

INTERNAL SERVICE QUALITY IN THE MALAYSIAN
TELECOMMUNICATIONS INDUSTRY

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To my beloved family

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ABSTRACT

Internal service quality reflects the service quality of an organisation. The telecommunications industry, facing rapid technological changes and varied customer demands, nonetheless, would find this approach useful in attaining the service quality improvements. The Service Profit Chain concept was adapted to show the relationship between internal customer service quality and internal customer satisfaction (employee satisfaction). Thirty branches or service centres of telecommunications companies participated in the survey, of which 182 of 399 (45.61%) respondents returned the questionnaires. The survey questionnaire was constructed, based on the SERVPERF. The range of scale from one to eight was selected to give the respondents a greater differentiation in the responses, as well as to avoid potential problems in interpreting purely verbal answers. The resultant dimensions from this study were interpersonal relationship, internal customer orientation, internal support systems, work climate, adequate tools, and rewards and recognitions. The results of the study provided the basics of the internal service quality requirements for the telecommunications industry in Malaysia. Interpersonal relationship was found to be the most important dimension, proving that the Malaysian telecommunications companies need to look into this aspect for internal service quality improvements. The significance of using the mean was to show the degree of importance of the dimensions, as well as the level of internal customer satisfaction. The overall internal customer service quality and employee satisfaction for the industry were average. The study carried out could provide a benchmark for service quality improvements in the telecommunications companies, so that eventually customer satisfaction and the resultant profitability could be attained.

ABSTRAK

Kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman sesebuah organisasi mencerminkan kualiti perkhidmatan organisasi berkenaan. Konsep ini akan memberi banyak kebaikan kepada industri telekomunikasi yang sedang menghadapi perubahan teknologi yang mendadak, di samping pelbagai permintaan pelanggan yang turut berubah akibat perubahan teknologi. Konsep Rangkaian Keuntungan Perkhidmatan diketengahkan dalam kajian ini untuk menunjukkan kaitan kualiti perkhidmatan dan kepuasan pelanggan dalaman (pekerja). Tiga puluh buah cawangan syarikat telekomunikasi telah mengambil bahagian di dalam penyelidikan ini, di mana seramai 182 daripada 399 (45.61 %) responden telah mengembalikan soal-selidik yang telah diedarkan. Soal-selidik dirangka dengan menggunakan SERVPERF sebagai instrumen. Skala satu hingga lapan digunakan untuk memberi responden lebih pilihan untuk menjawab, di samping menghindar daripada masalah interpretasi yang dihasilkan secara lisan. Kajian ini telah mendapati enam dimensi kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman bagi industri ini, iaitu perhubungan di antara manusia, orientasi pelanggan dalaman, sistem sokongan dalaman, suasana kerja, peralatan yang mencukupi dan ganjaran pengiktirafan. Kajian ini telah menghasilkan keperluan asas kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman untuk industri telekomunikasi di Malaysia. Perhubungan di antara manusia didapati dimensi yang paling mustahak dan syarikat telekomunikasi perlu memberi lebih perhatian di dalam aspek ini. Penggunaan min di dalam kajian ini adalah mustahak untuk mendapatkan gambaran tentang dimensi kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman serta tahap kepuasan kerja pelanggan dalaman. Pada keseluruhannya, min kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman dan kepuasan pekerja dalaman bagi industri ini adalah agak sederhana. Kajian ini boleh dijadikan kayu pengukur kepada kualiti perkhidmatan dalaman bagi syarikat telekomunikasi di Malaysia agar kepuasan pelanggan dan keuntungan syarikat dapat ditingkatkan.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMPS	:	Advanced Mobile Phone System
CDMA	:	Code Division Multiple Access
GSM	:	Global Systems for Mobile
ICT	:	Information and Communication Technology
IP	:	Internet Protocol
IT	:	Information Technology
IS	:	Interim Standard
ISDN	:	Integrated Services Digital Networks
ISP	:	Internet Service Provider
MCMC	:	Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission
NMT	:	Nordic Mobile Telephone
PCN	:	Personal Communications Network
PDA	:	Personal Digital Assistants
PMR	:	Private Mobile Radio
SAN	:	Storage Area Network
TACS	:	Total Access Communication System
TDMA	:	Time Division Multiple Access
UMTS	:	Universal Mobile Telecommunications System

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

The telecommunications industry is facing a new market environment driven by new technologies, regulating drive in response to enhance social, commercial, and competitive advantage; and potential growth in revenue for advanced and new services (Telekom Malaysia Berhad, 2000).

