

PERCEPTION OF INTERNAL CUSTOMERS OF A SERVICE COMPANY, CASE STUDY: HUMAN RESOURCES DEPARTMENT

PERCEPCIÓN DE LOS CLIENTES INTERNOS DE UNA EMPRESA DE SERVICIOS. CASO PRÁCTICO: EL DEPARTAMENTO DE RECURSOS HUMANOS

García González Juan Manuel

National Technological Institute of Mexico/IT of Chihuahua II
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-8531-4938>

juan.gg@chihuahua2.tecnm.mx

Silva Martínez Mario Héctor

National Technological Institute of Mexico/IT of Chihuahua II
<https://orcid.org/0009-0005-0659-9004>

mario.sm@chihuahua2.tecnm.mx

Martínez Vela Carlos Alberto

National Technological Institute of Mexico/IT of Chihuahua II
<https://orcid.org/0009-0000-4374-2838>

carlos.mv@chihuahua2.tecnm.mx

García Guerrero Braulio Rene

National Technological Institute of Mexico/IT of Chihuahua II
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1285-2924>

braulio.gg@chihuahua2.tecnm.mx

López Martínez Brenda

National Technological Institute of Mexico
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-2401-5078>

brelopez8405@gmail.com

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Abstract-- This study explores how first-semester Business Management Engineering students in Mexico perceive and use artificial intelligence in their daily academic lives. Researchers surveyed 31 students between August and December 2025 to understand what they really think about tools such as ChatGPT and similar programs.

The results are quite revealing: students are very enthusiastic about the potential of AI to improve their learning and even their quality of life. However, not everything is rosy. Although they feel comfortable using these tools, they recognize that they are not as easy to use as they seem. Most interestingly, they show surprising maturity in identifying the risks: they know that they can become dependent on them, that they could affect their critical thinking, and that they facilitate plagiarism.

Keywords— Education, Students, Artificial Intelligence, Perception, Technology.

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INTRODUCTION

In today's dynamic and highly competitive business environment, organizations have recognized that service quality is not limited exclusively to external customer service, but rather finds its genesis in the effective management of human talent and employee satisfaction. This premise is particularly relevant in

service companies, where the human factor constitutes the main asset and competitive differentiator (Heskett et al., 1994; Zeithaml & Bitner, 2002).

The concept of the internal customer has become one of the pillars of organizational strategies that consist of Total Quality Management. Employee satisfaction and commitment are related to organizational efficiency, creativity, and the financial success of the business. However, this proven theory is absent from management practices that consider the employee experience to be the core of organizational success.

A company's human resources department plays a key role in the organization's relationships with its employees, both as an internal service provider and as a designer of the overall work experience. Because of this unique position, the human resources department handles a wide variety of important functions, from simple administrative tasks such as payroll, recruitment, and benefits, to more complex strategic work in organizational development, corporate culture, and change management (Ulrich & Brockbank, 2005).

When employees form perceptions about human resource services, it is not limited to that instance alone; rather, it is a phenomenon that permeates the entire work experience and affects important factors such as commitment to the organization, job satisfaction, intention to stay, and ultimately, performance at individual and collective levels (Guest, 2017). Human resources management that is efficient, accessible, and attentive, and that focuses on employee development, can stimulate commitment. Conversely, a negative perception can trigger emotional detachment and loss of productivity, as well as worsen the organizational climate.

The paradox here lies with a department that is a key component of a company's strategy. Considerable time and money are allocated to measuring how satisfied customers are. However, the same type of measurement involving employees and the human resources department is neglected or addressed only superficially. This paradox contributes to the stagnation of an organization's development and improvement of its performance.

This study examines service employees' perceptions of the quality, impact, timeliness, and customer orientation of human resource services. These types of analyses are relevant to the following current conditions:

- Management of remote and hybrid work: Management of work practices that require the redesign of traditional human resource management functions.

- Digital transformation: the advent of human resource information systems (HRIS) and employee self-service systems that fundamentally alter the nature of contact between employees and human resources.
- Younger generations are expecting more flexibility in terms of work arrangements and personalized arrangements. They want to receive feedback faster than their older counterparts and expect feedback to be given through people management practices that are formalized at the organizational level.
- There is a greater focus and shift toward employee well-being due to the recognition that effective functioning includes an emotional, mental, and physical element.

The main objective of this research is to understand how internal customers perceive the quality of services offered by the human resources department of a company in the service industry in order to understand the strengths, opportunities, and links with relevant organizational variables.

