DESIGNING AND DELIVERING A CUSTOMER SATISFACTION MEASUREMENT AND MANAGEMENT (CSMM) COURSE

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this paper is to share a pedagogical approach for teaching an advanced undergraduate or graduate level course in the field of what is commonly known as customer satisfaction measurement and management (CSMM). This pedagogy draws upon both the theory and practice of customer satisfaction measurement (CSM). The ideas and methods shared result from my experience in teaching both graduate and undergraduate versions of the course, instructing non-credit professional seminars, conducting empirical research on managerial practices, and from working with an international CSMM consulting firm.

BACKGROUND ON THE CUSTOMER SATISFACTION *MOVEMENT*

Without a doubt, one of the most important trends affecting world class businesses today is a renewed and more serious focus on bringing the voice of the customer (VOC) into their organizations and using that information to change or improve business processes. Much of this trend is certainly due to the emphasis placed upon customer satisfaction found in the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award Program and the general teachings of the late Dr. Edward Deming. More broadly, intense competition and increasingly sophisticated and fragmented markets have necessitated that suppliers better understand how they are assessed by customers. However, this "new thing" about businesses studying customers probably has come as a "what’s new?" phenomenon to many marketing educators who have preached the marketing concept for decades and who have taught marketing research for even more years. The question arises as to why we, as marketing educators, should devote more or special attention to customer satisfaction measurement if, in fact, it is already encapsulated in traditional marketing education curriculums.

THE POTENTIAL PROBLEM

Unfortunately, too many marketing educators may be standing still on CSM-related curriculum because they do not feel or perceive that anything is new. While the basic premise that needing to understand customers (current and potential) to create successful marketing strategies is not new to marketing educators, many of the approaches for measuring customer satisfaction and incorporating results into organizational culture and business processes may represent a turf that a relatively small number of marketing educators are walking on today. A non-scientific survey of numerous marketing textbooks crossing this author’s desk suggest that textbook authors see customer satisfaction as something to be mentioned only in a paragraph or two of their books. Some authors locate the topic in the research chapter while others put it in the product chapter—lying CSM to product quality. A search for a robust textbook in customer satisfaction results in few choices with all but one being oriented toward what is known as "the trade." None have ancillary or support materials to aid student learning and instructor teaching. In fall 1997, a senior McGraw-Hill/irwin representative suggested that some 40-50 U.S. schools of business now offer a customer satisfaction measurement class. While this is a marked increase over the less than one dozen that offered such a course when BSU offered its first CSM course (1994), it still seems to be a low number given industry’s interest in the field and desire for graduates prepared to help bring VOC to their firm.

But, the purpose of this paper is neither to empirically prove that there is a need for teaching customer satisfaction (i.e., the demand) nor is it to document that too few schools offer such a course (i.e., the supply). Instead, its purpose is to suggest a clinically tested pedagogical approach to teaching CSM (and some CSMM) to those professors who would like to offer an effective CSM course to their students. It is assumed that this audience is not necessarily interested in "reinventing the wheel" or spending inordinate amounts of time designing the course. The ideas shared in the paper can also be used by those already teaching a module of CSM in another course such as marketing research. Thus, the paper was written expressly for WMEA members who typically look for ideas, information, and tools that can be put to immediate use. The remainder of the paper will focus upon three very relevant pedagogical questions and the answers found via my experiences with the
CSM course.

Three CSM Pedagogical Questions (and Answers)

Question 1: Where should a CSM course be positioned in the marketing curriculum?

There has been a documented call for the teaching of customer satisfaction within the context of relationship marketing-focused curriculum (Cannon and Sheth 1994). While these authors suggest that the CSM course only be a five- to eight-week module within another course (e.g., marketing research), it is believed it should be a stand alone course—not a module within other courses such as marketing research, marketing strategy, or buyer behavior. While many CSM tools should be learned in a traditional (marketing or general survey) research class, or their use shown in a product management or strategy class, or shown with specific application models (e.g., SERVQUAL), or demonstrated in a number of other marketing classes (such as services marketing), it is felt that this coverage approach is incomplete.

The main reason for favoring a stand alone CSM course is the belief that a successful CSM course must devote considerable effort to teaching students how customer satisfaction measurement programs must be linked to key business processes and made part of the overall organizational culture (again, this is the notion of a CSMM not just a CSM focus). Thus, the need for marketing curriculum integration called for by others (Pharr and Morris 1996) is a key consideration. And, criticisms of relying upon individual course exposures such as buyer behavior and marketing research to provide a complete understanding of how to analyze customers have been documented (Anderson 1997). Going further, many CSM program construction and implementation issues typically are not even found in other marketing courses—but may be found in quality management classes or other related courses lying outside the domain of marketing. Finally, it is believed that a stand alone course is necessary because effective CSM learning requires a complete immersion into CSM model building and execution. This level of exposure is only made possible by significant and time consuming experiential exercises. Still, one (especially department chairs) must recognize limited resources and the need to make tradeoffs in course and content coverage. Thus, this paper also offers ideas on how the proposed learning modules of full semester CSM course could be sliced, diced, and modified for use in other marketing courses.

Question 2: How should a CSM course be structured around learning objectives?

