

**Does Culture Impact Preferred Employee Attributes
in Complaint Handling Encounters?**

Thorsten Gruber
Ibrahim Abosag*
Alexander Reppel\$
Isabelle Szmigin#
Martin Löfgren****

*** Loughborough University
School of Business and Economics*

**The University of Manchester,
Manchester Business School*

*\$The University of London, Royal Holloway
School of Management*

*# The University of Birmingham,
Birmingham Business School*

***CTF, Service research center
Karlstad University*

Corresponding author:
Prof Thorsten Gruber
Loughborough University
School of Business and Economics
Epinal Way
Sir Richard Morris Building
Loughborough LE11 3TU, UK
Tel.: +44-(0)1509 228274
Email: t.gruber@lboro.ac.uk

Does Culture Impact Preferred Employee Attributes in Complaint Handling Encounters?

Recently, Gruber et al.'s (2011) Kano study revealed that complaining customers in Saudi Arabia are less difficult to delight than UK customers. The present study investigates whether these differences are caused by different service sector development stages, as suggested in their study, or by cultural differences instead. Data were collected using Kano questionnaires from 151 respondents with complaining experience in Singapore. This country was chosen as it has a highly developed service economy (like the UK) but also a collectivistic culture (like Saudi Arabia). The analysis reveals that Singaporean customers show the same preferences as those in the UK. We consider this as a strong indicator for the suggested impact of the stage of service sector development rather than cultural differences on complaining customers' preferences of frontline employee attributes. Our results support the findings by Gruber et al. (2011). By doing so, they surprisingly refute previous research which concluded that national culture plays a significant role in shaping customer expectations during complaint handling encounters. Our study especially corroborates the notion of a life cycle of quality attributes that had been found for goods and services and the preferred attributes of frontline employees dealing with customer complaints.

Keywords: Complaint handling; Kano theory of attractive quality; service encounters; cross-national comparison

1. Introduction

Kano's Theory of Attractive Quality, developed by Kano et al. (1984), contributed to the TQM debate by questioning a one-dimensional view of quality. A literature review by Löfgren and Witell (2008) shows an increasing interest from both practitioners and academics in Kano's work. Kano et al.'s (1984) different quality dimensions show that quality attributes play different roles in creating customer satisfaction and preventing dissatisfaction, building upon previous work by Herzberg (1959) in the area of job satisfaction. Quality management comprises different levels. Lagrosen and Lagrosen (2012) use the following three levels with increasing levels of profundity: techniques, models, and values: A large number of practical techniques, which are occasionally based on statistics, are at the most superficial level. Examples of models, the second level in Lagrosen and Lagrosen's (2012) framework, are ISO 9000 and award models. Examples of values, the highest level of profundity, are customer focus, leadership commitment, and continuous improvement (Lagrosen & Lagrosen, 2012). The Theory of Attractive Quality could, in quality management terms, be described as a technique for providing the valuable customer focus by analysing customer requirements based on different quality dimensions. The theory helps companies categorize customer needs and allows researchers to gain a better understanding of customer preferences. Kano (2001) also found that quality attributes are not static but follow a life cycle: Attributes start as indifferent factors and then, over time, develop first to excitement factors before they later change to performance factors and then finally become basic factors. However, there is limited empirical evidence to support the suggested life cycles of quality attributes (Löfgren et al., 2011). Kano (2001) and Nilsson-Witell and Fundin (2005) provided empirical support for the existence of a life cycle for successful quality attributes. Sireli et al. (2007) and Raharjo et al. (2009) have presented new approaches for dealing with the dynamics but do not provide any empirical evidence. Högström et al. (2010) found indications of life cycles but could not verify them as they did not use longitudinal data. Due to the scant number of

existing studies, Gruber et al. (2011) conducted an exploratory study to investigate whether the life cycle phenomenon also would hold true for attributes of frontline employees dealing with customer complaints. For this purpose, they collected data in two countries at very different stages of service economy development: They chose the UK as a representative of a highly developed service economy and the still heavily oil-based economy of Saudi Arabia as a representative of a less developed service economy. The authors found that attributes of customer contact employees handling customer complaints that are performance factors in the highly developed UK service economy would still delight customers in the less developed Saudi Arabian service economy. The authors suggested that this finding would show the strong link between the developmental stage of a services economy and customer satisfaction and as a clear support for the concept of a life cycle of quality attributes. However, they also suggested that “future research should investigate to what degree the found differences of preferred frontline employee attributes were caused by the different developmental stages of services economies and to what degree cultural differences between the two countries may also have played a role” (Gruber et al., 2011, pp. 139-140).

The purpose of this research study is to address this important research question. As stated by Gruber et al. (2011), Furrer et al. (2000) for example found that consumers from individualistic cultures have higher levels of service expectations than customers from collectivistic cultures. It is therefore possible that the revealed differences between the UK (an individualistic society) and Saudi Arabia (a collectivistic society) were caused by cultural differences and *not*, as claimed by Gruber et al. (2011), by different developmental stages of service economy. We will therefore replicate Gruber et al.’s (2011) study in a third country. We will use Singapore as the third country as it has a highly developed service economy (comparable to the UK) but also a collectivistic culture (such as Saudi Arabia). Moreover, Mattila and Patterson (2004a) have expressed the need for more service recovery research,

which complaint handling is a part of, in Asian countries. Therefore, it is believed that the current study, although exploratory in nature, can contribute to the limited literature on cross-cultural complaint handling research.

2. Principles of Kano's theory of attractive quality

Recent research in customer satisfaction/dissatisfaction suggests that attributes of products, services and individuals can be classified into several categories, which all have a different impact on customer (dis)satisfaction (Löfgren & Witell, 2008). Customer satisfaction is regarded as a multidimensional construct that consists of the following categories of quality elements (Kano et al., 1984): Must-be quality elements, or basic factors (Matzler et al., 2004b) are features that customers expect and take for granted. While the fulfilment of these requirements does not increase customer satisfaction, these elements must be designed into the offering if dissatisfaction is to be avoided. If the offering does not meet these basic quality expectations, then customers will be very dissatisfied. One-dimensional quality elements, or performance factors, are attributes for which a linear relationship between attribute performance and (dis)satisfaction exists. The more (less) an attribute can fulfil the requirements; the more (less) customers are then satisfied. Attractive quality elements, or excitement factors are attributes that create high levels of customer satisfaction or even delight if the product or service achieves these factors fully (Matzler, et al., 1996). Customers, however, will not be dissatisfied if products or services do not meet these requirements.