BACKGROUND

The last few decades have seen significant advances in the study of the role of human resources in organizations and the quality of their internal services/customers. Both academia and the professional sphere have contributed to significant advances. Three dominant models have evolved from the following domains: the evolution of the internal customer concept, the literature on human resources service quality, and positivist research in the service industry.

Evolution of the Concept of Internal Customer

The idea of internal customers comes from Total Quality Management (TQM). In simple terms, it means looking at customer needs from within an organization rather than from outside. The first authors to note that employees are an organization's primary market were Berry et al. (1976). In doing so, they established the first theoretical elements of internal marketing. Grönroos (1981) then went further by stating that external customer satisfaction cannot be achieved without service provider satisfaction, viewing the service provider as an “internal customer” of the organization.

Service companies in Latin America can use Bohnenberger's (2005) internal marketing model, which focuses on the internal customer and explains how it improves the service climate and service quality. Internal marketing in Bohnenberger's studies showed that Brazilian companies with High Internal Marketing Practice (H.I.M.P.) lead to greater organizational commitment and decrease employee turnover.

More recently, Lings and Greenley (2010) refined the construct by developing the INTMARKOR scale, a validated instrument for measuring internal market orientation. Their findings confirmed that organizations with greater internal customer orientation perform better in terms of job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behaviors, and business performance.

Service Quality in Human Resources

Many researchers have modified classic service quality models and applied them to the evaluation of service quality in human resources departments. One example is Gilbert (2000), who was the first to use the SERVQUAL model to evaluate human resources services in organizations in the United Kingdom. He lists five dimensions of service quality in the context of human resources services: Tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. Studies of Gilbert's gaps found responsiveness and empathy difficulties. Employee expectations in these cases are higher than what the human resources department offers.

In today's world, companies operate a little differently. For example, Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggest 'the strength of the human resource system'. To understand how people in a company practice the system, it is important to know the structure and encourage participants to practice the structure. The framework shows the level of impact that practices could have on participant performance and behavior. To obtain better participant performance, the practices in the framework must be distinct, consistent, and agreed upon.

Nishii et al. (2008) drew on this perspective when they showed ... There is a mediating effect whereby employees' attributions regarding management motives influence employees' perceptions of human resource practices. If employees believe that human resource practices are implemented to foster their growth and interests, they become even more satisfied, committed, and perform to the best of their abilities. Conversely, if employees believe that the purpose of human resource practices is economic or controlling, this can cause a negative effect, and employee perceptions may be at the lower end of the scale.

In Latin America, Calderón et al. (2010) conducted a study in Colombian companies on the relationship between human management and organizational commitment, identifying that the perception of organizational justice in HR processes is a significant predictor of employees' affective commitment. Their findings underscore the importance of transparency, fairness, and effective communication in human

talent management. The results of his research show that in human resource management, transparency, fairness, and efficient communication are of real value.

Research in the Service Sector

Specific attributes of the service industry make studying the internal customer perception more pertinent. Lovelock and Wirtz (2011) state that for service firms where human interaction is instrumental to the provision of value, effective people management is a success determinant that is hard to imitate. Their studies show that service firms with high internal customer satisfaction consistently achieve above average results in external customer satisfaction and profitability.

In their meta-analysis of 52 studies covering more than 12,000 business units, Schneider et al. (2009) empirically confirmed for the first time the existence of 'service climate' as a legitimate construct of an organization. Service climate, understood as the collective perception of the practices, procedures, and behaviors that are expected and rewarded in relation to service, was shown by Schneider et al. (2009) to contribute positively to customer and organizational satisfaction, loyalty, and overall performance.

Garg and Dhar (2017) focused their research on the insurance sector in India. They studied the impact of human resource practices on organizational commitment and employee performance. The authors noted that development, communication, recognition, and work-life balance practices help predict service commitment, which in turn improves the quality of services provided to policyholders.

Bagyo (2019) studied the relationship between internal marketing and job satisfaction and employee performance within the Indonesian insurance industry. It was established that internal customer orientation significantly mediates the relationship between people management and organizational performance. Furthermore, his model suggests that organizational improvement comes from increased employee performance and service value through organizational investments in training, development, and people-oriented management.

There is still early research focused on customer perception in human resources in Ecuador, but there are some contributions. For example, Amaya et al. (2020) diagnosed the organizational climate of companies in the service sector in Guayaquil. Some of the variables identified were integrated communication, internal leadership, and organizational commitment. Their suggestions indicate that human resources should be more consultative and service-oriented.

