illustrate the results obtained from the narratives collected in the second phase. A semi-quantitative method is used in the second phase in order to provide a more comprehensive interpretation of the key elements affecting the quality of service performance. Structured interviews and focus groups generate different information,

for example, they reflect public views and private views respectively. When used together they provide a better understanding of individual experience during service encounters and of individual perceptions of service quality, from the employees' perspectives.

The results obtained from the traditional qualitative methods are not able to provide a quantitative or semi-quantitative relationship of the concepts and variables being explored. They are unable to provide a statistical analysis, or show patterns, trends, numbers, etc., in the issue of interest. By designing the questionnaire and filter based on the concepts and key elements derived from the narratives, additional semi-quantitative information can be obtained. Once a pattern is visualized (from the distribution and clustering of data), any anomalies in these patterns can be easily recognized, and the explanation can be sought by going back directly to the narrative materials that lies beneath.

Snowden also (2006) points out that the information collected from people telling a story about their experiences without having options suggested to them, are far richer in nature and easier to understand during analysis of the material, than if options are suggested to them. The approach of this research study is based on the narrative paradigm to explore how the front-line staff makes sense of their service experience without any need for the researcher to make any assumptions. On the other hand, hypothesis research focuses on the possible relationship between two or more variables which can be tested. The usual methods of formulating a hypothesis are based on assumptions which are often built upon the prior knowledge of the researcher regarding the issue or problem to be investigated. On the other hand, the

relationship (no matter positive or negative) surfaced from the narrative analysis can be used to construct a formal hypothesis to be used for the quantitative research (see Figure 3.4, in Chapter 3). In other words, the narrative analysis can be regarded as what Snowden described as “pre-hypotheses research” which avoids expert opinions and the associated bias in framing the study.

6.4 On the Use of Narratives or Stories

The objective of this research is to study the service quality of the front-line employees and to interpret the experience of the participants by asking them to tell their own stories or experiences in a particular context. That means, this research tends to gather data from the “inside” of the social phenomena, understanding situational experiences from the perspective of those who experience them; and to explore and understand the interpretation of the phenomena from the viewpoint of people involved in such social situations. This research study has adopted the interpretive paradigm as the basic assumption and makes use of a narrative approach to investigate the service quality performances of the front-line employees. It also makes use of the sense making items, such as anecdotes, in order to throw light on the meaning of the contexts and to understand the meaning.

Snowden (2006) emphasizes that human beings evolved to understand and use stories - they were the earliest form of knowledge that was transferred and are still one of the most powerful. Storytelling is natural and easy, and it provides material at the right level of abstraction for human comprehension and communication. This research study is based on the use of narrative technique for capturing the perceptions of the

quality of service performance from individual experiences and from an empirical study which was carried out to investigate and study the perceptions of service quality of the front-line employees of a local public utility.

Meyer (2004) suggests that narratives/stories are a vehicle for knowledge exchange as well as being an indication of the prerequisites for sharing knowledge that is tacit, implicit or un-codified. That means, narratives carry embedded knowledge and perceptions. It seems more appropriate for some forms of knowledge to be transferred in a narrative form. Perceptions of low staff morale and insufficient coordination and support from internal departments emerge from the patterns of the perspectives indexed to the stories. Narrative may be a contextual indicator for knowledge sharing. It can also be a medium for sharing mental models. Some forms of narratives, for example, anecdotes (small fragments of narrative rather than fully-formed stories) are part of day-to-day discourse, which may embed a lot of one's personal experience and knowledge.

In this research study, the narratives collected from the group interviews can be regarded as a kind of sense-making items. These items were captured from large numbers of people with each one contributing one or more than one anecdote or story during the interview. After the narratives were collected and the concepts and key elements turned into filters, the participants were asked to index these filters for each story. The researcher was able to move on from these to find out those stories which had been indexed and produced anomalies and next to move directly from a quantitative measure in search of further explanation. By doing such type of indexing, narrative patterns can surface. This helps to facilitate a proper

understanding of what is happening in the narratives. The employees involved in this study were able, through the use of narratives/stories re-examined in a group context, to develop new insights and understandings about their practices. Knowledge generated in these ways remains grounded in the real life of the technicians offering service to customers. This approach contrasts with the reliance on the expert approach to understanding and interpreting the problem. The expert directly interprets narrative data and allows their own perspective to influence the way they interpret the story. The more stories collected from the population of study, the greater the statistical validity of patterns that can be discovered. An illustration of how to make use of narratives and stories for exploring the overall perceptions of the service quality and interpreting the meaning or understanding of how certain key elements affecting the quality of service performance has been made in this research study by using the mixed model design.

Chapter Seven Conclusions

7.1 Significance and Contribution of the Study

This study has made two major contributions to research into service quality. The first is the identification of the key elements that affect the quality of service performance. This is an improvement on current models and contributes to a better understanding of how the quality of service can be improved. The second is the demonstration of a real-life industrial case study where an experiment using mixed method research is carried out in which the narrative approach is combined with the sense making approach. This method overcomes some of the pitfalls in traditional qualitative research and in hypothesis research.

In the identification of the dimensions that affect the service quality from the narratives of front-line employees, six key elements, communication with customers, internal communication, professional ability, staff morale, customer care and coordination and support, have been uncovered. Most previous research in the published literature on service quality models pays attention to the system aspects such as responsiveness and accessibility etc. In this study, additional elements of Staff Morale, Coordination and Support which are related more to the human side are identified. When referring to the stories that feature these elements, the low staff morale can be related to the employees' stress, heavy workload and piecemeal nature of the work. On the other hand, insufficient internal support and poor coordination may come from other internal departments such as the Customer Installation Department and Project Installation Department, with which the service technicians of the Customer Service Department have the most frequent contact in their daily

maintenance work. Sometimes, lack of experience sharing and poor communication among the front-line employees may affect their work performance. Insufficient sharing can be the result of the tight order schedule under which these service technicians have to work. During the group interviews, service technicians emphasized that they were the group most visible to the customers; therefore, they had to face all the blame and expressions of frustration from the customers even if the problems were not derived from their performance, but were due to some failure of the system or breakdown in the working procedures of the company as whole. All of these expressions or feelings have been elicited from the narratives collected from the group interviews with the service technicians of this research study.

Generally, the management of a service organization would normally place emphasis on the qualities required in staff looked at from the customer's point of view, such as attitudes of the employees, skill sets possessed by the employees, promptness of service, and behaviour etc. However, there has been insufficient attention paid in most organizations to the morale of staff and to internal coordination and support for their work as it was given a low priority. Such elements have been neglected or have not have been dealt with adequately in the traditional models of service quality or in models of organizational behaviour and productivity improvement.

This study contributes a real-life industrial case on the development of a systematic process of adopting a narrative approach together with the use of sense making capabilities (i.e., a mixed method research) for the elicitation of employees' perceptions of the quality of their service performance. A large volume of the narratives, including anecdotes and twenty-six complete stories, were collected from

the group interviews. The technique for eliciting the perceptions of employees involves a much more dynamic and interactive process than that of traditional observations and interviews. Various concepts that were contained in the transcribed and codified narratives were grouped into different categories of elements that affect service quality. In the process of collecting the data, which was similar to that used in Grounded Theory, the bias of the researcher can be avoided or minimized.

These findings from the narratives or stories then lead to the design of a survey questionnaire based on the context of the daily work experience of the front-line staff. Their views or their perspectives on each of the stories they told could be further elicited by rating (indexing) each of the key elements according to two opposing abstract indicators (such as low morale or high morale). This quantitative information was obtained by making use of a sense-making tool, SenseMaker™ developed by Snowden, to investigate the pattern of distribution of the perspectives indexed to each of the stories told. The pattern of the relevance uncovered from the stories (i.e., the relationships and correlations among the key elements) provided visualized images which revealed the complex patterns and anomalies that would not be easily visible in a conventional analysis.

The proposed technique can be applied to service quality research that attempts to look at situations from the perceptions of employees and which explores factors that are related to their underlying values. The results can also be used as a basis for formulating survey strategies, for example, in the design of questionnaires. Traditionally, the design of a questionnaire has to rely on the judgment, observation or pre-assumptions held by the researchers, even though some vigorous methods (such

as extensive literature review through desktop research, or preliminary interviews etc) may have been used. Although researchers are aware of the potential bias in setting the assumptions in hypothesis research, the level of bias can not in essence be checked or even known. This explains why “weak signals “which are often ignored could lead to drastically different outcomes and results in social and human research. There is no weak signal. Whether the signals are weak or strong depends on the receiver. It is our strong mental models, assumptions and selective bias that prohibit us from noticing factors that we might have thought to be unimportant or irrelevant to our studies. The approach used in this study can serve as a pre-survey tool to discover issues and concerns from the consumer’s perspective. This is also known as pre-hypothesis research as this helps us to formulate a more meaningful research hypothesis based on statistical relevance. This can provide market practitioners with rich information, which may be of use in the design of more relevant third-person surveys.

A focus on front-line employees’ perceptions for developing service quality has many further implications for a range of managerial and marketing activities, which include internal evaluation of service quality, design of management strategies for improving staff morale and internal communications, and for improving the service response to customers. All these activities can enhance or constrain the service performance that is developed and maintained in an organization. The implications of this study are that such managerial and marketing activities should be designed and conducted in a way that should be aligned with and take into consideration the employees’ perspectives and concerns regarding the quality of service performance.

7.2 Suggestions for Future Work

To further enhance the study, there are two areas that can be addressed. Suggestions are made on the data collection and interpretation, and also on the questioning techniques used in the collection of stories, and in the conducting of a parallel survey on the views of the managerial staff.

The results of the visualized outcome of the narrative patterns offer a general picture of the distribution of the perspectives of the twenty-six stories selected but no further details relating to the quality attributes have been discussed in the research study. More complete stories need to be collected. This will help to generate a more thorough understanding of the actual situations in which service is performed and provide a richer database for later story searching. Our understanding of the experiences described and of the stories is context-dependent. Even though it is possible to identify the concepts underlying the key elements that affect the service quality, the key elements may be different in other working groups or populations.