The telecommunications industry is becoming one of the most competitive and important sectors. Globalisation and technological innovations are causing rapid changes in the telecommunications industry leading to increasingly similar demands of end-users for global products; changing needs and capabilities of global customers; and underlying economies of scale and scope in research, product development, and manufacturing (Bradley *et al.*, 1993).

The public could benefit from the strong communication infrastructure of the telecommunications services by providing a lifeline: in the rural areas for medicinal and other emergency services; and facilitating more effective internal operation of the country's markets, government, and private social service organisations (Schwartz, 1996).

The internet explosion is changing the telecommunications industry, particularly, with the implementation of e-commerce (Bishop, 1999), resulting in higher customer satisfaction and retention; lesser operational costs (Polatoglu and Ekin, 2001); and changes in the customer preferences, perception and expectation of the services (Zeithaml and Bitner, 1996).

The convergence of the telecommunications and information services, as the result of technological changes, affects the service distribution networks. The networks are interconnected and closer to handle broad service packages (including media, information and communication services). New patterns of competition and co-operation emerge to accommodate for these changes. Thus, it becomes essential to understand and cope with technological changes and their effects on the structures and processes of the emerging service distribution network (Bradley *et al.*, 1993; Andersson and Mölleryd, 1997) in order to be responsive to the customers by improving the service perceived by the customers and its cost effectiveness (Jackson and Humble, 1994). Therefore, there is a higher level of customer retention and over a long run, will result in profitability (Hart, 1995; Heskett *et al.*, 1994).

The role of the employees as the internal customers is important. For the company to be competitive, it must also involve people (employees) and organisational design. Service companies should possess excellent customer service, skilful in managing employees, and at the same time satisfy the shareholders (Polak and Kleiner, 2001). Employee evaluation of the company's service quality is vital in the measurement of the organisational effectiveness by identifying the organisational performance measurement that the employees view as important (Gilbert and Parhizgari, 2000).

This study focuses on the internal service quality in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. The results of the study are expected to give some insights into the telecommunications industry in Malaysia as well as help set the benchmark to achieve the appropriate service quality.

1.2 Background of the Problem

Rapid changes in the telecommunications industry are due to the convergence of Information Technology (IT) and telecommunications technologies, resulting in changes in customer preferences. Thus, the internal customers (employees) need to have the capability to cope with the changes to achieve customer satisfaction and improve the quality of service of the company.

To attain service excellence, external customer support requires internal systems that are aligned to serve the external customer. Effective internal supplier in the customer relations is the internal pre-requisite to the level of quality of service, such as satisfaction, loyalty and retention (Gilbert, 2000). Thus, the satisfaction of the internal customers is seen as the cause-and-effect relationship as problems with internal customer satisfaction will lead to problems in external customer satisfaction (Fečiková, 2004).

Human factors, such as leadership, training and teamwork, are important as they drive service quality (Longnecker and Scazzero, 2000), indicating that the service quality initiatives are linked to effective internal communications, leadership and employee issues (Fletcher, 1999). Therefore, effective organisations, requires sound internal structures and processes. Internal performance indicators of organisational structures and processes could serve as the measures of the organizational effectiveness. Thus, it is important to identify organisational performance measures that employees view to be important and enable them to perform their tasks. These organizational measures are standards to compare the effectiveness among organizations for the purpose of benchmarking the best practices (Gilbert and Parhizgari, 2000).

To increase employee satisfaction and improve the internal customer service quality, a survey should be carried out to measure the importance of the internal customer service quality dimensions and level of employee satisfaction as supported by the Importance and Satisfaction Model by Chen *et al.* (2006). The approach was intended to show the usefulness of service quality data in attaining service improvements by focusing on areas of resource allocation (Shaw and Haynes, 2004).

1.2.1 The Telecommunications Industry

The telecommunications industry was originally viewed as a monopoly and a “typical public service” due to the economies of scale, political and military sensitivities and large externalities resulting in the governmental control over the industry to safeguard its interests (Schwartz, 1996).

