

**Putting the Customer First!**

**The Management and Marketing  
Conception of Würzburg Public  
Library**

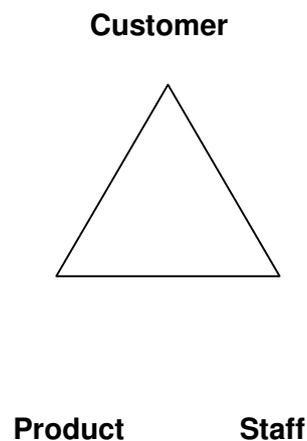
**Lecture  
Hongkong  
2006**

## 1. Introduction: Basics of Customer Orientation

Since the nineteen-seventies librarians have been engaged in customer orientation. At that time they were mostly concerned with the „products“ – that is collection and its presentation; nowadays they focus more and more on the customer. There are different reasons for this so there is a demand for libraries to redefine their role: (foil)

- Social changes – e.g. better education or shifting of values
- Development of new media and the changes in their use
- Information society
- Digitalisation and Internet
- Financial restrictions.

Customer-orientation is a concept for the future of libraries because it integrates the essentials for successful library work. These are customers, products and staff, which are in a close mutual relationship. (foil)



In the context of customer-orientation – staff plays a major role. Staff are the internal customers of the library and so they have the same importance as the external, the „real“ customers. Dissatisfied staff will never generate satisfied customers. So you **have to start** with staff, if you want to improve customer satisfaction. Ask the staff first!

How can this be achieved? I will give you some examples:

- Internal surveys on staff satisfaction
- One-to-one conversations with staff members – based on a conversation manual
- Internal complaint management
- Advanced Training (behaviourally based) and workshops

- Improve staff information systems – e.g. install an the intranet
- Internal meetings
- Mystery shopping etc.
- Intranet

### **Term and Current Status of Customer Orientation?**

Business literature uses many different definitions for the term customer orientation; it has proven practicable to use as wide an interpretation as possible: **FOIL**

”Customer orientation is the comprehensive, continuous establishing and analysis of customer expectations as well as their internal and external realization into both entrepreneurial performance and interactions intended to establish stable and economically profitable customer relations in the long-term”:

### **Customer Satisfaction – a Decisive Factor in Customer Retention**

The positive connection between customer satisfaction and customer retention is a given fact. The nature of this connection, however, is neither simple nor unidimensional, but very complex. It is proven, for example, that a satisfied customer is not inevitably a loyal customer. Customer satisfaction does not automatically lead to customer retention; it is, however, a pre-requisite.

### **Customer satisfaction – already old hat for many libraries?**

Unfortunately not! When searching the specialist librarian press for terms such as „customer satisfaction“ or „customer orientation“ one can hardly find anything.

### **FOIL SMILIES**

The aim of library work is to satisfy as many customers as possible by utilizing resources optimally. Numerous studies prove that satisfied customers relate their positive experience to three people, whereas dissatisfied customers tell eleven to thirteen people about their negative experience. Hence it is up to four times more likely to create a negative image than a positive one.

Customer orientation and customer satisfaction are highly significant, as a satisfied customer is the best promotion and image carrier. Libraries need to take action with regard to customer satisfaction, since, in the face of ever increasing competition in the leisure, education and culture sector, they must retain their ground and present themselves to their customers as an

attractive option. The citizens can choose from a variety of spare time activities; therefore cultural institutions should design their offers to be as attractive and unique as possible in order to keep on re-winning their customers. This is their only means of legitimizing their *raison d'être* and their sponsorship by the authorities. The German sociologist Gerhard SCHULZE (1992:507) states:

“From the perspective of those on the demand side for events, there is no difference between publicly or privately produced event offers. For those demanding an event, the creation background for these goods is sociologically not relevant. [...] Public and private event offers have to stand up to the same selection criteria by the end consumer – therefore there is no difference between theater, cultural center, museum on the one hand and amusement arcade, comics and the gym on the other hand.”

The future will not primarily be about having edited as large a number as possible of media and information in high quality. Instead what will be relevant will be having as many highly satisfied (regular) customers as possible.

The business sector has known this for a long time now and has responded accordingly. Marketing has undergone a fundamental change over the last few years. “Influence marketing” has been replaced by “relationship marketing”. The information age has made it easier than ever before for customers to find information about competing products. The focus, therefore, is increasingly on positive customer relationship. The spotlight is not on creating sales, but on creating trust. That is why marketing expert, Philip Kotler, views the service provider – in this case the library – more as a “gardener,” who grows and nurtures customer relationship, rather than as a “hunter,” who chases customers.

