

ANALYSIS OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN CASE OF THE DAY CENTER FOR THE ELDERLY, CLUJ-NAPOCA CITY HALL *

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Abstract

This paper focuses on the analysis of customer satisfaction, being a research whose main purpose was to make an evaluation of social services offered to elderly people. The motivation of this study was to provide data for the organization in order to understand and increase the impact of its social products and services on the beneficiaries, to emphasize ways that can improve the organization's mechanisms, to help the organization make the services suitable for its beneficiaries, and to take decisions regarding funding, customer needs and program improvement. The study focuses on the strengths and weaknesses within the studied organization based on the results obtained through the analysis of customer satisfaction in relation to the behavior and responsibility of the staff, to the quality of the services and to the variety of the activities that take place within the organization. The conclusions point out ways in which the organization can improve its services, emphasizing future directions of this study.

Keywords: customer satisfaction, evaluation, social services, public administration, elderly persons.

* This study took place at the Day Center for the Elderly (no. 1), which functions under the authority of Cluj-Napoca City Hall. I am grateful to the coordinator of the Center for her help, assistance, and co-operation to the completion of my project.

1. Introduction

Studies regarding customer satisfaction defined the concept of satisfaction by converging toward two main approaches, defining satisfaction as either an outcome or as a process. In the first approach, customer satisfaction is defined as a final evaluation from consuming experience, while the second approach sees satisfaction as an evaluative process, psychologically and emotionally based either on an assessment centered on the actual experience of a product quality, or on the alternative choice based on some preconception or assessed perceptions about the discrepancy between a priori expectation and the current performance level of a product or service.

Therefore, there are experts who focused their work on the analysis of customer satisfaction through perceived quality and expectations related to a product or service, considering that satisfaction is related to and influenced by the quality level and appears after comparing the actual or perceived quality level, subjective experience of the consumer and its expectations regarding quality. Terry Vavra asserts that 'satisfaction is a customer's emotional response to his or her evaluation of the perceived discrepancy between his or her prior experience with and expectations of our product and organization and the actual experienced performance as perceived after interacting with our organization and consuming our product' (Vavra, 2002, p. 5). Richard Oliver goes from the roots of the word mentioning that 'satisfaction is derived from the Latin *satis* (enough) and *facere* (to do or make)', claiming that 'satisfaction is the consumer's fulfillment response. It is a judgment that a product/service feature, or the product or service itself, provided (or is providing) a *pleasurable* level of consumption-related fulfillment, including levels of under- or over fulfillment' (Oliver, 2010, pp. 6-8). The author also explained that consumer researchers have moved away from the literal meaning of satisfaction and now pursue this concept as the consumer experiences and describes it.

Other authors consent that satisfaction represents an affective, cognitive or conative (volitional) answer, based on the evaluation of the product/service, on the consumption experience and other attributes related to consumption, and occurs before selection, after selection, during consumption, after consumption, or any time the researcher questioned the customer about that product/service or about its attributes (Muntean, 2010, p. 80).

Starting with these definitions, this study tries to assess the degree of satisfaction based on 'consumption experience' by analyzing satisfaction in relation to the behavior and responsibility of the staff, to the quality of services provided, and the variety of activities that the beneficiaries are part of, trying to depict the differences between groups of people who benefit frequently of these services and those who benefit rarely.

2. Satisfaction of public services customers

2.1. Models and theories of customer satisfaction

In public administration, customer satisfaction has become a widely used concept because of the public and non-profit organizations interest in performance measure-

ment, quality improvement and revitalization of these organizations. Speaking of models and theories of customer satisfaction, firstly we have to mention that a model has been defined as 'a simplified representation of some aspect of the real world. It may be an actual physical representation – a model airplane, for example, or the tabletop buildings that planners and architects use to show how things will look when proposed projects are completed. Or a model may be a diagram – a road map, for example, or a flow chart that political scientists use to show how a bill becomes law' (Dye, 1998, p. 14). Vavra describes the model of customer satisfaction as 'an ideal way to identify key constructs of satisfaction and to speculate on the interrelationships of the constructs measured. Further, without a model, data collection can be incomplete, and analysis directed more by intuition than driven by hypothesized relationships' (Vavra, 1997, pp. 35-36).

One of the most common theories regarding customer satisfaction is the 'confirmation process/failure to confirm satisfaction' theory, based on the idea that customer satisfaction is a process of comparing what you have expected from a product or service and what you have got from that product or service. Richard Oliver suggested that expectations serve as a frame of reference against which customers' experiences are measured. Dissatisfaction occurs when the perceived quality is below expectations, the situation of balance 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied' occurs when the perceived quality is at the same level with the consumer expectations, and satisfaction occurs when perceived quality is above expectations. The model based on this theory is SERVQUAL model, proposed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1988), which measures the difference between 'what customers want' and 'what customers receive'. This model has been criticized because it is based on expectations, the model proposed by its critics, Cronin and Taylor (1994), being based only on the performance component (SERVPREF), considering that the perception of a high performance means high quality services.

The following figure represents the cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions, developed by Richard Oliver who emphasizes the relationship between expectancies and satisfaction, and between disconfirmation and satisfaction. The author underlines that satisfaction can be seen as a function of the expectation level and disconfirmation, the attitude at T2 (post-purchased attitude) being a function of the attitude at T1 and influence of satisfaction or dissatisfaction; satisfaction influences future purchase intentions, which are influenced by initial intentions, too.

