AN IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT OF DELEGATES' SATISFACTION WITH THE CATERING COMPONENT OF COURSES OFFERED BY CONTINUING EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA

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OPSOMMING

Die gebruik van 'n belang-prestasie-analise is 'n instrument om die spysenieringskomponent van kursusse aangebied deur Voortgesette Onderrig aan die Universiteit van Pretoria (CE at UP), 'n inrigting vir hoër onderwys, te assesseer asook die bydrae tot gasvryheidstudies en toerisme uit te lig. Voortgesette Onderrig aan die Universiteit van Pretoria is 'n onderriginstelling wat sertifikaatkursusse vir nagraadse individue in verskeie studierigtings aanbied en die spysenieringskomponent is uitgekontrakteer aan voedseldiensverskaffers wat op die kampus geleë is. Die spysenieringskomponent is 'n kommerwekkende aangeleentheid, aangesien dit die laagste puntetelling ontvang het tydens vorige evaluerings.

Data is versamel deur gebruik te maak van verkennende metodologie bestaande uit beide kwalitatiewe en kwantitatiewe navorsingstegnieke. Kenmerke vir spyseniering is verkry deur middel van ongestruktureerde een-tot-een onderhoude en fokusgroepe. Daarna is 'n totaal van 357 vraelyste versamel. Dié studie het gebruik gemaak van beskrywende statistieke wat ook eenvoudige frekwensies insluit. Gemiddelde waardes en standaardafwykings is bereken deur gebruik te maak van data met betrekking tot respondente se demografiese profiele en ook met betrekking tot die 25 geïdentifiseerde kenmerke vir spyseniering.

Die prestasie en die belangrikheid van elke spysenieringskenmerk is bepaal en bespreek. Die assessering van 'n betrokke maatskappy se spysenieringskomponent sal daardie instansie in staat stel om toepaslike en noodsaaklike bestuursbesluite te neem ten einde die maatskappy se bestaande kliëntebasis te behou asook die kliëntebasis uit te brei.

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INTRODUCTION

Most companies today acknowledge that they have to meet the needs of their customers in order to keep them and to attract new customers (Hill *et al.*, 1999:1). In this realization customer satisfaction plays a vital role. Using importance-performance analysis (IPA) has become a popular managerial tool in this regard and is often applied in hospitality and tourism industries to identify strengths and weaknesses of brands, products, services and retail establishments (Keyt *et al.*, 1994).

Continuing Education at University of Pretoria (CE at UP) Trust of the University of Pretoria is a company responsible for the presentation of career-focused courses. Situated on the campus grounds, it offers over 450 certificate courses to delegates from various professional backgrounds. Its core business is to offer short courses, workshops and seminars. The delegates generally have a higher education qualifycation and/or superior experience within their field of business and attend these short courses to further their education. Very little re-search has been done on the services provided by such higher education institutions that focus primarily

on the catering component as is done in this study. The majority of CE at UP's catering needs (more than 80%) are outsourced to one food service provider operating on campus, hence this study concentrates on its modus operandi. The food service provider offers a conference package that typically includes the following: early morning tea/coffee and rusks; midmorning tea/coffee and sandwiches, scones or muffins; buffet lunch with two main courses and fruit juice (this includes a Halaal and vegetarian dish); cleaning of lecture rooms and replenishing water and sweets; afternoon tea/coffee and biscuits. The researcher only considered the catering provided on site, although the food service provider also has a full service restaurant that offers food and related services to the general public.