Even if libraries have already achieved a high degree of customer orientation, i.e. if they are already thinking “like a customer,” they can still go one step further. If libraries do not want to become marginalized in our society in the long term, they need to develop their offers with the readers, not just for them, and turn their patrons from users and participants into advisers and performers, i.e. partners. This new self-awareness depends on a reciprocal relationship and dialog; customer orientation thus takes on a completely new dimension.

Patience, time and competence, as well as the continuous nurturing of relationship and mutual respect are key elements in building trust and customer retention.

## **EXURS**

**Higher customer retention is profitable for libraries in a number of ways:**

- Legitimation for the carrier - and thus inventory saving
- Improved calculation of earnings and lower spending
- More targeted offer planning
- Higher customer loyalty
- More openness towards new offers
- Higher error tolerance
- Positive attitude towards the institution and positive remarks about it
- More interest in participation and dialog with the institution, e.g. focus groups discussions.

Modern business management offers a wide and proven range of tools for ensuring visitor retention; some selected models will be presented here.

## 50 Tips for Retaining Customers

1. Create a service culture: Each employee should be aware that he/she contributes to customer satisfaction.
2. Have a service vision: Service and customer orientation as the library's 'guiding principle.'
3. Complete participation: Everyone is included in this philosophy, from the management to the staff.
4. Lay down the service policy in writing: No instructions without exceptions, however – every employee has the ability to overstep the rules for the benefit of the customers.
5. Employees are 'empowered': They have the decision-making freedom to respond to customer needs in concrete situations.
6. Further training for employees: The Basis of Good Customer Care!
7. Make service policy public: Let the customer know that efforts are being made to achieve ideal customer satisfaction.
8. Hire 'good' staff.
9. Reward loyalty: Both customers and employees should receive recognition for their commitment to the library.
10. Measure performance: Measure productivity and effectiveness in reference to the standards and make the results public.
11. Mutual training: Employees should be able to perform each other's jobs.
12. Rotation: Let employees also perform tasks from other areas in order to create a broader understanding of interconnections.
13. Create easy access: User-friendly technology and tools.
14. Customer-friendly telephone service: Try calling your library – are callers really helped? Can you hear whether the person who answered the phone is smiling?
15. Flexible rules: The only rule is that the customer is king – support your staff in making independent decisions.
16. Customer education: Every customer contact simultaneously informs and educates about the services the library offers.
17. React appropriately to complaints: The first step should be to 'accept' the customers' irritation, listen carefully to them, ensure them that everything possible is being done to resolve the problem, thank them for having complained.
18. Obtain customer reactions: Acquire systematic information on what the user / customer thinks of the service offers and how they experience these services (surveys, user meetings, reply cards) – make the results public.
19. Age-specific customer orientation: Customer needs change at different stages of life.

20. Suggestions for improvement: In particular those employees with contact to customers should contribute their ideas.
21. Act in a consistent and fair manner: One does not always have to agree with the customer, but one should follow a consistent policy.
22. Keep service offers realistic: Don't promise too much, disappointments have far-reaching consequences and positive surprises create greater customer loyalty.
23. The customer should benefit from the service: Customers need more than just friendly service, they need solid, correct information.
24. High-tech with the human touch: High-tech makes the human touch and understanding customer support all the more important.
25. Talk to customers: Always approach customers first and ask them what they are looking for, offer assistance.
26. Everyday service management: How can it be made easier for the staff to serve customers?
27. The cost of a lost customer: All forms of positive support are important. Unsatisfied customers tell others about their dissatisfaction 11 times.
28. Monitoring of the competition: Not only of other information providers, but monitoring of competition for public funding as well.
29. Market research: One can never have enough information about one's customers.
30. Know the users' needs: Learn about the information behavior, wants and expectations of the users – keep up with changes.
31. Find out which employees are the customers' favorites: Identify the employees who interact best with customers and use them as examples.
32. Communication: Communicative competency is a critical factor: Continual personal training is essential.
33. Smile: It makes both you and your communication partner feel good.
34. Take customers seriously: Every customer is individually important, make sure they know it!
35. Cite customer experience in public relations work: Case studies with real customers illustrate the quality of service best – the customers involved will appreciate this.
36. Customer groups: Establish user councils or customer representative delegations and include them in your work.
37. Superior performance: Average service is not enough, only the best is good enough for your library.
38. Employees and colleagues are customers too: Internal customers are just as important.

