

# THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER SATISFACTION IN THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS: A CROSS-CULTURAL STUDY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper aims at presenting the concept of customer satisfaction in the context of activities focused on quality management in the food industry enterprises in Poland and in the USA. The studies were conducted in food industry enterprises that possessed quality systems, certified according to ISO 9001:2000 standard. Author-investigated assessment of enterprises' activities in the area of customer satisfaction management indicate that American and Polish companies have similar perceptions of issues associated with measuring customer satisfaction. However, American companies have more knowledge of the theoretical concept of customer satisfaction, therefore they possess a greater understanding of the implications of customer satisfaction research.*

**JEL:** L66, M11, M39, N62, N64

**KEYWORDS:** Customer satisfaction, quality management systems, food industry in Poland and the USA

## INTRODUCTION

A wide range of marketing research studies have been conducted to investigate the concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction that can lead to the creation of sustainable competitive advantage. However, marketing literature does not consider the concepts of quality management and customer satisfaction as corresponding issues in manufacturing firms. This study presents the concept of customer satisfaction in the context of activities focused on quality management in food industry enterprises. The authors provided an assessment of organizational activities in the area of customer satisfaction management and conducted cross-cultural studies including enterprises in Poland and in the USA that possess quality systems, certified according to the ISO 9001:2000 standard.

The rationale for this study emerged from an analysis of current trends in quality management systems. Business organizations are aware that in order to improve their business performance they need to satisfy customer needs, and they need to deliver a high quality product. Many times companies decide to invest in quality management systems because they believe that this will guarantee success in delivering high quality products, and therefore customers will be satisfied. This is a valuable approach, however business organizations are focusing more on the technological standards of quality and tend to forget about their relationship with customers. They ignore the importance of customer satisfaction, believing that with a good product, satisfaction will follow.

In the US there are about 30,000 companies that are classified as food manufacturers, and about 1,100 possess ISO certification ([www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov)), whereas in Poland there are about 3,200 companies in this industry, and about 200 companies are certified (Institute of Organization and Management in Industry "Orgmasz," 2009). However, the ISO certification is becoming the worldwide-accepted quality standard, and in the case of the food industry, it is implemented by more than 430,000 organizations in 158 countries ([www.iso.org](http://www.iso.org)). Importantly, these norms not only cover managerial and operational issues, but

also require that organizations conduct customer satisfaction studies. Because of that, there is a growing demand for increased research in the area that merges the concepts of quality management and customer satisfaction. This paper tries to eliminate this gap in literature because little research has been conducted to address the benefits of these two concepts as mutually supportive in the manufacturing industry.

This paper is organized as follows: literature review discusses issues of customer satisfaction and the importance of quality management systems. The next section describes research methodology. Finally discussion and conclusions are outlined.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Customer Satisfaction – The Notion and Its Core Issues

There are a number of discussions in marketing literature devoted to the effects of customer satisfaction on business performance. Many discussions in marketing literature support the importance of customer satisfaction on business performance and business success (Fornell 1992, Harting 1998, Zairii 2000, Bolton, Kannan and Bramlett 2000, Rampersad 2001, Gounaris and Stathakopoulos 2001, Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl 2004). Therefore we should perceive satisfied customers as an enterprise's assets that carry strong economic meaning in the highly competitive environment. A variety of studies emphasize customer satisfaction as a necessary condition for customer retention and loyalty (Fornell 1992, Bolton 1998, Morgan and Strati 2000), that can help secure future revenues (Rust and Zahorik 1993, Scheuing, 1995; Reichheld, 1996; Helgesen, 2006,). Through delivering a high level of satisfaction, firms can decrease the costs of future transactions (Reichheld and Sasser 1990, Shneider 2000), decrease price sensitivity (Anderson 1996, Shneider 2000) and complaint behavior (Fornell 1992, Bolton 1998, Barlow and Moller 1996). The literature also presents multiple positive effects of customer satisfaction on improvement of brand image (Lawson and Glowa 2000), company reputation and positive recommendations (Anderson and Sullivan 1993, Zairi 2000, Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl 2004), employee motivation (Muffatto and Panizzolo, 1995, Naumann and Hoisington 2001) and identification of improvement areas (Pasquier and Fastnacht, 2001).

Constant need for communication with the customer and the ability to listen to their opinions about products or services is becoming a very important issue. It is the customer who decides which product or service offering represents the highest value. Customers' decisions determine the future of the organization. A manufacturer or service provider is forced to provide the customer with the information that he/she demands to satisfy expectations and fulfill customer needs. The concept of marketing orientation assumes that determining the needs and demands of target markets as well as supplying the demanded level of satisfaction to customers more efficiently than competitors is the key to achievement of enterprise goals (Sudol, Szymczak and Haffer 2000). This is a trend that shifts strategic behavior of enterprises by limiting strategies of increasing market share and switching to strategies of increasing customer satisfaction (Fornell 1995). Numerous quality management systems can be helpful to achieve this state because knowledge about the customer and his/her needs is becoming necessary to develop and implement the efficient quality program of every enterprise. Customer satisfaction measurements that function as a specific type of early warning system for management could be seen as an activity that serves that goal. Sales level and profits generated by the enterprise can be seen as the ultimate measure of future activity results, while customer satisfaction measures can indicate the future customers' behavior and, as a consequence, what results the enterprise can expect.

