ABSTRACT

This paper presents the methodology that was used to assess satisfaction among users of Social Programs in Mexico and the results obtained from the pilot test. The causal model, the Mexican User Satisfaction Index (IMSU), is an adaptation to Mexico of American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI). The methodology in development is intended to become an alternative for the evaluation and improvement of Social Programs and Social Policies in Mexico.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction, Social Policies, Government Services, Social Programs, National Satisfaction Index and Quality.

1. INTRODUCTION

The work reported in this paper is part of the research project: Mexican Customer Satisfaction Index (IMSU for its name in Spanish), developed by the Universidad Iberoamericana Mexico City. Its objective is to design and implement a methodology for a National Index of Satisfaction of Beneficiaries of Social Programs in Mexico. The aim is to arrive at a standardized, comparable and reproducible methodology, based on that of the ACSI but adapted to Mexico’s conditions. This paper focuses on the results of the pilot test of the model and its questionnaires.

Mexico’s history is characterized by high levels of poverty and persistent inequality. According to Székely (2005), in 1950 88.4% of the population lived below the poverty line, and today 47% of the population (CONEVAL, 2007) still remains under this classification. For this reason the Government is obliged to generate a Social Policy that might strengthen social protection for the poorest. One of the mechanisms to implement this Policy is the creation of Social Programs.

In this sense the evaluation of Social Programs is very important. As mentioned in the study of Talukdar et al. (2005), the World Bank recommends that we hear what the users of these programs have to say about the goods and services they are receiving. The World Bank seeks to incorporate the "voice of the consumer" -consumers are mainly the poor- in its socioeconomic development projects. "Thus, the World Bank's goal to represent the voice of the poor - the" target market "- in its funding for the provision of public goods and services, is analogous to a customer-driven company’s goal to incorporate the voice of customers in its marketing of private goods." (Talukdar, et al. 2005: 101). In the case of Public Policy, Hastak et al (2001:172) mention that
“outcomes of a Policy must be evaluated in order to determine if the Policy is meeting its objectives. Evaluation must also provide feedback so that the Policy may be modified to improve its effectiveness”. This is exactly what we intend to do by measuring beneficiary satisfaction with Social Programs in Mexico. This research project seeks to identify opportunities for improvement, which may translate into changes in the operation of the programs towards a higher quality of the services offered by the Government to the poorest. In addition, this project seeks to contribute to the field of Engineering in Mexico by developing a theoretical model and a methodology to assess the performance of processes and their relative importance from the user perspective; thus providing Engineers with a tool to improve processes.

2. BACKGROUND

Social Programs

The "Plan Nacional de Desarrollo 2007-2012" (National Development Plan), establishes a series of Social commitments and Social Policies for the government. The way Public Administration carries out the Social Policies is through Social Programs. Social Programs, like Gómez (2004) defines them are "technical services related to specifically identified human needs, that tend to provide care to those groups which, because of their circumstances or conditions, are in a situation of need or marginalization" (Gómez, 2004: 31). Such groups are composed mainly of people living in poverty. All programs being evaluated in this project are in charge of the Agency for Social Development (SEDESOL for its name in Spanish). Like SEDESOL says, the primary mission of its Social Programs is "to create equal opportunities for all people, regardless of their place of birth, income, family or socio-cultural conditions, so that every citizen may have access to goods and services essential to his development” (SEDESOL, 2009).

National Satisfaction Index Models

At the international level, there is a trend to establish National Satisfaction Indexes. In 1989, the first satisfaction index, called the Swedish Customer Satisfaction Barometer (SCSB) was born (Fornell, 1992). “The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) was introduced in 1994; the Norwegian Customer Satisfaction Barometer was introduced in 1996; and the most recent development is the European Customer Satisfaction Index (ECSI)” (Johnson et al., 2001). Other countries are also developing national satisfaction indices including New Zealand, Austria, Korea, Germany, Taiwan and Hong Kong.

American Customer Satisfaction Index

The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) is a national indicator that measures the level of satisfaction among Americans about the quality of goods and services consumed. The ACSI evaluates ten sectors of the economy of the United States, covers 41 industries and more than 200 companies and federal or local government services. The satisfaction index is obtained from the treatment of the American people responses to a telephone questionnaire. The ACSI model for government has been useful to describe government programs and services in the United States and has also been successfully tested in Mexico in previous studies such as the Diconsa Rural Supply Program and the Local Development (Microrregiones) Program (Lobato et al., 2006a; Lobato et al., 2006b). Therefore the ACSI was selected to be tested and adapted to the Mexican reality in order to create a National Index for Social Programs in Mexico, the IMSU. This model is the one that has been used in the seven Social Programs that have been evaluated during this project.
3. METHODOLOGY

The IMSU board is an interdisciplinary group made up of Engineers in Quality, Statisticians and Social Scientists. Through a series of pilot test, the board has adapted the ACSI model to evaluate seven Social Programs in Mexico. We will briefly present some definitions and basic properties of the ACSI model.