Contemporary Trends and Research Gaps

Stone et al. (2015) reported that digital changes in HR, through changes in HRIS systems and self-service portals, have changed employee expectations regarding efficiency, ease, and personalization in relation to HR services. Employees have dehumanized their relationships with HR. Stone et al. (2015) suggest that even if technology can improve efficiency, the operational balance between technology and human aspects should be discouraged.

Parry and Battista (2019) analyzed the impact of merging corporate social networks and collaborative tools on the flow of communication between human resources and employees. While these tools can offer instant feedback and assist in the collaborative construction of solutions, they can also create an expectation of instant communication. This can be especially concerning for human resources units that are limited in resources and budget.

Carnevale and Hatak (2020) studied how the pandemic forced a quick shift to remote work for employees, and the immediate changes (or lack of changes) that HR departments had to make. They found that organizations where the HR departments were flexible, open communicators and prioritized employees, had employees experience lower work-related stress and had the organization demonstrate higher levels of resilience.

Even with this research, there are still serious gaps in the literature. Research that integrates the internal customer's point of view remains limited in Latin America and especially in the insurance industry in Ecuador. There are also few studies that use mixed methods to take into account service perception in quantitative dimensions and employee experience with qualitative dimensions of human resources.

This research intends to fill the perception gaps of internal customers of the Human Resources department and analyzes an Ecuadorian insurance company case study through the perceptions of service quality, organizational climate, service training, service culture, etc. This study provides an understanding of different HR practices and the employee experience to assist in the constant improvement of personnel management in the service industry.

METHODS

Research Design

A mixed approach with a quantitative predominance was chosen, a methodological hybrid that allows stories to be told with numbers without losing sight of the fact that behind each piece of data there is a person who arrived late to their desk because HR did not process their vacation request on time. The study

is descriptive-correlational, cross-sectional, with a non-experimental design that respects the natural flow of work dynamics without artificially intervening in them.

Context and Participants

The setting for this research is an educational services provider. The study population consisted of the internal clients of the HR staff themselves.

A non-probabilistic convenience sampling was used, as not all samples can be probabilistic when working with limited resources and tight deadlines, seeking to achieve the greatest possible representativeness within operational constraints. Participation was voluntary, anonymous, and the absolute confidentiality of responses was guaranteed, which were fundamental aspects for people to share their perceptions without fear of reprisals or identification.

There was a considerable mix of ages, with new employees in their twenties just starting out to older employees with years of experience in the industry. All of these employees came from different departments, from sales to technology and administration. All of these different backgrounds give us the opportunity to see the same problem in the organization in different ways.

Data Collection Procedure

Data collection was carried out using an electronic questionnaire, because we are in the 21st century and paper is for the nostalgic; this allowed participants to answer the questionnaire from their computers or mobile devices at the time and place of their choice. This virtual modality had multiple advantages: immediacy in data capture, reduction of transcription errors, ease of subsequent analysis, and, perhaps most importantly, a sense of privacy that probably generated more honest responses than if someone from HR were looking over their shoulders.

The first step in the process involved obtaining approval from the company's senior management (an inevitable step, albeit a rather bureaucratic one) to address the purpose, scope, and ethical concerns of the study. After that, a broad call for participation was sent out, along with the informed consent document, which explained the participant's rights, how the information could be used, and the guarantee of confidentiality. Participation was completely voluntary, and no one was required to participate.

The collection window remained open for approximately two weeks, long enough for people to respond without pressure but not so long that the topic lost relevance or participants forgot about the survey in their inboxes. Friendly reminders were sent, never invasive, to maximize the response rate without becoming that annoying email that everyone ends up deleting without reading.

Data Analysis

The collected data was treated with the respect it deserves: cleaned, coded, and organized into a matrix that allowed for systematic analysis. Descriptive statistics were used as the main tool—frequencies, percentages, measures of central tendency, distributions—because sometimes simplicity is more revealing than complexity. The goal was not to impress with sophisticated mathematical models but to understand patterns, trends, and critical points.

Specialized software was used for processing (probably Excel or SPSS, tools that, although sometimes ridiculed by purist statisticians, perform their function perfectly when used appropriately). The results were visualized using graphs and tables that transform rows of data into visual narratives that are understandable even to those who do not speak the language of statistics.

The analysis did not stop at reporting percentages; it explained the relationships between variables, comparisons made between different demographic groups, and ranges between different departments. For example: Do people aged 25 to 45 perceive HR in the same way? Is there a difference between commercial and administrative areas? Does the perception of service quality differ according to gender? These second-level questions are what really make this study worthwhile.