The catering component is of high importance for CE at UP. However, it is an area of concern as it generally receives the lowest score given by delegates during course evaluations. CE at UP course delegates are asked to complete a standard evaluation form that appraises the following aspects of the course: the environment, the content and presentation, the material, the catering, the perception of the teaching institution, the level of future recommendation, overall satisfaction and the competence of the lecturer. The evaluation data collected from these forms shows that course delegates have been the least satisfied with the catering component. Furthermore, a quantitative pilot study regarding the delegates' overall satisfaction was done by a group of graduate students from the Department of Consumer Science. This study was conducted at CE at UP's premises in 2007. The results of this study showed that the delegates were generally dissatisfied with the catering component, particularly with the lack of variety of the menu items, preparation methods and beverages. The attributes used in this study were however pre-selected by the researchers and thus did not necessarily represent those most important to the course delegates.
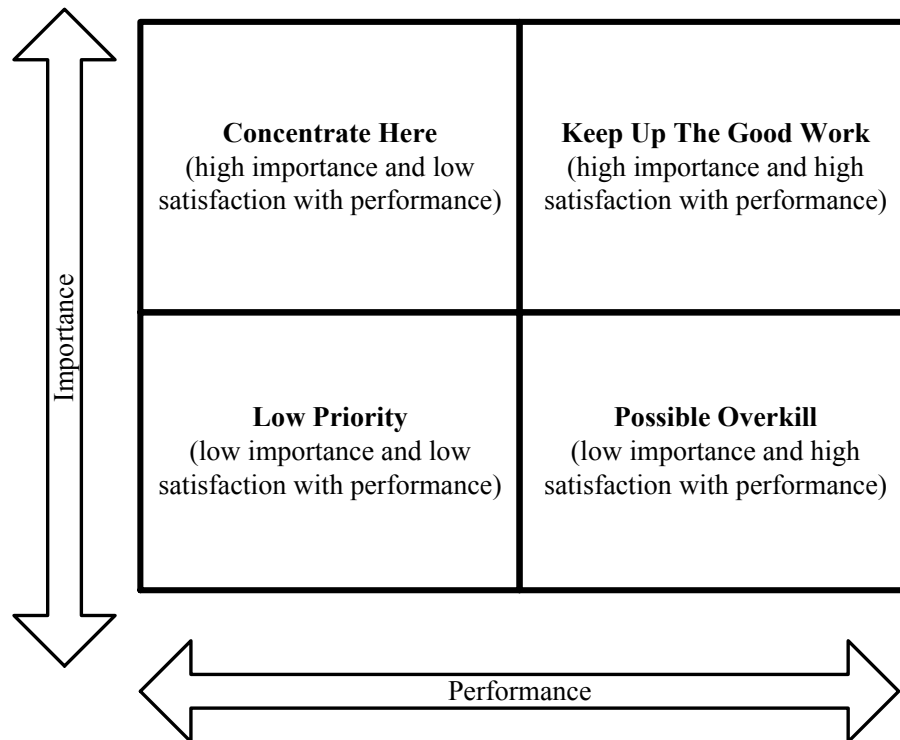
THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Importance-Performance analysis

Importance-performance analysis (IPA) was first introduced into the field of marketing by Martilla and James (1977) in the late 1970s. The aim of this theory was to serve as a simple framework for analysing product attributes. The IPA evaluates a set of attributes pertaining to a particular service or product on the basis of how important each attribute is to the consumer. It also evaluates how the service/product performs relative to each attribute (Sampson & Showalter, 1999).

The first stage of the IPA is to determine which attributes to measure. The second stage is to separate the importance and the performance measures. Third, once calculated, the importance and performance means for each attribute are plotted on the vertical and horizontal axes of the importance-performance grid. The fourth stage is to analyse the importance-performance grid (Figure 1). The ratings captured in stage three are then illustrated on the four quadrants of the importance-performance grid that result in specific interpretations (Martilla & James, 1977). The "concentrate here" quadrant depicts high importance of an attribute but low satisfaction with the performance of the attribute. The "keep up with the good work" quadrant depicts high importance of an attribute and high satisfaction with the performance of the attribute. The "low priority" quadrant depicts low importance of an attribute and low satisfaction with the performance of the attributes. The "possible overkill" quadrant depicts low importance of an attribute and high satisfaction with the performance of the attribute (Martilla & James, 1977).

Importance-performance theory has been applied in various industries such as service quality (e.g. Ennew et al., 1993), travel and tourism (e.g. Evans & Chon, 1989, Go & Zhang, 1997), leisure and recreation (e.g. Guadagnolo, 1985; Hollenhorst et al., 1992), education (e.g. Alberty & Mihalik, 1989; Ortinau et al., 1989), and healthcare marketing (e.g., Dolinsky & Caputo, 1991; Hawes & Rao, 1985). In customer satisfaction research, various researchers have studied convention-tourists' views of the services provided by a convention facility, but these were mostly limited to the hotel industry (Bonn et al., 1994; Hinkin & Tracey, 2003; Oppermann, 1998). Another study identified attendees' needs and service priorities when attending an exhibition at a large convention centre. By applying IPA, they found that the overall cleanliness of the convention centre, a well-maintained facility and helpfulness of the personnel were the top priorities for the attendees (Breiter & Milman, 2006). Also using an IPA, Chu and Choi (2000) "examined business and leisure travellers' perceived importance and performance of six hotel selection factors in the Hong Kong hotel industry". The

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                      ↑ Importance