Since a large volume of narratives, such as anecdotes and stories had been collected during the group interviews, the effort and time spent on transcribing and interpreting these narratives was very considerable. The process of coding and categorizing the narratives required great concentration from the researcher who had to analyze the details of the narrative, identify the key elements and sort them into different types according to how they affected the quality of service performance. In the processes of story indexing, the participants were required to read all the twenty-six stories and

to index each of the stories according to the opposing abstract indicators at the same time. The interventions from the researcher were minimized in this process. Some of the participants might just scan the stories and answer the questions stated in the questionnaires very quickly and some of them might spend more time to complete the whole process; the relevance of the outcome depended on how seriously they interpreted the stories and attempted the indexing. The accuracy of the answers listed on the questionnaires and the validity of interpreting or indexing the stories can not be guaranteed.

To understand more fully the context under which the stories are told, more generic questions such as “Why was the story told?” should be asked in the group interviews. The relationship of the tellers to the story and the degree of truthfulness involved would be helpful for providing useful search criteria and points of analysis for making a thorough interpretation of the data. However, due to the limitations of the design of the narrative workshop, it would be not capable of accommodating these kinds of generic questions which would enrich the layers of analysis in this study.

In present research study, the focus is placed on the front-line employees’ perspectives only. It would be of interest to repeat this study focusing on the managerial staff of the Customer Service Department. Further investigation of how the management staff indexes these twenty-six stories according to the given key elements affecting service quality would be useful. It would provide some service quality implications for an entirely different group of staff. This will not only enable the collection of another set of meaningful data, but also enable the management to share and

understand the views of the front-line staff by reading and indexing their stories. Both the considerations from the management and the perceptions from front-line employees would help to formulate shared strategies for improvements of service quality. A comparison between the indexed outcome derived from the employees' and management's choices can be made. The results of the indexed outcome would be a rich context for explaining what sort of the quality of service that the company should provide to the public. A better understanding of the concepts of service quality and service encounters can be obtained if the analysis includes a comparison of the results contributed by the two different parties.

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Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| 客戶 (Customer's Concerns) | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|--------------------------|-----------|---|---------------------------------------|---|
| 1 | 客戶對服務者的態度 | 長者較親切及友善；其他客戶比較冷淡，較少主動交談。 | 如遇到較嚴肅和笑容較少的客戶，技術員便要提高警覺，說話小心。 | 經歷： 曾經有一位婆婆知道一位技術員未用午膳，熱情地要該名技術員食她親手做的炒飯，才肯讓他離開。 |
| 2 | 客戶查詢 | 今日的客戶會主動查詢及提問。 | 耐心聆聽及解釋，說話要小心，因為客戶會十分注重技術員所作出之服務承諾。 | |
| 3 | 客戶接受解釋程度 | 長者客戶較信任技術員，容易接受解釋。 其他客戶，就要視乎情況，如爐具較複雜，則需要長細解釋。 | 要坦白地、親切地及耐心地向客戶解釋；要有一份真誠的態度去回應客戶。 | 經歷： 客戶不接受因爐具舊、且經十年以上的使用令它損耗的解釋。因為在第一次的維修是可以把它修理好；但在第二次的維修，就未能把它恢復操作，所以客人認為這是技術員的技術問題。客人要求技術員承擔所有責任。 |
| 4 | 客戶對服務的要求 | 客戶的要求是很高的，他們有一定的期望。 | 技術員要有良好的判斷能力，回應要求要快及準確，並要快決定下一步的工作。 | |
| 5 | 客戶的權利 | 客戶十分掌握所擁有的權利，並曉得如何利用投訴手段威脅技術員。 | 技術員要十分小心處理，並再耐心解釋。 有時要曉得自我保障，免被責備。 | |
| 6 | 客戶所提出的要求 | 某些客戶的要求是不合理的。 如爐具只有小毛病，經維修後便可，但客戶要求更換整個爐具而免收任何費用，這是不合理的。 | 技術員要技巧地回應要求，不要令客人不滿，再把事件交由上級決定。 | |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--|---|--|
| 7 | 客戶對收費的反應 | 當然審慎！ 某些反應更大，如在早幾年經濟不景時，客戶對收費之不滿更即時表現出來。 | 技術員必須保持平和心情面對他們。 | |
| 8 | 客戶對更換爐具的反應 | 長者客戶的爐具較為舊及有耗損，他們都樂意接受；但其他客戶可能會質疑公司的爐具的耐用服性及提出可否免費更換等要求。態度亦非常審慎。 | 技術員必須保持平和心情面對他們，並加以解釋，使他們明白需要更換的理由。 | |
| 9 | 遇上： 1) 怒氣的客戶/ 2) 面對有情緒問題的客戶 | 1)客戶經過幾次投訴，仍未得到滿意的解釋或安排，便會把埋怨或怒氣加到技術員身上。2) 這是不能預料的，但明白這是有可能發生的！ | 1)技術員必須保持平和心情，並耐心地解釋，並了解他的真正需要。 2)保持冷靜，向上級求助。 | 故事： 1)客戶的煙筒跌了落街，最緊要冷靜！(S001) 2)一個情緒不穩的客戶 (S002) |
| 10 | 客戶對時段的定義之理解與技術員所想的有差異 | 也許客人明白技術員會在某一時段到訪進行維修，但他們則誤以為這個時段是完全給單一名客人，所以他們認為可以任意調動時間或要求技術員不斷等候。 | 因為在同一時段內分配給每張維修單的時間是有限及非常緊迫，所以技術員感到十分困難，技術員會盡力去安排，但難免未能完全應客人之要求。有時會安排不善，招來客人投訴。 | 故事： 1)客人不滿，為何我不願回頭為他維修爐具？(S003) 2)客人要我等，那敢離開呢！（一次親身經歷）(S004) |
| 服務者 (Service Provider's role) | | | | |
| 11 | 客戶與服務者的關係 | 明顯分別了客人與服務者的角色，少了建立人際關係的機會。 客人表現冷淡，交流不多；技術員對客戶有一種防範和自保心理。 | 只有接受這現實，無奈！ | 故事： 「觀念改變了，不要以為自己很專業。」- 自我調節的方法 (S005) |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|----|-----------------|---|--|---|
| 12 | 對客戶服務的看法及服務者的角色 | 以往的做法是以「維修為主」，盡力把爐具維修好；今日則以「令客戶滿足」及「減少重覆維修」為主。客戶可主導整個過程，技術員則盡量配合。 | 技術員只有按照公司指引向客戶解釋利弊因素及應客戶的要求向上層反映，不敢提出太多意見。 若能得到別人的認同，技術員必定盡力而為為客人服務及保持服務水平。 | 故事： 一位被推舉參與「傑出員工選舉」的技術員的感受。(S006) |
| 13 | 服務者的承諾及態度 | 客戶十分緊張技術員所作出的承諾及對客戶的態度。因為這是日後追討的憑據。 | 說話要十分小心，免被無理客人「借題發揮」。 | |
| 14 | 提供服務的應變力 | 在提供服務時，應變力是最緊要的； 在不同的處境下，要作出適當的判斷。 | 應變能力可從以下方面鍛鍊出來： 1) 人生經驗； 2) 個人技術； 3) 實際情況； 4) 當時狀態； 5) 細心觀察 | 經驗： 1) 自備適合的輔助工具進行維修2) 如遇上客人質疑時，也需要把整個爐具拆下來進行檢查，讓客人了解技術員是盡力為他們查出問題所在。 |
| 15 | 要懂得自我保障 | 因為有無理的投訴，所以要懂得自我保障，防犯觸怒客人。 | 要懂得觀察入微、說話小心及評估風險。 | 自保方法(事例)： 1)要客人簽名確認相方達成的共識，防日後追究責任； 2)在浴室維修熱水爐前，要求客人先取回貴重物品； 3)不許亂移動客人的物件 |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|----|-------------------|---|---|--|
| 16 | 社會的現象-投訴文化 | 社會內增添了不少的渠道，如傳媒、區議員、投訴機構，可讓客戶方便作出多方面的投訴；客戶會以此為威脅手法，逼公司妥協他們的要求，這令前線員工感到不值。 | 自我調節及接受這一行的現實，保持平和心情；同兄弟分享事件及感受，免重犯過失或跌入陷阱。 | |
| 17 | 排單的技巧或次序 | 有一定經驗時，便知道如何安排。因每項維修都是獨特，所需的時間差異也大，所以須隨時調配排單次序。 | 可循以下條件安排維修次序： 1) 按指定時段；2) 順地區、地址；3) 預計所需之維修時間；4) 應客戶的即時要求。 | |
| 18 | 環境因素可引致之爐具失靈或功能失效 | 例如，利用一個恆溫熱水爐負責兩間浴室之熱水供應，因水壓問題可導致溫度有差異。近恆溫熱水爐的浴室，就熱；較遠的浴室，就溫度不均。 | 因為這種現象是難避免的，技術員只有盡力而為及耐心地向客人解釋。 | 故事： 1) 郊外小昆蟲 (S007) 2) 客戶自行安裝石油氣爐 (S008) |
| 19 | 回想當年的歲月 | 與客戶關係良好、融洽、和受尊重；覺得自己是有技術的，可以幫到客人；少被投訴。 以前苦樂參半，現在就苦多樂少。 | 昔日，有機會學建立友誼及向客戶主動關懷，但現在與客戶互相交流較少！ | |
| 20 | 政策改變了，我的觀念也要變 | 不再只是維修服務，客戶服務包括很多，最緊要學懂如何令客人稱心滿意。 | 要接受改變觀念，緊貼公司步伐及面對現實！ | 故事： 「我已看化了！」一個維修技術員的剖白。(S009) |
| 21 | 客戶的安全 | 明白客戶的安全是非常重要的，一切措施都以此為大前題。 | 依公司指引去進行維修及檢查！ | |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|---|----------------|--|---|---|
| 22 | 對公司的客戶服務的認識 | 維修技術方面，是足夠應付；但客戶服務方面就包括很多，亦覺得比較難，對公司整體客戶服務不太認識。 | 靠自己摸索！ 希望可盡量解答客戶查詢。 | |
| 23 | 建立自己的互助人際網絡 | 明白建立自己的互助人際網絡是非常重要的，因為一個人學的範圍有限及可應付急時之需。 | 但都示乎技術員之間的交情/關係，正所為"求救都要有人肯救！" | 故事： 點只係修理熱水爐咁簡單！ 1) 技術員互相幫助的故事 (S010) 2) 水喉塞了，要想辦法！ (S011) |
| 24 | 檢查爐具配套或觀察周邊設備 | 例如，熱水爐附近的水喉喉管，因水喉生鏽堵塞喉管，影響熱水爐出水的功能，牆身滲水等問題。 | 要細心觀察周邊環境對爐具帶來的影響及即時要作出準確的判斷。 | |
| 25 | 天賦條件－客戶服務 | 擁有獨特的天賦可幫助技術員更能妥善處理當時的環境。例如，身形高大的技術員在一個狹窄的櫃臺下進行維修時，就十分不方便。 | 有幽默感、老實； 對客戶的要求、態度及情緒的變化要敏感。 | |
| 26 | 所累積的經驗，有助提升維修技 | 有經驗之技術員曉得先查看爐具那部份壞了，這可減少檢查或維修時間。 | 1)熟悉爐具特性及其操作之認識；如，在一束顏色電線中，曉得選那幾條電線來檢查。 2)若對有關環境有認識和了解，是絕對有幫助的。不過，真係做到才知道！ | |
| 公司政策 (Company's Customer Service strategies) | | | | |
| 27 | 公司所關注的，只有... | 公司所關注的只有客戶的投訴。 由技術員提出的要求或所反映的現實，就為其次，首要應付的只有客戶的投訴。 | 無奈地接受！ | |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|----|-----------------------|---|--|---|
| 28 | 當公司在查究客戶的投訴時... | 公司認為如何令客戶感到滿意是最重要的，如需要查明投訴時，總是追問技術員為何引起投訴，矛頭總是向着他們。 覺得公司壓迫力大，不平衡的！ | | 經歷： 公司只追問技術員為何在第一次的維修中不檢查清楚，令客人不滿，根本沒有考慮技術員的感受。 |
| 29 | 技術員執行守則時，也感矛盾！ | 有時政策在執行時互生矛盾，根本未能把事情解缺，只是把它略帶過。若果太強硬依足指示執行，就令事情難處理。最終為難了技術員！ | 懂得「執生」及有彈性去處理事情，應當時的處境作出應變。懂得避免投訴！ | 例如，要求駕駛貨車的技術員盡量帶多些零件，但是帶大量零件/爐具可導致車身則埋一邊，這會引起駕駛安全問題。 |
| 30 | 公司應付客戶的要求-如何面對故作無理要求？ | 估計公司都肯應客戶的要求作出讓步；公司較遷就客戶、盡量迎合客戶的要求，令執行者感到為難。 | 要令客戶完全感到滿意是很困難的，只有依公司指示去做，盡量不去計較。 | 故事： 「客人投訴成風氣」- 技術員認為這是一個不健康的現象！(S012) |
| 31 | 爐具維修以外的附加工作，如爐具銷售 | 有時因時間緊迫，不能顧及這些額外工作，只有盡力而為。 | 要把握時機，盡力而為。 | |
| 32 | 其他部門與客戶服務部之協調 | 其他部門未能了解技術員的實際工作情況及需要，所以他們所忽略的細節，往往為技術員帶來很多不便。 | 技術員要懂得向客人提問及解釋。 技術員指出客戶服務熱線(CSH)的同事是他們的緊密合作伙伴，如他們能提供準確維修資料，一定可以協助他們提高服務水準及避免不必要的誤會。 | 經驗： 維修單內的資料錯誤或不準確，可能技術員會帶錯零件。 |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|----|---------------|---|--|---|
| 33 | 公司提供之溝通渠道 | 技術員覺得要向管理層表達對客戶服務或公司政策的意見是不易的。他們沒有正式的渠道，最多只有向上一層表達，不知意見有否被考慮。 | 只有默默無言地接受一切在服務政策上的任何改變。 | 總有例外的故事： 1)我所反映的竟變成了一項公司政策」- 真實的事例 (S013) 2)我所提過的竟然真的幫到他(一位傷殘客戶) (S014) |
| 34 | 公司的爐具性能及特點之認識 | 技術員對爐具性能及特點是有一定的認識，並了解怎樣的爐具可給予客戶最理想的享受。他們也能為公司從客人身上搜集第一手的用後感受予部門。 | 技術員相信他們是有責任向部門反映一切從客人搜集得到的爐具性能之意見，並按他們的專業評估，希望有助部門找出爐具的問題及有待改善的地方。 | 故事： 曾經向上級反映恆溫熱水爐之性能的小故事- 結果令我們有點失望！ (S015) |
| 35 | 公司或部門的支援 | 部門未能了解技術員的需要及困難。 常以有沒有讚揚或投訴來作準則，形成一個競爭、比較氣氛。技術員不太認同這種衡量模式。 | 雖然有壓力，也要面對，總之做足份內事。 | |
| 36 | 技術員之間的交流機會 | 面對繁重的工作，根本沒有精力去互相交流。 再者，公司/部門都沒有安排，政策上沒有考慮這一點。 只靠在每天早上派維修單時的短聚，怎能交流呀！ | 只有靠自己人際網絡去查詢。 可是如工作太忙都想休息，除非是非常緊急的，才找人幫助。 | |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|---|----------|---|--|---|
| 37 | 新爐具產品的認識 | 安排上認識新爐具產品非常困難，只派單張簡介要靠自己去摸索。有時，推出新新爐具產品的速度太快，使他們未能適應。新爐具產品的零件又未能配合，這會在客人面前引起尷尬。 | 只有靠自己摸索！ | |
| 38 | 部門的士氣問題 | 以往同事之間關係很好，但現在卻因工作太忙及互相有競爭，所以變得疏離了。 再者，工作量大而且公司政策經常改變，令他們的歸屬感降低。他們的士氣也很低落。 | 只有做好本份！ | |
| 服務者面對的挑戰 (Challenges and Difficulties of the front-line employees) | | | | |
| 39 | 面對的無形壓力 | 不論從客戶或公司，技術員都覺得有無形壓力：如， 1)客戶不接受解釋，可隨時投訴技術員服務不佳；2)比以往多接聽客戶電話查詢，這影響他們工作；3)公司的扣分制度、工作時間緊迫及政策有矛盾之處 | 要常常提醒自己小心謹慎，也要曉得放鬆。可是，有時在客戶家中維修時，不時要接聽另客戶的來電查詢，就怕該客戶不滿技術員未能專心工作，可引致投訴。 | 故事：「強詞奪理」的客人 (S016) |
| 40 | 面對太緊迫的時間 | 工作量繁重及兼顧其他事情，所以不能隨便應客戶額外要求，而提供更體貼服務。 因為會延遲到達下一位客戶的時間。 | 作出準確的判斷及果斷的決定十分重要。 | 故事： 「我足足花了二十分鐘在泊車、登記，才能到達客戶的家進行維修。」 - 一個技術員的親身經驗。(S017) |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