In addition to these three main categories, elements may also be classified as either indifferent quality elements that do not have an effect on customers' satisfaction levels, or reverse quality elements that create customer satisfaction when not fulfilled and dissatisfaction when fulfilled (Kano, 1984).

Kano's Theory of Attractive Quality can also show which attributes have the strongest impact on customer (dis)satisfaction. The following equation can be used for calculating averages for "Better" and "Worse" (Berger et al., 1993, p. 18):

$$\text{Better} = \frac{A + O}{A + O + M + I} \quad \text{Worse} = -\frac{O + M}{A + O + M + I}$$

A, O, M, I represent "attractive", "one-dimensional", "must-be", and "indifferent" quality respectively in the equation. "Better" states whether customer satisfaction can be increased by fulfilling a customer requirement and "worse" shows if a customer requirement's function is to avoid dissatisfaction (Berger et al. 1993). Knowledge about how quality attributes function in terms of raising customer satisfaction and preventing dissatisfaction helps organizations identify the attributes that add value by increasing customer satisfaction and which attributes only meet minimum requirements (Matzler & Sauerwein, 2002). Organizations can then decide for which qualities and behaviours of contact employees they should design effective training programmes to help improve employee performance. In this context, there are two previous studies by Martensen and Grönholdt (2001) and Matzler et al. (2004a). The first of these studies developed a model for employee satisfaction and loyalty, whereas the second concluded that Kano's Theory of Attractive Quality could be applied to investigate employee satisfaction. The present study focuses on frontline employees dealing with complaining customers and not, as the previous studies, on employee satisfaction per se.

3. The importance of handling customer complaints after a service failure

According to Reichheld and Sasser (1990), service providers aim at offering "zero defects" services because the ability to 'do it right the first time' offers significant benefits in terms of lower costs of delivery and positive customer evaluations. However, due to the inherent heterogeneity in service provision, it is unrealistic to expect that companies can always attain

that goal (Schoefer & Diamantopoulos, 2008). The opportunity that a complaining customer gives a company in terms of recovery and improvement of the relationship should not be underestimated. Companies who do not rise to the challenge of complaining customers are turning down the important opportunity of reclaiming and improving a relationship (Rothenberger et al., 2008). Companies who have not as yet understood this, urgently need to reconsider their thinking and management such that they regard complaints as a valuable source of market intelligence which enables them to solve the customer's problem *and* improve the company's offerings (Priluck & Lala, 2009).

4. The important role of frontline employees in handling customer complaints

There are many channels (e.g., e-mail, chat, telephone) available to customers to voice their dissatisfaction. Still, according to Lovelock and Wirtz (2010), most customers generally make their complaints in person. For complaints made in person, the qualities and behaviours of frontline employees have an impact on how customers perceive the complaint handling encounter and on how they evaluate the complaint handling efforts of the company. Hartline and Ferrell (1996) believe that the behaviours and attitudes of frontline employees primarily determine the customers' perceptions of service quality. Companies therefore need to know what complaining customers expect and how frontline employees can meet or exceed customer expectations to recover and strengthen the endangered relationship with dissatisfied customers (Bitner et al., 1994). Dahlgaard-Park (2012) suggests that organizations need to understand how employee satisfaction and commitment are affected by different kinds of needs. Her trinity model, 3 L, of human needs builds on the research field of motivation factors (Maslow, 1954; Herzberg, 1959) and includes the categories "physical" or "biological needs (living)", "mental/psychological needs (learning)", and "spiritual needs/core values (loving)". If companies know what customers expect, frontline employees may be able to adapt their behaviour to their customers' underlying expectations, which should have a

positive impact on customer satisfaction (Botschen et al., 1999). However, as pointed out by Dahlgaard-Park (2012), to achieve that, companies also need to know how to satisfy their employees.

5. The role of national culture in shaping (complaint handling) expectations

In managing satisfaction and quality, companies operating in several countries have to cope with an additional level of complexity: national culture. Understanding the role of national culture is an important research issue because of its effect on both international marketers and consumers. In international marketing, national culture is frequently named as an crucial factor for foreign market entry and global branding strategies (Bearden et al., 2006). National culture also influences consumer behaviour in international markets (De Mooij, 2009) and is defined as the “collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from those of others” (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005, p. 4).

Individuals share a collective national character, which shapes their behaviours, values, and beliefs.

Most developed economies are service economies and an increasing number of companies are offering their services internationally (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2010). As service providers shape their offerings in line with their domestic target market’s expectations, during inter-cultural service encounters these differences may cause problematic ‘culture shocks’ (Stauss & Mang, 1999). Therefore, service providers need to have a good understanding of the specific national culture in which the organization competes (Zhang et al., 2008).

Despite this crucial role of cultural differences, Furrer and Sollberger (2007, p. 97) surprisingly point out that “global marketing of services is under-researched and that cultural differences in customers’ expectations for service and service performance are not well understood”. Further, most research in consumer behaviour relies on theoretical frameworks developed in Western societies (Mattila & Patterson, 2004b). In particular, relatively little is

known about the cross-cultural generalizability of service recovery strategies (Mattila & Patterson, 2004a) and Zhang et al. (2008) in their review of cross-cultural services research found that there is surprising lack of research on service failure and recovery. Developing a deeper understanding of the impact of national culture on service recovery expectations is an essential first step in the process of designing effective service recovery strategies (Mattila & Patterson, 2004b).

6. The research study

Zhang et al. (2008) indicate that Hofstede's (2001) five dimensions (power distance, individualism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation) provide the most popular framework for cross-cultural services research. Including Singapore in the present study will allow us to investigate to what degree cultural differences may have influenced the discovered differences between UK and Saudi Arabia in Gruber et al.'s (2011) study instead of different stages of service sector development. In particular, we will test the following hypothesis:

- Hypothesis 1a: If the Kano map for Singapore is similar to the UK map, then the *stage of service sector development* is predominantly responsible for the discovered differences.
- Hypothesis 1b: If the Kano map for Singapore is similar to the Saudi Arabian map, then *cultural differences* are predominantly responsible for the discovered differences.