Kotler (1994) defines customer satisfaction as the situation experienced by an individual and related to comparison of perceived characteristics of products and expectations of that individual concerning those characteristics. According to Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) it is the product or service evaluation in terms of whether that product or service has met customers' needs and expectations. This approach utilizes a

disconfirmation paradigm (Oliver 1995), which states that satisfaction is believed to occur through the process of matching expectations and perceived performance. Woodruff and Gardial (1996) define satisfaction as a positive or negative feeling of the customer related to the value received as a result of choosing a specific product offer in a specific situation. That feeling can be attributed to the direct reaction to overall experiences associated with a product or company. In defining customer satisfaction the emotional aspect of it is highlighted by defining satisfaction as a mental state, which is the emotion expressing satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the choice made in the act of purchasing (Otto 1999).

Still other authors focus on the aspect of valuation and assessment of the product or service acquired (Westbrook and Oliver 1991). In other words, it is the comparison of the expected product quality, perceived product quality and the importance of its different characteristics. Schneider (2000) suggests that customer satisfaction can be treated as the result of the psychological process in which the customer compares the perceptible level of enterprise operation (the existing quality) with already established standards that generally represent his expectations (the expected quality). Therefore, the latter two definitions stress the importance of the connection between satisfaction and quality. All cited above definitions suggest that the appearance of satisfaction should be understood as a dynamic process where assessment of the consumption experience in the category of satisfaction is done within the framework of the continuum from undesired lack of satisfaction to the desired satisfaction. It should be remembered that the appearance of satisfaction is a relative state, not an absolute and permanent one (Zairii 1996).

There are two generally accepted major concepts of customer satisfaction, i.e. the *transaction-specific satisfaction* and *cumulative satisfaction* (Jachnis and Terelak 2002), which were suggested in the definition by Woodruff and Gardial (1996). The first highlights the shortness of consumer experience with the product or service (from transaction to transaction) and deals with the cognitive dissonance related to the transaction experience and consequences of product purchase. However, that assessment does not include the personal “historical” experience of the buyer. The second approach focuses on accrual of customer experience related to the object of purchase or overall experience with a particular company. As a consequence, satisfaction is not a passing and short-term state of contentment but it represents comprehensive assessment of consumption over a specific time. That concept is consistent with the approach presented in the economy combining satisfaction with the ability to assess the usefulness of the product acquired.

### Customer Satisfaction and Quality

The link between quality and customer satisfaction is often presented only as a result of each other. Most of the studies of consumer satisfaction highlight the unavoidable relationship between customer satisfaction and quality. Sureshchander, Rajendran, and Anantharaman (2002) argued that an increase in one is likely to increase the other, therefore service quality and customer satisfaction are closely related. Others (Ranaweera and Neely 2003) also report that service quality is often positioned as an antecedent of customer satisfaction. Even contemporary definitions of quality frequently refer directly to customer satisfaction. The American Society for Quality ([www.ASQ.org](http://www.ASQ.org)) distinguishes two meanings: “(1) the characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs; (2) a product or service free of deficiencies.” Therefore, it is apparent that satisfying customer needs is an integral part of delivering quality along with conformance to requirements. Anderson, Fornell and Rust (1997) define quality that meets customer needs as a design characteristic of the product (attributes and features) as well as the way in which service is delivered. Some countries (Japan, Sweden, and United States) raise the issue of quality and customer satisfaction to the rank of the social issue where they developed national level economic metrics of Customer Satisfaction as a measure of quality (Fornell 1992). The importance of this relationship is included in the regulations of the International Organization for Standardization regarding quality (ISO 9000). Currently these standards are strongly influenced by customer satisfaction, whereas formerly they were mainly based on norms (Muffato and Panizzolo 1995).

ISO series 9000:2000 standard even provides the definition of customer satisfaction. It is customer contentment, and customer perception concerning the level to which his expectations have been satisfied. It also states that customer complaints represent the common indicator of its low level. On the other hand it is pointed out that the absence of complaints is not equivalent to high customer satisfaction level. ISO 9001:2000 standard indicates also one more aspect - treatment of customer satisfaction as one of the measures of quality management system performance. Quality awards such as the European Quality Award and the Malcolm Baldrige Award treat customer satisfaction as one of the most important areas in an organization during assessment of quality focused management systems.

Enterprises that are currently on the path of quality improvement processes and have certified quality systems compliant with the ISO 9001:2000 standard are required to conduct customer satisfaction studies. The new standard pays special attention to the customer focus of the enterprise. Quality systems are becoming necessary tools supporting implementation of quality tasks in the enterprises striving to satisfy the customer (Lock 2002). The ISO 9000 revision requires firms to develop processes that are both effective and efficient for generating, analyzing, and applying customer satisfaction information in order to improve organizational performance (Bond and Fink 2003). To attain true customer satisfaction the companies need to achieve quality not only by eliminating the causes for direct complaints but also by providing their products with an excellent, attractive quality – to delight to the customer (Fecikova 2004).