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|----|------------|---|--|---|
| 41 | 面對及應付的無理要求 | 客戶會利用各種方法迫公司作出的讓步，公司又好像總是希望息事寧人，這可能引致令技術員的專業受質疑。 | 只有聆聽清楚要求，向上級匯報及跟公司指示做。 可是，面對當前的客人始終是我們 - 一班前線維修技術員。 | 故事： 1) 無理的投訴，我管不了！(S018) 2) 也許保養期過了，客人亦要免費更換零件。(S019) |
| 42 | 面對投訴(如何避免) | 某些投訴是不合理的，都要面對，只希望上司體諒。 技術員相信引起投訴的原因有很多，不可完全由他們獨力承擔。 | 除了盡量做齊一切指定步驟，免再被指責，亦要部門多作支援。 (簡述12樣引起投訴的基本原因。) | 故事： 1) 「不當說的一句！」 - 一位技術員被投訴的經驗。(S020) 2) 「誰是客户的揸fit人」 - 我怎能辨別出來呢！ 故事(S021) 及 故事(S022)； 3) 「我已經在客人的門前守候了很久，可是仍被投訴，你話苦不苦呀！」 (S023) |
| 43 | 與客戶溝通 | 良好的溝通及應對技巧可幫助避免投訴或麻煩。 | 盡力找出客人最關注的是什麼，並嘗試從客人角度去改善問題。 | |
| 44 | 對超時工作不感興趣 | 現在真的不想有超時工作！ 因為太辛苦、大疲倦了。 | 有時真的難避免，只有無奈接受！ | |

Perceptions of Service Encounter (Service Technicians' views)