   ┌─────────────────────────┬─────────────────────────┐
   │   Concentrate Here      │  Keep Up The Good Work   │
   │ (high importance and low│   (high importance and   │
   │ satisfaction with       │   high satisfaction with │
   │ performance)            │   performance)           │
   ├─────────────────────────┼─────────────────────────┤
   │     Low Priority        │     Possible Overkill    │
   │ (low importance and low │  (low importance and     │
   │ satisfaction with       │  high satisfaction with  │
   │ performance)            │  performance)            │
   └─────────────────────────┴─────────────────────────┘

              ←──────── Performance ────────→
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FIGURE 1: IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS (MARTILLA & JAMES, 1977)

six hotel selection factors used were: service, quality, business facilities, value, room and front desk, food and recreation and security. The results of this study showed that value was perceived to have the highest importance and the lowest performance. A study done by Knutson (1988) revealed that there are five factors that both leisure and business travellers consider when selecting a hotel for the first time. These factors are: clean and comfortable rooms, convenient location, prompt service, safe and secure environment and friendly personnel. One study conducted to demonstrate the use of IPA to assist the management of a campus food service organization to improve its services, resulted in identifying five attributes in terms of importance. They were: having dining areas that are thoroughly clean; providing prompt and quick service; having staff members who are clean, neat and appropriately dressed; during busy times, having employees shift to help each other to maintain the speed and quality of service; quickly correcting any problem with service that was brought to its attention (Aigbedo & Parameswaran, 2004).

Customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction can be defined as the customer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service has provided the customer with a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment (Oliver, 2010). Customer satisfaction can also be defined as a phenomenon based on an outcome or a process (Vavra, 1997:4) or the customers' evaluation of a consumption experience (Klaus, 1985:17-33). There are three components of customer satisfaction: namely, customer satisfaction is a response, the response is aimed at a specific focus, and the response occurs at a specific point in time (Giese & Cote, 2002). One researcher added that customer satisfaction, with regard to a service industry, consists of the actual product, the behaviour of the relevant employees and the environment itself (Reuland, 1985).

Customer satisfaction research found in today's literature, is often conducted within the restaurant industry (Dube *et al*., 1994; Ladhari *et al*., 2008; Andaleeb & Conway, 2006; Johns & Howard. 1998). A group of researchers engaged in a study on a small restaurant for the purpose of identifying the most highly desired service attributes. After selecting a set of attributes by using an exploratory factor analysis with VARIMAX rotation, they developed several scenarios. The respondents were then asked how likely they would be to return to the

restaurant in each case. Both business and pleasure diners/respondents placed the greatest importance on food taste and attentive service (Dube *et al*., 1994). Turning their focus to a larger market, Andaleeb and Conway (2006) determined the factors that explain customer satisfaction in a full service restaurant industry. They found that customer satisfaction was mainly influenced by the responsiveness of the frontline employees, price and food quality, in that particular order. They also found that physical design and appearance of the restaurant did not have a significant effect on customer satisfaction (Andaleeb & Conway, 2006).

Not many studies have been done on the customer satisfaction of campus dining experiences, but one group of researchers did investigate the relative importance of institutional DINESERV factors that affect customer satisfaction in university dining facilities. They also examined the influence of customer satisfaction on return intention and word-of-mouth endorsement. They found that food quality was the strongest predictor of customer satisfaction as well as revisit intention. They also found that reasonable pricing and the customers' characteristics (such as age group) play an important role in the overall satisfaction of the customers (Kim *et al*., 2009). These results tie in with a similar study done on a university cafeteria whereby Almazna *et al*. (1994) identified 17 attributes which affect customer satisfaction in university foodservice operation. Quality of food, cleanliness, convenient location, reasonable price, nutritious food and speed of service were found to be the most important attributes.

METHODOLOGY

The design of this study is that of case study research, as it was a strategy that focused on understanding the dynamics present within a single setting (Eisenhardt, 1989). The single setting in this study refers to the offering of refreshments to delegates attending short courses at CE at UP at a specified time, prepared and presented by the company's appointed food service provider. Considering the three main types of case studies, namely exploratory, descriptive and explanatory case studies, this study has the characteristics of exploratory research. The researcher gathered information in order to gain additional insight into the importance and performance of the catering attributes (Fouché & De Vos, 2005:106) so used pur-

posive sampling to illustrate the feature that was of interest for this particular investigation (Strydom & Delport, 2005:328-239).