Individualism is the degree to which individuals' identities are linked to their existence as individuals, rather than as members of groups (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). At nation level, individualism and collectivism appear as opposite poles of one dimension (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). Compared to individualists, collectivists tend to be more conscious with their relationships with other people and put higher values on face, group harmony, conflict

avoidance, respect, and group status (Triandis, 1995). Individualist cultures are high-context cultures whereas collectivist ones are low-context cultures. Hofstede and Hofstede (2005) thus link individualism/collectivism to the findings of Hall (1976) who distinguishes cultures on the basis of communicating along a dimension from high-context to low context. This dimension is based on preferences for high-context or low-context messages. High-context messages are covert, implicit and internalized with much non-verbal coding, while low context messages are overt, explicit and precise with verbalized details (De Mooij, 2009). Following Hofstede's (2001) framework, the Singaporean and Saudi Arabian culture are characterized by collectivism and high power distance, while the UK culture is characterized by high individualism and low power distance.

With a score of 89 (maximum value is 100), the UK has the third highest of all individualistic scores with only Australia and the USA having even higher ones (Hofstede, 2012). By contrast, Singapore is a collectivistic society with a low score of 20. For Singaporeans, the "We" is by far more important than the "Me" and people belong to in-groups (families, clans or organisations) in which everyone is looked after in exchange for group loyalty. Similarly, Saudi Arabia has to be regarded as a collectivistic society with a low score of 25. Close long-term commitment to the member group and loyalty are crucial and are more important than most other societal regulations and rules (Hofstede, 2012).

The power distance dimension refers to the extent to which the less powerful members of institutions and organizations within a country expect and accept that power is distributed unequally (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005). With a score of 35 (maximum value is 100), the UK has one of the lowest scores, which means that it is a country that strongly believes that inequalities amongst people should be kept at a minimum (Hofstede, 2012). By contrast, in large power distance cultures, like Singapore (score of 74) and Saudi Arabia (score of 95),

everyone has a rightful place in a social hierarchy and as a result acceptance and giving of authority is something that comes naturally (De Mooij, 2009).

Individualism/collectivism is widely regarded as being the most researched and validated dimension of Hofstede's framework (Sánchez & Curtis, 2000) and recent studies have used this dimension in the context of international services marketing (e.g. Hui et al.,2011). These cultural dimensions are also relevant here because both individualism/collectivism and power distance focus on the relationships between oneself and other people. Furthermore, the individualism and power distance dimensions are correlated; large power distance countries tend to be more collectivist while small power distance countries tend to be more individualist (Hofstede & Hofstede, 2005).

The following table summarises Hofstede's (2012) individualism and power distance scores for all three countries and the scores for services sector contribution to gross domestic product (GDP). Services cover communications, finance, government activities, transportation, and all other private economic activities that do not produce material goods. The table also shows that Singapore has a similar level of service sector development like the UK and similar individualism and power distance scores like Saudi Arabia, making it the ideal country for this replication study.

Insert Table 1 about here

7. Data collection and analysis

Gruber et al. (2011) originally collected data from 149 respondents with complaining experience in the UK aged between 22 and 28 years (average age=25.4) and from 123 respondents in Saudi Arabia with complaining experience aged between 25 and 36 (average age=32.8). For our replication study, we collected data from 151 respondents aged between 24 and 33 years (average age=26.3) with complaining experience in Singapore.

As in the Gruber et al. (2011) study, respondents first had to recall a situation in which they complained in person to a frontline employee. Respondents had to remember how the employee reacted and if they were satisfied or dissatisfied with the company’s complaint handling process in general and with the qualities and behaviours of the frontline employee in particular. No specific industrial sector was concentrated on as the study focused on the qualities and behaviours of frontline employees and previous research by Winsted (2000) found that the majority of behaviours of service employees are the *same* across different service industries. This first part of the questionnaire acted as a “warm up” for the following Kano questionnaire, which contained the 19 attributes that Gruber et al. (2011) used in their study.

For each frontline employee attribute in the questionnaire, respondents had to answer a question consisting of two parts: ‘How do you feel if the feature is present?’ and ‘how do you feel if the feature is not present?’. For each question, respondents could then answer in five different ways: 1.) I like it that way. 2.) It must be that way. 3.) I am neutral. 4.) I can live with it that way. 5.) I dislike it that way. Table 2 shows an example taken from the questionnaire used in this study.

Insert Table 2 about here

Using Kano et al’s. (1984) evaluation table, we then classified the attributes following recommendations by Berger et al. (1993) and Matzler et al. (1996). Table 3 shows an example of an evaluation table. The functional and dysfunctional forms of the question were combined in the evaluation table, which lead to different categories of requirements. For instance, if a respondent answered “I like it that way,” to the functional form of a question – and answered “I am neutral,” or “I can live with it that way,” to the dysfunctional form of the question, then

the combination of these questions in the evaluation table lead to category A, which indicated that the attribute is an attractive or excitement factor to the respondent.

In addition to the three categories relevant for our analysis (basic, performance, and excitement factors), the evaluation table also allows for the classification of requirements as reverse, questionable or indifferent (Witell & Löfgren, 2007). Reverse features are those that respondents do not want and that also lead to actual dissatisfaction if present (Burchill & Shen, 1993). Questionable results reveal a contradiction in the respondent's answer to the question (Berger et al., 1993) and commonly mean that the respondent either misunderstood the question or that it was phrased incorrectly (Matzler et al., 1996).

Insert Table 3 about here

In this study, no frontline employee attribute led to any questionable results. The results of the classification process resulted in a customer satisfaction (CS) coefficient (Matzler et al., 1996), indicating the impact of an attribute on satisfaction (if fulfilled) and dissatisfaction (if not fulfilled) that was then visualized in a matrix chart. This chart then illustrates which frontline attributes are basic, performance, and excitement factors for complaining customers.

8. Findings and discussion

The Kano map in Figure 1 depicts the results of the classification process described above and illustrates which attributes of frontline employees are basic factors that complaining customers in Singapore take for granted, performance factors for which the relationship between attribute performance and (dis)satisfaction is linear, and excitement factors that have the potential of delighting complaining customers.