Ethical Considerations

The analysis did not stop at reporting percentages; it explained the relationships between variables, comparisons made between different demographic groups, and ranges between different departments. For example: Do people aged 25 to 45 perceive HR in the same way? Is there a difference between commercial and administrative areas? Does the perception of service quality differ according to gender? These second-level questions are what really make this study worthwhile.

It was ensured that the results would be reported in aggregate form, without singling out specific departments in a way that could lead to stigmatization or retaliation. The information collected was stored in secure systems with restricted access, and a commitment was made to destroy personal data once the analysis was complete. Because if one thing should be clear, it is this: the pursuit of organizational knowledge never justifies violating the dignity or safety of the people who generously share their experience.

Limitations of the Study

No research is perfect, and recognizing limitations is not an admission of failure but an exercise in intellectual honesty. This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the

results. First limitation: non-probability sampling prevents the findings from being generalized to the entire population with strict statistical rigor. The results are indicative, suggestive, and guiding, but not conclusive in the most rigorous sense of the term.

Second limitation: the cross-sectional method shows us that there is a specific moment in time when this ‘snapshot’ could look different if taken 6 months earlier or later. Depending on recent events (restructuring, new people, an organizational crisis), these HR perceptions could change, but this study is not able to capture these time-related changes.

Third limitation: Although the instrument was developed with great care, the design did not undergo rigorous psychometric validation processes. In simpler terms, the instrument measures something relevant to the perception of the service, but we lack the universal certainty that it measures what it is intended to measure with the accuracy of a scientifically validated instrument.

Fourth limitation: With respect to the educational service provider’s context, it requires adjustment to generalize the findings to other domains, organizations, or contexts. What is workable or unworkable about this initiative could be entirely different in a technology startup, an NGO or a government agency.

TOOL

General Description

The instrument used to evaluate internal customers in this research is a structured 14-question survey designed to measure the perception of service quality, training, and organizational commitment among employees of an educational services provider.

Structure and Characteristics

Demographic Data

The survey begins by collecting basic information:

- Gender (Female/Male)
- Age (18-28, 29-39, 40 and above)

Types of Questions

Dimensions Evaluated

1. Quality of Interdepartmental Service

- Identification of problems between areas (P1)
- Areas with the most complaints from policyholders (P2)
- Response times to requests (P3)

- Characteristics of claims service: speed, efficiency, and problem-solving ability (P4)
2. Organizational Climate and Attitude
- Perception of attitude in different areas (P5)
 - Level of staff motivation (P9)
3. Training and Competencies
- Staff training assessment (P6)
 - Priority skills for hiring (P7)
 - Investment in training programs by area (P8)
4. Organizational culture
- Existence of a culture of service toward internal customers (P10)
 - Established service parameters (P12)
 - Evaluation methods applied (P13)
5. External Customer Service
- Quality of service offered to external customers through specific variables (P11): attitude, eye contact, advice, understanding, and willingness
6. Willingness to Change
- Need to implement improvements (P14)

RESULTS

Figure 1 shows the gender distribution.

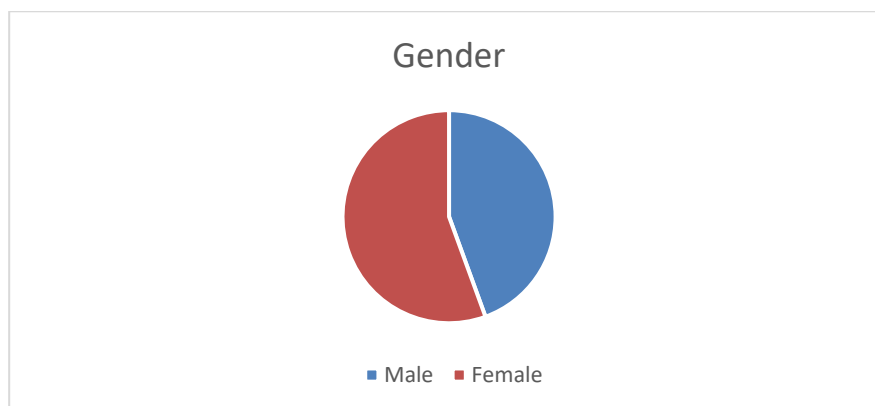


Figure 1. *Gender distribution.*

This figure shows the breakdown between female and male participants in the study. It is the typical demographic starting point that every researcher uses to contextualize who responded to the survey. The

interesting thing here is not just counting heads but understanding whether there is balance or whether one gender is overrepresented, which could skew perceptions of HR depending on whether certain policies or services affect men and women differently.

Figure 2 shows the age distribution: 18-28, 29-39, 40 and above.

