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CUSTOMER SERVICE GOES TO COLLEGE

by

Donald W. Hudspeth

A project submitted to the School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management
at Rochester Institute of Technology
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science

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ROCHESTER INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY
School of Food, Hotel and Travel Management
Department of Graduate Studies

M.S. Hospitality-Tourism Management
Presentation of Thesis/Project Findings

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a feedback model that can be used to gather data from students that have shared a common educational experience at a college in Croatia. Historical data was researched on surveys, interviews, and focus groups in order to discover the characteristics of each. The characteristics were classified as either a strength or a weakness of each of the models. The operating constraints of the college were identified as the effect that cultural differences can play in the collection of data and the financial budget. After these constraints had been applied to the characteristics of each model, it was determined that the survey was the best method for data collection for the College.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

As the global economy continues to change from a manufacturing based model to a service based model, the need for a customer service focus is essential. To embrace a customer service focus, and maintain it, many organizations are utilizing feedback as a method for measuring their success.

Feedback, as defined by J.D. Ryder in Grolier's Multimedia Encyclopedia (1998, p. 1), “refers to a system, process, or machine in which part of the output is fed back—that is, returned to the input in order to regulate the operation” In the context of this study, feedback will refer to the process an organization uses to gather data to determine if its product and, or, service package is what the customer wants .

Feedback is now used in industries and businesses where its use was not previously popular. One of those fields is the world of academia. Some universities and colleges administer course and instructor evaluations to gather data on the class room experience. Gathering feedback from graduates of these institutes, on the “real world” applicability of their educational experience could also be beneficial. An effective feedback method could address these issues as well as other areas associated with customer service in the academic environment.

The process of data gathering is very popular in developed countries. North American business and industry are heavy users and gatherers of data that is used for the purpose of feedback. In fact, most of the research available in this field is based on studies conducted in either the United States, or Canada. The conclusions draw from the findings are primarily applicable to a North American setting. Can these conclusions on feedback

gathering be applied to other countries and cultures? Specifically, would an effective feedback method in an academic environment in a foreign culture differ from that implemented in an academic setting in North America?

This study will review historical research on feedback gathering, as well as historical research on the effect that cultural can play in feedback gathering, in order to make recommendations for the use of feedback models in an academic environment in a foreign culture.

Problem

Many organizations have decided to collect feedback to evaluate and improve their product or services. Once this important decision has been made to collect this information, the next step is to determine what feedback model best suits the needs of the organization. This study will examine the characteristics of various methods for measuring feedback in order to determine which method is the soundest for gathering data from those that have shared a common educational experience in a foreign country. The study will also look at the effect that cultural differences and financial constraints can have in the selection of a feedback model.

Background

Increased competition within the university and college arena is forcing these institutes of higher learning to establish closer relationships with customers. Customers in the context of the academia are defined as potential students, existing students, alumni, and industry. Universities and colleges now recognize that a “happy customer” directly impacts enrollment through referrals. Increased enrollment is a desired goal of these institutes as it leads to larger operating budgets which in turn facilitates further growth.

To keep their customers satisfied, universities must have a sense of what the customer wants. An effective method for obtaining this information is through the use of customer feedback. Customer feedback can be obtained by using various methods. This study will examine the characteristics of some of those methods.

The importance of a feedback mechanism increases significantly when the institution is relatively new and is seeking to establish a positive reputation. The importance is further amplified when the new university or college is located in a foreign country.

One American university, the Rochester Institute of Technology, has established programs abroad in both the Czech Republic and Croatia. Its program in Croatia is in its second year of operation, and it is possible that the findings of this study may be beneficial for the future growth of those programs.

Purpose

The purpose of this study is to examine the features of various feedback methods in order to identify the common and individual characteristics of each model. The characteristics will be used to recommend a model that would be appropriate for obtaining data from students that have shared a common educational experience within Croatia.

Significance

This study may provide universities, colleges, and other forms of educational institutes with the blueprint for designing, or selecting feedback models.