對「服務接觸」的感覺/看法 - 從服務提供者的角度

| | | 在提供服務時的感覺/看法 | 應付策略/技巧 | 個人故事或經歷 |
|----|------------------------|---|--|-----------------------------------|
| 45 | 如何令客戶滿意？ | 其實客戶服務已比往提升不少，但當遇上阻礙時，便要即時評估在短時間把事情辦妥；如附近有沒有支援、客人的容忍度，作出一個最合理及可行的解缺方法。 | 所以要靠經驗、應變力、自己的人際網絡等等。 同時，要學懂洞察客戶可能會投訴自己，要向上司先報告。 | |
| 46 | 如爐具安裝在較隱蔽的位置，這便增加維修難度。 | 技術員需要： 1) 爬入狹窄的廚櫃底下進行維修，在黑暗及密封的環境下，有時技術員會因此弄傷腰背及肌肉勞損； 2) 拆除假天花及其後把它還原需時； 3) 有可能要求客人找專人先拆除廚櫃 | 這樣不單增加維修難度和需要更多時間。因此技術員是需要支援的。 | 故事： 1) 我要做蜘蛛俠！(S024) |
| 47 | 為客戶找尋適合的配件或零件，也不容易！ | 有時因爐具的配件或零件存貨不足，要嘗試不同途徑尋找零件。 | 在特別情況下，技術員會盡力應客人之要求為客人想辦法去尋找配件或零件，希望可以替客人盡快維修好他們的爐具。 | 故事： 為客人尋找抽油煙機的零件的經過 (S025) |
| 48 | 如何評估風險？ | 常見的例子，熱水爐附近的水喉喉管，因水喉生鏽堵塞喉管，技術員嘗試拆除通鏽，可能會把這條喉管弄破，會被客戶投訴和追討。 | 憑經驗曉得檢查/評估周邊配備設備的風險程度，並作出判斷是否可做多一步。要擁有實際的經驗才知怎去應付。 | 故事： 「我試過折斷水喉...」，一次真實經驗。(S026) |

| Major Perceptions | Concepts elicited | Coding |
|---|-------------------------------|---|
| 部門士氣低落 | 控制時間有困難 | 逗留時間長,不斷延遲到達時間 |
| | | 因每項維修都是獨特,所需的時間差異也大 |
| | | 等候時間長 |
| | | 在傍晚或晚上時段要求上門維修 |
| | | 登記手續繁複需要較多時間 |
| | | 如爐具安裝在隱蔽的位置,這便增加維修難度及時間 |
| | | 面對太緊迫的工作時間 |
| | 工作量大,事情又零碎、又繁重 | 現在真的不想有超時工作! 因為太辛苦、大疲倦了 |
| | | 多功夫、時間長、多解釋 |
| | | 工作辛勞、肌肉勞損 |
| | | 需檢查舊屋苑的煤氣配套設備 |
| | 管理層未能體諒實際工作情況 | 花時間與客人在電話聯絡、浪費時間 |
| | | 也許明知整體支援及資源不足,只有頂硬上! 個個成員都盡了力! |
| | | 高層未能考慮我們的工作與其他部門或項目有相當的聯繫性及整體性,往往她們所作的,日後便影響我們的工作表現 |
| | | 因為我們所做的認受性低。若把事情弄歪了,那就要完全承擔,所以壓力很大! |
| | 面對不公平情況 | 相比其他部門,客戶服務部的功能、成績認受性低 |
| 不應獨自承擔投訴的後果 | | |
| 客人的需求是各有不同,我們的專業就是能應付不同的客人之需要,可是工作太零碎、認受性低及成績不顯注。 | | |
| 為了部門生存,除做好本份外,我們還落力賣煤氣爐具,這樣才可令管理層覺得我們是有價值的。 | | |
| 估計公司都肯應客戶的要求作出讓步;公司較遷就客戶、盡量迎合客戶的要求,卻為難了執行者。 | | |
| 也許我們把投訴平息了,都沒有什麼了不起! | | |
| 公司所關注的只有客戶的投訴;總是追問技術員為何引起投訴,矛頭總是向着他們。 | | |
| 高層未有了解我們的真實工作情況,未能得到高層的體恤。 | | |
| 面對及應付的無理要求 | 某些客人不願付錢更換零件 | |
| | 公司好像總是希望息事寧人,這可能引致令技術員的專業受質疑。 | |
| | 公司較遷就客戶、盡量迎合客戶的要求,卻為難了執行者! | |

| Major Perceptions | Concepts elicited | Coding |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|
| | 未能得到認同 | 我們大部的同事都同意客戶服務部是：「天下無敵、天下圍攻」；人人都盡力地去幹，但不開心，因為感受不好。 我們需要負責很多零碎、突發、緊急的事件、處理客戶的投訴及冗長的處理時間、等等；往往處理的是吃力不討好，又要被客人罵，這都是不好的感受 |
| 員工之間缺乏交流及經驗分享 | 員工之間缺乏溝通渠道 | 我們沒有多餘的時間互相交流經驗，根本部門也沒有這樣的安排；我們永遠都是靠「撞板」才可學習，經驗分享是非常缺乏 技術員之間的交流機會少 |
| | 靠自己建立互助人際網絡 | 建立與下屬的良好互信關係 明白建立自己與下屬的互信關係是非常重要的，因為有時是靠友情去填補公司制度上之缺陷 遇上問題，只有靠自己人際網絡去查詢。如非必要，也不敢麻煩別人，叫他決幫助！ |
| 面對的無形壓力、增加心理負擔 | 壓力來自公司 | 客戶服務部則肩負維持高服務水平的形像的責任 對超時工作不感興趣 只有默默無言地接受一切在服務政策上的任何改變 公司只關注如何減少投訴事宜 公司的扣分制度、工作時間緊迫及政策有矛盾之處 今日則以「令客戶滿足」及「減少重覆維修」為主 |
| 壓力來自客戶 | 客戶的不合理要求 | 客人曉得利用投訴手段威脅技術員 壓力來自客戶的不合理要求 技術員對客戶有一種防範和自保心理 客人有心為難我們 客戶十分緊張技術員所作出的承諾 社會內增添了不少的渠道，如傳媒、區議員、投訴機構，可讓客戶方便作出多方面的投訴 客人誓不擺休、不斷投訴；我們是怕被投訴 |
| | 客戶的態度 | 年輕客戶表現冷淡、嚴肅，交流不多 客人主動查詢、要求即時的答案 客戶對收費及更換爐具的反應 客人對服務要求很高 |

| Major Perceptions | Concepts elicited | Coding |
|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| | 面對投訴 | 與爐具有關的投訴，我們需要了解爐具的特點及性能及查考成因，這一一都有蹟可尋；若是涉及技術員的服務態度，那就較難作判斷 |
| | | 從下屬收取有關資料，並先了解爐具性能，才可向客人詳細解釋及協助下屬補救事件 |
| | | 客戶對時段的定義之理解與技術員所想的有差異 |
| | | 某些投訴是不合理的，都要面對，只希望上司體諒 |
| | | 社會的現象-投訴文化 |
| | | 客人不理我們的困難及客人不講道理 |
| | | 提高警覺, 小心說話 |
| | | 客戶不接受解釋，可隨時投訴技術員服務不佳 |
| 公司政策矛盾 | 公司政策矛盾 | 公司應付客戶的無理要求時，總是作出讓步 |
| | | 某些政策是互相矛盾，在執行時根本未能把事情解決，只是把它略帶過。 |
| | | 六星級服務水平與資源分配不足，是互相矛盾的！ |
| | | 公司政策經常改變，令他們的歸屬感降低。他們的士氣也很低！ |
| | | 公司較遷就客戶、盡量迎合客戶的要求，令執行者感到為難。 |
| | 對新爐具產品的認識不足 | 對公司的新爐具性能及特點之認識不深 |
| | | 沒有足夠課程介紹，只靠看單張或簡介 |
| | | 推出新新爐具產品的速度太快，使他們未能適應 |
| | | 新爐具產品的零件又未能配合，這會在客人面前引起尷尬 |
| 其他部門與客戶服務部之協調未如理想 | 其他部門支援不足 | 其他部門未能了解客戶服務部的實際工作情況及需要，所以他們所忽略的細節，往往為客戶服務部帶來很多不便或增添我們的負荷量。 |
| | | 客戶服務熱線的維修預約系統未能發揮大的作用！ |
| | | 客戶服務熱線一日可以落高達30張維修預約，或在同一時段內有七張維修預約，這根本不能應付的！ |
| | 要懂得自我保障, 操練 | 保持和平心情 |
| | | 懂得避免投訴 |
| | | 提醒自己小心謹慎，也要曉得放鬆 |
| | | 要常常提醒自己小心謹慎，也要曉得放鬆，並要維持強健身體。 |

| Major Perceptions | Concepts elicited | Coding |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------|--|
| 擁有的專業技巧及技能 | 應有的工作態度 | 真誠地去回應客戶 |
| | | 承受客戶不斷的追問，並要妥善向客人交待事情 |
| | | 向客戶解釋利弊因素，不敢提出太多意見 |
| | | 要懂得觀察入微、說話小心及評估風險 |
| | | 一切措施都以客戶安全為大前題 |
| | | 依公司指引去進行維修及檢查 |
| | | 與客人全接觸，每一個過程都要充分了解客人的需要 |
| | | 要細心觀察周邊環境對爐具帶來的影響及即時要作出準確的判斷 |
| | | 對爐具性能及特點有一定的認識，這樣才可了解問題；所在及如何向客戶解釋，想出適合的方法去作出補救，減低客戶的不滿了 |
| | 良好的判斷力、回應要快及準 | |
| | 自我的肯定及消減壓力 | 客人若見到我們盡心盡力為他們解決難題，也很欣賞我們 |
| | | 如擁有天賦條件，如幽默感，容易與客戶溝通 |
| | 認同客戶服務部的功能 | 客戶服務部不單提供維修服務，更重要的是她是一個直接面對客戶的部門，為要滿足客人一切有關煤氣公司相應之服務的需要。 |
| 一定要為客戶作出一個最合理及可行的解缺方法。 | | |
| 在提供服務時，應變力是最緊要的；在不同的處境下，要作出適當的判斷。 | | |