ACSI Model

ACSI uses an econometric model that measures several indicators that conform an index of satisfaction as well as other indicators related to latent variables or constructs. The opinions of customers are collected through a survey and the data analyzed to obtain a description model by the method of partial least squares (PLS). The latter is an iterative procedure that integrates aspects of principal component analysis with multiple regression. What we measure are the manifest variables (survey questions), and through the model we find the value of the latent variables (including satisfaction), because the ACSI model is a system of cause-and-effect relationships (see Figure 1).

In the ACSI government model, Customer satisfaction has two antecedents: "Perceived Quality" and "Customer Expectations". The construct Perceived Quality has entries that must be determined for each case study and correspond to those Program Processes where the user has direct contact with the operation (left side components of the model). The consequences of satisfaction, according to the model, are: "Customer Complaints" and "User Trust". Satisfaction itself is a latent variable (central box in Figure 1 model), measured through multiple manifest variables, which are the questions that make up the satisfaction survey. The index produces results on a 0-100 scale. One of the primary objectives is to estimate the effect of ACSI on loyalty and trust of the user, a construct of universal importance in the assessment of current and future performance of the business (for further details on the ACSI model see “Methodology Report” ACSI, 2005).

One of the main advantages of this model is that it not only estimates customer satisfaction, but it also identifies the impact of each process experienced by the customer.
in the perceived quality. I.e. it presents an analysis of processes, where we can identify which of them need improvement and which would yield a better result, thus allowing a targeted investment.

The Federal Programs evaluated during the pilot runs included:

2. Subsidized Fluid Milk Program. Subjects: bearers of the program’s ID cards.
3. Daycare Centers Program – support for parents Subjects: working mothers and single fathers receiving the benefit.
4. Daycare Centers Program – support for owners. Subjects: owners of the centers who received support for opening or remodeling the centers.
5. Senior citizens older than 70 – cash transfers. Subjects: Senior citizens older than 70.
7. Concrete Floor Program. Subjects: Residents of homes granted a concrete floor.

A causal user satisfaction model was developed for each program. In the paragraphs below the general procedure for the design and pilot testing of the seven satisfaction models is described.

• Qualitative study. Analysis of existing information about each program and of their operation rules for a preliminary identification of key processes and main users. Extensive group interviews with the programs’ administrators were a major component of this step.

• Field trips. Also a part of the qualitative study, these trips consisted mainly of observation of the delivery of the benefits to the population, in-depth interviews with the beneficiaries (to know what processes are key to them and to know their lexical uses) and in-depth interviews with the programs’ local administrators.

• Design of the causal model. The processes that are more likely to drive user satisfaction were identified and grouped in no more than four dimensions.

• Questionnaire design. The instruments are comprised of a set of homogeneous items for user expectations, perceived quality and user satisfaction, as well as items measuring the drivers of satisfaction, which are different according to program characteristics.

• Pilot test. Questionnaires were tested in a small convenience sample with similarities to the population of each program. The pilot run pretended to test the causal model, the logistics of fieldwork and the interviewing procedure. Possible sources of variation in the responses were sought.

• The ACSI software was used to estimate the models: satisfaction indexes and significant relations. The results up to this point are reported in the rest of this paper.

The next steps of this research project (under way while this paper is being written) are:

• Conducting interviews on a national scale for each of the seven programs.
• Estimation of the final causal models.
• Analysis and interpretation of results. Identification of improvement opportunities.

4. RESULTS

We will use the Subsidized Powdered Milk Program to illustrate the results obtained from the pilot tests. The evaluation model is shown in Figure 2. Our first observation is that the main causal relations proposed by the ACSI model are confirmed for this Program: "Perceived Quality" has a significant impact (2.599) on "Customer Satisfaction", and "Customer Satisfaction" also has a significant
The evaluation model of customer satisfaction used in this paper, based on the ACSI model, is presented as a good alternative for the evaluation of the mechanisms that affect to the government's Social Policy; in this case social programs remain a way for citizens to give their opinion on whether the public policies

5. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation model of customer satisfaction used in this paper, based on the ACSI model, is presented as a good
implemented by their governments are fulfilling the objectives for which they were created and meet the needs of the population.

The evaluation model presented allows users to give feedback to the studied processes. This could lead to specific changes in the variables where improvement needs were identified, resulting in an increasing level of satisfaction among beneficiaries for these Programs.

The results presented here correspond to those obtained in the pilot test. We are currently working on the national assessment, which will render the final results of this project.

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