Artículos científicos

Calidad y satisfacción de los servicios escolares de una institución de educación superior mexicana: la visión de los estudiantes

Quality and satisfaction of the school services of a Mexican Higher Education Institution: the vision of the students

Qualidade e satisfação dos serviços escolares de uma instituição mexicana de ensino superior: a visão dos alunos

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Resumen

La presente investigación se realizó en el departamento de Servicios Escolares (SE) de una institución de educación superior ubicada en México y tuvo como objetivo medir la calidad del servicio ofrecido desde la percepción de los estudiantes. Este estudio, por tanto, fue exploratorio y descriptivo; primero se realizó una medición cuantitativa y posteriormente se aplicaron entrevistas cualitativas mediante la técnica de grupos focales. Los resultados indican que el servicio que ofrece el departamento de SE es de adecuada calidad, de acuerdo con la percepción de los estudiantes. Las calificaciones más bajas se presentan en las dimensiones *capacidad de respuesta* y *empatía*, ya que prevalece como principal inconveniente la actitud que asume una parte del personal del departamento de SE, caracterizada en ocasiones por la falta de amabilidad, disposición y tiempo de respuesta. Se requiere, por tanto, que los administradores inspiren en estos empleados el significado y la importancia que tiene el servicio a los estudiantes, plasmados en su misión, visión y objetivos. Por eso, se propone que la institución fomente una cultura de sensibilidad del servicio, apoyada en la teoría del comportamiento organizacional, en donde todos los trabajadores sean amigables, corteses, accesibles y expertos. Asimismo,

se recomienda establecer un sistema de evaluación constante en la institución para determinar los niveles de satisfacción en beneficio de la calidad de los servicios escolares ofrecidos.

Palabras clave: calidad del servicio, comportamiento organizacional, satisfacción del usuario.

Abstract

This study was conducted in the Department of School Services (SE) of a Higher Education Institution located in the southeastern of Mexico and aimed to measure the quality of the service offered from the perception of the students. This study is exploratory and descriptive, first a quantitative measurement was then qualitative interviews were applied through the focus group technique. The results indicate that the service offered by the SE department is of adequate quality according to the perception of the students. The lowest scores are presented in the dimensions: responsiveness and empathy, since the attitude assumed by a part of the SE department staff, characterized by the lack of kindness, willingness and response time, prevails as the main drawback. Administrators are required to inspire in these employees the meaning and importance of service to students, embodied in their mission, vision and objectives. Therefore, it is proposed that the institution foster a culture of service sensitivity, supported by the theory of organizational behavior, where all workers are friendly, courteous, accessible and expert. Likewise, it is recommended to establish a constant evaluation system in the institution, to determine the levels of satisfaction for the benefit of the quality of the school services offered.

Keywords: Quality of service, organizational behavior, user satisfaction.

Resumo

Esta pesquisa foi realizada no Departamento de Serviços Escolares (SE) de uma instituição de ensino superior localizada no México e teve como objetivo medir a qualidade do serviço oferecido a partir da percepção dos alunos. Este estudo, portanto, foi exploratório e descritivo; primeiramente, foi realizada uma mensuração quantitativa e, posteriormente, foram aplicadas entrevistas qualitativas por meio da técnica de grupo focal. Os resultados indicam que o serviço oferecido pela secretaria de SE é de qualidade adequada, na percepção dos alunos. As pontuações mais baixas são apresentadas nas dimensões de responsividade e empatia, visto que a principal desvantagem é a atitude

assumida por parte do pessoal da área de SE, por vezes caracterizada por falta de gentileza, disposição e tempo de resposta. Os administradores devem, portanto, inspirar nesses funcionários o significado e a importância do serviço aos alunos, incorporado em sua missão, visão e objetivos. Portanto, propõe-se que a instituição promova uma cultura de sensibilidade ao serviço, apoiada na teoria do comportamento organizacional, onde todos os trabalhadores sejam amigáveis, corteses, acessíveis e experientes. Da mesma forma, recomenda-se estabelecer um sistema de avaliação constante na instituição para determinar os níveis de satisfação em benefício da qualidade dos serviços escolares oferecidos.

Palavras-chave: qualidade do serviço, comportamento organizacional, satisfação do usuário.