During the 1980s, industrialised and developing nations participated in the telecommunications privatisation as the result of increased demand and technological innovation. The decrease in the cost of transmitting and processing information altered the cost structures of telecommunications and other industries. New ways of meeting telecommunications demands are created, leading to the reduction of users’ dependency on established telecommunications operating companies, as well as the increasingly integrated information and telecommunications technologies and services.

Political climate was becoming more conducive to privatisation, even in developing countries, as the state monopolies had reached a limit of their ability to accelerate the supply of the telecommunications services. The governments could not provide the large amount of capital required to cope with the demand and began to adopt the market-oriented economic strategies such as liberalisation of trade and restructuring of private enterprises. The implementation of the broad economic reforms requires the development of the telecommunications infrastructures (Schwartz, 1996).

The demand for IT and telecommunications technologies leads to an urgent concern for potential methods to meet the increasing demand. New fusion of (IT) and telecommunications occurs as the result of the increase in global competitors, radically affecting the companies. The new technological firms are extremely dynamic and will change the fundamental structures to enable more co-operative work (Bradley *et al*, 1993).

Technology results in the creation of many new industries. The competitive strategies of firms are affected by the creation of new industries and the focus on gaining competitive advantage through the fusion of IT and telecommunications technologies (Bradley *et al*, 1993). There is a trend in the manufacturing companies becoming service companies. Rapid technological changes are increasing acceptance of integrating new technology products with service as a usable “package” creating a service and knowledgeable society from what was the industrial society (Edvardsson *et al*, 1994).

The fundamental of the restructuring of the telecommunications industry requires the changing business of competitive advantage in the industry as the ways in which buyers, suppliers, and rivals compete and interact with one another, are different. Although traditional computer and telecommunication companies seem to reorganise demand for fused services, they are not currently structured to provide them. Thus, the role of software in developing fused services is becoming more important (Bradley *et al*, 1993).

Globalisation of business has emerged as a sophisticated set of management principles in the information economy, unlike the industrial economy business concept. It is possible to send information to any part of the organisation instantaneously, linking directly to their customers, suppliers, and partners around the world (Bradley *et al*, 1993). The increasing internationalisation and international competitiveness are intensifying as deregulation alters the market conditions. Thus, companies must have

better environment to build up competency and ability to change before, or at the same time as the other companies are undergoing changes, to ensure the right quality, (Edvardsson, *et al.*, 1994).

The movement of strategic resources from capital to information, knowledge, and creativity creates the “human capital”. The primary asset of the company is the knowledge held by key employees. However, with knowledge becoming obsolete at an alarming rate, there is greater effort to ensure that the staffs are competent. The company personal development and self-fulfilment through employee development and job creation for the expansion of the number of employees could attract the “best people” (Edvardsson, *et al.*, 1994).

The Malaysian telecommunications industry took the liberalisation path in the early 1990s. The Malaysian Communications and Multimedia Commission (MCMC) took over the role of Jabatan Telekom Malaysia (JTM), as well as assuming additional regulatory functions under the Communications and Multimedia Act, 1998 or CMA (The Malaysian Business, July 16, 2001).

There is an increase in investment in the service sector from an estimated value of RM5.2 billion in 1999 to RM10.4 billion in 2000. Higher capital outlay with the increase in the number of companies in the telecommunication sector, banking, and finance industry, as well as the business services sector in the information and communications technology (ICT) activities. Most of the telecommunications companies embark on capacity expansion and upgrading of their network to cater for larger subscriber base and broader coverage area. The upgrading exercises also include the increase in transport capacity in the Internet service provider (ISP) and broadband services (Bank Negara Malaysia 2000).

The deregulation and rapid technological changes in the telecommunications industry are catching up in Malaysia. Technological changes have contributed to changes in customer preferences over the time, making it necessary for suppliers and

internal customers to adapt to changes occurring in the industry. Thus, the volatility of the industry would be important in the study of its effects to the service industry.

The employees' ability to cope with the diverse customer demands, as well as their perception of the quality of service of the telecommunications company they are working with, could contribute to the company's service quality improvements. As we go on, we shall see the importance of service quality and the role of employees in attaining service quality improvements for their organisations.

1.2.2 Service Quality

Service quality is important to the telecommunications industry as an effective differentiating factor. It is likely to create the necessary competitive advantage, as well as an essential ingredient for establishing and maintaining a loyal and profitable consumer base (Rust *et al.*, 1996; Zeithaml, 2000).