Despite of a large volume of conducted research in this area, the question of how satisfaction is formed is not fully elucidated. We can emerge from specialists' research that satisfaction is influenced by expectancies, disconfirmation and perceived performance, but there are a lot of other factors named determinants of satisfaction, factors that also influence the level of satisfaction that someone experiences. To name just a few, we should mention emotions, the mood of the consumers, situational factors or socio-demographics etc. Based on these studies some other models regarding satisfac-

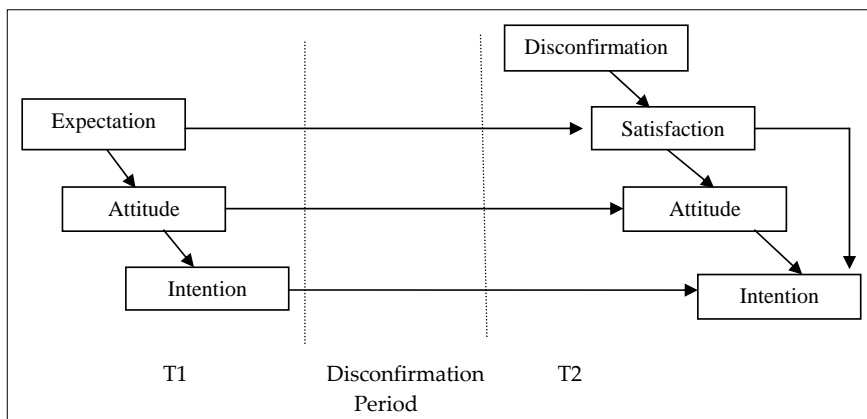


Figure 1: Cognitive model of the antecedents and consequences of satisfaction decisions

Source: Oliver, 1980, p. 462

tion have been developed, as, for instance, the model that relates satisfaction to affection (how people feel), in which affection is seen as the variable mediating between stimuli, the cognitive and behavioral response.

2.2. Measuring customer satisfaction

Nowadays, the organizations are trying to get clear indicators that their investment in customer satisfaction is worth the trouble and provides good results. From this point of view the measuring of customer satisfaction became an important tool for private and public organizations, based mainly on its informational and communication roles. The researchers recognized that the most important purpose for measuring customer satisfaction is 'to collect information regarding either what customers report needs to be changed (in a product, service, or delivery system) or to assess how well an organization is currently delivering on its understanding of these needs' (Vavra, 1997, p. 28). By surveying customer satisfaction the organization shows interest in knowing its customers' needs, pleasures or displeasures.

Measuring customer satisfaction can be described as 'a process of defining, highlighting and monitoring customer satisfaction or customer satisfaction indicators, level and indicators which, in the final, show the performance of the organization or the program' (Raboca, 2008, p. 164). Terry Vavra described customer satisfaction measurement as 'a formalized, objective tool for assessing just exactly how «ya treats people» (both customers and employees)!', mentioning that 'satisfied customers testified that an organization is quality oriented. Their satisfaction extends to both their lifetime and their lifetime value and their willingness to recommend an organization to others!' (Vavra, 1997, p. 3).

Consumer satisfaction measurement is used on the market by private organizations in order to influence the consumer loyalty, being known that a satisfied consumer will express a higher probability to repurchase the same product or service. Consumer loyalty is important to any private organization because it will assure a

constant cash-flow, will decrease the costs supported by any organization in order to get new clients, and will determine an increase in the organization's status, that is needed at the time the organization launches new products or services on the market. We should not forget another aspect of satisfaction, from a private organization's perspective, that satisfied customers will be more tolerant and open to changes in price and more willing to support the differences in price in order to obtain the known benefits. So, we have to agree that customer satisfaction has a major impact over the present and future survival of an organization, measuring customer satisfaction becoming a field of study for many private organizations and researchers.

In public administration, customer satisfaction measurement is the 'sum of processes and actions undertaken by public institutions at present, in order to create and lead, in future, to becoming active organizations or organizations that through their high results or high quality of their products or services offered meet in a high degree the public consumer needs and demands' (Raboca, 2008, pp. 165-166). While private companies are mostly interested in measuring customer satisfaction in order to maintain an advantage over opponent players on the market, the major benefits of public institutions from measuring customer satisfaction emerge from the improvement in the quality of services that they are offering, and an efficient way to do it by reducing costs and expenditures. Also, a higher confidence in public institutions is one of their objectives on a long run.

2.3. Elderly people as 'customers' of social services

Elderly people are considered to be part of that category of people with special needs, the nature of their needs and the resources that can satisfy those needs being quite complex and, sometimes, difficult to deal with. Despite some aspects of homogeneity of this category of people, the elderly represent the most heterogeneous segment of population, and their needs are more diverse than those of people coming from another segment of age, due to a different rate of ageing, genetic heritage, life experience, spiritual and psychological profile, family, and socio-cultural environment in which everyone is living (Nechita, 2008, p. 326). This period of life is filled with a lot of biological, psychological, economic and social problems. Researchers showed that elderly people who benefit from the company of other people will show a higher degree of independency and a higher rate of survival than elderly who live alone; besides that people who are socially integrated in the community tend to have a better health condition and a lower mortality rate (Nechita, 2008, pp. 160-161).

Elderly people are confronted in this stage of life with some stressful factors as they will suffer morph-functional changes, chronic diseases, psychological problems and crises correlated to different events such as retirement, economic and social problems etc. In this stage of life people feel helpless, unsatisfied regarding their health condition, overwhelmed with their economic problems, and unable to understand and to be understood by young generations. Trying to cope with these stressors, the body's resistance depends on the person's coping ability and the existence of some

social support networks, which will influence the person's general health condition. There are models that emphasized the potential benefits of 'positive feelings' (positive psychology theory), and theories in which were approached self-regulated goal attainment strategies and personal growth (proactive coping theory).

