

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSIONS, DISCUSSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter was divided into 5 parts: 1) a summary of the study, 2) a summary of the findings, 3) discussions of customers' satisfaction with consulting services at the SMEs Coordination and Services Center, Office of SMEs Promotion (OSMEP), 4) conclusions, and 5) recommendations for further research.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

The satisfaction of the customers with consulting services and facilities provided by the SMEs Coordination and Services Center of Office of SMEs Promotion is very much important to accomplish the vision and mission of the organization because the Office of SMEs Promotion is the central organization in formulating SMEs promotional policies and strategies as well as coordinating governmental and private working system in achieving the firm and sustainable growth of small and medium enterprises. Also, its mission is serving as the country's SMEs information center and developing information systems and networks to support the operation of SMEs.

Consequently, the customers' satisfaction measurement is very crucial for the executives of Office of SMEs Promotion since they will recognize how well and effective their consulting services are perceived by customers. Also, the service providers can employ the findings to improve their consulting services in order to provide enhanced and more satisfactory services.

5.1.1 Objectives of the Study

The study of customers' satisfaction with consulting services at the SMEs Coordination and Services center provided by Office of SMEs Promotion aimed to examine the degree of satisfaction of the customers with the overall consultation services provided by Office of SMEs Promotion. Furthermore, it aimed to identify the demographic details of the customers, and to figure out their problems and suggestions for further service improvement. The service elements included facilities and location, staff and consultants, methods and procedures, and data and information availability.

5.1.2 Subjects, Materials, and Procedures

The subjects used in this study consisted of 63 males and 57 females who were all customers obtaining services at SMEs Coordination and Services Center of Office of SMEs Promotion throughout the country during December 2007 and January 2008. The targeted group of this study was those who contacted with the SMEs Coordination and Services Center for the purpose of obtaining consulting services and coordinating with the Office of SMEs Promotion in the provincial service centers and Bangkok head office.

Questionnaires were used as the instrument to collect data and were distributed only to customers who obtained the consulting service and coordinating with the service centers and requested them to return questionnaires on the same day. The questionnaire consisted of three main parts; (1) asking for general information, (2) asking for the satisfaction level of the perceived service, and (3) asking for the suggestions and comments for service improvement. All data received from the questionnaires were analyzed by using the SPSS program

5.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS

The results of the study can be summarized as follows:

5.2.1 General Information Result

From the study, it was found that more than half of the respondents were males (52.5%), while the rest were females (47.5%) in which more male respondents (31.7%) came to obtain consulting services in Bangkok. On the contrary, more females (24.2%) came to provincial service centers.

About the age of the sampled customers, most of them were around the age of 25 – 35 years old which was similar pattern in both Bangkok and provincial service centers. In addition, the respondents mostly held bachelor's degrees (60.8%). Very few respondents were educated at lower than secondary school level (1.7%).

The occupations of the respondents were collected and it shows that majority of the respondents are SMEs' entrepreneurs and owners of enterprises (64.2%). In addition, the statistical data provided that most of the respondents were previous customers (85%) who had come to obtain service and coordinate with SMEs Coordination and Services Center at least once a year. Also, it is interesting that more

provincial customers than Bangkok customers came to the center three times and above within a year. The respondents were mostly obtaining services (86.3%) while the rest would coordinate with staffs in agency to agency basis.

The findings also illustrate that the fields of consultation were similar in both Bangkok and regional service centers which was regarding to business implementation. Most of the total respondents (64.7%) obtained consulting services regarding to business development and followed by marketing management (36.3%). The respondents were also interested in training courses and attending seminars at 22.5 percent among 11 fields of consultation.

The findings of channels obtaining consulting services illustrate that the majority of the respondents came to obtain the consulting service at G. Floor, TST Tower Viphavadi-Rangsit Road, Bangkok (48.6%), while 33.1 percent of the respondents obtained consulting services at regional SMEs Joint Investment and Mentoring Service Center. There were some other channels that respondents also used to contact with Office of SMEs Promotion such as iSMEs Design Center, OSMEP Call Center, and other temporary exhibited booths.

About regional SMEs Joint Investment and Mentoring Service Center, the findings show that Samutprakarn province was highest in its numbers of customers (25%) among the total of provincial sampled customers. This could imply something about the effectiveness and hard-working character of the officials.

Also, the statistical data of the respondents' state that few customers obtained the service at iSMEs Design center. Though, there are four offices of iSMEs Design center in many provinces such as Bangkok, Chiangmai, Prae, and Songkla, very few people went to obtain the services at those centers. Only 4.1 percent of sampled customers went for consulting services at iSMEs Design center.

5.2.2 Customers' Satisfaction with Consulting Services Result

RQ 1: Are the customers satisfied with the following services elements: facilities and locations, staff and consultants at the SMEs Coordination and Services Center, methods and procedures at the service delivering, data and information available?