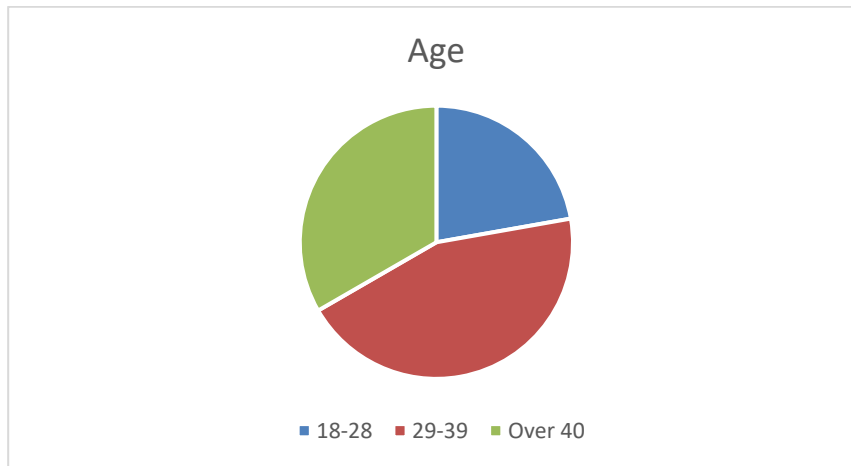


Figure 2. *Age distribution.*

The graph is revealing because there are likely to be different expectations regarding human resources depending on age. People in their 20s tend to appreciate improvisation and the ability to develop quickly. People in their 30s tend to seek more concrete benefits and a supportive environment for the stability they seek. People in their 40s and older tend to value security and want to be appreciated for their experience.

Figure 3 represents the Interdepartmental Service Quality dimension

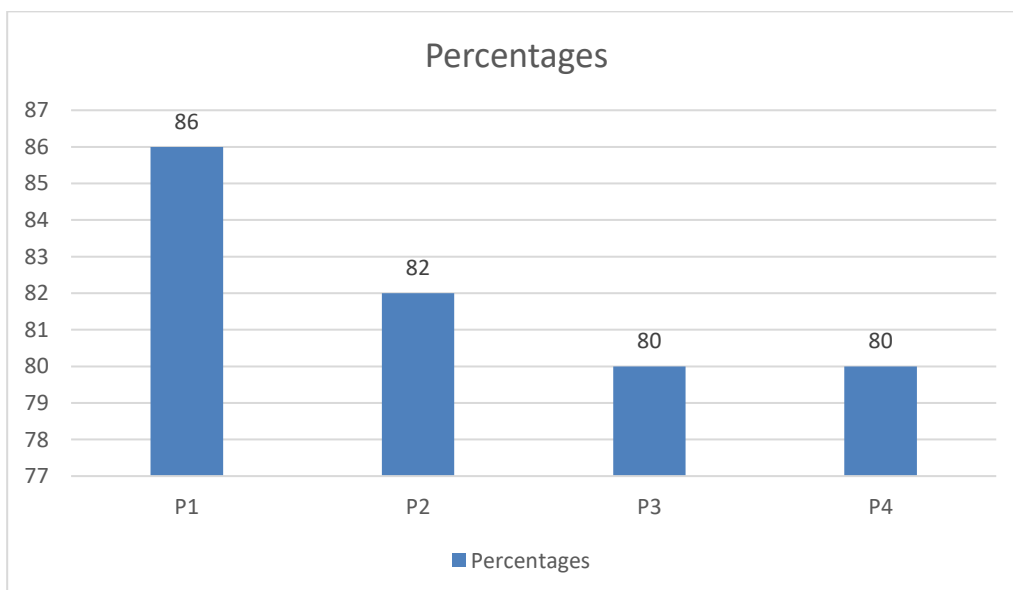


Figure 3. *Interdepartmental Service Quality dimension.*

This dimension measures the quality of collaboration between the different parts of an organization. It does not only measure courtesy, but also the operational efficiency refers to how quickly administrative and technical requests are responded to. We know that the average score was 82.

Figure 4 represents the Organizational Climate and Attitude dimension.