Introduction

Service Concept

In its beginnings, the service concept was considered as a process that served to add value to a product, which established a closer relationship between the producer and the consumer. However, starting in the 1980s, the definitions of this word began to acquire a certain autonomy. For example, Lehtinen and Lehtinen (1982) point out that services are intangible activities in which a supplier and a client intervene in order to create the satisfaction of the latter. For Fisher and Navarro (1994) a service is a type of economic good that constitutes what is known as the tertiary sector (that is, everyone who works and does not produce goods is supposed to produce services).

The word service manifests a particularity of the process, where the activity and the result coincide in time and space. The service production process is, in turn, the service's consumption process. In other words, what is produced is at the same time what is consumed. Kotler (1997) states that a service is any activity that one party offers to another, and is characterized by being intangible and by not giving rise to the ownership of anything, since its production is not necessarily linked to a physical product. For Schroeder (1992) a service never exists: you can only observe the result after the fact. For his part, Colunga (1995) indicates that service is the work that other people do.

In short, it can be said that the fundamental objective of a service is customer or user satisfaction, which will generally be reflected in their intentions to buy or use again.

Therefore, the interests of consumers must always be taken into account, hence incomprehensible or complicated formats threaten good service.

Quality of service

Globalization and accelerated technological changes have generated a changing market, characterized by the appearance of new competitors. It can be pointed out that from the 70s on, the market stopped being focused on sellers to focus on buyers. The focus was on consumer preferences, prompting the shift in marketing from a make-and-sell approach to a detect-and-respond concept. Companies, therefore, now examine the preferences of their customers first and then react by offering them the products and services they demand.

Since its inception, the quality of service has been difficult to measure compared to products due to its intangible, subjective, inseparable, heterogeneous and expiration characteristics (Lovelock, 2011). Cronin and Taylor (1992) comment that the quality of the service is what the client perceives of the level of performance of the service provided. In the area of services, quality represents more than compliance with standards, as these are easily achieved if the parties are committed to the functions they perform. Quality means making a difference, impacting customer perception and guaranteeing high levels of satisfaction and return (Rodríguez, s. F.).

The quality of service and customer satisfaction are concepts that are interrelated, as a higher quality of service increases consumer satisfaction. In other words, quality of service can be understood as everything that needs to be done to achieve consumer satisfaction. Therefore, a service can be perceived and valued by users as bad, deficient or unsatisfactory, or as successful and satisfactory.

Oliver (1980) points out that a customer satisfied with the service is more willing to use it again and recommend it to others. In fact, while satisfied users transmit their positive experiences to an average of three people, dissatisfied users do so to an average of thirteen people (Kotler, 1997). This means that there are up to four times more likely to create a negative image of a service, so a satisfied user is the best promotional resource and the best image maneuver. (Hobohm, 2002).

Quality is an indefinable concept, which makes the measurement process extremely complex, and services are essentially intangible, which means designing procedures that make this property tangible. Studying service satisfaction is important because this concept constitutes a quality indicator that influences the mood of users and

has repercussions on productivity levels, absenteeism and costs. Therefore, users must be satisfied with the services to achieve the institution's objectives.

User satisfaction

Gierl (1993) mentions that user satisfaction is not a condition to ensure its conservation, although it is necessary. According to Simon and Homburg (1997), this satisfaction is the result of a constant process of comparison between experience and subjective perception, on the one hand, and expectations and objectives, on the other. The results can be a) user dissatisfaction, b) user satisfaction and c) user enthusiasm.

In this sense, it is necessary that the quality expectations of the users are influenced by the previous experience they have with the institution and by the information that other people have transmitted to them. Likewise, the image of the institution and the development of a corporate identity model play an important role.

Hobohm (2002) states that a user who does not feel comfortable when using the services is more likely to disclose low quality, compared to a user who can endure tangible failures as long as they have been served in a helpful way. A high level of quality is achieved when users are satisfied or when they exceed their expectations. Generating enthusiasm among users strengthens their loyalty and allows positive word of mouth to spread.

In the 1990s it was shown that user satisfaction has a positive effect, although user retention is much more important for success (Reichheld and Sasser, 1998). In public institutions, dialogue with users has a greater influence on their conservation than other elements of satisfaction. Homburg, Giering and Hentschel (1999) state that user conservation is made up of a prior behavior (purchase and recommendations) and a proposed behavior (intentions to consume again, to consume more and to recommend). Also, while user loyalty maintains perspective from a demand point of view, user retention encompasses both supply and demand.