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| S001 | 客戶的煙囪跌了落街，最緊要冷靜！ |
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這個個案就已經週旋了幾天，去到 Supervisor 那個層面，客人在電話交談中也激氣地掛斷線。客人要求我們去維修一個熱水爐，因為那個熱水爐的煙囪有少少裂縫。我是第三個上去維修的技術員，我一入到客戶的屋內，客戶已不客氣了。他怒氣地說「你們已經煩了我好多次了，又常打電話來:；什麼服務性質，常命令去叫我去做這樣那樣！」他再說:「如我的爐是破舊，需要更換，我不介意；但我已向你們提到我在短期內(約一個月)就會搬走，因我買了新樓。」客人一口氣發了約十五分鐘怒言，我便知道不可再跟他拖下去，要有技巧性地扯開話題。我便問「你買了居屋，你買那處的居屋呢？」聊吓聊吓...他的心情平伏了。跟着，我便打開個爐檢查。

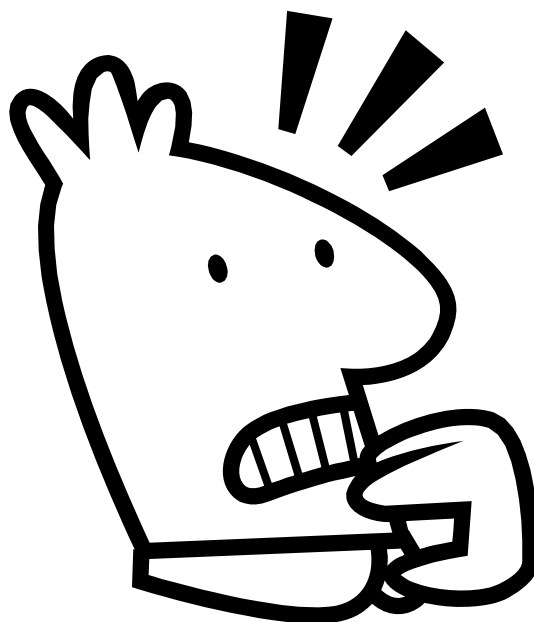
我知道有部份的熱水爐裂了，他需要換一個煙囪，但是我明白他其實還剩一個月到便要搬屋，所以我嘗試拆除那個煙囪，希望可以把它通一通！我便對他說:「大家都是做工程，大家都是粗人，我不介意直接講吓！你是需要更換熱水爐，不過，我嘗試拆除那個煙囪，希望可以通得啫！其實個煙囪不是爛得很厲害，個火柴盒裂了少少，我已帶了防火錫紙去幫佢包。整完後，個人污穢得好似泥鬼！那個客人便說:「你真的幫到手，你哋其他的伙記就用命令式的態度叫我去做。我就不是那麼高興了，我係消費者！不能單叫我買什麼來換什麼，你們應派人來看看，若不行，我不會怪你們。」當我準備放回那個煙囪時，誰不知，一裝上去整個煙囪跌了落街，跌到去簷煙囪蓬頂，我跟個那位客人，你眼望我眼。

我覺得他的表情已表示不會怪我。他跟我講:「師父，咁點好呀？你有受傷嗎？隻手有沒有事？」變了很關心你，他再說:「做工程一定有這樣的事，我不會怪你。」我便說:「黃生，介意我明天才取一個煙囪給你」其實我已心裡想辦法在今天內試找一個煙囪，想想有沒有人可幫我取煙囪啦！拖就拖住一日先。他說:「好呀！盡量幫忙吧！」當我知誰幫我，我便向他講:「我盡力在下午 6 時取煙囪來幫你更換。」黃生已很感激我了。結果，那個客沒有提到賠償的事，他已完全改觀了。他說:「蔡生，我信得你過，我叫工人在家等你來，做完致電給我！」我覺得我以誠意去幫他，亦已挽回他的信心了。

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| S002 | 遇見一位情緒不穩的客戶的經歷 |
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那次的經歷都發生了很久以前了！有客人投訴熱水爐出現「紅火」，我便上門檢查修理。其實已經把它修理好，但他仍堅持己見認為仍有「紅火」出現。我再向他解釋，但他說：「我話有就有呀！」。我告知已維修好了，他不理會。

他說：「你不可以走，我已把門關了。你不要打電話，我會插入自己一刀的！」他真的插了一下！我立刻報告上司，最後 supervisor 也來了，supervisor 也被他纏繞了一陣了。這是遇見一位情緒不穩的客戶的經歷，亦是最深刻的感受。



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| S003 | 客人不滿為何我不願回頭為他維修爐具 |
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有一晚，我本預備收工去上夜校。其實剛好有一張維修預約在下午 6-8 時段，我已經在 5:50 打電話給客人、6:00 又再打，6:00 之後再打，都沒有人接聽。我只有上去客人家的門口等，直至 6:15 左右，再致電一次仍沒有人接聽，我便把「到訪通知書 - No Access Card」在客戶門外。怎料在 6:35 左右客人打電話來要求我必須回去。我已向他解釋也不接受，一定要我回去，若不然後向公司投訴我。我亦只有立刻向上司報告我已登了巴士往長沙灣去了，並表示不願回去。最後我知道派了緊急維修組替客人進行維修檢查。翌日，我便接了該名客人的投訴。他投訴我屢屢不覆電話。幸好有通話記錄才可擺脫嫌疑。我亦要親身向客人提供通話記錄證明，結果他不能再為難我了。



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| S004 | 客人要我等，那敢離開呢！（一次親身經歷） |
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我試過一次有一張下午 6-8 時段的維修預約，我便在 6 時左右致電給客戶，通知他我快到了。客人要求我在 6:30 分到他那處，因為他說正在趕回來，所以我答應了。怎料到 6:45 分還未見人，我再打電話給他，他說他正在從地下鐵站回來。我又只有等，後來才知道他在柴灣地下鐵站，可是他家在將軍澳。到 7:15-25 分，再打電話給他幾次，他又說正在趕回來；我只有向他提出預約另一日再來維修，他便一口拒絕，還說：「師傅等多一陣都唔得，你們約下午 6-8 的！」結果快將到晚上 8:00，客人才現身。他還說：「師傅，你們約下午 6-8，代表你要等我的。如果我想捉弄你，就要你等多半個鐘都得！」，這令我很不高興及激氣呀！



S005 「觀念改變了，不要以為自己十分專業。」- 自我調節的方法

以往的我是有「師傅」性格的，我是很主觀的，可是現在的客人，不是每個都接受我的提議或我所講的一套。我終於都試過一次，我很主觀地告知那個客戶，我認為要這樣作維修的，這個客戶最後投訴我，之後就完全不需要我去修理，叫另一個師父去修理。那個師父就跟隨人客的要求去做，結果都係可行的。

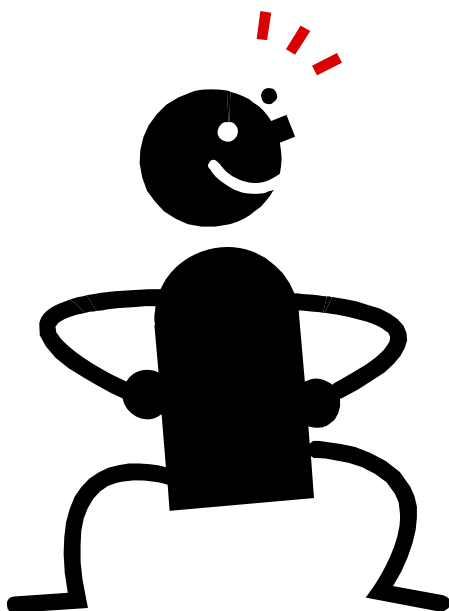
我從這事看到原來不一定要跟足我所提議的去做，我要提議給客戶每一個做法的利害關係；而不是好似以往幾十年前的模樣，一定要跟我所提議的去做，好似有師父脾氣。以往所訓練的人，主觀性強，一定要叫客戶跟自己的提議去做。現在就不同了，公司是要以人客為主導的，考慮人客的心理，這樣我便要同樣地考慮/顧及人客的心理，所以只有講述所有的利害衝突；而不是要客戶跟我所講去做，今時的客戶是有選擇權，我們不能規限，客人有權去決定，總之決定權是屬於客戶的。

還有，現在我們少了機會分享；以前做學師跟三年，我們可以跟師傅偷師及吸取經驗，不論在工作或人生經驗都有得益。現在新聘的就沒有這種機會；他們經常碰釘，便要求我們去補救的。因為他們被外判公司聘用而沒有十足的訓練，一路碰釘，扣分，扣完全部分數便會離開去別的公司做。現的學徒只有機會在煤氣公司訓練一年，之後，便到外判公司工作。其實工作形式大致相同，唯獨老闆不同了，分賬、管理也不同了；質素都有不同，所以很難保證。客人有投訴便會打去客戶服務中心，之後就要叫有經驗的師父去做。客人可能把之前的怒氣轉向我們的身上，情緒便會發洩在我們身上的。



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| S006 | 一位被推舉參與「傑出員工選舉」的技術員的感受。 |
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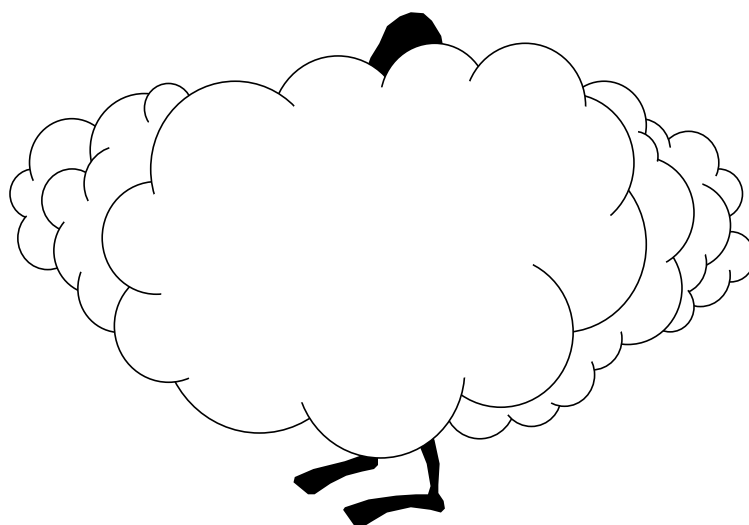
回想初入行時，總是怕被客人投訴，令自己心理壓力很。現在已經有一定的年紀又做了那麼久，便知道想轉工作也不易，因此我會自我調節去適應現實。但當我被甄選出來參加公司的「傑出員工選舉」時，我有一種深的感受。我覺得自己是有責任做好這份工作，對自己有一定期望及不要令上司和同事失望。也許我是落選者，這也代表有人認同我的表現。這影響我要以整體利益為依歸和留意事物。因此，我覺得如能得到部門及公司的認同是非常重要的。這使我有點滿足感！