When dealing with 'healthy' elderly, social services need to propose those kinds of activities that help the elderly to maintain their well-being condition, mentally and physically, in order to slow down the ageing process and to face those problems that are specific and come along with this progressive ageing process (Apahideanu, 2001, p. 106). The elderly must be helped to age successfully through using occupational therapy and involving them in activities that make them feel useful in society or in their living community. Through this kind of activities and therapies, the elderly will be actively involved in everyday life, will be oriented toward solving problems and will regain a healthy condition, improving the quality of their life.

Social services that provide specific services to elderly people should be engaged in assuring that kind of services that improve the general well-being condition of the people that they serve, preparing them for the changes that will take place in their life after retirement. They should assist people to pass those age-specific events, the biological, psychological and social changes, by helping them to accommodate with the new status of retired person, to accommodate with lower incomes, loss of their social roles in the community, loss of their physical strengths, reduced intellectual capacities, the loss of their spouse, life partner, etc.

3. Analysis of customer satisfaction at the Day Center for the Elderly, Cluj-Napoca

3.1. Methodology of research

This research took place at the Day Center for the Elderly (no. 1), which functions under the authority of the Cluj-Napoca City Hall. The purpose of this research was to assess the degree of satisfaction among the beneficiaries of the Center, focusing on identifying the differences that exist in customer satisfaction between those elderly people that often attend the center activities (once a month and more often) and those that come rarely (less than once a month), and on the analysis of the satisfaction of those who attend the Day Center for the Elderly in what regards 'the behavior and responsibility of the staff employed' at the Center, 'the quality of the services provided' at the Center, and 'the variety of the activities that take place' at the Center. In addition to assessing customers' satisfaction, we also aim to highlight the major factors influencing the satisfaction level.

The analysis of data is based on the results of a survey conducted among the people benefiting from the services of the mentioned institution, who voluntarily decided to participate in the research. In terms of respondents, surveys were conducted on a group of 50 people, and in terms of testing instruments, we used a structured questionnaire that includes the following set of questions: questions designed to emphasize customer satisfaction related to different attributes or dimensions of service quality; overall satisfaction questions designed to highlight satisfaction regarding the

services offered; questions intended to examine issues related to customer complaints or recommendations; questions intended to examine issues related to management and staff attitudes; questions designed to highlight the socio-demographic customer data, etc. Questions were mostly closed-ended and used as a continuous scale of measurement the Likert scale 1-5. The only open-ended questions used in the survey are questions related to proposals for change in order to increase the elderly comfort at the Center, and a question regarding the respondent's profession. Data processing was made using SPSS 11.5. To analyze data we used descriptive frequency tables, charts and graphs attached to frequency distributions. We performed the analysis using *t test*, trying to emphasize those attributes that affect in a high degree the customer satisfaction, and which can be used at managerial levels in order to increase service quality and achieve higher customer satisfaction.

In order to deepen our analysis and make associations between the results obtained through questionnaire and tested hypotheses, we also conducted interviews with participants categorized as sharing the longest experience within this Center (7 people).

3.2. Socio-demographic description of the sampled population

The sample included 50 respondents belonging to different categories; variables related to the frequency of their attendance to the Center activities, age, income, housing condition (in terms of living alone or not), level of education etc. were researched.

The majority of the respondents are over 65 years old (72%), and only 28% (14 respondents) are 65 years old or less than 65 years old. This frequency is what we expected to find at a Day Center for Elderly, based on the fact that population that attend this kind of facilities are retired people who come over to socialize with people of the same age or closer. The majority of the respondents have a high-school or university degree diploma (70% of the respondents have a high-school or university degree diploma), while only 15 respondents (30%) finished 8 years of education or less than that. None of the respondents categorized himself/herself in the 'no education' category, 3 respondents (6%) belong to 'Primary School' level of education, 12 respondents (24%) graduated Middle School, 23 respondents (46%) are included in the 'High School' category, and 12 respondents (24%) finished the university level of education.

40% of the respondents were females (20 females), while 60% (30 respondents) were males. 24% of the respondents live alone, while 76% of the respondents live with their wife/husband or with one or more family members (children and/or grandchildren). The majority of them (56%) is married and lives together with their spouse. We expected to find more alone people to attend the Center, but it seems that a lot of the respondents are married and usually participate at the Center's activities without their husband/wife, explained by the fact that usually men preferred to play chess when socializing at the Center, while females are watching TV at home.

In order to make the research more representative and to find specific data when analyzing our sampled population, we grouped the respondents in two categories:

‘those that attend the Center activities at least once in a month’ and ‘those that attend the Center activities less often than once in a month’.

Table 1: The distribution of the respondents according to how often they use the services provided

		Frequency no.	Percent %
How often do you use the services offered by the Center?	at least once in a month	32	64.0
	less often than once in a month	18	36.0
Total		50	100.0

Out of 50 respondents, 32 attend the Center at least once in a month (64%), and 18 of them rarely attend at the Center activities, less than once in a month (36%). Combining the above criteria we analyzed the frequency of the respondents, finding out the percent of male/female respondents, the gender that is more ‘visible’ within the Center activities, the percent of the respondents who are living alone compared to those who live with a spouse or another family member and the frequency of their attendance. The data from the table below (Table 2) gives relevant information regarding the analysis of those two groups of respondents chosen for interpretation.

