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Author(s): J. Hah, J. O'Bryan, D. O'Neill, W. Powell and A. Schaff

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Abstract: Describes an application of Total Quality Management that establishes a baseline measure to the current customer satisfaction.

Following this, the paper suggests actions the consumer can take to improve the quality of the shopping experience.

**Increase Consumer Satisfaction When Grocery
Shopping**

J. Hah, J. O-Bryan, D. O'Neill, W. Powell, A. Schaff

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"QUALITY ONE" QUALITY IMPROVEMENT TEAM PROJECT

INCREASE CONSUMER SATISFACTION WHEN GROCERY SHOPPING

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Dr. Milosevic

Submitted by Team Members:

Jay Hah
Jeff O'Bryan
Dave O'Neill
Wade Powell
Anatole Schaff

ABSTRACT

Due to the current state of consumer dissatisfaction, grocery shopping was identified as a practical application of total quality management principles. Because of the inability of the customer to affect all facets of the experience, attributes of grocery shopping were chosen that could be controlled by the shopper and directly correlated to improve the level of satisfaction. The attributes identified were time and money. Thus, the objective of the "Quality One" Quality Improvement Team project was decided as "to increase the level of consumer satisfaction through the minimization of time and money expended".

Research was performed to evaluate the magnitude of the problem. A survey was created and implemented to gather consumer related behaviors and tendencies. Targets in terms of time and money were developed. The consumer data was evaluated to identify causes of the problem. The problem causes were translated into countermeasures and justified. The countermeasures were then simplified into easy to use corrective actions called the "Ten Shopping Commandments". The "Ten Shopping Commandments" were based on the most successful behaviors and tendencies of the average shopper as positively correlated to the research information.

To verify the success of the corrective actions a second survey questionnaire was developed and implemented onto a focus group and made available to potential consumers over the INTERNET. All countermeasures listed in the "Ten Shopping Commandments" were found successful by the focus group. Each target set by the team was attained. Substantial improvement was found by the consumers when applying the process, especially those who had not applied a similar method previously. Consumers saved approximately 11% and 18% regarding money and time respectively applying the process as recommended by the team. All shoppers applying the "Ten Shopping Commandments" felt the process increased the level of satisfaction of the experience.

Due to the success of the process the concept was standardized to all purchasing ventures.

Even though the team will disband at the end of the quarter the data gathered from the INTERNET web page will be revisited for the next six months to further verify the study results.

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PROBLEM DEFINITION

Grocery shopping is not a looked-forward-to activity in peoples lives. Car rental agencies rate higher in consumers minds than grocery shopping at supermarkets (19). Consumers enter supermarkets leery of what games will be played on them. Congested aisles, spotty price labeling, missing sale items and long check-out counter waits only exacerbate consumer dissatisfaction.

As our society becomes increasingly complex, simplifying the necessities of life will become more and more urgent. Considering the average consumer household spends approximately one half hour per week per person grocery shopping totaling at least 104 hours per year for the average family of four, shouldn't this activity be fun (8)? After all, isn't the principle of life to have fun? As more families are forced to become dual income and free-time is at a premium the choice of the consumer will be to minimize cost and time which are all directly related to satisfaction. Currently men take responsibility for 30% of the average households shopping needs. Since the majority of households in the U.S. cannot delegate the shopping of basic goods to another, it is a necessity that this time and be minimized.

Thus, the problem our team will attempt to solve is to decrease the time and money spent by the average consumer while shopping so as to increase satisfaction.

CURRENT PROBLEM SITUATION

Many attributes of supermarkets increase or decrease the pleasure the consumer has with their grocery shopping experience over and above the obvious: price, sales, availability, quality of products, store cleanliness, and the courtesy of the employees, not to mention the policy of the organizations themselves. Is the supermarket fair to its employees? Is the store easy to traverse or must one plan on spending an exorbitant amount of time when wishing to acquire a minimal number of items? Even if the actual gathering of required items is short, is it all for naught when one must still wait in the check-out line for an excessive amount of time. Are one's shopping trips expensive regardless of what is purchased?

Studies show that these considerations all weigh heavily on consumers' minds. One study found that quality of items, store cleanliness and courteousness of employees ranked higher than price (13). This does not imply that price is not important, though. Fifty-one percent of consumers purchase unplanned sale items (13). Primarily store brands are purchased when the consumer is on a limited budget (13). Consumers even drive several miles to a variety of locations to obtain the best price on frequently purchased items (5). Checkout lines are rated as one of the most annoying factors of shopping (12, 19). The time required to locate items is another burden consumers wish not to deal with (19).