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| S007 | 郊外小昆蟲 |
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我試過有一次為一位居住在新界郊區的客戶維修煮食爐具時，預計是某部份電子零件失靈，可是無論怎樣檢查都查不出是那部份引致煮食爐不能點火，煮食爐沒有反應。我相信是有外來物件阻塞爐的某部份，這是不常見的失靈問題，只有花更多的時間去摸索原因。

最後我發現了有一隻似是小昆蟲的物體堵塞了爐具，才能證實失靈的原因。原來有一隻飛蛾堵塞了爐具。我相信這種情況多數在新界郊區會遇到而市區則較為罕有的及我們要憑經驗才能把原因找出來。



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| S008 | 客戶自行安裝石油氣爐 |
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有一次我遇過一個客戶自己安裝石油氣爐，因爐具失靈，需要我們來維修。因為煤氣公司是該爐具的總代理，所以他致電公司要求派人來檢查。那位客戶亦住在新界郊區的村屋，可能他未能估計安裝的複雜情況。從其安裝的手法便可一眼看出這不是由專業人員安裝的。我發現有一條喉管放在廚房另一旁，不過，我只關心所安裝的是否安全有沒有漏氣。

經檢查及觀察後，這是因為安裝不善而且其喉管不夠長，所以我建議他去找合資格代理/承辦商重新安裝這個爐具。我亦向他解釋煤氣公司只負責免費維修，如須找煤氣公司安裝則要收費。其實我只能為他做到這些，其他也無能力了！



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| S009 | 「我已看化了！」一個維修技術員的剖白 |
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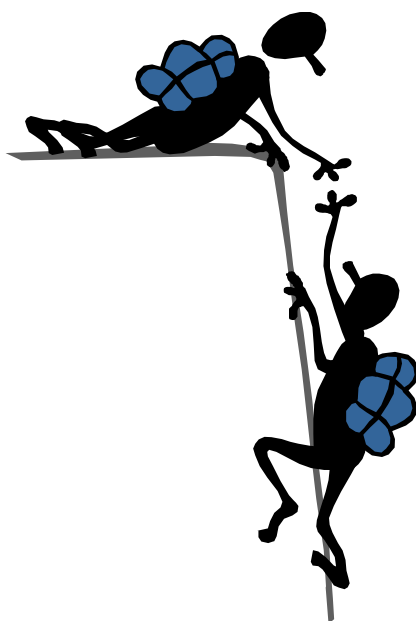
我都要改變想法，那就是不要以為自己是這麼專業呀！這是沒有用處的。例如，我憑經驗及技術去檢查及評估爐具的問題和判斷要不要更換零件，這一切我都覺得是合乎指引向客人解釋及告知收費細節。誰不知客人一樣有辦法免去收費，我們所做的好似白費了，根本不用理會那個爐具被客人用了多少年，總之他們也有方法免去一切收費呢！以往我會很激氣的，我覺得第一步是要堅持，如爐是有問題的便需要更換零件，客人就應該負責，但他們可以透過投訴去獲得豁免。不過，這是公司決定的。但現在我則不要以為自己好有本事，什麼氣或電的牌照，都不能代表什麼。要自己想通，記住一定要向客人講清楚一切收費之需要，之後的則我們管不了。這幾年我把這些事情都看化了！



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| S010 | 點只係修理熱水爐咁簡單 - 技術員互相幫助的故事 |
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技術員到客戶家修理煤氣熱水爐。經檢查後，發現該煤氣熱水爐需要更換零件；可是，他缺乏所需的零件，只好向客人提出須預約另外一天到她家再作維修。當時，客人感到非常失望，因為那時正是農曆新年，天氣寒冷，如缺乏熱水實在太不方便！當技術員離開後二十分鐘，客人聽到門鐘響起；打開門後，見到他回來使她覺得十分驚訝！他解釋：「我有一位同事在附近，他身上有你那隻熱水爐的配件，他肯過來幫你安裝這零件。可是現在已是傍晚了，為節省時間，我先拆開這零件讓他可免去拆零件的時間。他來到便可專心負責安裝配件了。」果然，十五分鐘後，另一位技術員到客戶家安裝熱水爐的配件。

客人的熱水爐就這樣維修好了！客人十分感激兩位技術員不怕勞苦為她修理熱水爐，她亦十分欣賞他們的專業和合作精神。令她最深刻的是他們在短短的時間內為她解缺了沒熱水用的難題。使她不用苦等幾天，這實在表現出他們明白客戶的最大需要。



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| S011 | 點只係修理熱水爐咁簡單 - 「水喉塞了，要想辦法！」 |
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技術員到客戶家中修理煤氣熱水爐。經檢查後，發現該煤氣熱水爐需要更換零件；技術員即時把零件更換。他後來發現原來熱水爐附近的喉管長期被鐵鏽堵塞，所以令這個熱水爐在操作時表現不佳。他向婆婆細心解釋：「因你的熱水爐喉管長期被鐵鏽堵塞，引致熱水爐在操作時表現不理想。我幫你清除喉管內的鐵鏽，這樣才可使喉管暢通。」婆婆聽到後十分高興及感激。

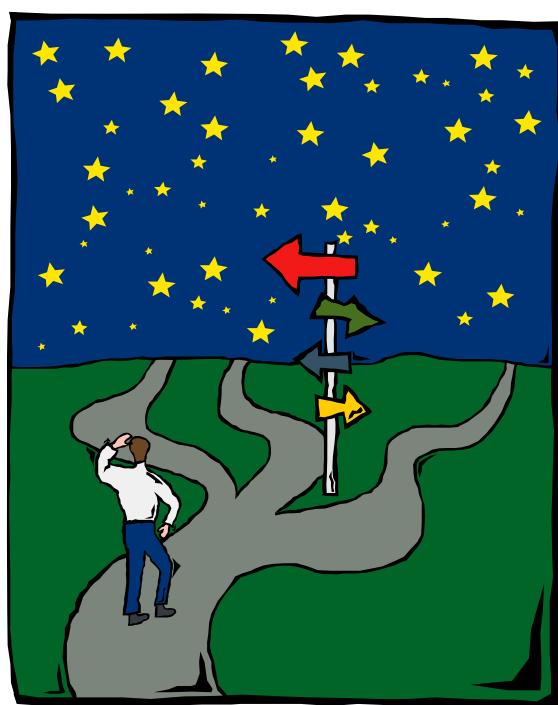
婆婆耐心地站在一邊觀看如此細心地把鐵鏽清除，這已花上不少時間及氣力了。結果，熱水爐的確比以往出水時及控制熱度時更為理想。婆婆向家人講述事情的經過。她的家人亦十分欣賞技術員對爐具及水喉管的認識程度十分熟悉，而且覺得他在工作範圍以外的工作亦樂於為客戶辦到，這是值得加許的！



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| S012 | 「客人投訴成風氣」- 技術員認為這是一個不健康的現象！ |
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我有一次要負責做一張跟進 (follow-up order) 維修熱水爐的預約。因客人投訴有同事弄污了浴缸，我要去清潔那被弄污了的浴缸，當中亦有工程師同行。老實說，我認為那些污蹟不是新的，應該已有一段日子。我們已明白那客人有心為難的，從中想得到利益，知道他想透過投訴去作無理要求。工程師叫我帶齊一切強力清潔用品到客人家裏徹底清潔，做到客人滿意為止。

我則認為工程師應盡力去爭取合理對待，不應完全遵從客戶的無理要求。也許向客人提出找公証行評估，無需跟這類客人爭拗。我怕公司愈怕被投訴、怕客人向外界，如傳媒公開事情，就助長此類任意無理投訴的不良風氣。



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| S013 | 總有例外的故事：「我所反映的竟變成了一項公司政策」 - 真實的事例 |
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我還記得以前更換銅喉是很貴的，現在公司提供優惠予公共屋村的客戶。大約已有十年之久！ 當年是我向李漢雲先生作了一個反映；跟著陳永堅實(MD)也叫我上去見他；向他講了一個個案，自此以後便推出了一個特惠予公屋居民，他們只須千元左右；街外承辦商約收三千，確是很超值呀！就算加埋約三十幾呎都係千元左右，還可替客人更換水制！不過，只有公屋煤氣用戶享受這優惠。 其實只會向有需要的公屋煤氣用戶提供，我們會考慮更換那些引至熱水爐有問題之銅喉。我們會找承辦商去做，不過我們要做事前的評估，我們要去看看有什麼問題，評估後匯報公司叫承辦商來修理。



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| S014 | 總有例外的故事: 我所提過的竟然真的幫到他(一位傷殘客戶) |
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有一次我為一住傷殘人士的客戶進行維修時，發現他因身體殘障無法扭動水制。就算只是普通的扭動式水制，對他也構成很大的困難了。我向上司反映該客戶的困難，不料部門竟為那客戶更換了一個「揭」動式的水制。部門叫我聯絡該客戶並再到他的家替他更換水制。我覺得今次只要自己肯幫人問多一句、行多一步就可以令有需要的人改善了生活。我能幫助他也感到有滿足感。