It was noticed that the respondents were satisfied with all areas of the service elements including facilities and location, staff and consultants, methods and procedures, and data and information available. They had the highest degree of satisfaction in the area of staff and consultants, especially satisfaction with ‘staff greet them with polite manner’, whereas the area of facilities and location got the lowest degree of satisfaction regarding the cleanliness of toilets and the adequacy of parking spaces.

In addition, the customers felt moderately good with methods and procedures in obtaining service. They were also moderately satisfied with data and information available at the service center.

To separate the satisfaction level regarding to the service centers location, it was found that Bangkok respondents were less satisfied with all service elements than regional respondents. Bangkok respondents were satisfied with staffs and consultants the most but, still, it was less than the provincial respondents felt to the staffs and consultants. The Bangkok respondents participated more in this study with the amount of 66 while there were 54 provincial respondents. With the total number of 120 respondents, the Bangkok respondents seemed to represent more than half of the respondents, this could be interpreted that Bangkok respondents could reflect true figure of the majority of the involved target group.

RQ 2: What are the degrees of customer satisfaction with consulting services at SMEs Coordination and Services Center, Office of SMEs Promotion?

The findings of the overall satisfaction towards SMEs Coordination and Services center at Office of SMEs Promotion states that the respondents in both Bangkok and provinces were satisfied with staff and consultants the most. They rated as 4.36 which could be interpreted as “Excellent”, followed by methods and procedures which was rated as 4.07 or “Good”, next was data and information available which was rated at 4.01 or “Good”, whereas the least satisfactory element of customers was rated as 3.96 or “Good” on the aspect of facilities and location.

However, the overall satisfaction for the Bangkok respondents was 4.03 or ‘Good’. The staff and consultants were rated with the highest level of satisfaction with the score of 4.26, the second highest level of satisfaction was given to the facilities and

location with the score 3.98, while data and information available was the lowest rating at 3.93.

On the other hand, overall satisfaction for the provincial respondents was 4.19 or ‘Good’ which was higher than Bangkok respondents rating. The staff and consultants were rated with the highest level of satisfaction with the score of 4.47; the second highest level of satisfaction was given to the method and procedures with the score of 4.22, followed by the data and information available at 4.11, while facilities and location had the lowest level of satisfaction with the rate of 3.94.

All in all, the over satisfaction level of respondents with consulting services at SMEs Coordination and Services Center was 4.10 which could be interpreted as “Good”.

RQ 3: Are there any differences in level of customer satisfaction regarding to the service obtained in Bangkok and provinces?

There are several differences in level of customers’ satisfaction between Bangkok and provincial service center.

The first identification, Bangkok respondents have less overall satisfaction level compared to provincial respondents. The Bangkok respondents rated the overall performance as 4.03 whereas the provincial respondents rated it at 4.19.

The second identification, the Bangkok respondents were quite dissatisfied with data and information being available the most (3.93), while provincial respondents were dissatisfied with facilities and location the most (3.94).

However, one thing in common for both Bangkok and provincial respondents was the highest degree of satisfaction which was given to the staff and consultants. The Bangkok respondents rated staff and consultants at 4.26, while provincial respondents rated them at 4.47 which both could be interpreted as “Excellent”.

RQ 4: What kinds of fields were customers satisfied with the most and which were they not satisfied with?

The results show that the most satisfying area was the staff and consultants with the score of 4.26 for Bangkok respondents and 4.47 for provincial respondents while the lowest level of satisfaction for Bangkok respondents was data and

information available which was rated at 3.93 whereas the provincial respondents had the least satisfaction for facilities and locations which was rated at 3.94.

5.2.3 Comparison of Satisfaction

After comparing the sampled customers' satisfaction, it was revealed that Bangkok respondents and provincial respondents were different in their level of satisfaction with consulting services provided by SMEs Coordination and Services Center and regional SMEs Joint Investment and Mentoring Service Center in many provinces. However, some similarities occurred in their level of satisfaction with the perceived services.

Both Bangkok and provincial sampled customers were highly satisfied with service providers of the organization. The staff and consultants got the highest score of satisfaction which could be interpreted as "Excellent" (4.26 from Bangkok and 4.47 from provinces).

Moreover, both places of respondents rated overall performances of the perceived services as "Good" which could be noted from the score of 4.03 from Bangkok respondents and 4.19 from provincial respondents.

The differences of Bangkok respondents and provincial respondents could be found in the lowest scores of satisfaction in which Bangkok respondents rated the lowest level of score for data and information available while provincial respondents had the least satisfaction with facilities and location.

One interesting finding in the study was the satisfaction level regarding to facilities and location which was the only service element that the Bangkok respondents had a higher score of satisfaction for. For the rest of service elements, provincial respondents had more satisfaction than Bangkok respondents.