In particular, it is hoped that the American College of Management and Technology operating in Dubrovnik, Croatia, will benefit from the findings. Other foreign educational institutes operating in Croatia may also find the study helpful.

If the findings of this study lead to the implementation of a particular feedback model, it is conceivable that the information obtained will be beneficial in curriculum design and revision, program expansion, course selection, and faculty placement. All of these areas are important components of complete customer satisfaction in an academic setting.

Methodology

This study will utilize historical data on feedback methods in order to identify characteristics of each model. The characteristics will then be evaluated for strengths and weaknesses. Historical research will also be conducted on the effect of culture in data gathering. From the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of each method, and from the information obtained on the effect of culture in data gathering, a feedback model that best fits the operating criteria and parameters of the American College of Management will be recommended.

Literature Review

The literature to be reviewed for this study will concentrate on the topic areas of data gathering, surveys, interviews, focus groups, and cultural effects in data gathering. Of particular interest will be any literature that concentrates on the characteristics of the various feedback methods. In the text, Mail Surveys, Improving the Quality, Thomas W. Mangione (1995) clearly outlines that mail surveys are a relatively inexpensive means of feedback that can gather information from a large number of respondents in a timely fashion. Also, Thomas L. Greenbaum, in his book, The Practical Handbook and Guide to Focus Group Research (1998), shows that focus groups are an effective tool to gauge the feelings, beliefs, and attitudes of the respondents.

Other sources will include periodicals, research trade publications, scientific journals, and university publication.

Hypothesis

This study is expected to show that there is an effective feedback model that the American College of Management and Technology in Dubrovnik, Croatia, can utilize to gather relevant data from its students.

Definition of Terms

Feedback Model / Method - a method of collecting data from a customer; for the purpose of this study, the words “model” and “method” will be used interchangeably

Relevant Data - information that is beneficial or pertinent to the academic institution

Customer – refers to a group consisting of existing students, potential students, alumni, and industry

Assumptions

Ideological Assumptions

It is assumed in this study that measuring customer feedback is an important process in the academic environment. The American College of Management and Technology in Croatia does not have a customer feedback model in place and the researcher is employed by the same organization. Therefore, in order to limit any bias the researcher may have, a wide literature search will be conducted.

Procedural Assumptions

It is assumed that the review of the literature will not bias or contaminate the evaluation process since recognized experts will be used as will existing objective studies on the use of feedback.

Scope and Limitations

The focus of this study is twofold. First is the identification of characteristics of feedback models. These characteristics will then be evaluated for their strengths and weaknesses. Second is an analysis of the effect that cultural differences can have in the collection of data. From the two components of the historical data review, a feedback model for the American College of Management and Technology will be suggested. The feedback model will also take into consideration the operating parameters of the college.

This narrow focus of the study may limit the application of the findings to similar academic environments. Also since the data will be collected from a historical literature review, the findings will also be limited by the depth of the literature review.

Procedures

The characteristics of the various feedback models will be outlined from a thorough examination of pertinent journals, texts, and research studies. These characteristics will then be reviewed for their strengths and weaknesses.

A complete review of literature on literature associated with the effect that cultural differences can play in data gathering will also be undertaken. This data will also be gathered from pertinent journals, texts, and research studies.

Next the operating parameters of the American College of Management and Technology will be outlined so as to provide a framework for evaluating which feedback

model best addresses the college's data gathering needs. The framework will consider both the strengths and weaknesses of the various models and the effect of cultural differences.

Long Range Consequences

A positive test of the hypothesis of this study will show that there is an effective feedback method that the American College of Management and Technology can utilize to gather data from its students. This result could suggest the design for feedback models that could be used in other settings in academia. Further study might then be conducted to validate the findings.

If the findings are equivocal or do not prove the hypothesis, it would suggest that further study is needed.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

This literature review will analyze historical data in order to identify the characteristics of the various feedback methods used in data gathering. Historical data will also be reviewed to determine the effect that cultural differences can have on the gathering of data.