To understand customer satisfaction, everyone within the organization should consider continuous improvement as something normal (Rampersad 2001). Results of studies carried out by many researchers (Moore, Hopkins and Hopkins 1998, Bowles 1992, Grant, Shani and Krishan 1994, Steeples 1992) provide strong support for the notion that quality improvement is a method of achieving customer satisfaction. Recent changes in ISO embrace customer satisfaction as a focus of the standard and require certified companies to collect and analyze customer satisfaction data (Bond and Fink 2003).

Another approach that explains creation and connection between customer satisfaction and quality is the PROSAT model (Schneider 2000). It is a multidimensional model that suggests that customer satisfaction can be seen as twofold: as a real value delivered by the firm and subjective customer' expectations. This model is theoretically rooted in the Parasuraman's Model of Service Quality (1985).

According to the PROSAT these are the following dimensions that influence development of Customer Satisfaction: 1) Technical product quality – conformation to specification requirements, safety, sustainability, environmental safety. 2) Quality of reputation – customer's perception about company and product/service that is based on his/her subjective benchmarking of competing companies, their competencies, brands and reputation. 3) Price perception – list price, discounts, sales promotions, perceived value. 4) Quality of interpersonal relationship – communication styles, empathy, complaints handling. 5) Service quality – sales personnel competency, immediacy of response, safety, tangible components of service (sales personnel appearance, atmospherics, equipment and promotional materials).

It is clear that customer experience is shaped before, during and after sale. Therefore, satisfaction is created not only by the objective product or service quality, but also through the process of customer perception. It is also important to understand the relationship between price and product value as a critical determinant of the purchase. It is the customer who is deciding if the product is worth the asking price. There is also another benefit of this situation. By enhancing perceived service quality to consumers, the company is able to increase the perceived costs of switching from one service firm to another (Meng, Elliott 2003).

From the other side of this model there are comparison standards - customer expectations. They can be grouped into three categories (Schneider 2000): (1) customer's experience, (2) other users experience (recommendations, word-of mouth), and (3) experiences shaped by the company's outside

communication (i.e. advertising). The third category suggests that the company itself can create a lack of satisfaction or cause dissatisfaction in extreme situations. Many times companies promise features and a level of quality that they cannot deliver; therefore they are shaping unrealistic customer expectations.

The PROSAT Model presents the concept of customer satisfaction creation that is the result of a mutual relationship between organization and buyer. It is possible to achieve this state only when communication between both parties occurs. Firms should know (through market intelligence) what the customer's needs and expectations are in order to deliver expected quality. Customers should be able to anticipate what level of quality the company is able to deliver at the accepted price, and therefore set the level of expectations. Quality is currently one of the major factors satisfying the customer.

This understanding of quality found its expression in the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) where the management system is focused on obtaining optimal quality. The quality management systems are part of the system for management in an organization that is focused on quality goals that satisfy the needs and expectations of the customer adequately. Quality goals are additional to other goals of the organization such as those concerning development, financing, profitability, environment, safety and hygiene of work. Different parts of the organization management system can be integrated with the quality management system into a single system using common components. This could facilitate planning, allocation of resources, defining the supplementary objectives and assessment of overall organizational effectiveness. The organization management systems are usually assessed against their own requirements and against the requirements of standards, i.e. ISO 9001:2000. Provisions of that standard also make it possible for the organization to adjust its quality management system to the applicable requirements of another management system or integration of those systems.

Firms make significant investments in quality programs with the hope of generating huge increases in profitability (Douglas and Erwin 2000). Return on investments in the processes of delivering high quality (implementation of quality management system) can be seen through increased sales (Bank 1996). The more the quality improves, the faster the sales increase, because satisfied customers buy more (Morgan et al. 2000). Similar relations are reported by Woodruff and Gardial (1996). However, some researchers (Urbanek 2004) advise that quality understood traditionally as a group of characteristics consistent with defined specifications could not be identified with the level of customer satisfaction because high product quality does not automatically mean that the customer will be satisfied.

The ISO 9001:2000 standard also indicates one more aspect - treatment of customer satisfaction as one of the measures of quality management system performance. Customer satisfaction measurements investigate, among other goals, customer expectations concerning the characteristics of a given product or service. That means it should investigate the customer satisfaction attributes.

#### Quality Management Systems in Poland and in The USA

Quality management systems compliant with the ISO standard are broadly applied in Polish food enterprises, which presents a different situation in comparison to food enterprises in the USA. The accession of Poland to the European Union did not cause a significant increase in the number of enterprises that implemented the Quality Management System according to ISO, although the number of enterprises that obtained certificates for the Integrated Quality Management System (ISO 9000 integrated with the HACCP system) and other systems (the IFS and/or BRC) increased (Morkis 2005).

Adjustment processes in the Polish food sector in the area of product safety and quality improvement resulted in an increased share of exports in food industry sales from 13.7% in 2003 to 18% in 2005 and the increasing positive balance of trade in agricultural-food products. Increased production and sales, particularly exports, resulted in a significant improvement of results in the financial standing of the food

industry, which is a beneficiary of integration with the EU (Urban 2006). Programs aiming at development of quality orientation (like TQM) in organizations are currently implemented in Poland to an increasing extent. Practice shows, however, that implementation of the ISO standard or basics of quality management, through implementation of the TQM, does not always bring the expected results in the form of increased sales of products or services.