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| S015 | 曾經向上級反映恆溫熱水爐之性能的小故事-結果令我們有點失望！ |
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我曾經向部門反映某一款的恆溫熱水爐出水時的熱度，是很難在冷天氣中被調節致一個令客人滿意的溫度；這亦是客戶常常投訴這款恆溫熱水爐的問題。原因在於新推出的恆溫熱水爐不再安裝一件配件；缺乏了它，恆溫熱水爐未能自動控制水的流量，這便無法在不用加大煤氣使用量的情況下可以令凍水加快被加熱。我們只有用其他方法，如在冬天或在夏天時，以人手去較細水流或較大水流等。

其實，這配件是絕對可以在冬天發揮很大的作用。雖然向工程師反映過，但他的回應是十冷淡。他說：「香港很少機會得幾度，已決定放棄安裝這配件了。根據統計，寒冷的情況是很少出現的，這配件是不必要的。」我認為客人所期望的是要享受舒服的沐浴感覺，但現在熱水爐未能提供這效果。我覺得有點失望，明知問題所在，而我們經過經驗累積而反映這些見解，但好像一一被忽略。我們要利用一些方法遮掩蓋這問題，好似欺騙客人，我們的專業形象也受損了。



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| S016 | 「強詞套理」的客人 |
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有一客戶的熱水爐失靈，而且煤氣喉管有小部份堵塞；我幫他進行檢查及維修。我亦向那位客人清楚解釋熱水爐也舊了，不過經維修後仍可供應適合的溫度給客人沐浴之用；煤氣喉管則有可能再次被堵塞的，如他考慮更換爐時也要一起更換煤氣喉管，才可有理想的效果。我已解釋非常清楚只是沒有把這段對話記錄下來。

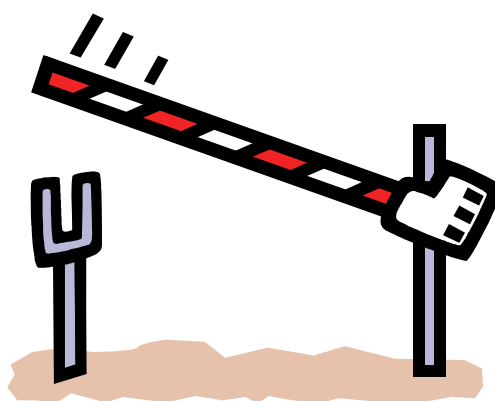
不久，他真的更換了熱水爐，但沒有更換煤氣喉管。結果在天氣轉冷時，喉管又堵塞了，便再次要求我們去維修。我看見這情況也覺得奇怪，問他為何不一起更換喉管，其實主要問題是條煤氣喉管。客人即時發脾氣及投訴我，投訴我沒有請清晰地告知他，結果除了花\$6000 買了一個新的熱水爐，他又要再花時間叫我們通喉。今次，幸好能把它弄好，但我請客人簽名確認他明白煤氣喉管是有機會再被堵塞的。



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| S017 | 「我足足花了二十分鐘在泊車、登記，才能到達客戶的家進行維修。」- 一個技術員的親身經驗。 |
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我試過在某一新建成之大型私人屋苑，花了差不多二十分鐘在泊車、登記，才能到達客戶的家進行維修。首先進入該屋苑的停車場，拍完車後在停車場登記一次；管理員通知樓下管理處同事，樓下管理處同事便通知住客有煤氣公司的維修技術員將會到訪。管理員要我往平台去，到了平台的保安部又要登記一次，取了訪客證。到了客戶所住的座數時，又要經管理員通傳一次，才可乘電梯上樓。

足足花了二十分鐘在登記及通傳上，就算有三十分鐘的免費泊車也沒有作用了，白白花了時間在這些手續上。我也曾問為何公司不嘗試跟那些大型私人屋苑的管理公司，相討簡化我們這些公共機構的工作人員到訪時的程序。



S018 「無理的投訴，我管不了！」

最經典的一次是有一個客人利用幾次投訴，使公司賠一個新爐給他。他原本所使用的 built-in hot plate 已經用了五、六年的，他弄爆了塊玻璃，明顯是他自己弄破的；他竟然可以要求公司賠一個新爐給他，還可轉爐款。這是我遇過的一個例子！其實某些客人也會要求免費更換零件，又或者要求我幫他們清潔，這一都是透過無理的投訴逼使公司讓步。有時可能因為公司讓步太多、怕被投訴而影響公司形象，就息事寧人！這樣就寵壞了我們的客戶。

我覺得我們的形象也受影響，明明依照工作程序、指引及我們能專業技術去檢查爐具，發現問題、進行維修及向客人報價更換零件費用等；經客人無理投訴後，一切費用可以豁免，更甚的情況是把整個爐也可更換的。這好像否定了我們的專業技術，教我怎會信服呢！我不知如何指導新加入的同事。總之不要跟客人硬碰，一切由管理層決定。對那些無理的投訴，我管不了！



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| S019 | 「也許保養期過了，客人亦要免費更換零件。」 |
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我曾應付一位客人，他知道保養期已逾期，但仍要求我們替他免費更換爐具零件。他的理由是為何在保養期逾期前，曾經替他做維修檢查的技術員為何在那時不向他提出更換爐具零件；要等約過了一段日子才今日當保養期逾期後才建議他更換爐具零件，要他付更換零件費用。為何在同一壞處中，當日的技術員不提醒他，今次他就要因保養期已逾期而需要付款。

我認為客人應在保養期逾期後負責一切有關更換爐具零件免費。再者，這位客人的爐具保養期已在 2005 年 5 日到期，那時我去維修已將近 2006 年年尾，我已向他解釋了。我相信前一位同事沒有做錯或做漏的，有時電子零件的問題是十分難預料的！客人真的十分緊張為何我們不替他早更換爐具零件，我們怎可以這樣做呀！他十分不忿致電客戶服務熱線查問一翻，我不敢騷擾他只有等他查問完畢；結果，他用了足足二十五分鐘才掛線。我亦只有把事情記錄向上司報告。



This is too hard!

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| S020 | 「不當說的一句！」- 一位技術員被投訴的經驗。 |
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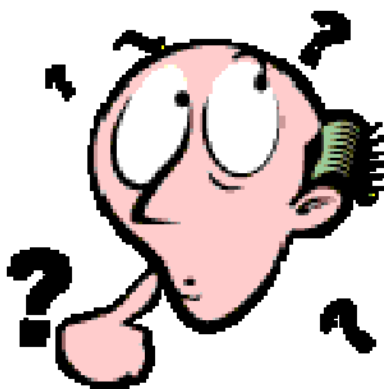
有一次我準備為客人檢查爐具時，才發現這個爐具不是公司代理的型號，因此不能替客人更換零件，提議客人找有關代理商維修及更換零件。我只是多問兩句就出事了。我問客人為何不找有關代理商，他不耐煩地回答，代理商要他等幾天才可安排上門維修，那麼我只好替他檢查那爐具，但仍然強調我不能替他更換零件；我只問了一句：「為何不買煤氣公司代理的型號？」他便怒氣地回答：「你公司的爐具很貴呀！」當時，我立刻閉嘴了！不久我便接到投訴，投訴我講了不適合的說話。回想當日入屋時已覺得該客人心情不佳，我都提高警覺，怎料問兩句都有麻煩。



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| S021 | 「誰是客户的揸 fit 人」 - 我怎能辨別出來呢！ |
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有一次在客户家中進行維修時，當時登記客户不在家，但是客户的家人也可以接待我的讓我進入家中進行維修。維修完畢後，我告知那位家人需要更換零件，收費約百幾元左右，並要求他在維修單上簽名確實。可是在第二天，該户的登記客户致電給我責怪我為什麼不先致電給她，問她是否願意更換零件及支付費用。她說當日接待我的是他的兒子、是一位小朋友，不懂判斷的。也許她有可能想更換整個爐，為何我不先問清楚呢？

跟着部門只問我為何我不弄清事情、不先通知客人，好似是我做錯。我覺得很無奈！其實，那個男孩子也看似有二十幾歲，我怎能分別他是不可作決定的。我認為客人也有責任去問自己的家人是否願意更換零件的。



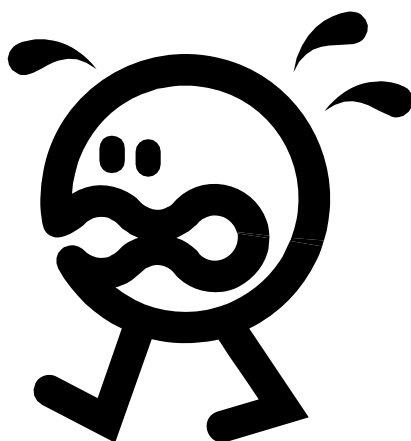
S022 「誰是客户的揸 fit 人 (II)」 - 我怎能辨別出來呢！

我也同樣試過這種情況的！ 你所遇到的是有二十幾歲的男孩子；我所遇到的比你更經典，那個接待我入屋維修的男人是四十幾歲的。 我只替他更換一條五十幾元的膠喉管，我也被她的妻子投訴。 她打電話給我責怪我不通知她，她說她才可決定換不換，她的丈夫不能作決定的。我提議把舊喉還原給她，那便不用收費了。 但是那位太太則表示可以，因為這已代表有危險潛在；換了就算但她不願付錢。原因是我沒有先向她查問。 我也被上司責備為何不先問清楚，最後公司免了收費。