Table 2: The distribution of the two groups of respondents based on gender, age, housing condition

Sub-group		Gender			Age			Housing condition (who lives with)			
		Female	Male	Total	65 years old or less	over 65 years old	Total	alone	with husband or wife	with family	Total
Once a month and more often	N	12	20	32	7	25	32	10	16	6	32
	%	37.5	62.5	100	21.9	78.1	100	31.3	50	18.7	100
Less often than once a month	N	8	10	18	7	11	18	2	12	4	18
	%	44.4	55.6	100	38.9	61.1	100	11.1	66.7	22.2	100
Total	N	20	30	50	14	36	50	12	28	10	50
	%	40	60	100	28	72	100	24	56	20	100

Note: with family – those who are living with children and/or grandchildren

By analyzing the data, the following statements can be made: males are the ones that attend more frequently the Center activities; people aged over 65 are attending more frequently the Day Center for the Elderly; people who are still married and live with their spouses have the highest frequency compared to those who live alone or with other family members (in this category we included those who live with children and/or grandchildren).

3.3. Data analysis and results interpretation

In order to analyze the relationship that exists between the beneficiaries’ attendance to the daily activities provided at the Center and beneficiaries’ satisfaction, we used a questionnaire, based on 26 questions, created at the beginning of this research, through which we tried to test three hypotheses that emphasize the relationship between customer satisfaction and the ‘behavior and responsibility of staff’ employed,

customer satisfaction and 'quality of provided services', and customer satisfaction in relation with 'the variety of activities that take place' at the Center.

H1: Elderly people frequently attending the Day Center (once in a month and more often than once in a month) have a higher level of satisfaction in relation to the behavior and responsibilities of the staff employed at the Center, compared to the elderly who come rarely at the Center (less often than once a month).

H2: There are no differences in the level of satisfaction between the elderly who come frequently at the Center and those who come rarely at the Center, in relation to the quality of provided services by the Center (we refer to accessibility, cleaning, ambient conditions etc.).

H3: However, we can notice significant differences between the level of satisfaction of those who come frequently and those who come rarely at the Center, in relation to the variety of the activities that take place at the Center. Participation at Center activities increases beneficiaries' satisfaction (through activities we define chess games, rummy, backgammon, reading newspapers, dance, competitions, workshops, trips etc.).

In order to determine if the difference in satisfaction between those groups of respondents is significant or not, we used *t test* (*Independent-Samples T Test*). The *t-test* is used to answer to this question: Is there any difference between the means of the two populations of which our data is a random sample? The *t-test* is also called a test of inference because we are trying to discover if populations are different by studying samples from the populations, what we find to be true about our samples we will assume to be true about the whole population.

The population sample is divided in two groups or sub-groups, as we already did, and *t test* evaluates the dimension of differences found between these groups of respondents. *T test* is used to help us in determining if an apparent relationship between two variables is a true relationship, at the whole population level, or it is only the result of chance. Using *t test*, the results showed us that the first group of respondents, those that are frequently attending the Center (named G1) registered, in general, higher average scores, compared with the second group of respondents, those who were rarely attending the Center (named G2). There are two exceptions to this general trend, at the second item which refers to the effectiveness of the managers' actions, and the last item analyzed, politeness of employees, where the differences between the means of the groups are higher for the second group (see Table 3). For Item 2 the difference is very small (4.59 vs. 4.61), but at Item 9 the difference should be taken into consideration because the mean for G1 is 4.16 while the mean of G2 is 4.61. In other words, the beneficiaries who are rarely coming to the Center declared that they are more satisfied with the politeness of the staff, than those beneficiaries who are frequently coming to the Center. These results can be explained through the fact that usually the longer is the contact with someone the higher is the incidence of a conflict or a bad experience, or any other situation in which we leave aside the kindness and politeness because of stress, tiredness, or some other reasons.

Table 3: Testing the differences in satisfaction between G1 and G2 in relation to the behavior and responsibilities of the employees of the Center

Groups of elderly	Statistical indicators	Satisfaction regarding the employees based on 9 items*								
		I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9
Group 1	N	32	32	30	32	32	30	32	32	32
	Mean	4.81	4.59	4.77	4.75	4.63	4.67	4.72	4.50	4.16
	St. dev.	0.40	0.61	0.57	0.44	0.55	0.55	0.59	0.98	0.88
Group 2	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Mean	4.28	4.61	4.17	4.39	4.56	4.56	4.72	4.50	4.61
	St. dev.	0.67	0.61	0.62	0.61	0.62	0.62	0.58	0.51	0.50
Statistical significance of differences	<i>T</i>	3.10	-0.10	3.43	2.22	0.41	0.65	-0.02	0.00	-2.00
	<i>P</i>	0.005	0.924	0.001	0.035	0.684	0.519	0.98	1.000	0.05

*The items are: I1: Center manager creates an environment where each customer feels comfortable; I2: Center manager promptly and effectively responds to the needs of the beneficiaries; I3: Do you trust the manager?; I4: Responsibility for customer; I5: Courtesy of staff; I6: Equity of conduct; I7: Management behavior; I8: How satisfied are you about your relationship with the manager of the Center?; I9: How polite are the employees of the Center?

Calculating the average of all items (I1-I9) we will get 4.62 for G1 and 4.49 for G2. So, the level of satisfaction is higher for the first group of respondents, those who are frequently attending the Center. The highest difference between those two groups that are analyzed, can be observed at Item 3, the 'trust in the manager', where those respondents who are frequently coming get 4.77 as the mean of their answers.

Identical mean value had been obtained by both groups at those questions where the respondents should manifest their satisfaction regarding the 'management behavior' (4.72) and their satisfaction regarding their 'relationship with the manager' (4.50). For this last item, we can see that the standard deviation for the first group is 0.98, which means that the variability of the answers among the beneficiaries that are part of the first group is very high. The respondents showed closer levels of satisfaction at the question regarding the satisfaction about 'how promptly and effectively the manager responds to the needs of the beneficiaries' (G1 obtained a mean value 4.59, while G2 obtained 4.61).