Insert Figure 1 about here

As can be seen from the map, no attributes of frontline employees are classified as basic or taken for granted factors and also no attributes can delight complaining customers in Singapore. However, “Listens carefully” and “Honesty” are close to the area of basic factors. The fulfilment of these requirements increases customer satisfaction only marginally. However, if frontline employees do not listen carefully to what their complaining customers are saying and if they do not appear to be honest, then customers will be very dissatisfied. “Active listening” is an attribute that frontline employee have to have in order to avoid customer dissatisfaction, which supports findings by authors such as Comer and Drollinger (1999) who suggested that the frontline employee’s listening behaviour is crucial for personal interactions and that customers demand employees who listen carefully to what they have to say.

Although no frontline employee attribute was classified as an excitement factor, “Further questions”, which means that frontline employees will contact the complaining customer again after some time to find out whether the customer is satisfied with the complaint resolution, borders the area of excitement factors.

The two frontline employee attributes “Tries to fulfil request” and “Shows Genuine Care” have the strongest impact on customer satisfaction. Frontline employees have to express genuine interest in the voiced problem of the complaining customer. Complaining customer have to perceive them as being authentic and *genuinely* willing to act on their behalf of, which supports findings by Gruber et al. (2011).

The Kano maps in figure 2 and 3 compare the findings for Singapore (black circles) with the ones for Saudi Arabia (grey circles in Figure 2) and the UK (grey circles in Figure 3). As a preliminary way of testing the research hypothesis whether the discovered differences between UK and Saudi Arabia in Gruber et al.’s (2011) study were caused by cultural differences instead of different stages of service sector development, we propose a visual

comparison as an innovative form consistent with the visual metaphor of the Kano methodology. As shown in figures 2 and 3, the dotted lines between attributes for Singapore and Saudi Arabia (Figure 2) are generally longer than those for Singapore and the UK (Figure 3).

Insert Figures 2 and 3 about here

This first visual comparison already reveals that the two countries with highly developed service economies (Singapore and the UK) seem to be more similar with regard to the preferred attributes of frontline employees dealing with customer complaints than the two countries having a collectivistic society (Singapore and Saudi Arabia).

While the visual representation of the findings is already informative, a closer look at the data confirms our initial assessment.

Insert Tables 4 and 5 about here

Tables 4 and 5 show the absolute values for satisfaction (SP Sat /SA Sat /UK Sat) and dissatisfaction (SP Diss /SA Diss /UK Diss) that provide the coordinates for each item shown in the Kano maps for the three countries (Singapore (SP)/Saudi Arabia (SA)/United Kingdom (UK)). The difference between satisfaction (DIF Sat) and dissatisfaction (DIF Diss) values is used to calculate the length between the position of an item on the Kano maps. We compared the position of each item and calculated the length of the direct line between items (e.g., the difference between the item “Listens carefully” on the Singapore and the UK map respectively). The difference between items for the Singapore and UK maps varies between .025 (“Authority”) and .167 (“Takes sufficient time”) with an average length of .099. By contrast, the length between items for the Singapore and Saudi Arabia maps varies between

.053 (“Apologises”) and .491 (“Listens carefully”) with an average length of .280. This further supports our preliminary conclusion that it is the stage of the service sector development that predominantly accounts for the differences between countries identified in this research.

9. Conclusion and implications

The study provides insights into the preferred attributes of frontline employees dealing with complaints in face-to-face complaint handling encounters in Singapore. Further, our study results support the findings by Gruber et al. (2011). By doing so, they surprisingly refute previous research which concluded that national culture plays a significant role in shaping customer expectations during service recovery encounters (Mattila & Patterson, 2004b). In particular, they contradict results from service recovery research where customers from individualistic cultures have been found to emphasize the service’s functional or transactional elements but customers from collectivistic cultures have been found to emphasize the more intangible relational dimensions of the service (Winsted, 1997).

Our study especially corroborates the notion of a life cycle of quality attributes that authors such as Löfgren and Witell (2008) found for goods and services and that Gruber et al. (2011) discovered for the preferred attributes of frontline employees dealing with customer complaints. Our findings from Singapore especially give further evidence to the findings by Gruber et al. (2011) that showed that frontline employee factors that are performance factors in a highly developed service economy (e.g. UK) can still create delight for customers in a less developed service economy (e.g. Saudi Arabia). Thus, customer sophistication and expectations indeed vary across countries due to the different stage of service economy development. Instead of tailoring complaint-handling tactics to consumer preferences based on cultural differences, our findings suggest that marketers should pay more attention to the stage of service development stage when planning complaint-handling strategies.

International companies operating in developed service economies are likely to have high

levels of experience and knowledge. Thus entering into less developed service economies such as Saudi Arabia could provide international companies with a strong competitive advantage with regard to handling complaints effectively over local companies.

10. Limitations and directions for further research

Due to the exploratory nature of the study and the scope and size of the sample, the results and our implications are tentative in nature. Even though our study has a sample size similar to other Kano studies (Löfgren & Witell, 2008), future studies could still use larger samples that represent the broader consumer population in the selected countries as suggested by Gruber et al. (2011). The use of a convenience sample of respondents limits the generalizability of the findings even though our respondents had both sufficient working and complaining experience. Further, Greenberg (1987) points out that the potential for generalizability can never be achieved in just one study but is an empirical question that demands comparisons over several studies.

Another area of potentially fruitful research relates to identifying differences between customer and frontline employee expectations. For example, service providers and employees may not match the quality perceptions and expectations of customers (Mattila & Enz, 2002). In this respect, from a TQM-perspective, it would be interesting to make connections to other areas of research such as Dahlgaard-Park's (2012) trinity model of human needs. Future studies could also include sampling both frontline employees and their customers in order to identify differences and similarities in perceptions of the complaint handling process. An understanding of such differences could prove particularly important for the development of appropriate training programmes.

References

- Bearden, W., Money, R., & Nevins, J. (2006). Multidimensional versus unidimensional measures in assessing national culture values: The Hofstede VSM 94 example. *Journal of Business Research*, 59(2), 195-203.
- Berger, C., Blauth, R., Boger, D., Bolster, C., Burchill, G., DuMouchel, W., Pouliot, F., Richter, R., Rubinoff, A., Shen, D., Timko, M., & Walden, D. (1993). Kano's methods for understanding customer-defined quality. *The Centre for Quality Management Journal*, 2(4), 3-36.
- Bitner, M. J., Booms, B. H., & Mohr, L. A. (1994). Critical service encounters: The employee's viewpoint. *Journal of Marketing*, 58(October), 95-106.
- Botschen, G., Thelen, E. M., & Pieters, R. (1999). Using means-end structures for benefit segmentation. *European Journal of Marketing*, 33(1/2), 38-58.
- Burchill, G. & Shen, D. (1993). Administering a Kano survey. *Center for Quality of Management Journal*, 2(4), 7-11.
- CIA – The World Factbook. Available under <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/fields/2012.html> (accessed April 30th 2012)
- Comer, L. B. & Drollinger, T. (1999). Active empathetic listening and selling success: A conceptual framework. *Journal of Personal Selling & Sales Management*, 19(1), 15-29.
- Dahlgaard-Park, S.M. (2012). Core values – The entrance to human satisfaction and commitment. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 23(2), 125–140.
- De Mooij, M. (2009). *Global marketing and advertising: Understanding cultural paradoxes*. London: Sage.