39. Let customers know that they are being cared for, e.g. with mailing campaigns or greeting cards sent to selected supporters / sponsors.
40. Make results public: 'Publicize' employee recognition and customer comments.
41. The crowning touch: Always go the extra mile to provide the service you yourself would like to receive (24-hour service, information preparation, active information, etc.)
42. Recognition and reward program for employees: Don't just talk about problems, discuss positive evaluations on a systematic and routine basis.
43. Breaks: Good customer contact is very demanding, so the employees involved need time to refresh their spirits.
44. Slogan: Come up with a powerful slogan that sums up your readiness to provide service and which customers can easily remember.
45. Mix work and fun: Don't neglect rituals and social life.
46. Negative feedback: Challenge customers to submit critical comments.
47. Freedom from prejudice: Take delight in the differences among your customers.
48. Appearance and atmosphere: How are the library staff dressed? Is the library clean, are the media well organized? Look at the library through the eyes of a customer.
49. Comfort and attractiveness: Furnishings and ergonomics of the work stations, light, design, etc.
50. Library terminology: Avoid jargon (OPAC, RAK, URL, etc.)

## **1 Constant Change – changing organisations permanently**

Change processes are typical for the information society and are playing an important role also in libraries. Organisational change is making high demands on leaders and staff and is one of the crucial tasks of the future.

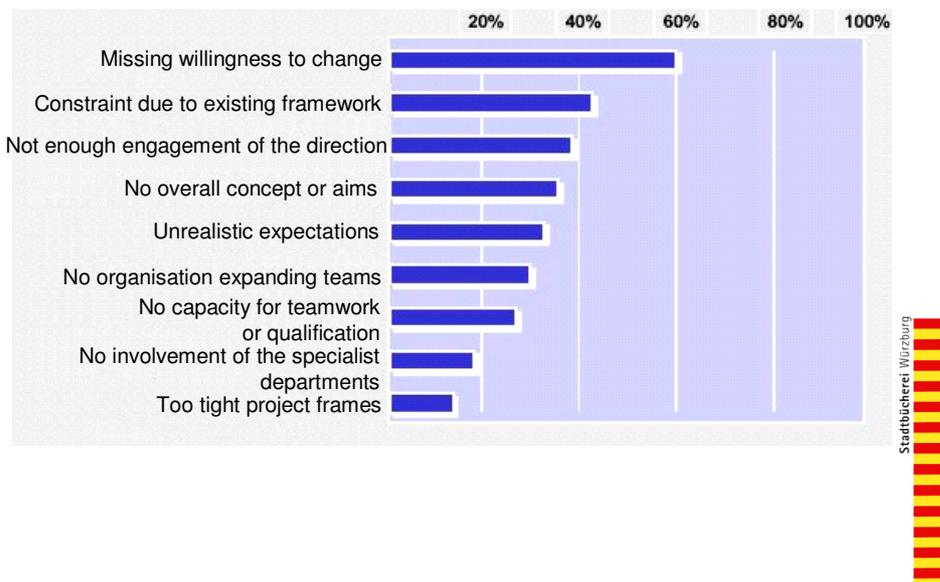
The technical literature says that organisational processes are a complex of sequential and variously linked learning processes and regards change as a **constant process, which affects all levels of an organisation.**

Therefore organisation must be seen dynamically. Changes should be continuously accomplished. Organisations must meet the technical, social and economical developments proactively and enhance the continued development. The change process affects especially staff and leaders. Since staff orientation is an essential element of customer orientation, the role of staff and leaders in the change process has to be regarded more exactly.

## 2. Success factors of change processes

The successful introduction of new organisational structures depends considerably on the positive attitude of the organisation members to these structures. By creating acceptance success adjusts itself. The principal reason for the high failure of change processes lies in the low willingness of the staff members to change **itselfes**. Further important reasons can be insufficient general conditions, lacking commitment of the leaders, missing goals or unrealistic expectations.

### Typical mistakes done in modifying processes



About 60% of all projects fail because of staff resistance - for both individual and organisational reasons. On the one hand it is the fear to loose the used and trusted, on the other hand there are fears of degradation, prestige, competence or status losses. The resistance against changes appears in different ways - from anxious demand over lack of comprehension up to illness or internal quitting.

In this context the change process is defined as a pyramid of resistance:

#### Pyramid of resistance

- **No knowledge**, viz missing information about the planned change
- **No competence**, viz missing skills to get the change done
- **No will**, viz missing motivation for changes



Lacking knowledge of planned change processes is the most elementary obstacle. On all levels of resistance staff participation and close communication are decisive for a successful change. Possible measures against knowledge deficits are progress reports, staff information and internal networks to accomplish the change. The abilities and talents of the staff members should be supported among other things by continual support, training or action plans. Resistance on the “will level” is dispelled by conviction work, argumentation or motivation and transmission of new responsibilities. The most important step on the way to the success is the activation of the change readiness.