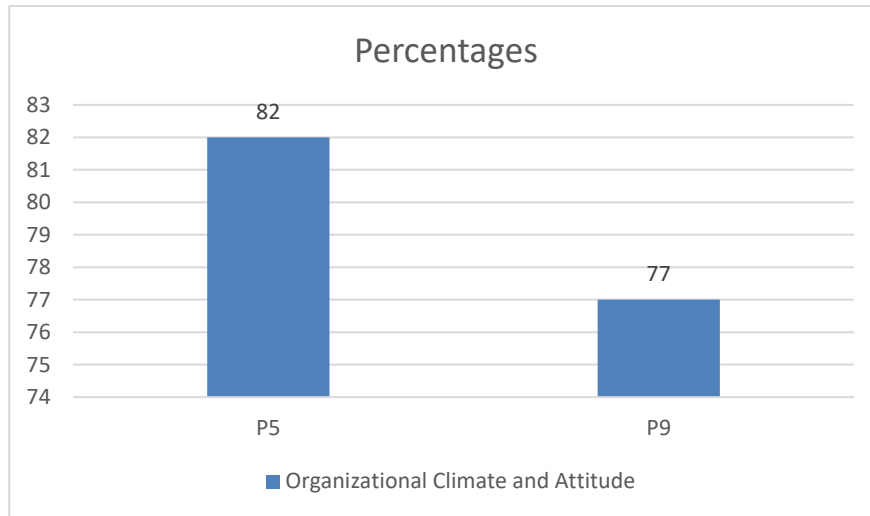


Figure 4. *Organizational Climate and Attitude dimension.*

This part measures how enthusiastic people are and how willing they are to help. It attempts to find out whether coworkers genuinely want to help or if they simply do not care. The average score was 79.5.

Figure 5 represents the Training and Competencies dimension

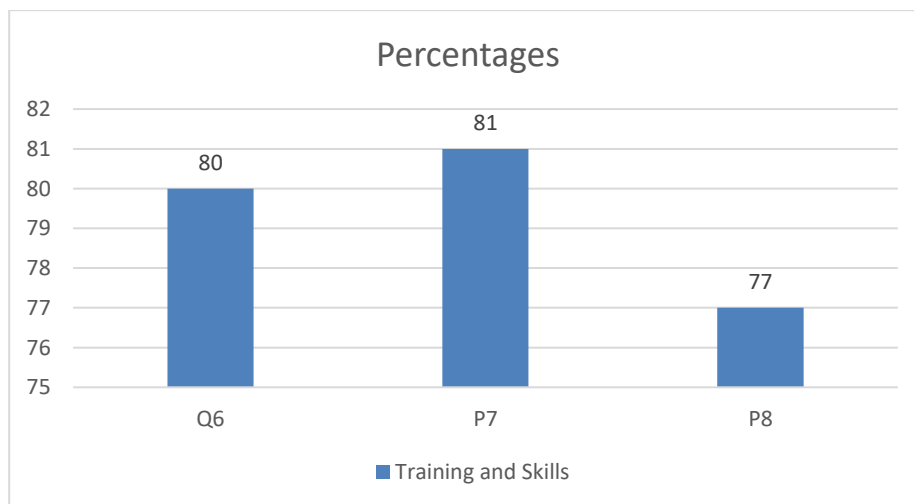


Figure 5. *Training and Competencies dimension.*

The interpretation of this figure focuses on the development of intellectual capital. It evaluates whether current training programs are sufficient and whether investment in training is distributed strategically across areas. The average score obtained was 79.3.

Figure 6 represents the Organizational Culture dimension

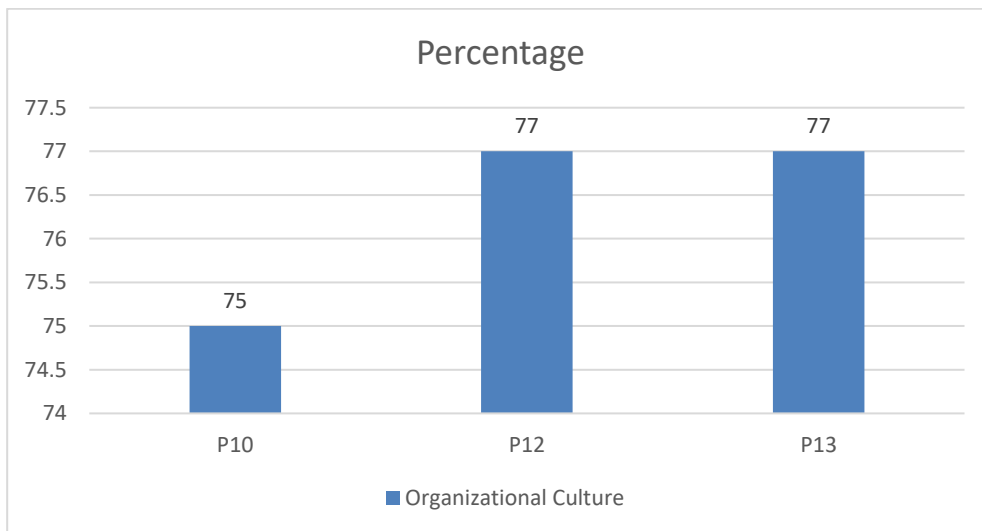


Figure 6. *Organizational Culture dimension.*

Here, the degree of institutionalization of internal service is analyzed. The figure examines whether attention to colleagues is governed by clear and formal parameters or whether it is left to the free will of the individual. The average obtained was 76.3.