As stated in the first paragraph, consumers find renting a car more enjoyable than grocery shopping. How many people have not had a negative experience at a grocery store? *Consumer Reports* and other similar periodicals have identified this as enough of a problem to write books on things to watch for while shopping. With all the bad press and the continuous crunch on everyone's free time it is obvious that something needs to be done to improve the experience for the consumer which is directly related to saving time and money.

Obviously, supermarkets have a strategy of their own to maximize profits from consumer grocery shopping. But does the consumer have a strategy? Even though the consumer strategy would in some ways compete with the supermarket, a process that increases consumer satisfaction while shopping would also benefit the supermarket if they took notice. As the average consumer's free time becomes more of a premium, the grocery stores that most succeed in meeting their customers' needs will be the ones that increase profits and gain market share.

DATA COLLECTION

To develop a strategy that can be applied by consumers to maximize satisfaction while grocery shopping through the minimization of time and expense, past data and analyses will be researched along with polling shoppers. The samples of shoppers will both be random and controlled. The random sample will be obtained by polling customers as they leave a representative supermarket. The controlled sample will be obtained by asking friends and family of team members to fill out a similar questionnaire. To conclude that our controlled sample - which will undoubtedly make up the majority of our data - is representative of the average consumer the random sample is necessary.

The questionnaire (Grocery Store Survey) is comprised of four sections. It is designed to discover habits of shoppers for comparison against previous studies and our own interpretations so that an optimal process can be suggested. The first section relates to when the consumer shops and if they impulse buy. The second section of the questionnaire is general information about the shopper - age, sex and occupation. The third section is to gather data about how the consumer spends their money, if they attempt to economize, and what type of products are typically purchased. Finally, the fourth section is to determine which supermarket chain is frequented, why it is frequented and what their frame of mind is. An example of the questionnaires is available in Appendix E.

The data gathered through the questionnaire will then be correlated to develop a grocery shopping process that maximizes consumer satisfaction while saving both time and expense. A method will be proposed to enable a consumer to go to a supermarket, spend a predetermined amount of time, stay within their budget, and, above all, enjoy the experience.

DATA RESULTS

The results of the "Grocery Store Survey" can be found in Appendices F and G.

The survey revealed the following consumer related information.

- Those that shop every day on average spend as much as five times that of those that shop twice a month or less.
- Those that don't use coupons spend on average two and a half times more than those who do.
- Those that compare prices save an average of \$68 per month per person.
- Those that make lists save an average of \$57 per month per person.
- Those that shop at grocery stores because of price and not just location spend about two thirds that of the average shopper.
- Those that shop every day on average spend as much as four times more time than those who shop twice a month or less.
- Those that shop on weekends tend to spend more time waiting in checkout lines than those that shop on weekdays.
- Those that shop on weekends tend to spend more time shopping due to the larger number of people who shop at this time.

After reviewing the data from our survey we propose the following targets.

1. Decrease the average amount of money and time spent grocery shopping by at least 5% for all consumers.
2. Decrease the average amount of money spent by 20% for above average spenders.
3. Keep all consumer average monthly shopping time to six hours or less.

The original project plan to accomplish these targets is available in Appendix H.

CAUSE ANALYSIS

Through brainstorming and individual analysis of the problem, a cause and effect diagram (CED) was developed as shown in Appendix I.

A summary of the major causes of grocery shopping dissatisfaction in general are as follows:

1. Consumers physical state, such as tired and/or hungry.
2. Consumer's mental, state such as mood.
3. How attentive and friendly the typical employee is at the supermarket.
4. Number of check out stands in operation.
5. Location of products in supermarket.
6. Availability of coupons applicable to desired products.
7. The time period a consumer shops.
8. Whether the consumer shops alone, or with children.
9. Cleanliness of facility.
10. Shopping trip frequency.
11. Time spent shopping.
12. Types of products typically purchased.
13. Proximity to a variety of local supermarkets.
14. Use of previously developed lists.
15. Quality of products.
16. Variety of products available.
17. Aesthetic and ergonomics of facility.
18. Amount of money spent each shopping trip on average.
19. Consumer product price knowledge.

All four causes associated with shopping displeasure - shopping environment, time, money and service - are of magnitude, but the first and fourth cannot be controlled by the consumer other than in the choice of establishment frequented. Thus, to maximize the enjoyment of the consumer we will focus on those aspects of the problem that they can control - time and money. Causes of dissatisfaction that cannot be controlled are the location of products within the supermarket, the number of check out stands in operation at any one time, the type and availability of coupons, the cleanliness of the facility, the courtesy of the employees, and number of competing customers.