Heinrichs and Klein (2001) point out that user conservation management refers to the systematization of the analysis, planning, execution and control of the measures aimed at maintaining and cultivating an exchange relationship with the users of an institution. Meffert and Bruhn (2000) report that establishing trust from a planned perspective is considered a necessary condition for any permanent relationship, both for an internal and external interlocutor. The relationship between provider and client is seen as an exchange in which the entire team identifies with the principle of user orientation and with the goals of the institution in which they work.

Main models of quality in services

The quality of the services have to be evaluated, since one cannot speak of evaluation if it is not for the improvement of the existing quality (Garbanzo-Vargas, 2014). Basically, two fundamental approaches are recognized as the most significant in the study of service quality: a) models based on the discrepancy paradigm, which defines service quality as perceived quality, the result of comparison or difference between expectations and perceptions, whose main representative is the Servqual instrument (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985); and b) models based on the performance perception paradigm, which defines quality as perceived, but the result of the perception of the performance of the service provided, in which the Servperf instrument stands out (Cronin and Taylor, 1994).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) created the Servqual (service quality) evaluation model and instrument based on their research on different types of services. The model defines service quality as a mismatch between the expectations prior to the consumption of the service and the perception of the service provided, determining that quality can be measured by the difference between both concepts. Likewise, the model proposes that the quality of the service can be measured through five dimensions:

a) Tangible elements: Refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and materials for communications.

b) Reliability: Ability to provide the promised service accurately, courteously and carefully.

c) Responsiveness: It consists of the willingness and willingness of the staff to help customers and provide them with an agile service.

d) Security: It is the knowledge and courtesy of the workers, as well as their ability to inspire security and confidence.

e) Empathy: Refers to the individualized care and attention that the organization provides to its customers.

These dimensions are measured on a scale of two sections of 22 points each; the first records the expectations of customers of excellent companies in the service industry, and the second measures the perception of consumers of a given company. The results are compared to determine gap scores for each of the five dimensions. In general, the difference between the expected service and the perceived service is measured.

The Servperf model (Cronin and Taylor, 1992) arises due to the criticisms of the Servqual model. The authors point out that Servqual is not the most appropriate to measure the quality of service due to deficiencies found. For example, they indicate that

expectations are the component of the Servqual instrument that has presented the most controversies due to the interpretation problems that it exposes to the respondents, they suppose a redundancy within the measurement instrument, since perceptions are influenced by expectations and their variability at various times of service provision.

Rodríguez (s. F.) Points out that Cronin and Taylor (1992) —based on various questionnaires— contrasted the measurement of quality carried out through the difference between expectations and perceptions of consumers and that carried out solely with their perceptions or attitudes. These researchers used the 22 items of the Serqual; on the one hand, they proposed using the Serqual and, on the other, measuring quality taking into account only the perceptions with the same five dimensions and items of the Servqual. Thus came the Servperf instrument.

Measuring service quality based on performance — as Servperf does — reduces the length of the questionnaire, allowing for greater respondent collaboration and easy understanding, instead of using two columns that create confusion and complexity. In addition, the Servperf requires less time to administer the questionnaire, better predicts satisfaction, and the work of interpretation and analysis is easier to perform.

Rodríguez (nd) refers that according to the opinion of various experts —such as Bolton and Drew (1991), Churchill and Suprenant (1982), Woofruff, Cadotte and Jenkins (1993), among others—, the Servperf instrument seems to conform more closely the implications on attitudes and satisfaction. Furthermore, the literature review provides sufficient support for the superiority of the service quality measure based solely on performance. Therefore, it can be affirmed that the Servperf has a better acceptance, since the exclusive measurement of the perception of performance shows with greater accuracy the reality of the service provided.

Study approach, objective and justification

The quality concept was initially used in the business environment and was later extended to the educational environment. When this construct is applied to the latter, both its purpose and its meaning and its functions must be considered, that is, the entire educational system as a whole (Sverdlick, 2012). Jiménez, Terriques and Robles (2011) consider that in assessing the quality of education, student satisfaction is an important factor and is reflected in the efficiency and effectiveness of the academic and administrative services offered, such as educational programs. study, interpersonal relationships, facilities and equipment, among others.