The format of the literature review will be as follows:

1. Introduction to data collection and the three feedback methods
2. Characteristic identification – Why?
3. Surveys – characteristics
4. Interviews – characteristics
5. Focus groups – characteristics
6. Affect of cultural differences in data gathering
7. Summary

Introduction to Data Collection and the Three Feedback Methods

The premise behind Social Science Research as explained by Dr. Ernest Krausz, and Dr. Stephen H. Miller in Social Research Design (1974), is that “the selection of a relatively small number of units on a scientifically arranged random basis will provide a sufficiently high degree of probability that this is a true reflection of the universe, that inferences may be made from the findings of the sample to the universe that is being scrutinized”

(Krausz and Miller, 1974, p. 32). The term, universe, in Social Research, refers to the population or group that a particular study is analyzing. In this particular study, the

universe are customers/students of the American College of Management and Technology, as defined in the background section of chapter one. Since sampling is used to make inferences about the universe, it is important that the method chosen for data collection provides accurate information.

In the field of Social Science Research, three base methods of data gathering have been identified. These methods are surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Other methods that have been identified during the research of this project are variations, or combinations of these three base methods.

Characteristic Identification – Why?

The first part of the purpose of this study, as identified in chapter one, is to examine the features of the various feedback models in order to identify the common and individual characteristics of each model. Characteristic identification was chosen as an evaluation tool because it allows the advantages and disadvantages, or limitations and potentials, of each model to be grouped into categories. Once the characteristics have been identified, it is then possible to determine if they are either a strength or a weakness of the model. The strength and weakness assessment will be documented in chapter three of this project and will be used to determine whether a particular feedback method falls within the operating parameters of the American College of Management and Technology. Those operating parameters are the affect that cultural differences can play in data collection, and the College's financial operating constraints.

Surveys

Surveys are generally described as a unilateral method of data collection. Data is obtained from the sample group by having them answer questions, or provide

information, via a questionnaire format, with little, or no input from the survey administrator. All of the respondents in the sample group will receive the same questionnaire, and ideally thoroughly complete it, and return it to the administrator (Kessler, 1996).

Traditionally, surveys have been administered in a print format and either handed, or mailed out to the respondents. An example of a hand out method would be a customer service response form left on a restaurant table for a guest to complete. Technology is now used in the administration of surveys through the use of facsimile and electronic mail

One of the advantages of the survey is that it allows the collection of data from a large volume of respondents at a relatively lower cost per response (Mangione, 1995). A large response from the sample group increases the validity of the data as it has a greater chance of being statistically significant and representative of the population as a whole (Mangione, 1995). Lower costs are represented in both administrator time and organizational time devoted to the process (Mangione, 1995). Additional cost reductions in tabulation effort can be facilitated through the use of scanner response cards.

When completing a survey the respondent also has the opportunity to see the question in a written format so it is less likely that they will misunderstand the query, providing that the question is not ambiguous. To avoid this ambiguity issue, questionnaire design is a crucial element of the survey process (Mangione, 1995). Care must be taken to ensure that the question actually obtains the information that it was designed for. Closed ended questions are primarily used in surveys so that the tabulation process is more efficient and cost effective (Farrall, Bannister, Ditton, and Gilchrist, 1995).

Mailed or electronically delivered questionnaires also have the advantage of being able to be completed when the respondent desires, which can increase the quality of the data obtained (Selwyn and Robson, 1998). Anonymity in the collection process of surveys also allows the sample group to be honest in their responses which in turn further validates the accuracy of the findings.

When a survey is mailed to a general population who may not have an interest, or a stake in the survey, the potential for a low response rate increases. In general, low response rates are a characteristic of many surveys (Mangione, 1995).

Interviews

The interview method of data gathering requires a researcher to solicit answers to open and, or, close ended questions through face-to-face conversation with an individual respondent. A newer form of this process involves the collection of data from two respondents at the same time. This type of study in the field of Social Research is known as “Joint-Interviewing” In this particular literature review the separate characteristics of joint interviewing will not be identified.