5.3 DISCUSSIONS

This section concerns how the results of the study match the theories and the earlier studies. Therefore, the discussions are as follows:

This research addressed several issues relating to customers' characteristics and their satisfaction with the consulting services. Independent variables were compared in relation to the customers' satisfaction level with the consulting services. Statistical

analysis and research-based conclusions can be generalized based on information in the literature and previous research.

The results showed that the customers were satisfied with consulting services, especially with the staff and consultants. The literature indicates that the relatedness and growth needs which motivate a person at the same time, the frustration – regression component of ERG theory suggests that a person who is frustrated in trying to satisfy a higher level of need eventually will go back to the previous level. (Moorhead & Griffin, 2001). The findings in this study, however, found that the security needs of Maslow theory and Existence needs of Alderfer ERG theory were not yet satisfied, but the belongingness needs and related needs – involving the need to relate to others were prior satisfied by respondents. Therefore, it could be realized that satisfaction does not require that each need level must be satisfied before the level above it becomes important. According to the Maslow Hierarchy of needs, the security needs or the satisfaction towards places and locations should be satisfied earlier than the relationship needs. On the contrary, the customers had more satisfaction with the staff and consultants while they were dissatisfied with the places of the service center.

According to the results gained from the study, there was only significant difference of satisfaction level in the area of methods and procedures between Bangkok and provincial customers. Based on the customers' place of received service, the Bangkok customers were more frustrated with methods and procedures than the provincial customers even though they were served with the same basis of service delivery. Moreover, the similar study indicates that personnel were more frustrated with too many steps in receiving and sending documents, time consuming process and lack of promptness by superiors to endorse the document delayed the transfer the documents (Torpradit, 2007). This could imply that more documents and processes are required for Bangkok customers but there are less methods and procedures in receiving the services.

Even though customers were satisfied with consulting services at SMEs Coordination and Service Center at Office of SMEs Promotion, the customers recommended that the SMEs Coordination and Service Center in provinces should be located in outstanding and easy to reach locations with better facilities and more toilets provided. Correspondingly, the similar study indicates that basic facilities such as

toilets, direction and signage should be given the most concern in terms of clearness and cleanliness (Chuanchuen, 2007).

In addition, the findings of this research shows that 85 percent of the total respondents were repeat customers that had been contacted with the service center at least once. The literature (Nulman, 2000) points out that a real customer is a person who becomes accustomed to buying from you, without a strong record of repeat purchases or obtain services, this person is not your customer, he or she is only buyer. Thus, the study reveals that the customers who came to obtain consulting services and coordinate with SMEs Coordination and Services Center are 85 percent real customers who have visited the service center at least once within a year. This group of people requires excellent customer service.

Still, numerous obstacles happen in the way of delivering best customer service. Harris (2000) said that many common barriers include management attitude, unreliable equipment, restrictive company policies, difficult-to-understand and out-of-date procedures. These barriers are mostly beyond the control of the customer service provider. However, there are some barriers to excellent customer service that are within the control of the customer service provider. These are challenges to the staff and executives at the SMEs Coordination and Services Center as to whether they can be overcome through diligent effort. Those barriers that can be overcome are laziness, poor communication skills, poor management time, attitude, moodiness, lack adequate training, inability to handle stress, insufficient authority, serving customers, and inadequate staff (Harris, 2000, p.4). After the real customers are satisfied with service, they become ambassadors to new customers anyway.

5.4 CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions can be drawn from the discussion above.

5.4.1 The customers were satisfied with overall area of consulting services, especially with the staff and consultants.

5.4.2 The customers were satisfied with the staff and consultants the most but they had least satisfaction with the facilities and locations.

5.4.3 The first priority where SMEs Coordination and Service Center should improve was facilities and location as well as data and information available.

5.4.4 The Bangkok customers had a lower satisfaction level than provincial customers' satisfaction which was demographics that caused statistically significant differences in satisfaction with the consulting services.

5.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made for further research.

5.5.1 The major limitation of the study was the generalization of the data collected from only particular period of time. The generalization of the study is limited to time obtaining consulting services (only one and a half month) and sample size. In the absence of a larger base of data, a large sample size may extend some degree of generalization.

5.5.2 This study does not account for customers' financial status such as income or business earnings. Thus, the results may express the true degree of satisfaction regarding also to their financial status. Because most customers have problems that they could not sell their products well which mean lack of liquidity in their business, we need to analyze the financial status of the customers to deliver the right consulting service and improve the right field of consultation.

5.5.3 Only willing customers answered the questionnaire. This created bias of analyzing by either favorable or unfavorable responses, in which it does not represent the population in the study area. Therefore, the feedback should be collected from every customer who obtains service.