In the United States ISO norms are not widely implemented in the food industry. Quality certifications using the ISO standards are very popular in heavy industry, electric, and technical industries, where all management and manufacturing processes are well controlled. In the food industry quality control measurements are focused on food safety rather than the quality of the processes. One of the most often used standards is Safe Quality Food (SQF). It is a quality program recognized by the Global Food Safety Initiative (GFSI), an organization representing over 70% of food retail revenue worldwide and is managed by the Food Marketing Institute. Currently, there are two SQF Codes: SQF 1000 for farmers/producers and SQF 2000 for food manufacturers and distributors. SQF 1000 and 2000 Codes are based on the principles of Hazard Analysis at Critical Control Point (HACCP), Codex, ISO and Quality Management Systems. So, there is already some level of implementation of the ISO standards. However companies in the USA do not go through the certification process, because of the additional costs associated with certification and a bureaucratic overload that they perceive will accompany ISO certification. SQF Certification gives assurance to retailers that the food from suppliers has been produced, prepared and handled according to internationally recognized standards.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Recently, the dynamic increase in the number of enterprises implementing quality management systems compliant with the ISO 9001:2000 standard has contributed to a significant proliferation of customer satisfaction studies. As a result of well-programmed customer satisfaction studies, management could obtain information on what characteristics of product or service customers are willing to pay for and what characteristics are less important to them. All in all, the revenues depend on whether we succeed in an accurate determination of customer expectations and whether we succeed in satisfying them better than the competitors do. The scope of this study covers analysis of the current status of the advancement of the customer satisfaction process management in Polish and American food sector enterprises possessing quality management systems certified in compliance with the ISO 9001:2000 norm. The study also looks at assessment of what possible activities for quality improvement would have the strongest influence on increasing revenues, and which would carry the relatively weaker effects.

The list of investigated organizations was obtained from the National Register of Quality Systems Certificates in Poland and Independent Association of Accredited Registrars in the USA. On that basis, 197 (Poland) and 27 (USA) food industry enterprises possessing certified quality systems were selected and qualified for the studies. The criteria for target selection were as follows:

1. Operation in the food sector
2. Possession of a certified quality management system

The study questionnaires were sent to all selected organizations. Not all the identified food industry enterprises joined the study. Some of them have already lost the validity of the quality system certificate (10% of enterprises covered); some enterprises were in the state of bankruptcy (3% of enterprises covered). Some organizations have liquidated their business (8% of enterprises covered) or simply did not respond to the questionnaire (49% of enterprises covered). As a result we used collected data from 60 enterprises in Poland representing 30% of the identified group of 197 organizations willing to participate in the study, and 19 enterprises (70% of identified organizations) in the USA. Questionnaires were distributed to all enterprises, so the return of questionnaires was treated as random selection of the

sample. Completed questionnaires were returned by 60 (Poland) and 19 (USA) enterprises, so it was decided to verify whether the sample of that size was sufficient to draw conclusions on the tested population of food industry enterprises. Characteristics of the sample populations are included in Table 1.

Table 1: Characteristics of the Investigated Organizations

	Poland	USA
Overall sample size (N)	60	19
Carried customer satisfaction measurements	53	18
Intent to measure CS in the future	5	1
Size of organization	medium and large	medium and large
Market	national/regional/ international	national/regional/ international
Participated in the study	55	19

*This table shows the characteristics of the investigated firms that include number of overall sample, number of organizations that have been conducting customer satisfaction measurements, size of organizations and scope of operations.*

The study has been conducted using the questionnaire that was distributed and returned by mail (Poland) and internet (USA) using the provided website that displayed the questionnaire. Surveys were completed by managers responsible for quality systems in the participating enterprises. The study covered the following issues: activities adjusting the enterprises to market economy conditions; reasons for customer satisfaction measurement; customer satisfaction measurement methods; objectives of customer satisfaction measurements; organizational units responsible for conducting customer satisfaction measurements; procedures for assessment of the customer satisfaction measurement system; purpose for which customer satisfaction measurement results are used; importance of customer satisfaction measurement according to the enterprise; barriers to customer satisfaction measurement.

The study also included assessment of the status of progress of individual activities in the area of customer satisfaction management in the investigated enterprises according to a scale from 0 to 5 where: 5 – the activity is present at very high level; and 0 – lack of activity at all.

## DISCUSSION

As many as 88% of Polish and 89% of American participated enterprises declared that customer satisfaction measurement is done within the quality management system as an activity imposed by that system (mainly on the basis of the ISO 9001:2000 standard). That trend is also confirmed by studies conducted in 2001 on the group of 282 large and medium Swiss enterprises, which indicates that the main reason for conducting customer satisfaction studies is the requirement imposed by ISO series standard ISO (Pasquier and Fastnacht 2001). One of the issues investigated by this study was identification of customer satisfaction measurement methods that participating organizations currently apply (Table 2).