The interview process can be conducted in a very structured format or via an informal process. In the structured format the questions are delivered much in the same manner as in a survey; care is taken to ensure that each interviewee hears the question in the same fashion. Whereas in the informal process, the respondent is asked to expand on topic themes that arise from typically open-ended questions (Vavra, 1997). In this format, each individual interview can yield different results.

One of the advantages of the interview method is that it also provides the researcher with non-verbal responses to questions. The interviewer can watch the body language of

the respondent to assess underlying attitudes and feelings to the questions. To effectively obtain this information, the interviewer must establish a comfortable rapport with the interviewee. This comfortable level of communication can encourage the interviewee to respond beyond the scope of the question, and provide valid data that was not known or accidentally left out of the questionnaire design (Helmreich, 1999). Care, however, must be taken to ensure that the interview process does not go off on too many different tangents.

A disadvantage of interviews is that they are very labor intensive and consequently an expensive means of feedback collection. Also to interview a large enough sample group, and obtain a result that is statistically significant, many expensive hours of interviewer time must be expended.

Interview results can also be skewed, or corrupted, by an interviewer that may have a positive or negative bias to the subject matter being queried. The respondent may react to the body language, or intonation of the interviewer, and give answers that they perceive to be the correct answer. That being an answer that they think the interviewer wishes to hear.

Also in the interview format, the respondent does not have a lot of time to ponder the question before answering. This could be both an advantage or disadvantage, as the respondent may give a more, or a less, truthful answer if they had the time to fully comprehend the question.

Focus Groups

Focus group use for data collection is an effective means of gathering the respondents attitudes, beliefs, or feelings on the topic being investigated (Greenbaum, 1988).

Individuals are assembled to share their ideas and viewpoints which have been formed as a result of their own personal experiences. A moderator or facilitator is engaged to lead the group and ensure that there is a flow to the discussion process. Their role also is to encourage debate on topic areas that the researcher desires.

This method of feedback gathering has been effectively used to gain insight on the purchase decisions of consumers, or more specifically, the underlying motivational factors that caused them to make a particular purchase (Nielsen, 1997). Non-verbal indicators, such as facial expressions, or body movements, can also be viewed during the focus group discussion period.

Focus groups as a means of data collection do have some limitations associated with the process. If the moderator is not trained properly in conducting a focus group, they can quickly become the leader of the group and bias the opinions of the individual respondents (Cowley, 1999). Or the group can take control of the process and move the conversation in directions that are outside of the field of research. There is also a question of whether the feelings and attitudes gathered are that of the individuals, or a consensus of the group. A strong individual personality in the group can bias the feelings of the entire group or intimidate shyer members from expressing their opinions (Gibbs, 1997).

The cost of focus groups is generally higher than that of interviews or surveys as the process is very time consuming. Skilled moderators, as previously discussed, are essential to the process and can be expensive to hire. To gain a result that is statistically significant, would in many cases would be prohibitive via the focus group method.

Affect of Cultural Differences in Data Gathering

Since the American College of Management and Technology operates in the Republic of Croatia, it is quite possible that the culture of the local population may act as a parameter in the selection of a feedback model. Or to express this in the form of a question, “Do cultural differences affect the data gathering capabilities of various feedback methods?” This portion of the literature review will analyze historical data in order to address this question.

The Republic of Croatia became a sovereign state in 1992. Consequently the amount of literature pertaining to social research in this new and relatively young state is very limited. Since Croatia was a part of former Yugoslavia, and part of a communist system that spanned central and eastern Europe, cultural research literature addressing the whole region was reviewed. Also general information on the study of culture in data gathering was studied.

Gathering data for the purpose of evaluating whether an organizations product or service is what the customer desires, is a relatively new procedure in Croatia. A significantly high percentage of the businesses and educational organizations are state run and still operating in the same manner as they were under the state controlled economy of former Yugoslavia. The lack of competition in many instances has made the gathering of customer feedback an unnecessary activity.