#### Success Factors are:

- active participation,
- early information,
- involvement in decision making,
- execution of the process of change in the group,
- willingness to change by cooperation,
- pass through all steps of change



Further studies show that ...

**The readiness to change is increasing, if ...**

- there is a consent about the necessity of change,
- the concept is at least in parts self developed,
- the change was corporately decided,
- the change is reasonable.



## 2.1 Groups in the context of change processes

### Def.:

Teams and groups are an important component of organisations. They are not simply an addition of individuals, but separate and independent social units with special interaction processes. Groups are having special ideals, standards and common reaction patterns.

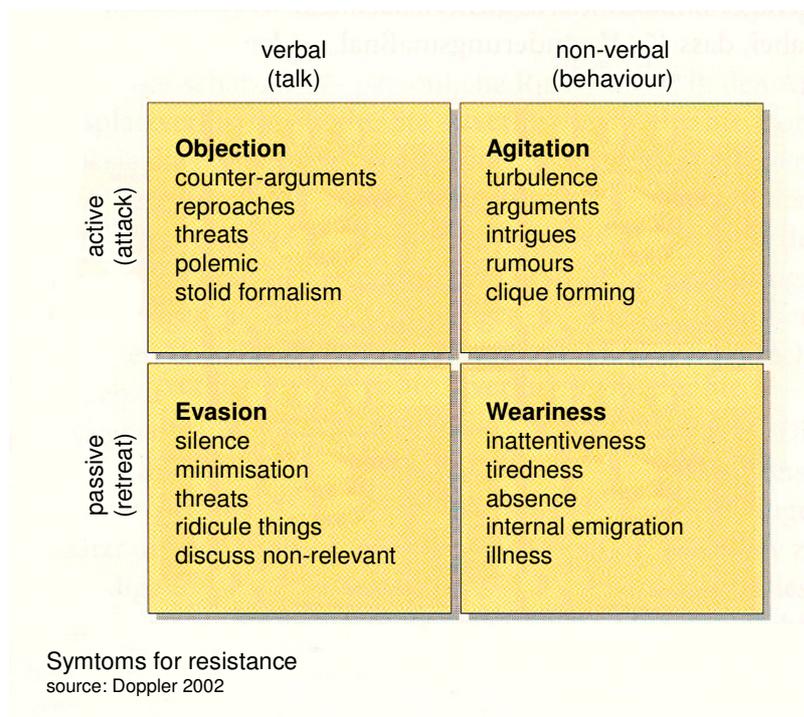
Change processes are only successful if they are accepted by staff and leaders. Only if the individual sees an advantage, he or she will support the project.

### Resistances against Changes

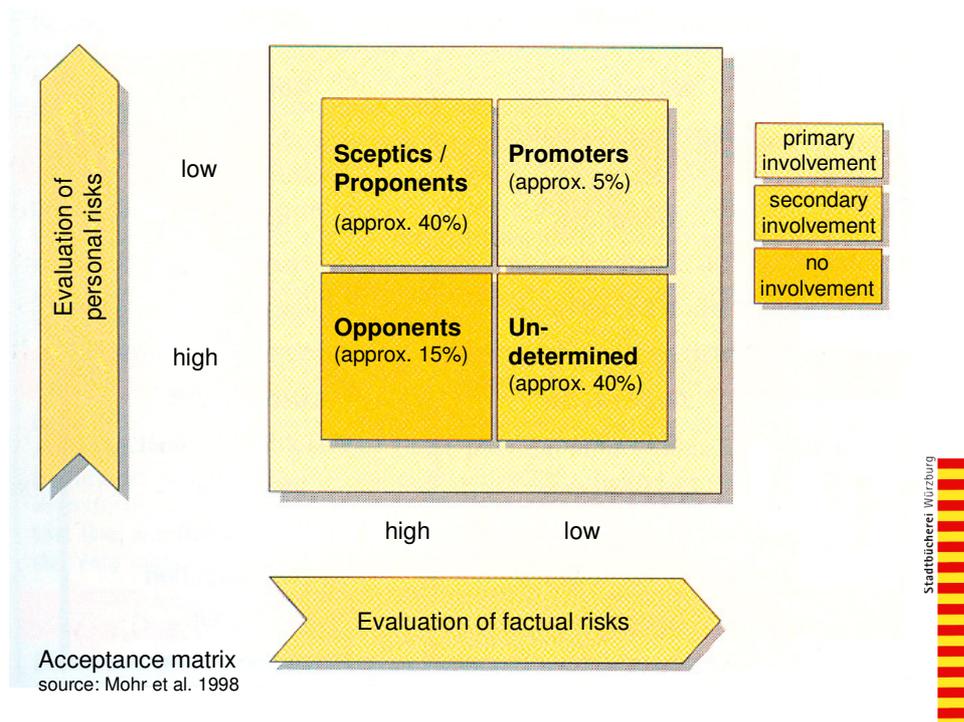
#### Symptoms for Resistance

Typical signs of resistance can manifest in half-hearted led meetings or in a stagnant decision-making process. Unimportant details are endlessly discussed, the remarkable restraint of otherwise active staff members or unclear statements are typical for a contra attitude.