Obtained results indicate that the enterprises applied a number of customer satisfaction measurement methods simultaneously, which is consistent with the principles of accuracy in customer satisfaction measurement studies. Based on collected data, we observe that American companies implement more methods than Polish companies. Among companies in Poland the most frequently used methods are: “analysis of complaints,” “monitoring sales levels, market share or ROI” and “surveys” (94.5%, 87.3% and 76,4% of answers respectively). This situation could be explained by the fact that these methods are very easy to apply. Another explanation could be the fact that there is not much tradition in Poland conducting specialized measurements of customer satisfaction. American companies have operated for a much longer time familiar with the concept of customer satisfaction; therefore the number of methods (they indicated they are using) and their variety is greater than among Polish companies. However, among the top three the same methods are found with a small difference in order: “monitoring sales levels, market share or ROI,” “analysis of complaints” and “surveys” (84.2%, 78.9%, and 78.9% answers

respectively). There is one more indication that American companies are much more aware of the concept of customer satisfaction. Among investigated organizations, 14 out of 19 (73.7%) conducted dedicated and specialized “customer satisfaction research.” Comparing these results with the results from Polish organizations we can conclude that American organizations have much more expertise in tracking the level of customer satisfaction.

Table 2: Customer Satisfaction Measurement Methods

Methods of Customer Satisfaction Measurement	Poland		USA	
	Number of answers	%*	Number of answers	%*
Analysis of complaints	52	94.5	15	78.9
Monitoring sales levels, market share or ROI	48	87.3	16	84.2
Surveys	42	76.4	15	78.9
Benchmarking	33	60.0	8	42.1
Focus groups	23	41.8	9	47.4
Customer loss analysis	19	34.5	3	15.8
Telephone/personal interviews	11	20.0	7	36.8
Reports from first contact employees	10	18.2	4	21.1
Critical events technique	5	9.1	3	15.8
Studies on internal clients (employees)	4	7.3	2	10.5
Industry Reports	4	7.3	7	36.8
Customer Satisfaction Research	2	3.6	14	73.7
Other	-	-	-	-

*This table shows methods of customer satisfaction measurement implemented by investigated organizations in terms of the number and percentage of obtained answers. \*Investigated enterprises could indicate more than one answer, as result the total could exceed 100 percent.*

We notice a significant difference between investigated groups of enterprises and the level of conducting customer satisfaction research as a separate method of tracking customer satisfaction: 3.6% and 73.7% in Polish and American enterprises respectively. Because of economic transformation in 1989, Polish business organizations had to quickly evolve and adjust their business activities to the “free” market economy. They did it successfully in a number of management and marketing areas. However, as obtained results indicate there are still issues that they had to address.

It is interesting that participating organizations in both countries indicated “analysis of complaints” as an important method of measuring customer satisfaction. This situation could be a direct result of implementation of ISO standards and adoption of the definition of customer satisfaction from these norms, where the level of complaints was directly associated with customer satisfaction. There is extensive literature on the subject of monitoring the level of complaints as a system of tracking changes in customer satisfaction, and it seems to be the appropriate action for these organizations, because consumer complaints are highly relevant sources of market information (Kasouf, Celuch and Strieter, 1995). They can provide organizations with an opportunity to learn from their mistakes, retain dissatisfied consumers, and influence consumer’s future attitudes and behavior (Powers and Bendall-Lyon, 2002; Estelami 1999).

The American Productivity and Quality Center (1999) assumes that an effective complaint management process can be an important quality improvement tool that is useful in making improvements that increase customer satisfaction. Effective responses to complaints can prevent a customer from switching brands or suppliers. This is important, since the cost of obtaining new customers is usually substantially greater than satisfying a current dissatisfied customer (Fornell and Wernerfelt 1987, Clark, Kaminski and Rink 1992).

Studies carried out by Nyer (2000) indicate that encouraging dissatisfied consumers to express their feelings and opinions may cause increased levels of satisfaction and product evaluation. Complainers tend to be more frequent users of the product and more affluent than a random sample of users. TARP (1979) studies reported that, even when complaints were not resolved satisfactorily, customers who complained experienced higher levels of repurchase intention compared to those who did not complain at all. Studies by Nyer (2000) showed that consumers who were encouraged to express their complaints were almost 59



percent more likely to purchase membership than consumers who were not asked to express themselves. A study of executives in 50 firms identified the process for handling customer complaints as a key driver of customer satisfaction (Mohr-Jackson 1998).

Customer satisfaction measurement in participating enterprises covers mainly the active buyers, followed by employees, potential customers, and intermediaries. Past studies (Fecikova 2004, Otto 2004) indicate that the satisfaction of internal customers (employees) is one of the basic conditions to satisfying the external – final customers on the market, therefore it is a good sign that in both groups of enterprises they do not neglect studying satisfaction of their employees.

In the majority of investigated Polish enterprises (64%), special positions within organizations have been charged with responsibilities of dealing with customer satisfaction measurement, while in the remaining (36%) enterprises there were no specially designated positions dedicated to customer satisfaction measurement. In American companies measurement of customer satisfaction has been conducted by employees in the marketing department as a part of the regular duties of these employees.