Figure 7 represents the External Customer Service dimension

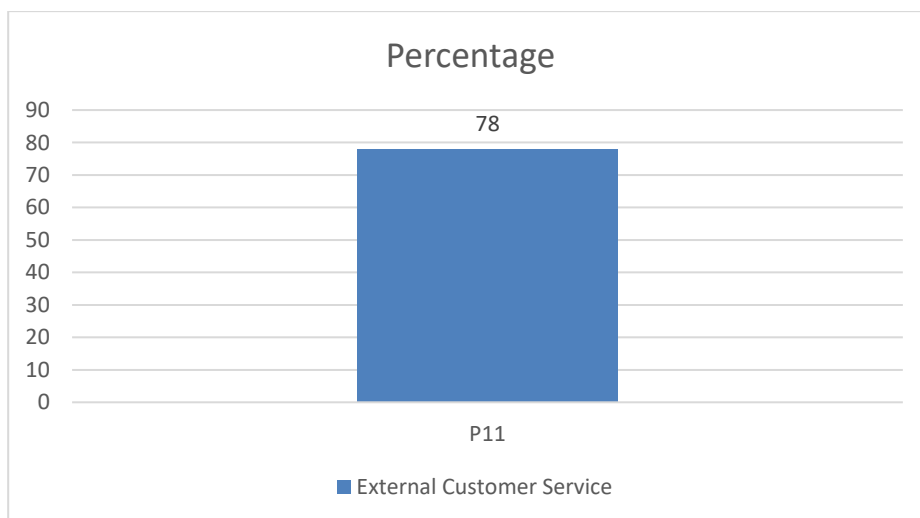


Figure 7. *External Customer Service dimension.*

This dimension connects the internal experience with the impact on the market. It analyzes direct behavioral variables such as empathy, eye contact, and professional advice. The average obtained was 78.

Figure 8 represents the Willingness to Change dimension.

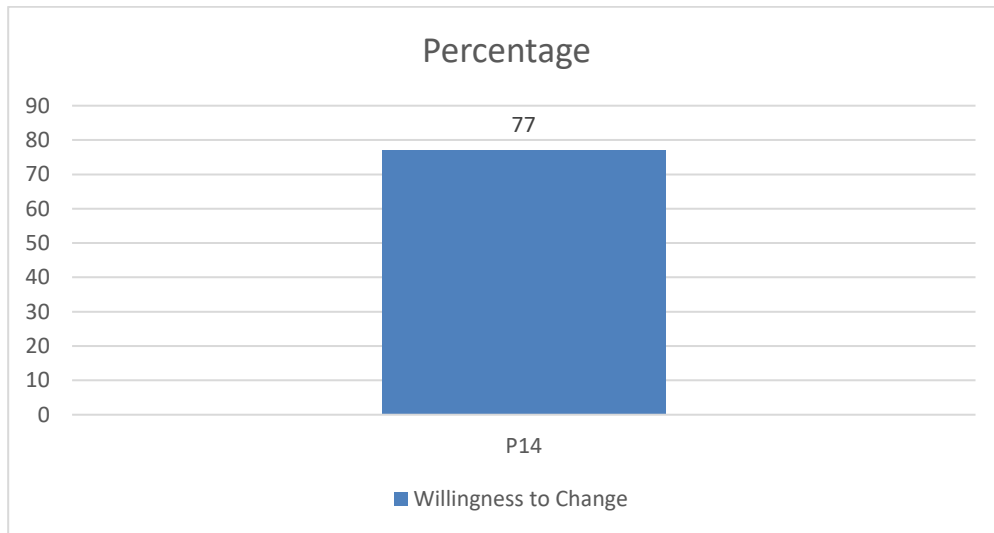


Figure 8. *Willingness to Change dimension.*

This figure measures the resilience and openness to innovation of the workforce. It reflects the collective awareness of the need to implement improvements in current processes. The average score was 77.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this research corroborate that the internal customer's perception of the Human Resources (HR) department is a multidimensional construct that directly impacts the operations and culture of service companies. The results obtained in the different dimensions suggest an organization with a solid operational base but with significant challenges in institutionalizing its service culture.