The highest value of the mean is observed at Item 1 (4.81), the majority of the elderly who frequently attend declared themselves very satisfied with the statement that the 'manager creates an environment where each customer feels comfortable', which indicates that the manager is indeed involved in his job and in creating a comfortable and enjoyable environment inside the Center, so each participant could feel relaxed and happy while spending his/her time at the Center. The lowest value of the mean is registered by the first group of respondents at Item 9 (4.16) when they had to express their satisfaction regarding the 'kindness and politeness of the employees'.

Those respondents that were part of G2, the group who is rarely attending the Center (less often than once in a month) got the highest mean at Item 7 (4.72) where they declared that they are satisfied and very satisfied with the 'management behavior', and the lowest value of the mean at Item 3 (4.17), the majority of them declared

themselves satisfied only with the 'trust in the manager'. The second group, visiting rarely the Center, could not demonstrate a high level of satisfaction while their contact with the Center employees is less often than once in a month, and we did not expect another kind of results considering that people have trust in someone only after a period of daily contact and experience which supposes to get over a lot of happy or sad events, funny things or difficulties, and to pass them successfully.

Looking at the results we have to say that the elderly who are frequently attending the Center declared themselves satisfied and very satisfied regarding the 'behavior and responsibilities of the personnel employed' at the Center, registering higher values of the means in comparison with the group that rarely attends the Center. So, our first hypothesis would seem to be confirmed by these results.

In order to make an analysis that is statistically significant, we will analyze the results from Table 3 taking into account the statistical significance of differences. If the difference between the means is large in comparison to the standard deviation of the difference between the means, then the *t-value* is large. The larger the *t-value* is, the smaller the probability that the means of the two populations are the same. It does not matter if the *t-value* is negative or positive, we will use the absolute value when interpreting the *t-value*. Analyzing the data from the *t* test, we observe that G1 obtains higher values when asked if 'Center manager creates an environment where each customer feels comfortable' (4.81 compared to 4.28), if they 'trust the manager' (4.77 compared to 4.17), and how they feel about 'staff responsibility for customer' (4.75 compared to 4.39), these differences being statistically significant (*t* registered consecutively the values of 3.10; 3.43; 2.22, at a *p* value lower than 0.05; $p < 0.05$). At item 3, for instance, $p = 0.001$ meaning that the chance of error when saying that there is an association between the frequency of attendance and satisfaction regarding the trust in the manager is 1 to 1000. Although the first group scored a higher average when measured the satisfaction regarding the 'courtesy of staff' and 'equity of conduct' (4.63 vs. 4.56, respectively 4.67 vs. 4.56), these differences are not statistically significant ($p = 0.684$ in the first example, and $p = 0.519$ for the second one).

No matter the attendance frequency of the beneficiaries, they show similar attitudes regarding their satisfaction in relation to the statement that 'the Center manager promptly and effectively responds to the needs of beneficiaries' (4.59 vs. 4.61), or when asked how satisfied they are about their relationship with the manager of the Center (both groups scored a value of mean equal to 4.50), and when they had to score the 'management behavior' (again the same mean for both groups, 4.72). These scores are not statistically significant because *p* is greater than 0.05.

As we mentioned before, we can observe an unexpected situation in the case of the last item: the group of elderly that are rarely attending the Center are more satisfied (in comparison with the other group) when questioned about 'how polite are the employees', scoring 4.61 vs. 4.16, difference that should be taken into consideration ($t = -2$; $p = 0.05$). An explanation of this result, as we mentioned earlier could be considered the fact that the elderly that are rarely coming to the Center interact

in a lesser extent with the employees, so they still share a good perception about the employees.

The results that were obtained using *t test* allow us to state that the first hypothesis was confirmed, the elderly frequently attending the Day Center (once in a month and more often than once in a month) have a higher level of satisfaction in relation to the behavior and responsibilities of the staff employed at the Center, compared to the elderly who come rarely at the Center (less often than once a month). This confirmation is reinforced during the interviews. We may quote one statement: 'I am very satisfied with the manager's behavior; she is very kind and helpful. She tries to solve any request that we address to her.'

In testing the second hypothesis, we try to emphasize the differences that exist between those two groups that were studied in what regards their satisfaction in relation to the 'quality of services provided' by the Center, mentioning that through quality of services we refer to the accessibility of the services (if the services are convenient for the elderly), cleaning, ambient conditions, competence of personnel, etc.

We used *t test* and analyzed the degree of satisfaction for those two groups in relation to the quality of services provided by the Center, looking for those differences that are statistically significant. The results of *t test* are resumed in Table 4; we can observe that the means registered by the group that attend frequently the Center are higher than the means obtained based on the second group answers. By calculating the mean or the average of the means for those 10 items we will get 4.44 for G1, and 4.24 for G2. The mean is higher for the first group which allows us to say that the majority of the respondents who frequently attend the Center declared to be more satisfied with the quality of services provided than the majority of the respondents who rarely attend the Center.

Table 4: Testing the differences in satisfaction between G1 and G2 in relation to the quality of services provided by the Center

Group of Elderly	Statistical indicators	Satisfaction regarding the quality of services based on 10 items*									
		I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9	I10
Group 1	N	32	32	32	32	32	32	31	32	32	30
	Mean	4.44	4.41	4.72	4.38	4.28	4.81	4.68	3.97	4.38	4.31
	St. dev.	0.56	0.61	0.52	0.83	0.68	0.47	0.48	0.93	0.98	1.23
Group 2	N	18	17	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Mean	4.39	4.41	4.22	4.11	4.00	4.72	4.50	3.56	4.17	4.33
	St. dev.	0.61	0.62	0.65	0.58	0.77	0.46	0.51	0.51	0.62	0.77
Statistical significance of differences	<i>T</i>	0.28	-0.03	2.96	1.31	1.34	0.66	1.22	1.73	0.82	-0.06
	<i>P</i>	0.78	0.98	0.00	0.20	0.19	0.52	0.23	0.09	0.42	0.95

* The items are: I1: Quality of services; I2: Accessibility of services offered; I3: Cleaning services; I4: Ambient conditions; I5: Variety of services; I6: Staff competence; I7: General feeling; I8: What do you think about the following statement: 'The services offered by the Center for the Elderly make my life easier?'; I9: Are you satisfied with the conditions and facilities that are offered by the Center?; I10: Will you use the Day Center services in the future, too?