In Polish organizations the specialists responsible for customer satisfaction measurement have been various employees: specialists for marketing (55%), specialists for sales (12%), specialists for quality (9%) and other positions (24%). The literature points out numerous differences in perception of quality (influencing customer satisfaction) between employees dealing with marketing and employees directly involved in assuring product quality in the enterprise (i.e. engineers, operations and manufacturing managers) (Bond and Fink 2003, Woodruff 1997, Cravens et al. 1988). Marketers define a product in terms of customer benefits (Kotler and Armstrong 1997), whereas quality managers define tangible attributes of the product that can be translated into specifications for a production process (Krishnan and Ulrich 2001).

As a result, marketers tend to avoid making commitments regarding products attributes too early in order to preserve adaptability in order to respond to changes in customer needs, while quality managers want to have manufacturing specifications as fast as possible. Success will depend largely on the willingness and ability of marketing managers to understand and collaborate with quality managers (Bond and Fink 2003). Empowerment is also an immensely important factor influencing customer satisfaction increases (More, Hopkins and Hopkins 1998, DuBrin 1997). Empowered employees use their judgment to take care of situations and solve customer-related problems so that customer satisfaction is created (More, Hopkins and Hopkins 1998). Only 30% of Polish enterprises covered by the survey reported that they estimate their customers' satisfaction level using only collected information from customers. The majority (61% of answers) declared that they know customers' satisfaction level from other sources (i.e. other market information), which are not part of the declared customer satisfaction measurements. These situations confirm that enterprises possess poorly developed methodological foundations of measurement and are unable to make full use of the results (as they do not have an internal, consistent customer satisfaction management system). Among American companies there is a higher level of understanding of the framework of measurements of customer satisfaction, and 63% of these organizations indicated that they know the level of customer satisfaction from reliable sources (methods, reports etc.).

Investigated organizations (over 90% of answers in both groups) described quality improvement as the most important objective in measurements of customer satisfaction (Table 3). Obtained answers indicate that investigated organizations are aware of the noticeable connection between the level of customer satisfaction and product quality. In both groups of enterprises the objective of "improving processes, production and products" has been pointed out as another important goal of conducting these measurements (73.7% - Polish, 78.9% American businesses). Interestingly, analysis of other responses suggests that Polish companies are seeing the potential of expanding customer satisfaction measurements

as a method of gaining customers' loyalty. This objective is rather ignored by American organizations (40.4% and 15.8% of answers in Polish and American companies respectively).

Table 3: Objective of Conducting Customer Satisfaction Measurement

Objectives	Poland		USA	
	Number of Answers	%	Number of Answers	%
Quality improvement	55	96.5	18	94.7
Improvements in products, production and processes	42	73.7	15	78.9
Gaining customers loyalty	23	40.4	3	15.8
Improving customer relationship	22	38.6	7	36.8
Improving customer service	19	33.3	4	21.1
Other	-	-	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>47</b>	<b>-</b>

*This table shows investigated organizations' objectives of conducting customer satisfaction measurements in terms of the number and percentage of obtained answers. \*Investigated enterprises could indicate more than one answer, as result the total could exceed 100 percent.*

From the follow-up questions about the potential direct relationship between customer satisfaction and enterprise profitability, we draw the conclusion that they do not see these issues as directly connected. The majority of enterprises (over 60% of answers in both groups) report that they do not conduct studies on this relationship. It should be stressed that studies on that relationship are one of the main activities in the assessment of customer satisfaction measurement efficiency.

Investigated enterprises perceive customer satisfaction more as information about level of quality than as an indicator of overall business performance. In this study we also tried to identify areas where the results of customer satisfaction measurements have been utilized. We asked respondents to indicate how the collected data has been exploited (Table 4). The investigated enterprises considered the increase of product quality level and the identification of customer needs to be the most important of them (81.8% in Polish and 73.7% in American businesses). We did not observe a significant difference among the answers in both groups except in one area - the importance of conducting measurements of customer satisfaction as a means to improve customer loyalty, where American companies put much more importance on this item than Polish organizations (68.4% and 16.4% of answers respectively).

Table 4: Utilization of Results from Customer Satisfaction Measurements

	Poland		USA	
	Number of Answers	%	Number of Answers	%
Improving product quality	45	81.8	14	73.7
Identification of customer needs	38	69.1	16	84.2
Sales increase	33	60.1	10	52.6
Improvement in competitive position	22	40.0	8	42.1
Improvement in brand recognition/reputation	21	38.2	4	21.1
Costs reduction	10	18.2	5	26.3
Customer loyalty	9	16.4	8	42.1
Improvement in employee's quality of work	6	10.9	4	21.1
Other	-	-	0	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>187</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>69</b>	<b>-</b>

*This table shows how results obtained from customer satisfaction measurements have been utilized in terms of the number and percentage of obtained answers. \*Investigated enterprises could indicate more than one answer, as result the total could exceed 100 percent.*

Because of the complexity of problems with customer satisfaction measurements, we also investigated the problems that might interfere with conducting these measurements. We asked a question about potential barriers and obstacles hindering customer satisfaction measurement (Table 5). Employees' resistance and fear of the consequences of a lack of customer satisfaction are the major barriers to customer satisfaction measurement in enterprises covered (47% of answers in both groups). In no case was lack of top management support for that type of activity indicated as an important obstacle. Interestingly employees

of American companies indicated that lack of knowledge of this issue was an important barrier, (63.2%) compared with Polish organizations (37%). Even based on collected data we could observe a much better understanding of the concept of customer satisfaction, as well as a number of methods and purposes where this concept is applied.