The rapid technological changes result in changes in the telecommunications industry lead to different perspectives in the customers' preferences and changes in ways to conduct business. Thus, the employees need to be competent in order to ensure that the service quality is met. Satisfying the demanding consumers in the telecommunication industry, calls for the need for service quality. Service quality could be judged objectively according to the quantitative standards (the network quality and customer service). In the cellular systems, for example, network quality consists of three important indicators: ineffective attempts, lost calls, and distortion due to the quality of transmission. Thus, the cellular licensee is expected to have customer service centres reasonably available to deal with the consumer complaints and inquiries (Schwartz, 1996).

Retention of customers is the key to the organisational survival as they contribute to the long-term profit. The satisfaction of the internal and external customers is seen as the cause-and-effect relationship as problems with employee satisfactions will lead to problems in customer satisfaction (Fečíková, 2004; Heskett *et al.*, 1994). The Service Profit Chain concept suggests that improvement in internal customer service quality will lead to improvement in the external customer service quality. Thus, the service operator should be backed up by internal processes to help create value at the service point (Heskett *et al.*, 1994).

This study will focus on the internal service quality and its relationships with the internal service quality dimensions and employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunications industry to highlight the importance of the internal service quality in the telecommunications industry and the internal customers' contribution to service quality improvements.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Parasuraman (2002) sets a conceptual framework to show the relationship between service quality, productivity, and profitability. He hypothesised that higher the levels of the company inputs and lower customer inputs will lead to higher levels of service quality. Service quality, in turn, influences outputs from both the company and customer perspectives.

According to the Service Profit Chain concept, improvements in the internal service quality could lead to improvement in customer service quality and eventually profitability (Heskett *et al.*, 1994). The conceptual model illustrates the relationships between internal customer service quality and employee satisfaction; and the relationship between external customer service quality and customer satisfaction

The application of the Service Profit Chain in this study would help to determine the following research questions:

- (i) “Is there a relationship between the internal service quality and employee satisfaction?”
- (ii) “Do the employee profiles influence the internal service quality and employee satisfaction?”

Improved Human Resource practices can result in an improvement in staff relations and quality; commitment and productivity of the employees; and help reduce labour turnover (Davies *et al.*, 2001). Thus, employees need to be competent to accommodate the rapid technological evolution and the changes in the consumers’ preferences.

The study will illustrate the importance of the employee evaluation of the service quality by strengthening the organisation’s internal structures and processes (Gilbert and Parhizgari, 2000). Apart from this, the study will determine if there are significant relationships between the internal service quality and its dimensions; and the internal service quality and employee satisfaction in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. The influence of the employee profile on the internal service quality and employee satisfaction will also be highlighted.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

Research objectives are set to carry out the study, as well as answer the research questions. The objectives of the study are:

- (i) To develop the underlying dimensions of the industry’s internal service quality.
- (ii) To determine the specific dimensions of the industry’s internal service quality.

- (iii) To examine the dominant elements in the industry's internal service quality dimensions.
- (iv) To investigate the relationship between the internal service quality and employee satisfaction.
- (v) To investigate the influence of the employee profile to internal service quality and employee satisfaction.
- (vi) To determine the overall service quality and employee satisfaction.

The study will be in line with the objectives above. These objectives will give some insights into the industry's internal service quality besides finding the answers to the research questions.

1.5 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine the internal service quality in the Malaysian telecommunications industry. A survey on the level of service quality and employee satisfaction of front-line employees from telecommunications companies will be carried out.

The telecommunications industry is chosen because the industry is undergoing rapid changes due to deregulation of the industry and technological changes. It has become one of the competitive sectors with the potential for future growth to cope with the demanding customer satisfaction, making it more challenging.

Previous studies have linked the improvement in the internal customer service quality to the improvement in the external customer service quality (Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Bowen *et al.*, 1999; and Allred, 2001). Internal organisational support leads to satisfied and loyal employees who provide better quality service to the external customers (Heskett *et al.*, 1994; Loveman, 1998), resulting in customer loyalty and retention, as well as long-term profitability (Loveman, 1998).

This study could help telecommunications companies improve external customer service quality through the improvements in the internal customer service quality and employee satisfaction.