Likewise, Araiza, Zambrano and Ramírez (2016) point out that certain studies have focused on the global assessment of students around the set of services offered by HEIs, such as school support, cultural, sports and social . Bustos, Salazar and Bermúdez (2012) indicate that one can speak of quality in education when it is capable of maximizing professional, social and economic benefits, as well as the quality of life of students.

In the last two decades, HEIs have increased their interest in quality assessment focused on continuous institutional improvement (Abarca, Cáceres, Jiménez, Moraleda and Romero, 2013). Tumino and Poitevin (2013) explain that students are the reason for being of educational institutions, so it is important to take into account the demands they make on the quality of services, in order to maintain the prestige and institutional image.

Having explained the above, it can be said that the present study was carried out in the Department of School Services (SE) of a higher education institution (IES) located in Mexico. The IES has nine faculties where 25 bachelor's degrees, eight master's degrees, six medical specialties and several research centers are taught. The SE department began operations in 1988. Currently, its mission is to plan, organize, operate and control the school services it offers with quality and human warmth in its admission, permanence and graduation stages. Its vision is to be recognized for the quality, transparency and opportunity with which it provides school services, using state-of-the-art technology and trained and ethical staff, committed and sensitive to the needs of the IES community.

The main objectives of the SE department are to coordinate and monitor that the selection and admission processes of applicants to enter the IES are carried out on time and in good time, carry out the registration of registrations and re-registrations in a timely manner, coordinate the registration and update of the academic record of the students, validate the proof of studies and certificates, and keep the documents and records that make up the academic record of the students updated, under safekeeping and protected, among other objectives.

The SE department raises within its mission, vision and objectives to offer quality services. This concern is due to the fact that the opposite can affect the environment and institutional results, since quality in education is related to the institutional structure and management, as well as to the methods for transmitting knowledge (Capalleras and Veciana, 2004; Salvador, 2005).

The IES under study obtained the certification of quality of services from the International Organization for Standardization (ISO, for its acronym in English) as of 2007, a status that it has managed to maintain until 2019. Once the commitment is made,

the The certifying body must evaluate the institution during two annual surveillance cycles to be able to renew and retain its certification, which constitutes a problem because - in case of not maintaining the certification after being evaluated again by external organizations - it would cease to receive certain support resources you currently have — p. eg, the Program for Strengthening Educational Excellence (Profexce) -. This would harm the acquisition of tangible goods, functionality, response times, satisfaction and the institutional image.

For this reason, the Quality Management System (QMS) of the institution under study has the need to monitor the adequate operation of existing processes, for which it requires constant information in order to optimize the quality of services in a manner keep going.

Therefore, it was decided to carry out this research, which aims to measure the quality of the school services offered from the perception of the students of a faculty of the IES under study. Likewise, this research will provide useful information for strategic planning and decision-making aimed at improving the working conditions, behaviors and performance of the personnel who provide the service.

Method

Type of study

This study is exploratory and descriptive. First, a quantitative measurement was carried out and later qualitative interviews were applied in order to deepen the results obtained. The qualitative study was carried out using the focus group technique with eight students, which allowed "to reinforce theories and identify critical questions for future research" (Stake, 1994, p. 245). The design is non-experimental with a transversal approach, since there is no interference in the results (Hernández-Sampieri y Mendoza, 2018).

Participants

Only new students were considered because they are the ones who use the customer service the most, since they are subsequently served online. From a total of 280 new students from an IES faculty under study, a sample with 95% reliability and a 5% allowed error was calculated, with probabilities p and q of 0.5, respectively. A sample of 162 students was obtained, of which 81 are from the Bachelor of Accounting and 81 from the Bachelor of Administration and Finance.

Instruments

To collect quantitative data, the Servperf instrument by Cronin and Taylor (1994) was used, based on the perceived service quality model (Servqual; (Parasuraman et al., 1985) and adapted by Pérez and Ramírez (2016).