Investigated Polish enterprises declared that 75% of their customers are satisfied and 16% are highly satisfied. Among American organizations this was reported at the level of 79% and 15% respectively. Rampersad's studies (2001) indicate that results exceeding 75% of satisfied customers can be considered good results. As a consequence, the reported level of customer satisfaction in investigated organizations was relatively good although it represented the point of view of plenipotentiaries for quality systems and was not verified by direct opinions of customers. Furthermore, the intensity of customer satisfaction plays an important role. "Completely satisfied" customers are much more loyal than merely satisfied customers (Stauss and Neuhaus 1997). According to Urbanek (2004), in current times customers leave the company not because they are disappointed but because they are not highly satisfied and they have another option. Highly satisfied customers of Xerox were ready to purchase products of this company six times more often than customers who were just satisfied (Urbanek 2004). According to Harting (1997), however, an attempt at securing 100% satisfaction for all customers would be the path to inevitable bankruptcy, in particular when we deal with a large number of customers possessing highly diversified needs. Therefore, companies should always try to satisfy customers in the profitable way.

Table 5: Barriers that Obstruct Customer Satisfaction Measurement

Barriers to measuring customer satisfaction	Poland		USA	
	Number of answers	%	Number of answers	%
Employees' resistance (fear of consequences if low level of customer satisfaction is detected)	34	61.8	10	52.6
Employees' overload of daily activities/responsibilities	26	47.3	12	63.2
Lack of financial resources	24	43.6	9	47.4
Lack of knowledge of the issue	20	36.4	10	52.6
Lack of understanding that a complaint is valuable market information	8	14.5	5	26.3
Lack of interest in specific analysis of relations with customers	5	9.1	7	36.8
Lack of top management support	1	1.8	4	21.1
Other	-	-	-	-
<b>Total</b>	<b>118</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>-</b>

*This table shows barriers that obstruct customer satisfaction measurements in terms of the number and percentage of obtained answers.*

*\*Investigated enterprises could indicate more than one answer, as result the total could exceed 100 percent.*

The last area of this study was the assessment of actions that people responsible for quality management and customer satisfaction measurements take in the area of customer relations. We formulated statements addressing the status of involvement in activities linked to customers relating to problems of customer satisfaction (Table 6). We used a scale from 0 to 5, where 5 points meant that the activity is present to a very high extent, and 0 points meant that the given activity was absent.

We used t-test for independent variables, where we conducted statistical analysis of the means in two investigated groups. Computed statistics indicate significant differences between Polish and American companies in 18 out of 23 areas of customer relations. Interestingly, in the areas that have been ranked higher (spread 3.40 - 4.13), American companies are much more active than Polish organizations, however in the areas ranked lower (spread 1.58 – 3.31) we observed a reverse trend.

Table 6: Declaration of the Actions in the Area of Customer Relations

Statements	Poland $n_1=55$		USA $n_2=19$		t	p-value
	M	SD	M	SD		
1. We carefully listen to all comments from our customers	3.88	0.58	3.25	0.74	4.751***	0.000
2. We know our customers, their numbers and segments	3.77	0.53	4.01	0.44	-3.473***	0.003
3. We regularly update the data on our customers' needs and expectations	3.65	0.54	3.97	0.43	-2.742***	0.005
4. We treat every customer individually	3.58	0.72	3.70	0.52	-0.832	1.298
5. We foresee the needs of our customers	3.52	0.82	3.50	0.79	0.092	1.448
6. We treat complaints as a tool of communication with customers.	3.45	0.85	3.78	0.47	-2.945***	0.004
7. Complaints filed are systematically analyzed	3.45	0.83	3.75	1.13	-3.017***	0.003
8. We have established the database of our customers according to their needs	3.44	0.82	4.13	0.55	-6.899***	0.000
9. Customer Service Department works to solve customers' problems	3.42	1.19	3.8	0.65	-3.879***	0.002
10. More than 75% of our customers are satisfied	3.40	0.75	3.9	0.57	-4.571***	0.000
11. The procedure for filing and processing complaints has been developed	3.40	0.99	3.88	0.49	-3.941***	0.001
12. We measure satisfaction with our products/services among our customers	3.36	0.92	3.56	0.87	1.448	0.152
13. All employees are informed about customer satisfaction results	3.31	0.97	2.21	1.23	10.039***	0.000
14. Complaints are processed within one week at maximum	3.28	0.96	2.47	0.76	7.599***	0.000
15. The database of complaints is maintained	3.17	1.09	2.39	0.96	7.899***	0.000
16. We know the percentage of dissatisfied customers	3.07	0.89	2.22	0.67	9.146***	0.000
17. Products/services best fitting their needs are recommended to customers	3.02	1.10	2.00	1.17	9.923***	0.000
18. We maintain regular contacts with our customers	2.73	1.10	2.32	0.54	3.709***	0.000
19. Customer loyalty measurement is performed	2.59	1.16	2.42	1.06	1.389	0.142
20. Cost of gaining a new customer is known	2.46	1.13	2.50	1.23	-0.570	0.616
21. Volume of sales lost through dissatisfaction of customers is known	2.41	1.22	2.11	1.13	3.034***	0.002
22. Customer loss cost is known	2.34	1.04	1.74	1.07	5.856***	0.000
23. Regular meetings with groups of customers are organized to obtain knowledge concerning their needs	2.19	1.06	1.58	1.23	5.923***	0.000