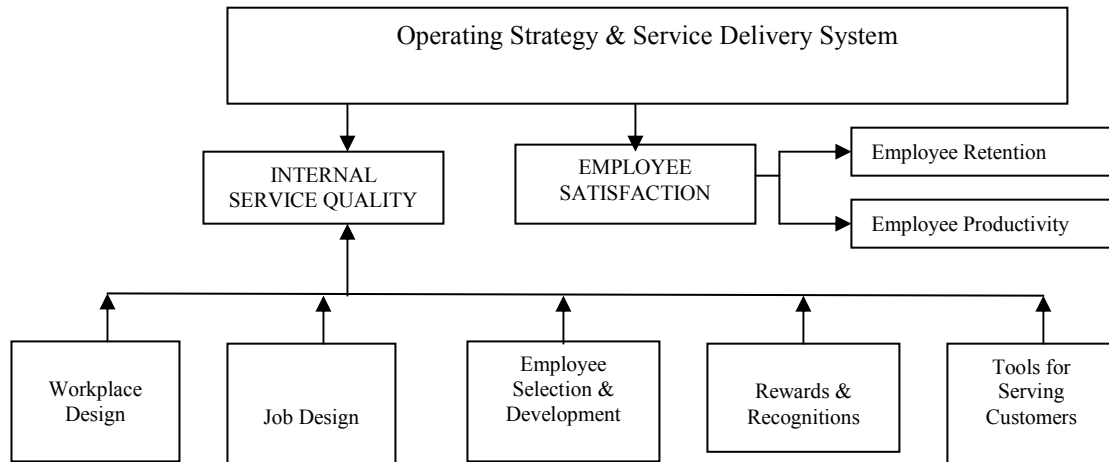
1.6 Theoretical Framework

The study relates the organisational effectiveness to the internal customer satisfaction. The conceptual framework for the study will be based on the concept set by Heskett *et al.* (1994) through the Service Profit Chain model focusing on the relationships between the internal service quality and the internal service quality dimensions; and the internal service quality and employee satisfaction. According to Heskett *et al.* (1997), the conceptualising of the Service Profit Chain in internal customer satisfaction and loyalty is the chain performance between internal service quality, internal customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The relationships between internal customer service quality and employee satisfaction, shows how customer satisfaction is achieved from the relationships between employee satisfaction and employee retention; and between employee satisfaction and employee productivity (Heskett *et al.*, 1994). Figure 1.1 illustrates the concept.

The dependent variables are the internal service quality and the employee satisfaction because they are the main focus of the study. The independent variables are the internal service quality dimensions. The independent variables influence the dependent variables. In the Service Profit Chain concept, the internal service quality dimensions include workplace design; job description; employee selection and development; employee rewards and recognition; and tools for serving customers. However, the dimensions in this study will be reassessed of their importance, along with other important dimensions from the literatures to be included as the dimensions of internal service quality.

Fig. 1.1 The Schematic Diagram of the Theoretical Framework



The questionnaire was constructed based on the SERVPERF. It is the perception-only model, adopting similar SERVQUAL dimensional framework on the comparison of Gap 1 (Consumer Expectations and Management Perception Gap) and Gap 2 (Service Quality Specification Gap) as suggested by Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Murphy (1999).

The questionnaire consists of items internal of service quality dimensions, in addition to the overall rating of satisfaction and perceived service quality (Gumus and Koleoglu, 2002) with closed questions. The Likert-scale is used to anchor for items ranging from 1 to 8, so as to offer the respondents a greater degree of differentiation in their responses, as well as avoids potential problems in interpreting purely verbal answers (Bruhn, 2003). The range for the internal service quality dimensions will be from 1 (Not Important) to 8 (Very Important), as the study is to investigate the level of importance of the internal service quality dimensions. For the employee satisfaction items, the range will be from 1 (Not Satisfied) to 8 (Very Satisfied). The questionnaire construction was adapted from the Importance and Satisfaction Model by Chen *et al.* (2006), who propose similar multi-item scales.

The last part of the questionnaire consists of demographic questions. Previous studies indicated the importance of internal customer segmentation as there are differences in various internal segments in creating effective personnel and internal customer strategies (Tsui and Milkovich (1987). Thus, demographic questions are necessary in organisational surveys (Sekaran, 1992). Marshall *et al.* (1998) examines the internal customer segments, namely, administrative, technical, and clerical positions in various departments of the organisation. In this study, the respondents will be segmented according to gender, age group, education level, job positions, tenure, and the types of telecommunications company the respondents are attached to.