Obviously, a consumer has to eat and, other than eating out every night or having a maid to shop for them, they will have to enter a supermarket at least occasionally. Therefore, the key is to develop suggestions to minimize the time spent while shopping and the money expended.

The problem causes identified that are attributes of time and money are as follows:

1. The time and day a consumer shops.
2. The grocery store chain frequented.
3. The use of coupons and/or taking advantage of sales.
4. The physical state of the consumer.
5. The use of shopping lists.
6. The frequency of shopping trips.
7. The length of time spent shopping.
8. The type of items purchased in relation to their cost.

COUNTERMEASURES

Through the analysis of our survey data (Appendix G) and CED (Appendix I) we identified 24 general methods to alleviate the problem of shopper dissatisfaction. Of the 24 methods the following eight were identified as those with the greatest likelihood to meet our target objectives.

1. Shop for groceries less often.
2. Use coupons and shop for sales, even if only sometimes.
3. Compare prices of different sizes and brands when shopping.
4. Make a list of necessary grocery items before shopping.
5. Consider shopping at grocery stores that are known for lower prices.
6. Make sure that you are not hungry when you shop.
7. Shop during weekdays instead of weekends.
8. Consider shopping at grocery stores that are known for more checkout stands and faster service.

All of the methods were evaluated using PRO/CON ANALYSIS. These eight methods were chosen because they could be controlled by the shopper and benefited the consumer. The only negative aspects of the methods were those associated with travel and the time of the week the consumer shops for the following reasons: driving to supermarkets known for lower prices, more checkout stands, and/or faster service may not be convenient for all shoppers. Additionally, due to the inconsistencies of individual schedules, it may not be possible to shop only on week days. Methods discarded were those associated with the store environment and prices of items such as layouts, orientation, cleanliness, selection, additional services, availability of bulk foods, frequency, and magnitude of sales.

The countermeasures were prioritized according to their affect on our target objectives in the following order: satisfaction, time and money. The logic associated with this analysis is that the shopper should first do what satisfies him/her the most and then consider those attributes that accomplish that goal. For instance, one of the major points of contention with shopping is the time it requires. Reducing the time involved in shopping can only dictate it as a more enjoyable experience. Even though money also contributes to satisfaction, many consumers will pay more for quality and services if it improves the time spent.

COUNTERMEASURE JUSTIFICATION

Shopping for groceries less often saves time due to economies of scale since approximately ten minutes of each trip is that of parking, walking in and out, and exiting the store. Minimizing the number of trips minimizes the average overall time spent on these activities. Shopping less often induces the individual to plan, which saves money, since one must plan and the tendency to impulse buy is reduced. Saving money and time when shopping improves the overall satisfaction of the experience.

Using coupons and following sales will improve shopper satisfaction since it reduces grocery expenditures and ensures that they becomes more involved.

Comparing prices of different sizes and brands when shopping will require the shopper to become more involved with the experience, save money, and thus enhance enjoyment.

Making a list of necessary items prior to shopping requires the individual to plan which saves money due to less frequent trips. Lists also guarantee the shopper becomes more involved with the experience. Both attributes improve shopper satisfaction.

Shopping at grocery stores known for lower prices allows the shopper to feel more comfortable and not so wary of the aims of the establishment. A relaxed atmosphere combined with savings improves satisfaction.

When a shopper is *hungry* everything looks good and the tendency to impulse buy is at its maximum. Additionally, the added anxiety of needing to eat and spending more money minimizes the satisfaction of the venture.

Shopping on week days reduces the number of consumers vying for the same space and store services. Additionally, sales are more prevalent on those days due to the supermarkets aim of

attracting more customers. Reducing tension due to less customers and saving money improves the overall shopping experience.

Faster service and adequate check out stands for a large volume of consumers minimizes the time required to shop which improves satisfaction.

CORRECTIVE ACTIONS

The following "Ten Shopping Commandments" are the corrective actions proposed to implement the countermeasures.