*This table shows the results for t-test for independent variables, where  $n_1=55$  and  $n_2=19$ . Respondent's answers are ranked on the scale from 0 to 5, where 0 described that the given activity was absent, and 5 meant that the activity is present to a very high extent. Significance levels are denoted \*, \*\*, \*\*\* for the 0.1, 0.05, and 0.01 respectively.*

The results show that Polish enterprises take an active role in the following dimensions: “listening to customers,” “knowledge about customers” and “updating information about customers” (means: 3.88, 3.77, 3.65 respectively). Among American organizations the dominant areas of involvement are: “maintaining contacts with customers,” “maintaining the database of customer needs,” “knowledge about customers” and “updating information about customers” (means: 4.21, 4.13, 4.01, 3.97 respectively). In both groups we observed some areas that scored far below 3 points, such as: “customer loyalty measurement” (mean = 2.59 and 2.56), “studies on costs of customer loss” (mean = 2.34 and 2.3), “studies on costs of gaining a new customer” (mean = 2.46 and 2.13) and “volume of sales lost as a

consequence of customer dissatisfaction” (mean = 2.41 and 2.56). Larger differences between enterprises can be observed, particularly in the case of statements where the average scores were low. Quality, customer satisfaction, value for the customer and customer loyalty are important links of the cause and effect chain of generating the enterprise financial result.

As indicated by studies conducted by Helgesen (2006), the more satisfied a consumer tends to be, the higher the loyalty of the customer, although the relationship between satisfaction and loyalty is not linear, and it is influenced by psychological and situational variables (Homburg and Giering 2001, Oliver 1999). While the relationship is positive, high levels of satisfaction do not always yield high levels of loyalty (Benett and Rundle-Thiele 2004). As a consequence, enterprises should not neglect conducting customer loyalty studies.

## CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this study was to present the concept of customer satisfaction in the context of activities focused on quality management in food industry enterprises in Poland and the USA. The empirical data has been gathered through surveys distributed among food industry enterprises certified with the ISO standards in Poland and in the USA. We believe that discussed findings provide important contributions to practice and research in this area. Due to constant changes in the market, companies are trying to improve their competitive position through the process of quality management. The path to improvement in this area leads through management of customer satisfaction.

Based on our findings we see that there are a number of similarities in the approaches of measuring customer satisfaction between organizations in the food industry in Poland and the USA. The important conclusion however, is that American companies are much more familiar with the theoretical concept of customer satisfaction and have a longer tradition in doing this.

The results of this study indicate that there are only small differences between Polish and American organizations in the food industry sector, especially in the perception of the importance of conducting measurements of customer satisfaction and the variety of methods employed. Based on the conducted study we can conclude that in both countries (Poland, USA), the majority of organizations conduct measurements of customer satisfaction as a requirement of the ISO 9001:2000 standard. Polish, as well as American companies, most often utilize a modest methodology for customer satisfaction measurements (sales level, analysis of complaints) because the data is readily available and does not require implementation of additional resources. However, American organizations seem to be more knowledgeable about the concept of customer satisfaction, therefore they also widely implement other methods (surveys, benchmarking, customer interviews and customer satisfaction research).

We can evaluate this as a positive direction, and we can observe that Polish enterprises are becoming aware of the benefits of more sophisticated methods. In the area of potential usage of the data generated by customer satisfaction research, we didn't observe a significant difference between Polish and American companies. In both investigated groups the increase in product quality and identification of customer needs have been declared the most important areas of data implementation. The focus on quality improvement is logical, although biased, because the surveys for this research have been distributed among employees whose primary responsibility is involvement in quality management in investigated companies. The indication of focusing on customer needs, however, suggests that investigated companies are seeing a link between the way they satisfy customer needs and the business performance of their organizations. As with any other research, this study has several limitations. The first limitation of this study is the size of the sample, particularly the sample size of the American companies.

The main obstacle that contributed to this state was difficulty in identification of the food industry enterprises that are certified according to the ISO standards. These standards are more often implemented by the enterprises in the construction and manufacturing industries. There are also a number of auditing units that award this certification, thus there is no single one registry that would include all certified enterprises. The second limitation is the fact that the study includes only organizations in one industry and therefore might not be representative of other sectors of the market. Therefore, future research could address these issues, particularly investigating the differences between industries and taking the cross-cultural approach to a different level.

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