This instrument assesses five dimensions: tangible elements, reliability, responsiveness, security, and empathy. It consists of 25 items with five response alternatives each: 1) totally disagree, 2) disagree, 3) neither agree nor disagree, 4) agree, 5) totally agree. Minimum scores of 25 and maximum of 125 can be obtained. The validity of the instrument was given through expert opinion and Lawshe's test; the results of the pilot sample were 0.80 (this shows that the items are acceptable for measurement). Likewise, the statistical analysis obtained a Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient of .949. In order to obtain the qualitative data, an interview guide with semi-structured questions was developed based on the results obtained and the five dimensions of the Servperf questionnaire.

Procedure

Data analysis was carried out through the following process:

a) For the administration of the Servperf instrument, we had the help of students from the IES under study. The questionnaires were applied in the classrooms of the institution by appointment. Four sessions were required to complete the data collection. With the information obtained, a database was created, which were captured using the statistical package for social sciences SPSS (Statistic Package for Social Science) version 17.0 for Windows.

b) The data obtained were analyzed using descriptive statistics, taking the mean as a measure of central tendency and the standard deviation as a measure of dispersion.

c) A semi-structured interview guide was developed to deepen the results using the focus group technique.

d) A climate of trust was created that contributed to the sincerity of the responses.

e) Data collection generated multiple statements, testimonies, documents, research reports, and data summaries.

f) The information was organized by categories and frequency tables, allowing the objective of the study to be identified and analyzed.

Results

Quantitative measurement

Table 1 shows the results of the administration of the Servperf instrument to the students.

Tabla 1. Calidad del servicio ofrecido desde la perspectiva de los alumnos

Dimensiones	N	Media	Desviación estándar
Elementos tangibles	162	4.12	.97
Confiabilidad	162	3.96	.95
Capacidad de respuesta	162	3.48	.04
Seguridad	162	3.98	.01
Empatía	162	3.49	.02
Servicio General	162	3.80	.90

Fuente: Elaboración propia

Table 1 shows that students agree with the tangible elements (4.12), with the reliability (3.96) and with the security (3.98) offered by the SE department. The certification of the school services available to the institution has allowed them to have certain support resources that they have used to improve the appearance of their facilities, equipment and personnel. Also, because the staff has received various technical training courses, they make a minimum of errors, which contributes to problem solving, and generates a certain security and confidence in the students.

Furthermore, the participants neither agree nor disagree with the responsiveness (3.48) and with the empathy (3.49) provided by the SE department. The institution has 7,375 students enrolled, so in enrollment periods the service becomes saturated and it is common to find students unhappy or upset with the treatment and response times. In this sense, the quality of the service must show empathy at all times, put themselves in the shoes of the student and really find out what they want, above anger or protests.

Regarding the quality of the service in general provided by the SE department, the students agree (3.80), since they perceive that it is appropriate mainly due to the fact that they use information technologies in their processes, according to modern times . It should be noted that the certification held by the institution has brought benefits for the entire community of the HEI under study.

Qualitative evaluation

When the students were interviewed about tangible elements (4.12), they pointed out that the SE department has functional computer equipment for the rapid solution of requests and that most of the time the staff supports the students in solving problems. . Regarding the uniforms, they commented that they all comply with the norm. One student commented: "They are presentable and the physical appearance is adequate."

When asking the students about reliability (3.96), they pointed out that "at the beginning of each semester the service is late, but it is understood because there are too many students and the number of computers is limited". Another student demanded that the response times on the requested procedures should be speeded up, as sometimes they are delayed by two to three days. The students indicated that they do not use the complaints and suggestions box; There were even those who pointed out that "they had no knowledge of its existence."

When the interviewees were questioned about the response capacity (3.48), one of them stated that sometimes the procedures are delayed. In this regard, there is the following testimony: "Sometimes the documents are not ready and you have to wait." They mentioned that this bothers them, since they ask for permission within their class schedule to carry out their procedures.

Regarding safety (3.98), the students stated that most of the staff treat them with kindness, are positive about serving them and show interest in helping them, but not all are like that. They also commented that the staff is trained to serve them, but sometimes they do not. One interviewee said: "Despite the time it takes to complete a procedure, they always do it correctly."

Regarding empathy (3.49), the students commented that the staff does not always show a positive, friendly and interested attitude to attend to those who request it. In this regard, a student pointed out: "I have been touched by kind people who clarify my doubts, but in the same way there are people who do not attend as they should."