1. *Always prepare a list.*
2. *Use coupons as much as possible.*
3. *Never go shopping when rushed or hungry.*
4. *Follow shopping list. Buy no more than three impulse items.*
5. *Experiment with store brands for better deals.*
6. *Use credit cards to receive bonus points.*
7. *Look for value packs or notices that offer savings.*
8. *Cruise through entire store so as not to miss better deals.*
9. *Seek help from store employees to discover unadvertised savings so as not to waste time searching aisles for better deals.*
10. *Frequent only your favorite stores where the shopping experience has been enjoyable.*

To verify the corrective actions met the project targets a second questionnaire was developed. The questionnaire begins asking the consumer whether or not they currently use a similar strategy when shopping. They are then asked to try the recommendations during their next shopping trip and rate their impact individually and the overall procedure with respect to effectiveness (efficiency) using a scale of one to five. At the end of the questionnaire the consumer is asked to answer five questions regarding time, money, use of coupons, and number of people shopped for pertaining to their most recent shopping trip. A sample of the questionnaire is available in Appendix L.

IMPLEMENTATION

Acknowledging that an important issue associated with a comprehensive quality project was the efficient communication of the message to a large audience, we decided to use two different strategies to implement our corrective actions. First, we implemented the project on a small scale by focusing on a group of friends and relatives. This helped us to get some constructive feedback on our recommendations (see *RESULTS*). In order to train the people we gave them a handout describing our recommendations and explained our objectives. Moreover, for the purpose of measuring the performance of our countermeasures, we asked the members of the focus group to pay attention to how much money they spent on food items, and the time it took them. We also asked them to give their conclusions after trying our recommendations. The second implementation strategy was to target a larger audience so as not to depend entirely on our focus group for all results. Because our budget was very limited, we decided to use the INTERNET to spread our message. In this way we could have access to 35 million individuals! Thus, we designed a web-page that is accessible at the following URL:

<http://odin.cc.pdx.edu/~psu12941/shopping>.

In order for any INTERNET user to find us, we indexed our site in search engines, for example "ALTAVISTA" (<http://www.altavista.com>). A sample of the web-page can be found in Appendix M. Through our web-page we are hoping to learn from consumers about our "Ten Shopping Commandments" as they send us feedback by e-mail and/or filling out the satisfaction survey.

A detailed project plan was developed for the implementation of the countermeasures which can be found in Appendix K. The plan consists of evaluating the results from the control population against the original satisfaction analysis for comparison in the *RESULTS* section of this report. The data obtained from the INTERNET web-page will be reviewed on a monthly basis for the next six months by the team to verify our recommendations.

RESULTS

Comparing the results of our original survey to those of the second, we discovered a great improvement. The results of the "Satisfaction Survey" implied all recommendations were seen as effective, although some much more significantly than others, especially for those who had previously only occasionally applied such a plan. Of the individuals who had not applied similar recommendations in the past, the efficiency rating was typically just over four. Those who previously had been using such a plan commonly rated the suggestions with a 3.5 since they typically felt their way was somewhat better.

Individual analysis of each suggestion is as follows: The focus group members felt that using credit cards to pay for groceries and to cruise the entire store were not effective due to the minimal number of supermarkets that accept the first and the time required to perform the second. Rating only somewhat higher was the suggestion to seek assistance from store personnel. This evaluation primarily seemed to be associated with the difficulty in locating store employees when one wants them and their often negative disposition or lack of knowledge. Focus members seemed to feel that using coupons was only marginally effective due to the time required to prepare, but those who did spent on average 7.5% less than those who didn't. All focus group members felt that limiting ones impulse purchases and not shopping when hungry were very effective recommendations due to the money it saved per trip. The commandments of preparing a list, experimenting with store brands, being aware of sale items, and frequenting their favorite store were excellent suggestions. Preparing a list prior to shopping seemed the most rewarding since the consumer had a plan as they entered the store to know exactly what to look for and not see the experience so much as a necessity but as a challenge.

When the focus group was asked to compare the experience when following the commandments, the group showed marked improvement.

Comparing this information to the original data, we discovered that following the typical behaviors of the average consumer maximized the satisfaction associated with the experience. Additionally, having a strategy caused the shopper to feel they had more control which made the experience more of a competition to beat the store rather than as a task. Taking responsibility for the venture also tended to allow the consumer to spend less time and save money. These results show us that our countermeasures were efficient in reducing the expenditures. We also notice the use of coupons did only partly contribute to the savings. This is in accordance with the good efficiency score of recommendations like "try store brands" or "look for value packs". A graphical representation of the improvement in satisfaction associated with the "Ten Shopping Commandments" can be found in Appendix N.

In all, the targets of the project were met and exceeded. The average money and time spent when grocery shopping by the members of our focus group decreased from \$172 to \$153 and from 43 to 35 minutes respectively saving 11% and 18%, both exceeding our stated target of 5%. Regarding those who typically spend larger amounts of money their average shopping bill went from \$373 to \$268 saving 28%, thus beating our stated target of 20%. The target that was exceeded the most was that to reduce the average time shopping to at least six hours per household per month. So far our results show that when following our recommendations while shopping saved in excess of 66 minutes per month.