- Furrer, O. & Sollberger, P. (2007). The dynamics and evolution of the service marketing literature: 1993–2003. *Service Business*, 1(2), 93-117.
- Furrer, O., Liu, S.C.B., & Sudharshan, D. (2000). The relationships between culture and service quality perceptions: Basis for cross-cultural market segmentation and resource allocation. *Journal of Service Research*, 2(4), 355-371.
- Greenberg, J. (1987). The college sophomore as guinea pig: Setting the record straight. *The Academy of Management Review*, 12(1), 157-159.
- Gruber, T., Abosag, I., Reppel, A., & Szmigin, I. (2011). Analysing the preferred characteristics of frontline employees dealing with customer complaints – A cross-national Kano study. *The TQM Journal (Kano Special Issue)*, 23(2), 128-144.
- Hall, E. T. (1976). *Beyond culture*. Garden City, NY: Anchor Books.
- Hartline, M. D. & Ferrell, O. C. (1996). The management of customer-contact service employees: An empirical investigation. *Journal of Marketing*, 60(October), 52-70.
- Herzberg, F. (1959). *The motivation to work*. New York, NY: John Wiley and Sons.
- Hofstede (2012). National Culture Dimensions – Countries. Available under <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html> (accessed April 30th 2012)
- Hofstede, G. (2001). *Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviours, institutions, and organizations across nations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Hofstede, G. & Hofstede, G. J. (2005). *Culture and organizations: Software of the mind*. New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Högström, C., Rosner, M. & Gustafsson, A. (2010). How to create attractive and unique customer experiences: An application of Kano's theory of attractive quality to recreational tourism. *Marketing Intelligence & Planning*, 28(4), 385-402.

- Hui, M. K., Ho, C. K. Y., & Wan, L. C. (2011). Prior relationships and consumer responses to service failures: A cross-cultural study. *Journal of International Marketing*, 19(1), 1-49.
- Kano, N. (1984). Attractive quality and must be quality. *Hinshitsu (Quality)*, 14(2), 147-156 (in Japanese).
- Kano, N. (2001, September). Life cycle and creation of attractive quality. Paper presented at the 4th International QMOD Conference on Quality Management and Organisational Development, University of Linköping, Linköping, Sweden.
- Lagrosen, S. & Lagrosen, Y. (2012). Trust and quality management: Perspectives from marketing and organisational learning. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 23(1), 13–26.
- Löfgren, M. & Witell, L. (2008). Two decades of using Kano's theory of attractive quality: A literature review. *The Quality Management Journal*, 15(1), 59-75.
- Löfgren, M., Witell, L. & Gustafsson, A. (2011). Theory of attractive quality and life cycles of quality attributes. *The TQM Journal*, 23(2), 235-246.
- Lovelock, C. & Wirtz, J. (2010). *Services marketing: People, technology, strategy*, 7th edition. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Martensen, A. & Grönholdt, L. (2001). Using employee satisfaction measurement to improve people management: An adoption of Kano's quality types. *Total Quality Management*, 12(7-8), 949-957.
- Maslow, A. (1954). *Motivation and personality*. New York, New York: Harper.
- Mattila, A. & Patterson, P. (2004a). Service recovery and fairness perceptions in collectivist and individualist contexts. *Journal of Service Research*, 6(4), 336-346.
- Mattila, A. S. & Patterson, P. G. (2004b). The impact of culture on consumers' perceptions of service recovery efforts. *Journal of Retailing*, 80(3), 196-206.

- Mattila, A. S. & Enz, C. A. (2002). The role of emotions in service encounters. *Journal of Service Research*, 4(4), 268-277.
- Matzler, K. & Sauerwein, E. (2002). The factor structure of customer satisfaction: An empirical test of the importance grid and the penalty-reward-contrast analysis. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 13(4), 314-332.
- Matzler, K., Fuchs, M. and Schubert, A. K. (2004a). Employee satisfaction: Does Kano's model apply? *Total Quality Management*, 15(9-10), 1179-1198.
- Matzler, K., Bailom, F., Hinterhuber, H. H., Renzl, B., & Pichler, J. (2004b). The asymmetric relationship between attribute-level performance and overall customer satisfaction: A reconsideration of the importance-performance analysis. *Industrial Marketing Management*, 33(4), 271-277.
- Matzler, K., Hinterhuber, H. H., Bailom, F., & Sauerwein, E. (1996). How to delight your customers. *Journal of Product & Brand Management*, 5(2), 6-18.
- Nilsson-Witell, L. & Fundin, A. (2005). Dynamics of service attributes: A test of Kano's theory of attractive quality. *International Journal of Service Industry Management*, 16(2), 152-168.
- Priluck, R. & Lala, V. (2009). The impact of the recovery paradox on retailer-customer relationships. *Managing Service Quality*, 19(1), 42-59.
- Raharjo, H., Brombacher, A.C., Go, T.N. & Bergman, B. (2009). On integrating Kano's model dynamics into QFD for multiple product design. *Quality and Reliability Engineering International*, 26(4), 351-363.
- Reichheld, F. F. & Sasser, W. E. (1990). Zero defections: Quality comes to services. *Harvard Business Review*, 68(5), 105-111.