Many businesses have not made the transition to becoming customer driven entities. This environment has many interesting implications for the process of data gathering. In studies conducted in other command economies, which have started the transition process to a market based economy, there has been an enthusiastic response from the sample

groups to participate in the feedback process. In an article published by Forbes magazine, it was stated that consumers in Eastern Europe are delighted when they are asked for their opinion, unlike U.S. consumers who will not respond to intrusive survey takers (Berss, 1991). This enthusiastic response behavior was also observed at the American College of Management and Technology when data for an economic impact study was being gathered. The mailed surveys to parents of the students resulted in an eighty-two percent response rate. A study conducted with presidents of major corporations in Croatia also yielded a high response rate of twenty-five percent on a mailed survey (Martin and Grbac, 1998).

Less information is known on the response of the population in Croatia to feedback instruments such as interviews and focus groups, where the opportunity to reply anonymously does not exist. It is a question whether the weaknesses associated with interviews and focus groups will be amplified in a previously oppressed environment where freedom of speech was not encouraged. However it may work in reverse and be very successful, as the respondents welcome the opportunity to finally express their opinions without fear of any reprisal.

Some of these issues have been addressed in cross-cultural studies where the “degree of openness” in responding to questions is analyzed. This degree of openness is also referred to as self-disclosure, “that which individuals will reveal about themselves to others” (Goodwin, Nizharadzel, Anh, Luu, Kosa, and Emelyanova, p. 1, 1999) . A study conducted in Russia, Hungary, and Georgia, three of the former Eastern Bloc countries, showed that students and affluent educated individuals, that were not part of the ruling communist party, were more inclined to disclose truthful and intimate details about their

feelings and opinions. Those that were a part of the ruling class, or were less educated, were more guarded in their responses. The age of the participants also was a significant factor in the degree of openness. In general, the younger the respondents, the higher the level of self-disclosure (Goodwin, Nizharadzel, Anh, Luu, Kosa, and Emelyanova, 1999).

The actual, or perceived, power base of the interviewer, or researcher, was also shown to influence the responses of the interviewee. Respondents sometimes perceived that they should answer the questions in a manner that would please the interviewer. In the respondent's mind, pleasing the interviewer may be personally beneficial in the long term. Although this can be a factor in the interview and focus group processes even in the western world, this affect was more pronounced in transitional economies (Easterby-Smith and Malina, 1999).

Summary

This literature review has shown that each of the three feedback methods have inherent advantages and disadvantages. These findings will be used to outline the characteristics of the three methods of feedback in chapter three of this study. The characteristics will be evaluated as to whether they are a strength or a weakness of the feedback method. The information provided from the review of the affect of culture in data collection has shown that differences can exist when gathering feedback in a foreign climate. This data will be used to develop an environmental constraint that culture can impose on the analysis and selection process.

CHAPTER 3

Tabulation and Analysis of the Data

Chapter three of this study will be presented in the following format:

1. Introduction
2. Characteristic Identification
3. Operating Constraints of the American College of Management and Technology
4. Results

Introduction

The problem identified in this study is to determine if there is an effective method, or model, for measuring feedback from those that have shared a common educational experience in a foreign country. The institute analyzed in this study is the American College of Management and Technology located in Dubrovnik, Croatia. If an effective method is identified, it will have to acknowledge the differences that culture can play in the process of data gathering, as well as work within the operating constraints of the College.

Chapter two of this study outlined the three primary types of feedback models which are surveys, interviews, and focus groups. A description of the advantages and disadvantages, or more appropriately, the potential and limitations, of each method was presented. This descriptive data will be used in chapter three to identify characteristics of the methods. The characteristics will be presented in a grid format to determine whether they are a strength or a weakness of each model.

The last section of this chapter will discuss the operating constraints of the American College of Management and Technology. These constraints are the effect that cultural differences can have in the collection of data and the financial status of the College. The constraints will be used as a filter to select the best method for the College to gather feedback.