A mixed or multiple research methodology was used, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative techniques. By using both methods, both testability and context were introduced into the research and provided a fuller overall picture of the study (Strydom & Delport, 2005:328-239). This method also increased the forcefulness of the results by strengthening the study through triangulation (Kamplan & Duchon, 1988). The sample comprised delegates who had attended short courses at the premises of CE at UP and who had their teas and lunches provided by the previously specified food service provider. The delegates who attend short courses at CE at UP are from various professional backgrounds and can attend courses in the fields of Health Sciences, Engineering, Education, Project Management, Natural Sciences, Theology, Humanities and many more. The CE at UP delegate generally has a higher education and/or superior experience within his/her field of business and attend these short course to further their education. The researcher identified the catering attributes in phase one by conducting an unstructured one-to-one interview with the Operational Manager of CE at UP and two focus groups. Ten delegates altogether participated in the focus groups where they could discuss their experiences. This included course delegates who attended the Advanced Programme in Event Management during the month of October 2010 and course delegates who attended the Short Course on Employee Assistance Programmes during the month of November 2010.

By using the chosen catering attributes, the researcher developed the questionnaire in phase two. The researcher used a four-point rating scale of "extremely important" (1), "important" (2), "slightly important" (3) and "not important" (4) to assess the importance of each attribute and a four-point scale of "excellent" (1), "good" (2), "fair" (3) and "poor" (4) to assess the performance of each attribute on the questionnaire used in the research. A total of 357 questionnaires were collected. These questionnaires had been delivered personally to course delegates attending short courses at CE at UP during October and November 2011. The advantages of personally delivering the questionnaires were that the researcher could assist the respondents with difficult questions as well as convincing and reminding them to fully

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complete the questionnaires. In this manner retrieving 93,95% of the questionnaires that were initially handed out was successfully effected (Wal-liman, 2005:282).

The study made use of descriptive statistics including simple frequencies. Mean ratings and standard deviations were calculated using data related to the respondents' demographic profiles and on the 25 catering attributes (Chu & Choi, 2000). The Importance Performance Analysis (IPA) procedure was applied and the mean ratings from the descriptive statistics on the
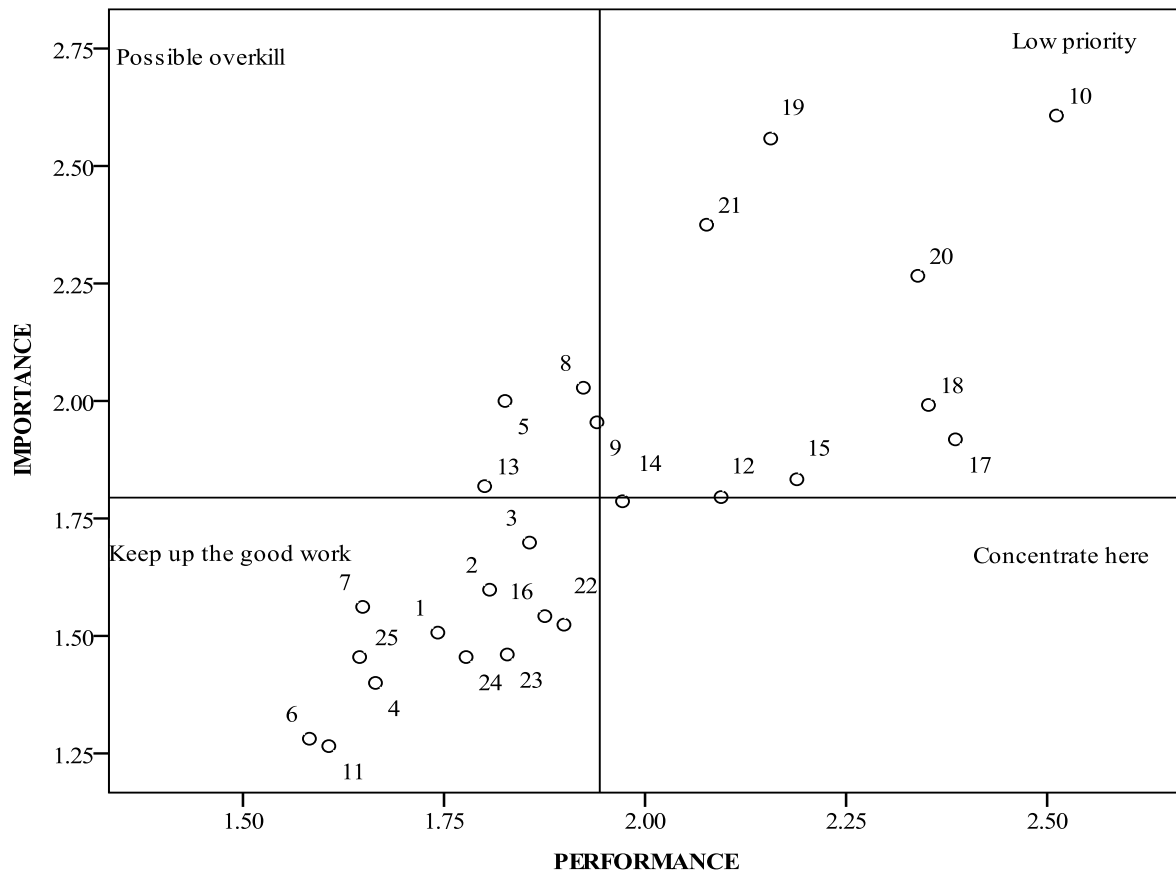
catering attributes were plotted on the IPA grid. When applied in the context of the importance performance analysis, cross-hairs refer to the placement of the vertical and horizontal axis on the grid. Using the mean ratings of the importance and performance, cross-hairs were calculated to separate the derived catering attributes into the four quadrants of the IPA. The importance was depicted on the vertical axis and the performance on the horizontal axis (Figure 2).