Out of those 10 items studied in order to test the second hypothesis, for three of them the means of both groups have values very close to each other. So, at Item 1 (quality of services) and Item 10 (use of services in the future) the differences are very low (4.44 vs. 4.39, and 4.31 vs. 4.33), while at Item 2 (accessibility of services) the mean of both groups is the same (4.41). So, the groups are more satisfied than unsatisfied regarding these attributes, the most of them declaring that they will use these services in the future. When asked about accessibility of the services, the majority of the elderly are satisfied and very satisfied with the accessibility, which means that they find these services convenient for them.

The largest difference between groups is manifested in case of Item 3 and Item 8, which refers to the 'cleaning in institution' and to the statement that 'The services offered by the Center for the Elderly make my life easier'. For both questions, the respondents who are frequently attending the Center registered a higher mean than those who are rarely attending, and we could expect this result especially for the question where they were asked if the services provided by the Center make their life easier. What it is obviously different from other questions, the mean is under the value 4, being the only question where the mean of the answers scored so low (3.97). It is essential to mention that also the second group scored a mean under 4 at this question, obtaining 3.56. We could consider that the attitudes of both groups are similar in what concerns their satisfaction about these services making their life easier, but the majority of the first group agreed with the statement, while the majority of the second group declared themselves as agreeing or being undecided (neither agree nor against). An explanation of this fact came out during interviews; the elderly who are attending the Center are enjoying these activities, services, and facilities, but once they are leaving the Center they are dealing alone with their problems, the Center not being their support any longer. One person declared: 'I enjoy being here, but once I am at home, all by myself, I am burdened by bills, health problems, no medicines, no money.'

A similar situation for both groups and similar attitudes can be observed for the question that refers to the degree of satisfaction in relation to the 'competence of the staff'; the means obtained are the highest means for both groups, the first group registered 4.81 as a mean of their answers, more declaring 'very satisfied' than 'satisfied', and the second group registering 4.72, and the values of standard deviation for both groups show us lower degree in their answers' variability (0.47, respectively 0.46).

To test the significance of differences between the two groups that we studied, we will analyze the values of t and p . Data shows that the means of the answers are higher for the first group, but we will focus on the difference registered at I3 - 'cleaning in institution' (4.72 compared to 4.22). This difference is statistically significant, T value being 2.96 at $p = 0.00$.

No matter to which groups they belong, the respondents manifested similar attitudes regarding I1 - 'quality of services provided', I2 - 'accessibility of provided services', where the means are both the same (4.41), and regarding I10 - 'Will you use

the Day Center services in the future, too?', where the means are 4.31 (for G1) and 4.33 (for G2). Based on the results of these three items, where the differences of means between the groups are very close to each other or even identical, we could affirm that our hypothesis would seem to be confirmed, but the observed differences cannot be considered statistically significant because p overpasses the value of 0.05.

The figures show that for Item 3, where the difference between groups is statistically significant, the difference between the means of each group registered the highest values (4.72 vs. 4.22). We have to admit that the respondents who are frequently coming to the Center declared themselves as being more satisfied in relation to the quality of services provided in comparison with the respondents that are rarely attending the Center activities, disproving our second hypothesis.

In order to test the third hypothesis and to evaluate the level of satisfaction in relation to the variety of activities that take place at the Day Center for the Elderly (different themes of conversations, games, reading books and newspapers, trips, anniversaries, parties, workshops, etc.) we have chosen those questions out from the questionnaire that refer to this subject, questions that were used to test the level of satisfaction in relation to this topic.

In the same way as for the first two hypotheses, we applied *t test*. At a first glance (see Table 5), the situation is quite unusual; at some items the means of G1 are higher than the means of G2, while at others the means of G1 are lower than those of G2, the difference being noticeable. More than that, if we compare data presented in Table 5 with data obtained when testing the first two hypotheses (Table 3 and Table 4) we observe that the means of the respondents' answers in testing H3 are the lowest ones, while the values of standard deviation are the highest ones. The respondents used in their answers the whole scale of options, from 1 to 5, and there is a strong polarization of answers, the answers are grouped at the ends of the scale, the middle value of 3 being avoided, the respondents declaring themselves either satisfied or dissatisfied, not undecided.

Without looking at significance we can calculate the average of the means for all 9 items, finding that the first group obtains an average of 2.95 and the second group an average of 2.86. So, the level of general satisfaction regarding the activities that take place in the center is in general higher for the group of respondents that attend frequently the Center, but, the mean of the answers is quite low in comparison with the first two hypotheses. The highest mean, or the highest level of satisfaction, is registered for the first group of people (those that are frequently attending) when questioned if they feel part of the group (4.28). Even the second group scored at this question their highest mean from those 9 studied items (4.11). We can conclude that the atmosphere at the Center is a welcoming one, even if elderly are not attending frequently the Center activities, people from there (staff and beneficiaries) make them feel like part of the group, the respondents showing a strong feeling of belonging to this group of people.