The Interdepartmental Service Quality dimension obtained the highest average (82). This data is significant, since efficiency in response times and the ability to solve technical and administrative requirements are pillars of the "strength of the HR system." As Bowen and Ostroff (2004) suggest, when HR practices are perceived as consistent and efficient, organizational ambiguity is reduced and collective performance is facilitated.

With an average of 79.5, the Organizational Climate and Attitude dimension reflects a predominantly positive environment. However, it is imperative not to underestimate the existing gap, as Nishii et al. (2008) indicate that the impact of management practices depends on the attributions that employees make

about the company's intentions. A healthy internal service attitude is the necessary precursor to a successful external "service climate," aligning with the service-utility value chain thesis of Heskett et al. (1994).

The greatest concerns relate to Organizational Culture (76.3) and Willingness to Change (77). The low score for culture indicates that, even when there is goodwill, internal customer service lacks formal measurement and service delivery standards. The absence of such institutionalization paves the way for highly variable service delivery. Similarly, a moderate readiness for change indicates a window of opportunity in relation to digital transformation; however, Stone et al. (2015) warn that in the implementation of HRIS systems, there is a concern that technological efficiency will lead to the dehumanization of the employment relationship.

The vision of External Customer Service (78) reflects management from within. This goes hand in hand with Grönroos' (1981) perception that the employee is the organization's first market. If human resources do not succeed in maximizing the employee (internal customer) experience, the quality perceived by the policyholder or end customer will always be limited.

CONCLUSIONS

This study corroborates the internal customers' evaluation of the Human Resources department as a pivotal factor in the organization's well-being and the external service quality. With respect to the evaluation of the collected data, the following points are made.

The relationship between the External Customer Service factor (78 points) and Interdepartmental Management (82 points) is evidence that a productive HR administrative service allows employees to demonstrate the level of empathy and consultation that the market expects.

Strength in Operational Efficiency: The organization demonstrates outstanding capacity in resolving technical and administrative requirements. This operational agility is fundamental, since, according to the literature, the "strength" of an HR system depends on its processes being perceived as distinctive and consistent by the workforce.

Vulnerability in Cultural Institutionalization: The largest gap in the Culture Division is the Organizational Culture Dimension (76.3 points). A deeper analysis leads to the conclusion that the most critical approach to be adopted is the shift from a service model based on individual will to one that is centered on definable service parameters and systematic evaluation. In the absence of this change, the quality of internal services will be unpredictable at best and, at worst, the quality of service may simply be absent.

Training as a Strategic Focus: The most highly rated area (79.3 points) is investment in training, but we cannot stop there either. We need to focus on training as an emotional anchor. For training to impact performance, it is crucial that employees feel that training has a purpose beyond operational oversight.

Resilience and Openness to Change: The evident willingness of staff to change (77 points) is testimony to the fact that the foundations for change are in place for the improvement of human management processes. However, it should be clear that in any future digital transformation, the balance between automation and human contact must be preserved to avoid work isolation and the psychosocial deterioration of the organization.

Future lines of research

Below are two lines of future research derived from the analysis and theoretical basis of the study:

Impact of digitization on the humanization of internal service: It is pertinent to investigate how the implementation of human resource information systems (HRIS) and self-service platforms affects the balance between operational efficiency and the warmth of human interaction. Given the risk of dehumanizing the employee-HR relationship, future studies should evaluate whether process automation in service companies strengthens or weakens emotional commitment and the perception of organizational justice in the Latin American context.

Influence of internal marketing on resilience and external customer performance: It is suggested that the causal relationship between internal marketing strategies and the responsiveness of employees to organizational crises be explored in greater depth. It is essential to determine whether a robust internal customer orientation not only improves the work environment but also acts as a predictor of organizational citizenship behaviors that directly impact end-customer loyalty and satisfaction in highly interactive sectors.

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COLLABORATIVE WORK TABLE

Role	Author(s)
Conceptualization	García González Juan Manuel
Method	Silva Martínez Mario Héctor, García Guerrero Braulio Rene
Software	Martínez Vela Carlos Alberto, López Martínez Brenda
Validation	García González Juan Manuel
Formal Analysis	Silva Martínez Mario Héctor, García Guerrero Braulio Rene
Research	Martínez Vela Carlos Alberto, López Martínez Brenda
Resources	García González Juan Manuel
Data curation	Silva Martínez Mario Héctor, García Guerrero Braulio Rene

Writing - Preparation of the original draft	Martínez Vela Carlos Alberto, López Martínez Brenda
Writing - Review and editing	García González Juan Manuel