TABLE 1:   IMPORTANCE AND PERFORMANCE MEAN RATINGS (N=357)

Attribute Number	Attribute Description	Mean Importance	Mean Performance
11	Cleanliness	1,27	1,61
6	Clean utensils	1,28	1,58
4	Fresh ingredients	1,40	1,66
23	Professional service	1,46	1,83
24	Trained staff	1,46	1,78
25	Timeous service	1,46	1,65
1	Good taste	1,51	1,74
22	Friendly staff	1,52	1,90
16	Healthy food options	1,54	1,88
7	Dishes in which the food is served	1,56	1,65
2	Correct food temperature	1,60	1,81
3	Taste variety	1,70	1,86
14	Buffet variety	1,79	1,97
12	Parking	1,80	2,09
13	Location	1,82	1,80
15	Catering for special diets	1,83	2,19
17	Beverage variety	1,92	2,39
9	Social dining room layout	1,95	1,94
18	Catering for variety of cultures	1,99	2,35
5	Colour variety	2,00	1,83
8	Portion control	2,03	1,92
20	Catering for special diets served separately	2,27	2,34
21	Three course meals	2,38	2,08
19	Larger portions	2,56	2,16
10	Background music	2,61	2,51

TABLE 2:   DIFFERENCE IN SCALES

Martilla & James (1977)			
Importance Scale	Extremely important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
	4	3	2	1
Performance Scale	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
	4	3	2	1
Current study			
Importance Scale	Extremely important	Important	Slightly important	Not important
	1	2	3	4
Performance Scale	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor
	1	2	3	4

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FIGURE 2: RESULTS OF IMPORTANCE-PERFORMANCE ANALYSIS (MODEL ADAPTED FROM MARTILLA & JAMES, 1977

RESULTS OF THIS STUDY

General profile of the respondents

A total of 380 questionnaires were distributed between October and November 2011 and a total of 357 questionnaires were completed (93,95 % response rate). Of these 357 respondents, 62,2% were male and 37.8% were female. Furthermore, 96,7% of the respondents resided in South Africa and only 3,3% resided in other African countries. The largest age group represented in the sample was between 30 – 39 years of age (36,8%). The other age groups were distributed as follows: 40 – 49 years (29,2%), 20 – 29 years (19,6%) and 50 – 69 years (14,4%). With regard to the highest qualification, 40,3% of the respondents had a formal higher education degree; 29,4% had a diploma; 17,1% had matriculated; and the remaining 13,2% had completed alternative education. Most of the respondents were of an African ethnic group (65,3%), 27,6% were White, 2,8% were Indian, 3,7% were Coloured and 6% were from various other ethnic groups.

The Importance-Performance analysis grid

By conducting the interview and focus groups, and consulting existing literature on the topic, the researcher identified 25 catering attributes (Table 1). These catering attributes and the mean ratings derived from their descriptive statistics are depicted in Table 1.

This importance-performance grid differs from the original importance-performance grid designed by Martilla and James (1977). The scales used by Martilla and James (1977) differ from the one used in this study. These differences are shown in Table 2. The quadrants of the grid are therefore not placed identically to that of the original quadrants, however not interfering with the interpretation of the impor-tance-performance grid.