Table 5: Testing the differences in satisfaction between G1 and G2 in relation to the variety of the activities that take place at the Center

Groups of elderly	Statistical indicators	Satisfaction regarding the activities that take place at the Center based on 9 Items [*]								
		I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6	I7	I8	I9
Group 1	N	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32	32
	Mean	3.69	3.91	2.38	2.81	1.84	2.28	2.06	3.34	4.28
	St. dev.	1.12	1.67	1.34	1.26	1.22	1.53	1.50	1.54	0.99
Group 2	N	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
	Mean	3.89	2.89	2.89	3.72	2.00	1.44	1.50	3.28	4.11
	St. dev.	1.13	1.78	1.68	1.45	1.57	1.15	0.79	1.60	0.83
Statistical significance of differences	<i>T</i>	-0.61	2.02	-1.12	-2.33	-0.36	2.19	1.74	0.14	0.62
	<i>P</i>	0.55	0.05	0.27	0.02	0.72	0.03	0.09	0.89	0.54

^{*} The items are: I1: Conversations with the members; I2: Games of chess, rummy, backgammon; I3: Reading newspapers; I4: Dances, parties; I5: Organized competitions; I6: Workshops on health topics; I7: Free medical advice; I8: Trips; I9: Do you feel as part of the group inside the Center?

Both groups of respondents registered low levels of satisfaction regarding the following activities: ‘organized competitions’, ‘workshops on health topics’ and ‘free medical advice’. From our personal observations, this kind of activities takes place rarely and inconsistently. As a result, the respondents marked them with a low score, which is explainable because they do not benefit of them, so they cannot manifest a higher level of satisfaction in relation to them.

The largest difference between those two groups can be observed at their level of satisfaction in relation to ‘games of chess, rummy, backgammon’. The first group scored a mean value of 3.91, while the second group scored 2.89. We can state that in what concerns chess, rummy and backgammon games, those attending frequently the Center declared themselves satisfied with this kind of activities (these games take place on a daily basis), while the second group is undecided, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. The explanation is obvious, as we mentioned before, these games take place every day at the Center, and there are already established teams and customary partners.

An interesting situation became visible when people were asked about their satisfaction in relation to the ‘dances and parties’. The level of satisfaction is higher for those who are attending rarely the Center. They scored a mean equal to 3.72 while the first group scored 2.81. This is explained by the fact that dances and parties are part of the Center activities but they take place once in a week, on Thursday, which allows those who are coming rarely to participate only to this kind of activities if they wish to, being well known that Thursday is ‘the party day’. For those who are participating frequently, maybe the routine determined their level of satisfaction as neither satisfied nor dissatisfied.

As a general observation, our hypothesis seems to be confirmed because the general level of satisfaction is higher for the first group of respondents, but we will further

proceed to interpret data that is statistically significant in order to come to a conclusion.

The participants from G1 scored the following values of mean compared to G2: at item 2 – ‘Chess, rummy and backgammon games’ 3.91 compared to 2.89; at item 4 – ‘dances and parties’ 2.81 compared to 3.72; at item 6 – ‘workshops on health topics’ 2.28 compared to 1.44. In these cases the differences between groups are statistically significant, the values of t being consequently the followings: $t = 2.02$ at $p = 0.05$; $t = -2.33$ at $p = 0.02$, and $t = 2.19$ at $p = 0.03$.

Analyzing data we can conclude that the third hypothesis was confirmed in a high preponderance; we could notice significant differences between the level of satisfaction of those who come frequently and those who come rarely at the Center in relation to the variety of the activities that take place at the Center, differences that allowed us to say that participation at the Center activities seems to increase beneficiaries’ satisfaction.

4. Conclusions

This research focused on the analysis of customer satisfaction at the Day Center for the Elderly (no. 1), Cluj-Napoca City Hall, being a research whose main purpose was to make an evaluation of social services offered to those elderly that are attending the Center activities. The motivation of this study was to provide data for the organization in order to understand and increase the impact of its social products and services for beneficiaries.

We chose to analyze customer satisfaction based on those theories and models that affirm that, in public administration, customer satisfaction can be used effectively as a management tool, as a tool for improving the quality of the products or services, as a benchmarking tool, as an image tool, as a tool for justifying expenditures of funds, as a compensation tool, or as a guide for the resource allocation at the organizational level (Raboca, 2008, pp. 142-143).

For the purpose of this study we used a questionnaire applied to 50 beneficiaries; the questionnaire that we constructed was based on the belief that ‘satisfaction with an organization is a cumulative, attitude-like construct that is composed of satisfaction with specific components, such as the people and the products’ (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p. 72). This research attempts to test three hypotheses regarding customer satisfaction in relation to staff, services and activities. In order to make connections between the results obtained through the questionnaire and the hypotheses, we also used interviews focused on how the beneficiaries interact during the Center activities, how they feel about the manager, the services that are offered and the activities that take place at the Center.

At a first analysis of data we can say that the elderly who are frequently attending the Center declared themselves satisfied and very satisfied regarding the behavior and responsibilities of the personnel employed in the organization, registering higher values of mean in comparison with the group that rarely attend the Center

when asked if 'Center manager creates an environment where each customer feels comfortable', if they 'trust the manager', and how they feel about 'staff responsibility for customer', these differences being statistically significant. Although the first group scored a higher average when measured the satisfaction regarding the 'courtesy of staff' and 'equity of conduct', these differences are not statistically significant. No matter the attendance frequency of the beneficiaries, they show similar attitudes regarding their satisfaction in relation to the statement that 'the Center manager promptly and effectively responds to the needs of beneficiaries', when were asked 'How satisfied are you about relationship with the manager of the Center?', and when they had to score the 'management behavior'.