On institutional level resistance expresses itself frequently in high sickness rates, absence from work, rumours and intrigues. A department-spreading paper war, high rejection rates and breakdowns can be further indications.



## Acceptance Samples – personal and factual risks



In the context of change management certain reaction samples can be seen. In the beginning of a change process there is the following distribution:

- Approx. 5% promoters
- Approx. 40% sceptic and proponents,
- Approx. 40% undetermined persons,
- Approx. 15% deniers or opponents.

In the beginning there are only **5% promoters**. They think the risk is modest and support the change. These persons should be integrated from the very beginning.

The **proponents and the sceptics** see a subjective use; they are risk-joyfully, engaged and want to profile. These persons should be supported and backed – to make as many as possible proponents to promoters.

Sceptics estimate material risks as extraordinarily high and argue with special arguments against the change process. They are sceptical against the effectiveness of the intended measures or fear a deterioration of their situation. Sceptics have to be convinced of the necessity for the change measure.

**Undetermined persons** are frequently the majority. They do not have made a decision yet and waiting cautiously. It is important to inform this group particularly well and encourage it for changes. Undetermined persons estimate their personal risk very high, like e.g. the loss

of the job. Although they recognize the necessity, they are opponents. They fear to become losers of the transformation. Undetermined persons must see the personal advantages of the change measure, in order to win them for active cooperation.

It is very difficult to influence the group of the opponents, which frequently rejects any change. These persons often are fearfully, frustrated and have had bad experiences. They see no use in changes, but fear personal damage. The doubts of these persons should be taken seriously, but their „killer arguments“ should be seen as what they are – killer arguments! They are afraid of personal and material risks. The necessity of change measures is estimated as not convincingly and they are fighting for their current status aggressively or even leave the enterprise. These staff members are to be affected only by success and they have to be regarded critically.

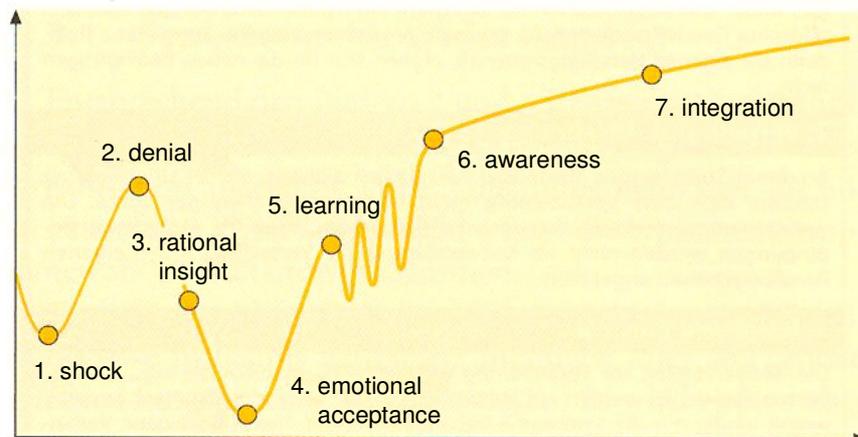
## 2.2 The individual in the change process

Change implies that something will become different and something one is familiar with has to be given up. Change means **to dare a view into** the future, but also to give up a certain routine and security. Change affects four essential psychological orientations: the temporal, the emotional, the cognitive and the behavioural. Change thus involves the whole personality. **People are reacting** are **different** to innovations. It depends on the **individual** whether changes are regarded as threat or enriching.

### Phases of change processes

Nowadays **these institutions are successful, which are fastest in facing up to new challenges.** This requires continuous learning processes initiated by the organisation. The illustration shows schematically the typical process of an individual change process, which normally consists of 7 typical phases:

Perceived own competence



Steps of processes of change

#### 1. Shock, surprise

At first there is a confrontation with unexpected general conditions (e.g. bad results). The sinks, because the own drafts are maybe not suitable for the new conditions.

#### 2. Denial, refusal

Here values and paradigms are activated, which strengthen the conviction that a change isn't necessary. The personal authority/competence (noticed own authority) rises again, because

the changed conditions are not regarded as necessity for the change of the own ways of acting.

### **3. Rational insight**

The necessity for changes is recognized, whereby the own authority drops. On short term success aiming solutions are looked for, with which frequently only the symptoms are treated. The will to change own behaviours is missing.