The distribution of the 25 catering attributes on the importance-performance grid is depicted as Figure 2.

Within the "possible overkill" quadrant of the

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grid, were the attributes of colour variety, portion control, social dining room layout and location. This quadrant represented the attributes which were of low importance to the delegates; however, they were very satisfied with the company's performance of these attributes. The "low priority" quadrant depicted the attributes of background music, catering for special diets, beverage variety, larger portions, catering for special diets served separately, three course meals and catering for variety of cultures. The attributes within this quadrant were of low importance to the delegates and the delegates were also not satisfied with the performance of the attributes. The attributes of good taste, correct food temperature, taste variety, fresh ingredients, clean utensils, dishes in which the food is served, cleanliness, healthy food options, friendly staff, professional service, trained staff and timeous service all fell into the quadrant of "keep up with the good work". This quadrant depicted attributes which were of high importance to the delegates and which also performed well. There was one attribute which fell into the "concentrate here" quadrant, that of buffet variety; and one which fell on the border between" low priority" and "concentrate here", which was parking. The "concentrate here" quadrant represented the attributes which were very important to the delegates, but the delegates were not satisfied with the performance of these attributes.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

There was a need to determine the present situation regarding the customer satisfaction concerning the catering component of CE at UP. This need was accentuated as a result of available delegate evaluations from previous years. The use of the IPA in measuring customer satisfaction within CE at UP or similar teaching institutions, has not yet been undertaken. By addressing the issues of CE at UP as a case study the researcher aims to contribute to the international body of empirical research. The execution of this study contribute to the body of knowledge by: providing an understanding of the catering component of CE at UP; providing an understanding of the catering attributes identified by course delegates; providing insight into the importance and performance of the catering attributes; providing insight into the customer satisfaction of the course delegates with regard to the catering component; supporting CE at UP to better manage the catering component; and demonstrating the usefulness of the importance-performance analysis in measuring customer satisfaction in this environment. These contributions enable the researcher to fill the gap in the knowledge and add information regarding the catering component of CE at UP and other similar teaching institutions. The results of this study will be presented by indicating and discussing the attributes that fall within each of the four quadrants as identified in the importance performance theory by Martilla and James (1977).

The attributes within the "**possible overkill**" quadrant (4 attributes), indicated that CE at UP performed well on the colour variety of the food on the menu as well as the portion control. The results also showed that delegates were satisfied with the layout and location of the dining room. However, the delegates did not find these attributes to be important. The researcher therefore suggests that CE at UP focuses less on improving these attributes, but rather still continues with this good practice.

The results showed that cultural and environmental attributes fell within the "**low priority**" quadrant (7 attributes). Cultural attributes such as portion size and catering for a variety of different cultures, and environmental attributes such as the background music and serving and catering for special diets, were not important for the delegates nor did the company perform well on these issues. CE at UP has to monitor these attributes to ensure that this remains true, and be aware of any changes in their importance.

Most of the attributes evaluated fell within the "**keep up the good work**" quadrant (12 attributes), indicating high importance and high performance. This quadrant included attributes related to the presentation of the refreshments such as cleanliness and the dishes in which the food is served; sensory aspects such as the desirable taste and temperature of the refreshments; and friendly and professional service by trained staff. The results provided positive feedback for CE at UP, and encouragement to keep their current good practice with regard to these attributes in place.

Regarding the attributes within the "**concentrate here**" quadrant (2 attributes), CE at UP has to focus on the buffet variety and the provision of parking facilities. The results show that the delegates found these two attributes important, but that CE at UP performed poorly on them. Considering the evaluation data collected from

previous years' course evaluations, the variety of menu items has been a long standing issue. It is therefore imperative that CE at UP negotiates alternative buffet options with the food service provider. They also have to discuss the matter of additional parking space with the relevant campus authorities.

The delegates' evaluation of the catering component is seen to play a vital role in overall customer satisfaction. The catering component therefore may influence the success and performance of CE at UP as a company. Concerning the practical managerial implications, the study has enabled CE at UP to assess the current agreement it has with the food service provider and it has given them more knowledge about managing the catering component more effectively and making recommendations for changes and improvement that are in-line with the delegates' assessment of the importance and performance of the various attributes. After analysing the catering attributes, the researcher concludes that to achieve improved customer satisfaction, CE at UP should focus on improving the attributes of buffet variety and parking. They should also be aware of any changes of attributes moving from one quadrant to another to keep up-to-date with their customers' needs.

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