- Rothenberger, S., Grewal, D., & Iyer, G. R. (2008). Understanding the role of complaint handling on consumer loyalty in service relationships. *Journal of Relationship Marketing*, 7(4), 359-376.
- Sánchez, C. M. & Curtis, D. M. (2000). Different minds and common problems: Geert Hofstede's research on national cultures. *Performance Improvement Quarterly*, 13(2), 9-19.
- Schoefer, K. & Diamantopoulos, A. (2008). Measuring experienced emotions during service recovery encounters: Construction and assessment of the e s r e scale. *Service Business*, 2(1), 65-81.
- Sireli, Y., Kauffmann, P. & Ozan, E. (2007). Integration of Kano's model into QFD for multiple product design. *IEEE Transactions on Engineering Management*, 54(2), 380-390.
- Stauss, B. & Mang, P. (1999). Culture shocks' in inter-cultural service encounters? *Journal of Services Marketing*, 13(4-5), 329-346.
- Triandis, H. (1995). *Individualism and collectivism*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
- Winsted, K. F. (2000). Service behaviors that lead to satisfied customers. *European Journal of Marketing*, 34(3/4), 399-417.
- Witell, L. & Löfgren, M. (2007). Classification of quality attributes. *Managing Service Quality*, 17(1), 54-73.
- Zhang, J., Beatty, S. E., & Walsh, G. (2008). Review and future directions of cross-cultural consumer services research. *Journal of Business Research*, 61(3), 211-224.

Figure 1. Influence of frontline employee attributes on satisfaction and dissatisfaction of complaining customers (Singapore)

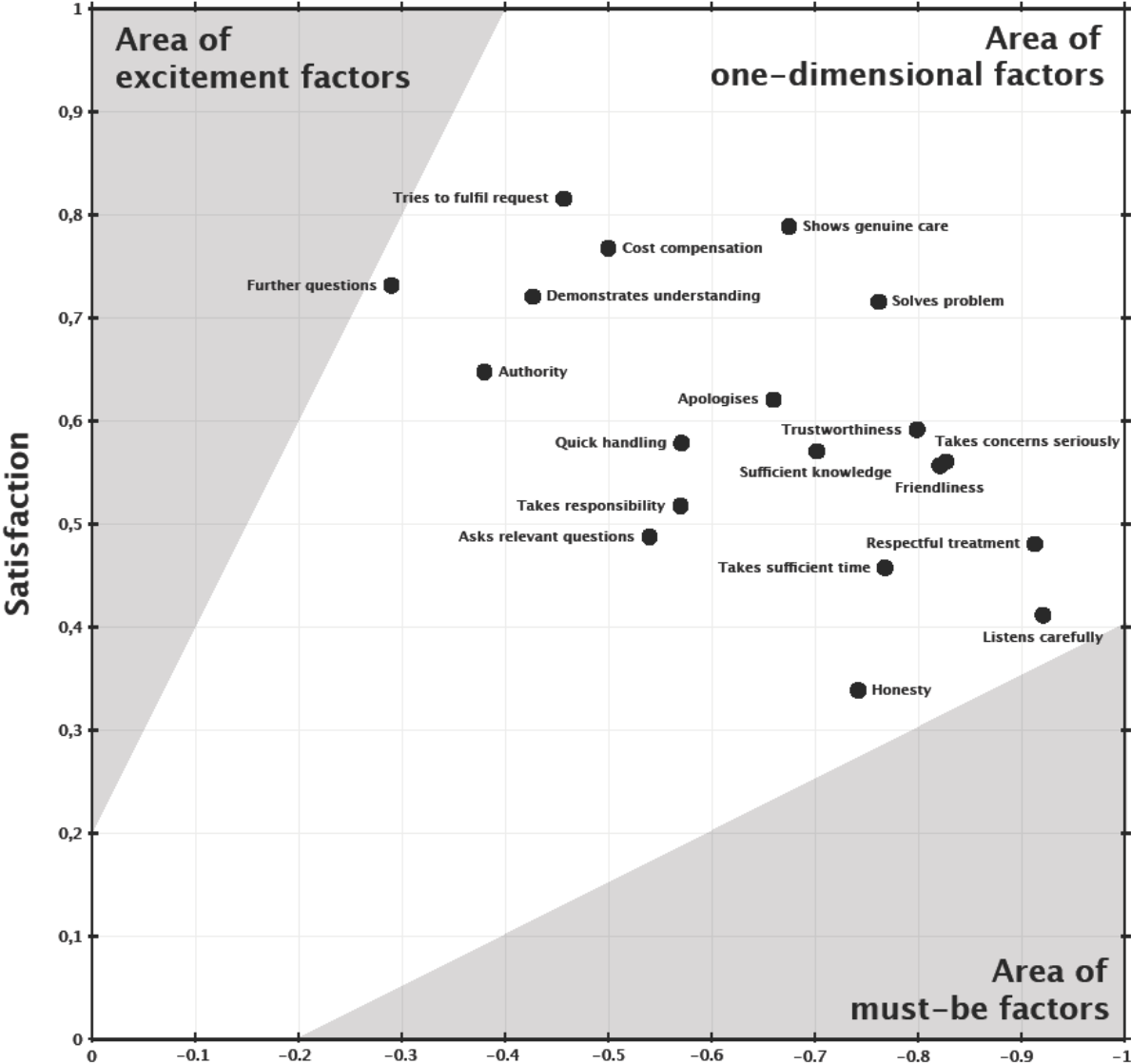


Figure 2. Influence of frontline employee attributes on satisfaction and dissatisfaction of complaining customers (Singapore (black circles) and Saudi Arabia (grey circles))