Table 1 summarizes my current ideas on how an undergraduate CSM course should be structured using a single semester time frame (assuming that principles of marketing is the only course prerequisite). This table presents sixteen learning modules in chronological order, the approximate number of class periods spent on each module (assumes 75-minute class periods), and the key learning objectives for each module. Table 2 offers ideas on which modules can be used in other course settings for those unable to offer a full semester CSM course.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mod. No./No. Days</th>
<th>Module Title</th>
<th>Key Learning Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1/2               | The Role of CSM in Business Strategy Course Introduction | * Understand how and why the changing business environment has necessitated the use of CSM.  
  * Review entire course content and expectations. |
| 2/1               | Achieving Competitive Advantage Through Customer Value Management | * Understand how CSM is only part (albeit a key part) of the overall marketing strategy of establishing and maintaining relatively high levels of customer value (vs. competitors). |

Table 1 continued on next page.
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<th>Key Learning Objectives</th>
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| 3/2              | CSM Objectives, Models, and Uses    | • Understand that there are a variety of ways that CSM data can be used.  
• Establish a “big picture” of how CSM should be linked to Business Processes.                                                                                                                                 |
| 4/3              | Designing CSM Programs              | • Understand different varieties of CSM programs.  
• Learn the steps used to establish a CSM program.  
• Appreciate how organizational culture influences program design, implementation, and success.  
• Realize the fundamental importance of conducting CSM programs that produce both valid and reliable results.  
• Understand the importance of defining “customer.” |
| 5/2              | Benchmarking with CSM               | • Create understanding of how CSM programs can include collection of competitive performance data.  
• Demonstrate unique complexities of collecting perceptions about competitors as well as the sponsoring firm.  
• Inform students about existence of other data sets available for comparative purposes. |
| 6/1              | Class Project Orientation           | • Establish clear expectations regarding the course project.  
• Give students keys to success for initiating client relationship.  
• Lay groundwork for start of CSM program.                                                                                                                                                                           |
| 7/3              | Identification of Satisfaction Drivers | • Understand the processes used to generate a list of company, product, and/or service attributes that are drivers (i.e., predictors) of customer satisfaction.  
• Recognize of which attributes are most important.                                                                                          |
| 8/3              | Alternative CSM Data Collection Approaches | • Create an awareness of the different processes that can be used to collect CSM data.  
• Clarify the relative advantages and disadvantages of each method.  
• Demonstrate how a variety of organizational and customer considerations influence the choice of method(s). |
| 9/4              | Questionnaire Design                | • Establish clarity on characteristics of instrument which produce valid and reliable data.  
• Demonstrate the importance of instrument design to effective CSM.                                                                                      |
| 10/2             | Sampling                            | • Understand statistical implications of sample size.  
• Recognize importance of carefully delineating who the customer is and who has the information needed.  
• Know how to minimize/measure sampling error.                                                                                                           |
| 11/1             | Pre-Testing the CSM Methods and Questionnaire | • Teach the importance of a pre-test step.  
• Explore options for pre-testing.                                                                                                                             |
| 12/2             | Analysis of CSM Data                | • Understand the use of personal computer technology for analyzing and reporting CSM results.  
• Give students enough basic training that they can establish and use SPSS on their class project (pre-test) data set (outside of class). |
| 13/2             | Dissemination of CSM Results and Implementation Action Issues | • Understand the value of sharing CSM data—internally and externally (e.g., with customers).  
• Understand the variety of platforms or vehicles with which to share CSM results and the pros and cons of each.  
• Reinforce the need to have (internal) ownership of results and translate into action-changing business processes. |
| 14/1             | Internal Customer Satisfaction Measurement | • Understand how the basic components of an external customer CSM program can be applied to the internal customer setting.  
• Reinforce the importance of the relationship between internal customer (employee) satisfaction and external customer satisfaction. |
| 15/1             | Future Directions of CSM Programs   | • Underscore the need to continually improve CSM programs and methods.  
• Explore some recent trends.                                                                                                                                 |
| 16/2             | Presentation of Student Developed CSM Programs | • Grasp a wide variety of CSM settings, obstacles, and possible solutions.  
• The main purpose is to expose students to the learning lessons experienced by classmates.                                                                 |
Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course Title</th>
<th>Learning Modules Recommended</th>
<th>No. 75-Min. Class Periods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSM with Marketing Research Prerequisites</td>
<td>1-5, 7-9, 13, 15</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Research</td>
<td>1-4, 7, 9, 13</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buyer Behavior</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 7, 8, 13</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marketing Strategy/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Product Management</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSM Seminar (two days)</td>
<td>1-5, 7-13</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 3: What specific in-class and outside-of-class activities, exercises, lectures, visual aids, discussion topics, textbooks, and journal readings are appropriate for a CSM course?

Included below is a list of suggested textbook and journal readings for both the undergraduate and graduate versions of the CSM course. Readers interested in a complete set of detailed learning modules, please check my WEB site for documents which identify lecture focus, key class visuals/learning supplements, in-class discussion focus, in-class exercises/activities, and outside-of-class exercises/assignments for all 16 learning modules: http://biz.idbso.edu/faculty/rmklinco

Suggested Textbooks and Readings

Textbooks


Undergraduate and Graduate Journal Articles


Graduate Only Journal Articles


References