An observation one might make about these results concerns the group of those elderly that are rarely attending the Center activities; they declared themselves more satisfied (in comparison with the other group) when questioned about 'how polite are the employees'. An explanation of this result, as we mentioned earlier, could be considered the fact that the elderly that are rarely coming to the Center interact in a lesser extent with the employees, so they still share a good perception about the employees.

The results that were obtained using *t test* allow us to state that, since the probability of error is less than 0.05, we must reject the null hypothesis of no difference, and conclude that there is a significant difference between the mean satisfaction of those who frequently attend and those who rarely attend, the first hypothesis being confirmed, elderly people frequently attending the Day Center having a higher level of satisfaction in relation to the behavior and responsibilities of the staff employed by the Center, than those who come rarely to the Center.

Data obtained by testing the second hypothesis shows us a difference between those two groups of respondents at item 'cleaning in institution', the difference being statistically significant. No matter the groups, the respondents manifested similar attitudes regarding 'quality of services provided', 'accessibility of provided services', and regarding the question 'Will you use the Day Center services in the future, too?'. Thus, the second hypothesis was not confirmed, which means that there are differences in the level of satisfaction between those elderly who come frequently to the Center and those who come rarely, in relation to the quality of provided services (accessibility, cleaning, ambient conditions, etc.).

Testing the third hypothesis, two items are worthy of being noted in relation to the findings. First, the means registered the lowest values and the standard deviation registered the highest values, which means that there is a high degree of variability in the beneficiaries' answers, using the whole scale from 1 to 5, with a strong polarization at the ends of the scale. The second observation one might make about these results concerns the scores obtained by the participants who are attending frequently the Center activities at items regarding 'Chess, rummy and backgammon games', 'dances and parties', and 'workshops on health topic'. We specified those variables because in all these cases the differences between groups are statistically significant. Analyzing data we can conclude that our third hypothesis has been confirmed in a high preponder-

ance. So, we have to say that we can notice significant differences between the level of satisfaction of those who come frequently and those who come rarely to the Center, in relation to the variety of activities that take place at the Center.

As a conclusion regarding the institution, the results showed that the Day Center satisfied to a large extent the requirements of its customers, being a flexible and open organization in which interaction between beneficiaries and staff is encouraged, the leadership of the institution being the result of a continuous interaction between manager and beneficiaries, being guided by those principles of assuring a 'new model of ageing' to those beneficiaries who attend the Center's activities. As we mentioned in theory, in social services the qualities of the manager lead to its management style, active or reactive. The organization that we focused our study on has an active manager (coordinator) who stimulates the organization and the external environment through obtaining the established goals. The manager tries to emphasize, through its attitude and through the Center activities the potential benefits of 'positive feelings' among its beneficiaries, trying to make them understand, cope with, and pass over the difficulties inherent to their stage of life.

The organization studied in our research reaches its goals of being a Day Center, in theory the concept of the Day Center being associated to that environment where the elderly have the possibility to interact with each other, to 'fight' against isolation, fear, depression, where the elderly can find those social instruments that affect positively their life and their well-being condition. Evidently, there is no universal support for each senior person, but through our analysis we emphasize the existence of this kind of accessible and closer support to the client, and the research showed us how the organization can better achieve its goals (as to provide assistance and support for an independent and active living of elderly people, social and leisure time, psychological and social counseling, health education, assistance in resolving administrative problems, occupational therapy) and can better answer to its customer needs.

In what regards the activities, the conclusion is that the organization needs to reorganize the activities that are offered to the elderly, being more focused on the desires of the beneficiaries and their proposals regarding leisure activities. Both groups of respondents registered low levels of satisfaction regarding the following activities: 'organized competitions', 'workshops on health topic', and 'free medical advice'. The answers from the interviews showed us that some activities scored so low in the level of beneficiaries' satisfaction because they are too rarely organized so people do not attend them frequently and cannot declare themselves as being satisfied with them. Based on interviews and our personal observation, we can state that this kind of activities take place rarely and inconsistently. As a result, the respondents marked them with a low score, explainable because they do not benefit of them, so they cannot manifest a higher level of satisfaction in relation to them.

As recommendations for future improvement in the activities that take place at the Center, a great help for the beneficiaries would be the services offered by volunteers (knowing the budgetary shortcomings and the insufficient personnel that is hired at

the Center). For instance, doctors who want to volunteer in order to provide medical advice, seem to determine a positive attitude and a well-being state of the elderly. To support this assertion we may quote the statement of a beneficiary: 'I see my doctor every two months in order to get a recipe. But it would help me very much if anyone here would give me specialized advice when I have high blood pressure or I just feel bad.'

Another recommendation would be the diversification of the activities, the interviews showing that the beneficiaries would be very pleased if there would be monthly rounds of poetry, songs, plays, organized by the beneficiaries, activities that would make them feel practical and useful in the society.

The interviews clarified some of the issues that couldn't be covered by *t test*, as why some elderly are attending rarely the Center. The main reason identified was that they are involved in a higher extent in their family life. Statistics support this statement, 67% of them declared themselves as living with husband/wife, and 22% as living with at least a family member.

In future, we intend to analyze the factors that mediate the future intentions of customers with weak and strong relationships, trying to test if this organization is part of 'the model of trust and commitment as mediator' or 'model of overall satisfaction as mediator', in theory being stated that 'unlike low relational customers, whose intentions are driven by overall satisfaction, high relational consistent subscribers are driven by trust and commitment. For high relational customers, overall satisfaction has no significant influence on future intentions' (Garbarino and Johnson, 1999, p. 82). Another analysis can be focused on comparing the services offered by the City Hall through the Day Center with similar services offered by other organizations, like NGO's.

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