The scope of the study is the front-line employees of the telecommunications companies of telecommunications companies throughout the peninsular of Malaysia.

1.7 Significance of the Study

The growth of the telecommunications industry, lead to the growing importance of service quality to the industry. This study will give some insights into the service quality of the telecommunications industry in Malaysia.

The study contributes to the earlier research on the internal service quality and its relationship to employee satisfaction (Heskett *et al.*, 1994; Hart, 1995; Heskett *et al.*, 1997; Gilbert, 2000; Farner *et al.*, 2001; Bruhn, 2003; and Fečiková, 2004).

The relationships between the internal customer service quality and the internal customer service quality dimensions; and the internal customer service quality and the employee satisfaction; as well as the demographic variables' influence on the internal customer service quality and employee satisfaction in the study could be analysed from the findings of the study.

The results of the study would be of value to the industry in the development of the organisational strategies, as well as service quality improvements through the internal service quality, taking into account the managerial implications in implementing service quality improvements.

1.8 Summary

The study focuses on the internal service quality of the Malaysian telecommunications industry. The industry is going through rapid technological changes in the recent years due to massive global competitions, as well as the liberalization and deregulation of the industry.

Service quality improvements become essential to increase the competitiveness of the industry and attain customer satisfaction. This study focuses on the internal customer service quality based on the Service Profit Chain concept to show the relationships between internal service quality and its dimensions, as well as the internal service quality and the employee satisfaction. The internal service quality concept stresses the importance of internal customer through employee service quality evaluation and the internal process systems; and the relationship between internal service quality and the employee satisfaction in implementing service quality improvements.

The study uses SERVPERF as the instrument to measure the internal service quality base on the important elements selected by the respondents and the level of employee satisfaction.

The employee evaluation of service quality in this study hopes to reveal the various aspects on the internal service quality in the Malaysian telecommunications industry.

1.9 Conclusion

Employee evaluation of service quality is important to a company, as previous studies have shown that employee evaluation could help improve the company's service quality through improvements in the internal service quality.

This research hopes to show the areas (the gap between the actual internal customer service quality and the expected internal customer service quality) that need to be improved so as to yield positive outcomes in future. The relationship between the internal service quality and the employee satisfaction could also be investigated. Comparative study between respondents' profiles and the internal service quality dimensions and employee satisfaction could show the differences and similarities found in previous studies. The study will also provide some insights into the overall internal service quality across the Malaysian telecommunications industry and this study could also be replicated as a comparative study among other service companies in other industries to measure the overall results of the service sector internal service quality.

Before proceeding to the literatures on service quality, it would be necessary to know some important aspects of the telecommunications industry. Chapter two will show the growing importance of service quality improvements to the telecommunications industry.

The method used for data collection was introduced to ensure higher participation from the companies, as well as higher number of questionnaires returned. Although, the number of questionnaires returned was over 40 per cent was quite an achievement, the channelling of the questionnaire had introduced some biasness and non-response. This was particularly so, for the job position segment and missing items in the questionnaires returned. Although, the study used random sampling, it should be dictated the percentage of respondents for each group of the segment, so that every group would be given equal chance of participating.

The relationship between the internal and the external customer service quality could give a better view of the Profit Chain Concept as well as the opportunity to use SERVPERF for both the internal and external customers. Thus, the study could be extended to the next dimension, that is, the comparative study between the internal and external customer service quality of the telecommunications industry.

The study was confined to the telecommunications industry. The future research could go further in conducting comparative study between services companies in the other industry so that the snapshot of the service industry could be attain. Such results would be of economic value, as well as provide some insights into the industry internal customer service quality, as well as the service quality achievements of the industry.

The influence of the employee profile on the internal service quality should take into consideration the influence to the internal customer service quality by one segment and one group of the segment. It would be good to get results based on a group of segments and study the effects with the segments in combination. To illustrate this, we take the case of the effects of gender on an internal customer service quality dimension, taking into consideration the results when combined with other segments and when on its own. Thus, the best effects could be determined through various combinations.

The employee profile should be extended to other demographic variables such as marital status, race and income groups. The demographic variable mentioned could give a better view of the country's socio-economic structure.

This research had set the basics for further studies on the telecommunications industry service quality. The expansion of this research has still a lot to offer and it is expected f the future research would show varied results, giving more insights into the industry, covering various aspects.

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