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| S023 | 「我已經在客人的門前守候了很久，可是仍被投訴，你話苦不苦呀！」 |
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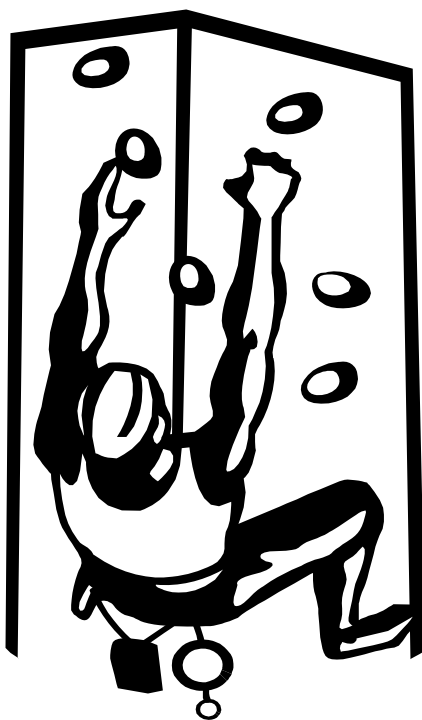
有一次，我在前往一位客戶的家之前已打了多次電話，可是沒有人接聽。根據公司規定我們也要登門，如真的沒有人在家就放一張到「到訪通知書 - No Access Card」。誰料竟有人開門，是一位女士；她叫我等一等，跟看關門。我足足等十分鐘都無人再開門，覺得很奇怪，所以再次按門鈴，那位女士開門，就責備我：「我已叫你等一等，你為什麼那麼急呀！」，立即關門。最後，她也肯開門，不過就面黑黑，非常不滿的！完成維修工作後，不久，我便接到投訴信，投訴我沒有禮貌，態度不佳等等。幸好她的丈夫致電告知我們他的太太情緒化，情緒比較波動，相信我是沒有做錯的。若不然，我今次實會被上司責備了。



S024 我要做蜘蛛俠！

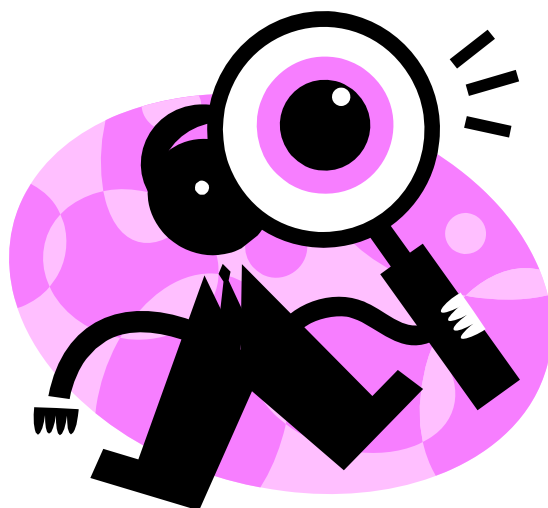
我到一名客戶的家維修，他的居所很大，算是大戶人家的。他把熱水爐安裝在屋外的天井位置；我需要從鐵梯爬上去找那個熱水爐。其實鐵梯距離地面也有十幾尺的，我必需向管理處借爬上爬落一把長的梯子接駁鐵梯，才可爬上去工作。

結果，我要從鐵梯及長的梯子爬上爬落十幾次去測試效果，花了很多的時間。我沒有找上司給予支援，因為怕麻煩又要等另一天去做。又不是辦不到，只是要花多些時間！我就似蜘蛛俠般爬上爬落。



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| S025 | 為客人尋找抽油煙機的零件的經過 |
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有一次，某個客人投訴抽油煙機有問題。其實那人都幾特別的，每次零件壞了他要求我們把載零件的膠袋給予他，他會查閱膠袋上所印有的出廠年份。那一次雖然更換了零件，但是都是操作不理想；因此又要換零件，不過今次不輕易才找到。我要詢問公司其他部同事，那些同事是負責測試新爐具的工作，可能他們會保留一些當年試爐的散裝零件。幸好今次能把需要的零件找出來替客人更換。如不能替那位客人更換適合的零件，他絕對有可能向報章投訴我們的。因為我們貨倉取來的零件未能配合，憑經驗我會判斷出這有可能向訂貨單的同事查詢他們還有沒有舊機；如有，可能要求他們從舊機拆除所需的零件；若釘貨的同事都沒有所需的零件，我就嘗試問負責測試機件的同事；若都是找不到，只有向上司報告。



S026 「我試過折斷水喉…」，一次真實經驗

我都試過折斷水喉喉管的！那次維修熱水爐時，我沒有留意有部份水喉被埋藏了。我嘗試拆除水喉喉管，怎料真的把喉管折斷了。客人立刻指責我及向公司投訴，我便要立刻向上司要求支援派多一位同事來幫助，才能修補水喉喉管及牆壁。這一整天，我心情都不佳，這樣絕對影響我的工作表現。

經這次後，我再也不敢輕舉妄動了！一定要跟客人講清楚會有水喉折斷的機會，我們不會負責任何責任。有時，我們會要求客人簽處確認我們之間所達成的共識。某些客人也會感到不耐煩的，嫌我們覺得他們有可能不認賬。



故事編號 _____

1. 從故事/事件中，你認為技術員與客戶之間的溝通是……

冷淡、嚴肅、
欠交流和諧、主動；
互相交流

2. 你覺得技術員之間的關係是……

缺乏溝通及沒有
分享渠道

建立了互助網絡

3. 在故事/事件中，你認為技術員的能力是……

洞察力弱、
判斷力差應變力高、
決斷力高

4. 在故事/事件中，你覺得技術員的工作狀況是……

工作繁重及
無奈地面對工作順暢及
積極面對

5. 與客戶接觸時，技術員的工作態度是……



疏忽客戶的需要

真誠回應客戶需要

6. 你覺得在這故事/事件中反映了什麼情況呢？



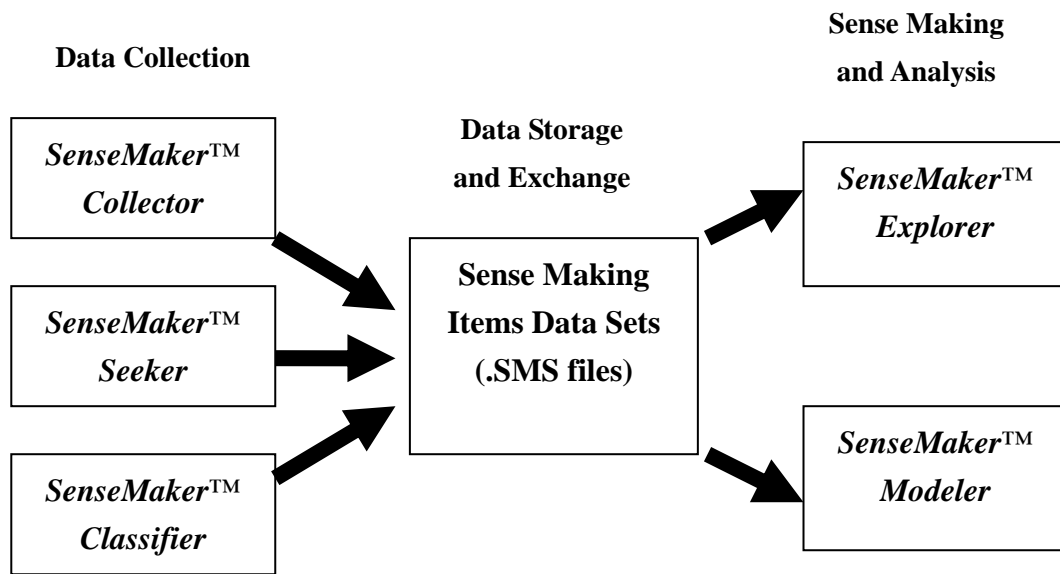
部門之間協調不足

同僚互相合作及支援

SenseMaker™

The SenseMaker™ software is developed by the Cognitive Edge. The Cognitive Edge has created the SenseMaker Software Suite, which is the outcome of several years of research into human-based organizational complexity, sensemaking, decision making, knowledge sharing and narrative by the Cognitive Edge. The purpose of developing this software is to provide a natural and intuitive approach to gaining multiple perspectives and new insights into complex problems. It provides a set of tools designed to enable informed decision making in organizations using both structured and unstructured data in a common environment.

The application tool develops five major components; they are SenseMaker™ Collector, SenseMaker™ Seeker, SenseMaker™ Classifier, SenseMaker™ Explorer and SenseMaker™ Modeler. The first three components are designed for performing the data collection and the other two components are designed for doing the sense making and data analysis. A diagram showing the basic components of the SenseMaker™ software tool is stated as below (quoted from the handouts of the Accreditation Programme, Dec 2006, Cognitive Edge).



The SenseMaker™ Collector is data capturing tool, which is designed for gathering sensemaking items from a broad population. The materials provided by the participants is self indexed at the point of capture. It is a customizable web based environment which can also be replicated on the PC.

The SenseMaker™ Seeker provides an ability to distribute sensemaking items for indexing by specialist where the function is either to improve the productivity of analysts or to gather statistical data on the way in which different populations index the same material benchmarking data-sets can be maintained and used for comparative reporting.

The SenseMaker™ Classifier allows for the replication of human indexing on new material. It provide the ability to index large volume of materials at low cost and to handle issues of knowledge sharing from many perspectives.

The SenseMaker™ Modeler is used to represent a range of understandings of an emergent situation and then compare incoming data against that understanding. This provides some of the functionality normally handled by scenario planning. It can also represent a field, for instance, a market as a landscape which provides capability for opportunity and threat detection.

The SenseMaker™ Explorer contains a range of analytical and interrogation tools that allow both recall and interpretation of sense making items. This module makes extensive use of visualizations to allow complex patterns and exceptions to be discovered. It combines the information processing capability of computers with the pattern based intelligence of humans. The final outcome showing the visualized narrative pattern would be appeared from the Explorer module for researcher to study and analyze the results directly from the software.

It consists of several viewers; they are Explorer Glance, Explorer Browse, Explorer

Compare, Explorer Range, Explorer Distribute, Explorer Cluster, and Explorer Graph.

Each of the viewers offers different functionality, they include 1) showing all indexes and searching for texts; making simple comparison between sets of items and reviewing the sense making items along a linear scale; indicating histogram of items linked to filters; watching the items cluster around filters or combination of filters; and analyzing the relationship among filters.