### **4. Emotional acceptance**

This phase is describes as “crisis” – and crisis means chances and risks. If there exists readiness to put values and behaviours into question unused and new energies can be released. If it is not successful, renewed refusal is thinkable and the change process is slowed down or stopped.

### **5. Trying out, learning**

The emotional acceptance for change starts the readiness for a learning process. The appropriate new changed behaviours can be tried out and practiced. There are success and failures. The noticed own authority rises only by continuous trying out and practicing.

### **6. Realisation**

When practicing more and more information is collected and one knows in which situations the new behaviour is appropriate. This leads to an extension of consciousness. The extended behaviour repertoire gives more flexibility. The personal authority/competence rises over the level before the change.

### **7. Integration**

The new behaviour is completely integrated.

## **Management of change processes FOIL**

### **1. Creation of awareness for necessary changes**

- examine and evaluate market and competitive position
- recognize chances and risks
- anticipate a possible crisis
- decide consequences quickly .

### **2. Visionary leadership and development of measurable strategies**

- arrange groups, which possess sufficient conviction and competence to arrange the change
- create visions,
- develop an actual strategy, which contributes to the realization of the
- define key figures, goal reaching degrees and action plans

### **3. Communicate vision and strategy**

- use each possibility of communicating the vision and strategy
- leaders exemplify their expectations to the staff by their own (role model)

### **4. Planning of short term success**

- divide large projects in small packages and/or activities, thus visible results can be planned
- communicate the success and award staff for it.

### **5. Process-oriented supervision by the staff**

- Align structures to the changed general conditions
- cooperate in the reorganisation and eliminate obstacles
- encourage to take risks.

### **6. Consolidation of achievements and institutionalization of changes**

- use increasing reliability in order to develop all structures and procedure, which do not contribute to the implementation of the vision,
- motivate and develop these staff members , who are capable to realise the change,
- keep the change process running with new projects, topics and impulses.

### **7. Cultivate new behavioural patterns**

- the changed behaviour is reflected in the social standards and values
- relationship between changed behaviour and entrepreneurial success must be shown

- develop measures, which consolidate the result.

Changes in organisations are only possible with the people. **FOIL**

Changes are more successful, the better and earlier staff is informed and supported, because qualifications existing in the organisation are determinants for the change possibilities, but they can become developed.

Early involvement of the staff members is important in all change management processes, because lasting and durable changes can only be implemented, if everyone is involved and the goals and the sense of the project are comprehensible.

Pros and cons, winners and losers must be specified.

For clarifying of the goals the following target fields are helpful:

- What is the goal? (Result)
- How it has to be done? (Process)
- What has to be done? (Program)
- Which resources have to be used? (Resources)

For change process different instruments are helpful for staff development. It is good, if

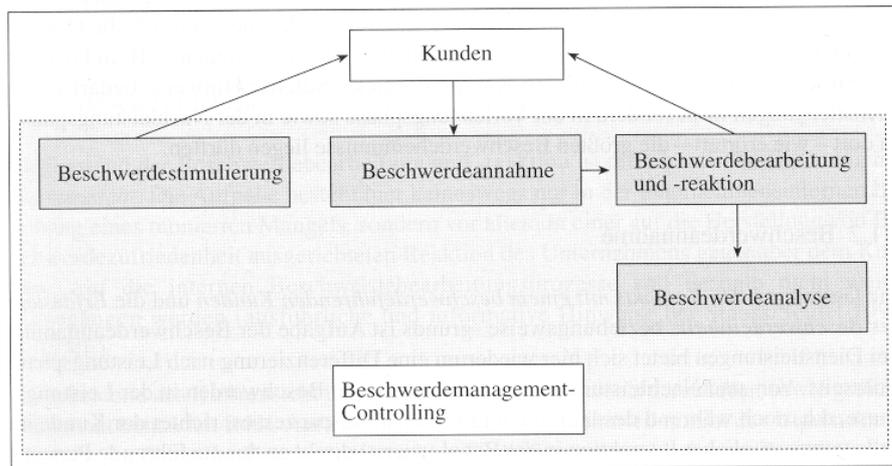
- first (small) successes and changes are quickly visible (quick wins),
- already existing results are respected and recognized,
- a honest and transparent information policy exists and
- there exists a comprehensive marketing for the change project in the organisation.
- Networks are also a successful tool as well as
- exchange between “promoters” and proponents””.

Acknowledgment, praise and attention are contributing not only to project success, but also to a positive working climate. It is very motivating, if success and good achievements are celebrated together.