Our project goal was to increase satisfaction by reducing time and money spent when shopping for groceries. Since satisfaction is directly correlated to time and money in this problem and we have exceeded all targets with respect to these attributes the project goal has been met. Additionally, the

impact of our recommendations is significant due to the high success rate associated with the results. The impact to our project goal is summarized graphically in Appendix O.

The "Ten Shopping Commandment" corrective actions were developed as a set of rules in checklist form for the average consumer to keep in their wallet, purse, pocket and/or kitchen for reference whenever preparing or going shopping. Prior to the application of our suggestions the majority of the shoppers in our focus group had no strategy when grocery shopping. Additionally they felt many of the attributes of the experience were uncontrollable which made the task a burden increasing individual stress and reducing enjoyment. When the focus group followed our simple guide, their satisfaction was enhanced while grocery shopping, through the minimization of time and money spent as summarized previously. Since the study has only been in place for one month and the team has yet to accumulate a significant number of results from the INTERNET survey there is no long term data, but we are confident that the analysis of the data obtained will mirror those of our focus group.

STANDARDIZATION

Due to the simplicity and success of the "Ten Shopping Commandments" we have condensed them onto a handy laminated 4" by 6" card and distributed them to potential users. All team member households have the shopping guide card and plan to use it on all similar excursions.

We strongly believe the new improved grocery shopping method can be applied to other shopping activities as well to save valuable time and money. When one is shopping for clothes, hardware and building supplies, automobiles, household items, homes, and any other commodity an organized list containing all items the consumer requires would be invaluable to reduce the chance of needless purchases and the time spent. For example, if one were wishing to obtain merchandise at a wholesale organization, like *Costco* or *Home Base* where detailed store directories are not provided, having a list and then seeking the advice of a store employee for an item's whereabouts would simplify the task and reduce the time spent immensely.

The team believes the benefits associated with the project results are great. Not only has the team developed a method to improve consumer satisfaction associated with grocery shopping but potentially all other types of purchases as well. Saving consumers time and money when performing the necessary tasks of life allows for a more beneficial application of those scarce resources in today's hectic world.

The only negative aspect of the project was the difficulty in acquiring the necessary data to perform the analysis in the time frame given. Additionally, since none of the team members are familiar with the design of surveys, the information gathered does not correlate as well as we would have liked to prove our assumptions and target results.

Overall, the project went very well. We gained significant knowledge in how to gather information from the society at large and how difficult and unreceptive some people are when attempting to obtain random consumer based data. Additionally we developed new skills on how to work in teams. The team gained new insights in how to analyze information using charts, graphs, and diagrams to maximize available data. We each have a better understanding in how to design survey questionnaires to discover pertinent information and verify its validity.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

All team members worked well together. Thanks to Jeff and Wade for developing the original surveys and correlating the data both literally and graphically. Thanks to Anatole and Jay for reviewing the information and developing the verification survey and results, and helping write the last two sections of the paper. Thanks to Dave for organizing and writing the remaining sections and the paper. All individuals of the team worked diligently to gather the survey data and make

recommendations on its evaluation. If it wasn't for the combined effort of the team the successful resolution and implementation of the project would not have occurred.

Thanks to Dr. Milosevic for his guidance and wisdom through the development of the project. Thanks to all of our friends, family and the kind shoppers who took the time to answer our surveys allowing us to obtain the abundance of data used to develop and complete this successful project.

FUTURE PLANS

Even though the team was able to successfully complete the project the study should be conducted over a longer period of time to discover if people are really willing to change their shopping habits. Thus, we plan to review the additional data as it becomes available over the INTERNET to further evaluate our recommendations in terms of long term effectiveness and relative implications.

If more time were available, the next step in our quality improvement project would be to investigate the reasons why people rated low or high on our "Satisfaction Survey" in order to correct our countermeasures. This would be the second part of our plan/do/check/act model. Depending upon this feedback, we would then develop corrective actions to make our countermeasures more efficient. It is clear that the more knowledge we have of consumer shopping habits and behaviors, the better the effectiveness of our recommendations. This is very similar to what occurs in industry: the more knowledge of a process one has, the easier it is to control and maximize.

Even though the team plans to disband at the end of the quarter we plan to keep tabs on the results of the "Ten Shopping Commandments" survey over the INTERNET and will look forward to working with each other again in similar groups as other classes or future career applications require.

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