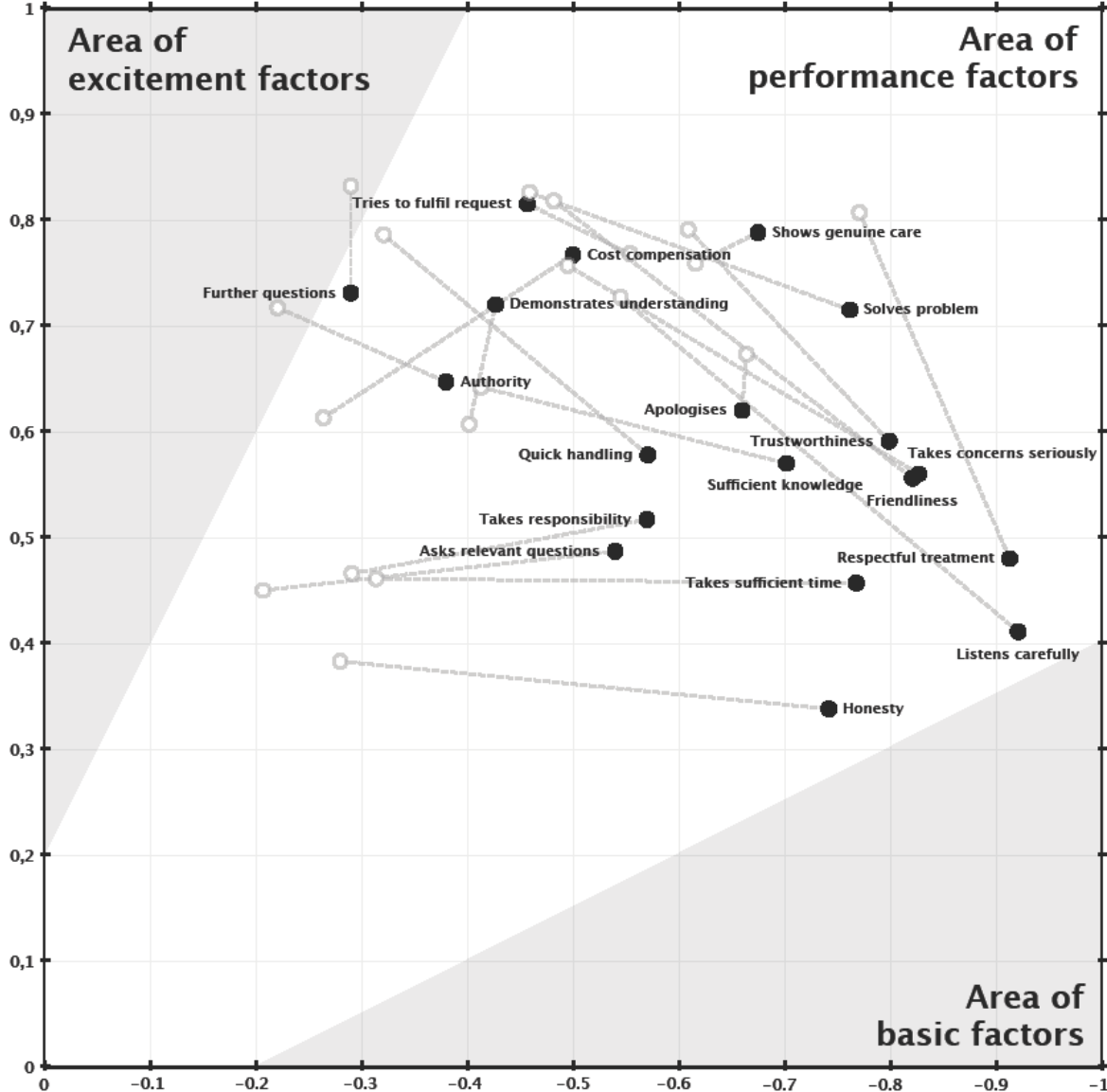


Figure 3. Influence of frontline employee attributes on satisfaction and dissatisfaction of complaining customers (Singapore (black circles) and UK (grey circles))

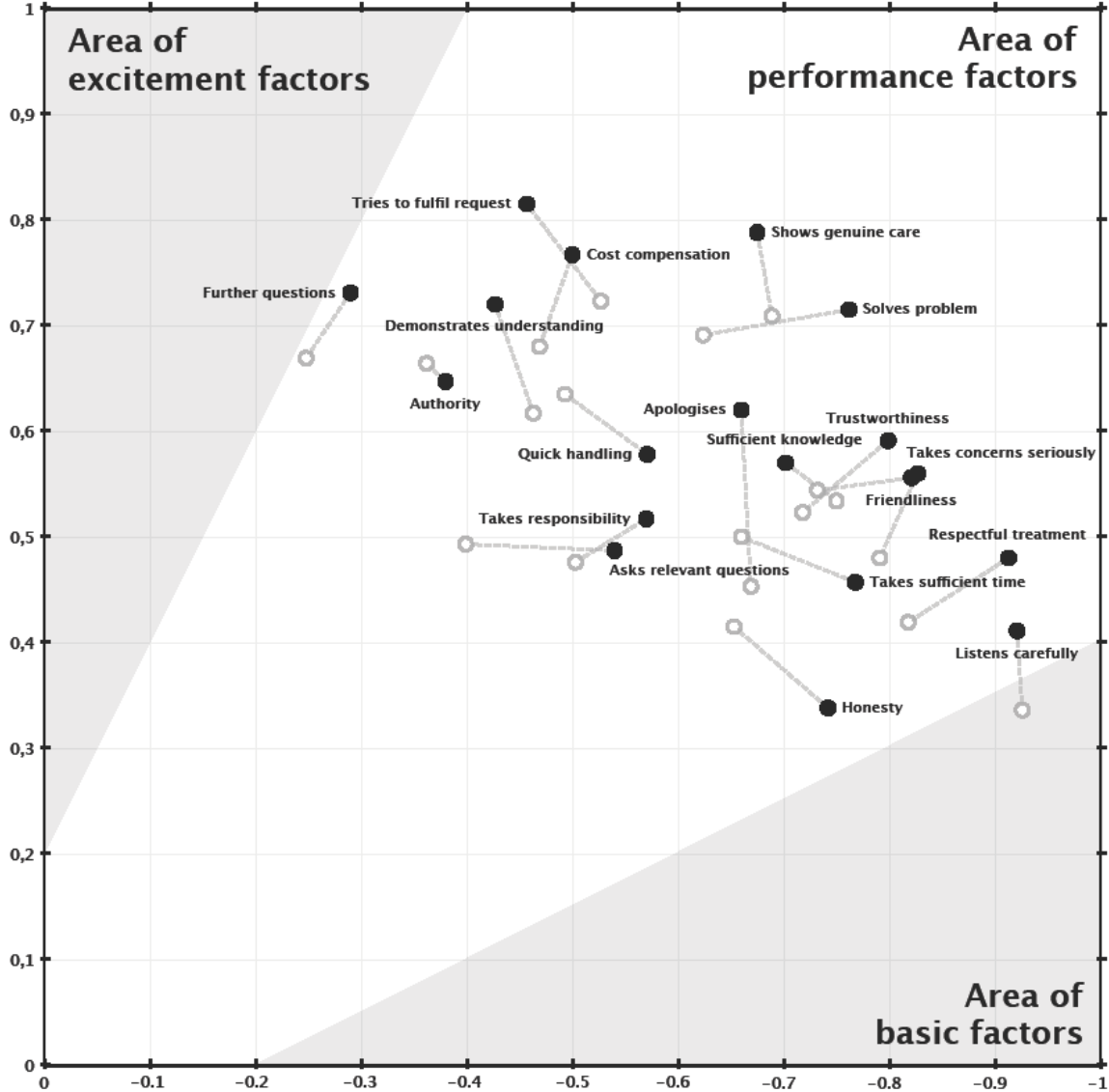


Table 1. Service sector development and national culture dimensions scores

	UK	Singapore	Saudi Arabia
Contribution of Services Sector to GDP	77.7% (2011 est.)	73.4%	30.4% (2011 est.)
Individualism Score	89	20	25
Power Distance Score	35	74	95