## 2.2 Complaint Management as a Success Factor

### Description

Complaint management is one of the qualitative customer satisfaction measurement methods used to ascertain what satisfaction problems are present among customers (KOTLER/BLIEMEL 2001:61). There are several steps in this method: stimulation, receipt, processing and reaction, analysis and complaint management controlling.



### Task areas in complaint policy

The term “complaint” has a more or less negative connotation. MILNER (1996:4) therefore suggests using the term “feedback,” which permits both positive and negative associations.

“Stop calling them complainers! They are critics, allies, consultants – anything as long as it reflects their contribution to the success of the organization.”

Just like complaints, compliments and praise should also be recorded as they contribute significantly to employee motivation (see Materials Enclosure 7 for a sample form). HERNON/ALTMAN (1998:79) therefore refer to “Compliment and Complaint Management.”

### Purpose

Customer satisfaction studies prove that up to 25 percent of customers are dissatisfied with their purchasing experiences, but only approximately five percent actually complain. 95 percent of all dissatisfied customers may not submit a complaint, but 90 percent of them will not return. A low number of complaints can thus not be equated with customer satisfaction. Dissatisfied customers assume that their complaints will not achieve anything, do not know to whom complaints should be submitted or are of the opinion that the effort is not worth it.

A satisfactory solution is found for only approximately half of the complaints or problems. Customers whose complaints have been satisfactorily addressed subsequently have a better relationship with the institution than customers who never had a reason to complain. Professional complaint management is an effective customer retention tool. Swift problem solving is especially relevant: 52 percent (in the case of serious complaints) and no less than 95 percent (in the case of minor complaints) will then return to the same company (KOTLER/BLIEMEL 2001:793-794). These figures illustrate how important good complaint management is, even though it does not provide a complete picture of customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Realization

### **Procedure**

Consistent complaint stimulation and the precise evaluation of complaints are the basis of complaint management. Employees must be sensitized for complaints, for example through discussion and conflict training or specialist literature<sup>1</sup>, as it has been proven that the degree of future customer satisfaction is often determined by the behavior exhibited when the complaint is submitted (HOMBURG/WERNER 1998:115).

The customer should notice that complaints are welcomed. This can be signaled, for example, through clear information on appropriate complaint channels provided in publications, on posters, membership cards, etc. as well as by means of the explicit request to voice complaints. The following are conceivable methods of complaint stimulation:

- Service hotline
- Contact via email
- Feedback form on homepage
- News forum (Internet)
- Complaint possibility in OPAC
- Complaint possibility (postbox, counter, pinboard)
- Desire book, complaint card, form
- Customer opinion poll
- Survey on the homepage
- Touch screen in the library
- Feedback sheet after events or tours
- Personal contact with staff

---

<sup>1</sup> Taking part in the online course “The Customer in Focus” from the Bertelsmann Foundation and the Einkaufszentrale für öffentliche Bibliotheken (Purchasing Headquarters for Public Libraries) is recommended.

A potential advantage of the pinboard and the news forum is that they encourage dialog among customers; a potential disadvantage of this method is that it may make other customers aware of deficits. Small material incentives such as vouchers or free tickets have proven a successful method of written complaint stimulation. The more ways a customer has to complain the better. In the service sector, complaints are usually submitted orally. In the consumer goods industry, on the other hand, complaints are more often submitted in writing or over the telephone. Multimedial submission of complaints will be on the rise in the future with increasing use of the Internet.

The goal of complaint processing must be to find the best possible solution to the problem. For customers, the decisive factor is how fairly or accommodatingly they are treated. Libraries can offer small compensation gifts for minor problems in the information and service area; the employees must decide what form of compensation is the most appropriate on a case-by-case basis. When it comes to compensatory action, it is frequently not the financial value of the compensation that is of key importance, but the type of reaction or behavior displayed by the employee (BRUHN 1999:181-193).

Complaint management can, to a certain extent, be kept consistent through standardized forms or responses such as reply letter templates. An individual reply is optimal, however. Complaints can be evaluated by quantitative and qualitative means. The quantitative measurement of complaints concentrates, among other things, on the frequency with which the problems occur and their relevance to the customers (frequency-relevance analysis)<sup>2</sup>, qualitative methods examine the underlying reason for the complaints (STAUSS/SEIDEL 1998:173ff.) (see Category System for Complaint Analysis, Materials Enclosure 8). This structured complaint analysis can help identify existing deficiencies and eliminate their causes. Complaint management thus contributes to improving customer satisfaction.