Regarding the general evaluation (3.80) of the service offered by the SE department, the students commented that they agree. However, there are some problems related to the treatment that students receive when being cared for by certain employees. One student pointed out that employees must know how to control their emotions. In this regard, there is the following testimony: "We are not to blame for what happens to them, sometimes they are upset and they should give them time to relax."

Discussion

Measuring the quality of school services means for the Institution's Quality Management System to have control indicators on these services, which allows to solve the irregularities detected in advance and maintain the certification of the IES.

In this study it was found that for students the quality of school services in general is appropriate. However, it is worth noting that only in three of the five dimensions that make up said construct (tangible elements, reliability and security) is there an acceptable quality, according to the perception of the students. These results are contrary to what was found by Bayraktaroglu and Atrek (2017), who found a lower relevance of tangible elements and a high personal interaction in the education sector. This means that the services offered, in this case, use very little technology in their processes and there is good communication between the educational community of the institution, which are important factors to take into account in improving the quality of services.

Likewise, in two of the five dimensions that make up the concept of quality, special attention is required before the situation worsens and jeopardizes the quality certification that is available. These two dimensions are causing students to feel some discontent, so it is suggested to create the appropriate strategies to act with empathy and correct the response capacity. This is consistent with that reported by Sánchez, Navas, Chávez, Miranda and Morocho (2019), who have pointed out that empathy is the main problem derived from the lack of training of human talent. In this sense, in the present work it has been detected that the ability to put oneself in the place of the student is generating problems, so it is not enough to train in the basic areas to perform the job well, but it is necessary to know and practice the techniques to improve human relations.

Various studies have been consistent in measuring the quality of the service in general. However, variations can be observed in the measurement of its dimensions, as happened in the present study when obtaining an appropriate quality and being congruent with the studies carried out by Ibarra and Casas (2015), who found an acceptable quality in the measurement of services offered. However, these authors obtained a lower score for the reliability dimension, while the present study obtained lower scores for the responsiveness and empathy dimensions.

On the other hand, the strength of the present study lies in the fact that the results of the quantitative measurement of quality were reinforced through the administration of qualitative interviews, which allowed to know in depth and detail the reasons for the approvals and the dissatisfaction of the students in relation to the quality of the service

offered, since the numbers only provide limited information for analysis. Likewise, the study contributes to the research literature on the quality of school services in HEIs. Finally, within the limitations, the study only focused on the perceptions of the students of a faculty in an IES.

Conclusions

In general terms, students perceive that the service offered by the SE department is of adequate quality. The lowest scores are presented in the dimensions of responsiveness and empathy because the main disadvantage is the attitude assumed by a part of the SE department staff, characterized - sometimes - by a lack of kindness, disposition and response time . Therefore, administrators are required to inspire in these employees the sense of importance and the meaning of service to students, reflected in their mission, vision and objectives, since it seems that they lack a greater identification with the quality of service they must pay.

Consequently, it is proposed that the institution promote a culture of awareness of the service, through the implementation of a permanent training program for the attention of students, which is consistent with the institutional objectives. In addition, it is suggested that said program be based on the theory of organizational behavior, where all workers practice empathy in difficult situations, are able to listen, are friendly, courteous, accessible and expert. Also, be ready to respond to students' needs with the right words and tone, and be willing to do whatever it takes to please them. This is consistent with Robbins and Judge (2017), who mention that organizational behavior offers a valuable guide to help institutions create that culture.

On the other hand, it is recommended to establish a constant evaluation system in the institution, where the Servperf model contributes as an effective support tool to measure and analyze proposals for quality improvement in the provision of school services. Likewise, it is recommended to take into account the opinions, complaints, suggestions and expectations of the students to determine the levels of satisfaction and establish corrective measures in cases of operational inefficiency or negative criticism. In this way, there will be relevant information from users for adequate decision-making on the activities that should be developed to achieve continuous improvement of the quality of the school services offered.

Future lines of research

Ultimately, it is necessary to carry out further research to consolidate the results obtained, as well as case and ethnographic studies. Future research could measure the quality of school services from the perception of school administrators in other faculties or in other public and private HEIs, to establish comparisons with the present results. Likewise, future lines of research could carry out studies to find out if there is a relationship between the quality of school services and other constructs, such as satisfaction, climate or organizational culture.

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