Sources: CIA (2012) and Hofstede (2012)

Table 2. Extract from Kano questionnaire

15a.	If a frontline employee contacts you again to find out whether the problem had been solved satisfactorily, how do you feel?	1.	<i>I like it that way</i>
		2.	<i>It must be that way</i>
		3.	<i>I am neutral</i>
		4.	<i>I can live with it that</i>
		5.	<i>I dislike it that way</i>
15b.	If a frontline employee <u>does not</u> contact you again to find out whether the problem had been solved satisfactorily, how do you feel?	1.	<i>I like it that way</i>
		2.	<i>It must be that way</i>
		3.	<i>I am neutral</i>
		4.	<i>I can live with it that</i>
		5.	<i>I dislike it that way</i>

Table 3. Example of a Kano evaluation table

		Negative / dysfunctional question				
		1.	2.	3.	4.	5.
Positive / functional question	1.	Questionable	Attractive	Attractive	Attractive	One-dimensional
	2.	Reverse	Indifferent	Indifferent	Indifferent	Must be
	3.	Reverse	Indifferent	Indifferent	Indifferent	Must be
	4.	Reverse	Indifferent	Indifferent	Indifferent	Must be
	5.	Reverse	Reverse	Reverse	Reverse	Questionable

Numbers represent answer options as shown in Table 2: 1. = “I like it that way”, 2. = “It must be that way”, 3. = “I am neutral”, 4. = “I can live with it that way”, 5. = “I dislike it that way” (Table adapted from Matzler et al. 1996, p. 10).

Table 4. Comparison of frontline employee characteristics leading to satisfaction (Sat) and dissatisfaction (Diss) – Singapore (SP) and Saudi Arabia (SA)

SP to Saudi Arabia							
Labels	SP Diss	SP Sat	SA Diss	SA Sat	DIF Diss	DIF Sat	Length
Listens carefully	0.921	0.411	0.545	0.727	0.376	0.316	0.491
Asks relevant questions	0.540	0.487	0.207	0.450	0.333	0.037	0.335
Sufficient knowledge	0.702	0.570	0.413	0.642	0.289	0.072	0.298
Authority	0.380	0.647	0.221	0.717	0.159	0.070	0.174
Friendliness	0.821	0.556	0.482	0.818	0.339	0.262	0.428
Shows genuine care	0.675	0.788	0.616	0.759	0.059	0.029	0.066
Honesty	0.742	0.338	0.280	0.383	0.462	0.045	0.464
Tries to fulfil request	0.457	0.815	0.554	0.768	0.097	0.047	0.108
Demonstrates understanding	0.427	0.720	0.402	0.607	0.025	0.113	0.116
Takes sufficient time	0.768	0.457	0.314	0.461	0.454	0.004	0.454
Respectful treatment	0.913	0.480	0.771	0.807	0.142	0.327	0.357
Quick handling	0.571	0.578	0.321	0.786	0.250	0.208	0.325
Solves problem	0.762	0.715	0.459	0.826	0.303	0.111	0.323
Cost compensation	0.500	0.767	0.264	0.613	0.236	0.154	0.282
Takes concerns seriously	0.827	0.560	0.495	0.757	0.332	0.197	0.386
Takes responsibility	0.570	0.517	0.291	0.466	0.279	0.051	0.284
Apologises	0.660	0.620	0.664	0.673	0.004	0.053	0.053
Further questions	0.290	0.731	0.290	0.832	0.000	0.101	0.101
Trustworthiness	0.799	0.591	0.609	0.791	0.190	0.200	0.276
						Average:	0.280
						Max:	0.491
						Min:	0.053

Table 5. Comparison of frontline employee characteristics leading to satisfaction (Sat) and dissatisfaction (Diss) – Singapore (SP) and the United Kingdom (UK)

SP to UK							
Labels	SP Diss	SP Sat	UK Diss	UK Sat	DIF Diss	DIF Sat	Length
Listens carefully	0.921	0.411	0.926	0.336	0.005	0.075	0.075
Asks relevant questions	0.540	0.487	0.399	0.493	0.141	0.006	0.141
Sufficient knowledge	0.702	0.570	0.750	0.534	0.048	0.036	0.060
Authority	0.380	0.647	0.362	0.664	0.018	0.017	0.025
Friendliness	0.821	0.556	0.732	0.544	0.089	0.012	0.090
Shows genuine care	0.675	0.788	0.689	0.709	0.014	0.079	0.080
Honesty	0.742	0.338	0.653	0.415	0.089	0.077	0.118
Tries to fulfil request	0.457	0.815	0.527	0.723	0.070	0.092	0.116
Demonstrates understanding	0.427	0.720	0.463	0.617	0.036	0.103	0.109
Takes sufficient time	0.768	0.457	0.660	0.500	0.108	0.043	0.116
Respectful treatment	0.913	0.480	0.818	0.419	0.095	0.061	0.113
Quick handling	0.571	0.578	0.493	0.635	0.078	0.057	0.097
Solves problem	0.762	0.715	0.624	0.691	0.138	0.024	0.140
Cost compensation	0.500	0.767	0.469	0.680	0.031	0.087	0.092
Takes concerns seriously	0.827	0.560	0.791	0.480	0.036	0.080	0.088
Takes responsibility	0.570	0.517	0.503	0.476	0.067	0.041	0.079
Apologises	0.660	0.620	0.669	0.453	0.009	0.167	0.167
Further questions	0.290	0.731	0.248	0.669	0.042	0.062	0.075
Trustworthiness	0.799	0.591	0.718	0.523	0.081	0.068	0.106
						Average:	0.099
						Max:	0.167
						Min:	0.025