### **General Conditions**

The combination of centralized and decentralized complaint processing is ideal for libraries. The principle of "complaint ownership" should be followed in the public area (counter, information) where most oral complaints are made and swift solutions to problems are necessary. According to this principle, the employee to whom the complaint is submitted is then responsible for its processing. Employees should be sensitized to the fact that complaints represent an opportunity for improving the library's services through special training seminars. They should be granted an appropriate amount of decision-making

---

<sup>2</sup> Possible subjects include: Average amount of time needed to solve the problem. Number of instances which the customer passes through. Percentage of unsolved problems. Fluctuation rate of complainers, etc. (HERNON/ALTMAN 1998:97).

freedom here. The problem should then be passed on to the central complaint processing office (which can also be only one person) on a standardized form for statistical evaluation.

### Timeframe

Complaints should always be processed as soon as possible after they are received. If the problem cannot be cleared up immediately, the person submitting the complaint should be provided with a brief feedback. Swift decisions must often be made, which is why the complaint department should be a management level staff unit or located in the “Central Services” department. An agreement on targets should be in effect in regard to maximum reaction time.

### Evaluation

Complaint policy includes the evaluation of task and cost-benefit controlling. In *task controlling*, objective, testable standards and performance indicators should be stipulated for activities related to complaint policy. These could, for example, be the precisely defined brief timeframe for reaction to complaints in regard to unjustified delinquency notices in media borrowing.

*Cost-benefit controlling* can be used to determine approximate costs, the resulting benefit is more difficult to measure, however. The complaint management activities presented in the following graphic and the resulting cost factors are also transferable to public libraries.

| Kostenkategorie                    | Beispielaktivität                                      | Primärer Kostenfaktor                                   |
|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Kosten der Beschwerde-stimulierung | Anzeigengestaltung<br>Internetauftritt<br>Broschüren   | Kommunikationskosten                                    |
| Kosten der Beschwerde-annahme      | Schulungen<br>Externe-Trainer<br>Info-Center           | Personalkosten für interne und externe Dienstleistungen |
| Kosten der Beschwerdebearbeitung   | Beschwerdesystem<br>Beschwerdeformular                 | Interne Verwaltungs- und Personalkosten                 |
| Kosten der Beschwerde-reaktion     | Kompensationsangebote<br>Geschenke<br>Beschwerdebrieve | Verwaltungs- und Realisationskosten                     |
| Kosten der Beschwerde-kontrolle    | Kontrollsysteme<br>Analyseprogramme                    | Interne Personalkosten und Betriebsmittelkosten         |

Complaint management cost categories

## Perspectives

### **Benefit:**

Professional complaint management is essential for a customer-oriented library. Even though its benefit is not easy to access, the specialist business literature is in unanimous agreement that active complaint management contributes significantly to customer orientation, especially in the service sector. Studies conducted within the framework of the “Schweizer Kundenbarometer” (graphical representation of customer satisfaction) have shown that customer satisfaction and customer retention are significantly higher among persons who complain than persons who do not (BRUHN 1999:178).

### **Problems**

Drawing the conclusion that “few complaints mean satisfied customers” is tempting but erroneous, as only a fraction of unsatisfied customers actually complain.

Customers who complain are often negatively stereotyped by employees, as complaints are regarded as negative criticism of their personal performance.

### **Success Factors**

Complaints offer the opportunity to better identify one’s own weak spots. They are significantly less expensive instrument than customer surveys. They provide more up-to-date, more specific and often more relevant information on customer satisfaction than do expensive and time-consuming surveys and often generate direct suggestions for action as well.

### **Suggestions**

Libraries in which systematic complaint management is nonetheless impossible to implement should at least conduct regular surveys among their employees or provide feedback forms for the employees. Possible subjects include: What complaints have you been confronted with in the last four weeks? Cite a few examples. Even if the results are not representative, it is possible to at least draw certain conclusions with regard to the type and frequency of complaints.

It is critical that patrons are expressly encouraged to voice their complaints, regardless of the form, and that a reply is given and a subsequent solution to the problem implemented as quickly as possible.

## **Würzburg**

The Würzburg city library has been operating professional complaint management since June 2003. A feedback box (similar to Helsinki) and a virtual complaint form are available. Roughly 376 forms were submitted during the last year, 33 a month.

The form contains the columns “Praise, Question, Criticism, Suggestions”. It has an email address field and an answer option that customers can check. Of the answers, 45 percent were suggestions, 29 percent praise, 25 percent criticism, and only one percent questions.

The box is emptied every day, and the forms are answered within three days. The forms are evaluated statistically and forwarded to the appropriate colleagues for processing. The date on which the forms are processed is recorded in the statistics. Having one person alone be responsible for the correct procedure has proved successful.

The feedback box and feedback form provide valuable information and suggestions for optimizing services. The high level of praise – some of the particularly complimentary feedback is hung on the employee pin board – motivates the team.