Characteristic Identification

From an analysis of the descriptive data presented in the literature review, it is possible to identify characteristics of the three feedback methods. The characteristics can be general and apply to all three of the models, or be specific, and apply to only one or two of the models. As the review of the literature gave evidence, the following characteristics were identified:

1. Anonymity – respondents can provide confidential answers or opinions
2. Assessment of Attitudes / Feelings / Motivation – ability to discover why a particular answer was given
3. Bias from other Respondents – the potential for respondents to influence the answers of other participants
4. Limited Scope – ability for respondents to expand their answers
5. Low Cost per Respondent – the expense for data gathering is low when expressed per response
6. Moderator / Administrator Bias – the potential for the moderator or administrator to influence the responses of the participants
7. Statistically Significant Result – the ability to generate a result that is statistically representative of the population under study

A strength and weakness assessment of the seven characteristics, when applied to the three feedback models, is illustrated in table 3.1.

Operating Constraints of the American College

Every process, or system, as described in systems theory, has a desired state as one of its ultimate goals. The process of feedback is utilized to correct, or adjust the system to the point that the desired state can be achieved. The desired state in essence takes into consider the constraints of the system, as it is the ultimate goal of the model. Constraints can take all forms. In this study, the constraints imposed on the feedback process will be limited to the impact of cultural differences, and the operating constraints of the College.

The literature review section on the effect of cultural differences in the gathering of data showed that consumers in Central and Eastern Europe were on average more prepared to participate in the process of data gathering than their American counterparts. There is, however, an age variance that affects whether the respondents in this part of the world will be more prepared to disclose information or be guarded with their responses. In general, the younger respondents were more willing to participate, or be open and truthful with their responses, or as described in the literature, exhibit a higher level of self-disclosure. Since the study population of the College are its students, that are on average between the ages of nineteen and twenty-two, the general conclusion can be draw that the respondents would provide accurate feedback no matter what model was used. This would suggest that cultural differences in the context of this study would not apply a limiting factor to the characteristics show in Table 3.1, and that a feedback model could be selected based on other limiting constraints. If the college was gathering data from a

**TABLE 3.1 – CHARACTERISTIC STRENGTH AND WEAKNESS
ASSESSMENT**

	SURVEYS		INTERVIEWS		FOCUS GROUPS	
	Strength	Weakness	Strength	Weakness	Strength	Weakness
1. Anonymity	X			X		X
2. Assessment of Attitudes		X	X		X	
3. Bias from other Respondents	X			X		X
4. Limited Scope		X	X		X	
5. Low Cost per Respondent	X			X		X
6. Moderator / Administrator Bias	X			X		X
7. Statistically Significant Result	X			X		X

study population other than the student body, the affects of cultural differences would have to be considered in the selection of the feedback model.

The American College of Management and Technology is a private non-profit institution for higher education. It is a joint venture of the Rochester Institute of Technology, and the Polytechnic of Dubrovnik. The ideal annual financial picture for the College is to run at a break-even, or end the year with a small surplus. The first two years of the College have been tight financially, and it is anticipated that this will also be the situation going forward. The financial position of the American College will only improve with an increase in the number of students attending every year. Since it is important for the institute to grow and provide a service that the students desire, it is important to use feedback to gather data about the students needs and wants. This feedback model must provide reliable data, at a relatively low cost. Low cost in this situation refers to the material costs involved in the feedback process, and the labor hours expended in the collection of feedback.

When this operating constraint is matched with the seven characteristics that were described at the beginning of this chapter, there is a fit with characteristic number five, “Low Cost per Respondent”, and characteristic number seven, “Statistically Significant Result” When this is visually illustrated, as in Table 3.2, it is noticeable that both of these characteristics are strengths of surveys.

Results

The tabulation and analysis of the data has shown that the survey model for data gathering best suits the operating constraints of the American College of Management and Technology. Based on the results of this study, using surveys to gather feedback will

TABLE 3.2 – CHARACTERISTICS – LIMITING FACTORS

	SURVEYS		INTERVIEWS		FOCUS GROUPS	
	Strength	Weakness	Strength	Weakness	Strength	Weakness
1. Anonymity	X			X		X
2. Assessment of Attitudes		X	X		X	
3. Bias from other Respondents	X			X		X
4. Limited Scope		X	X		X	
5. Low Cost per Respondent	X			X		X
6. Moderator / Administrator Bias	X			X		X
7. Statistically Significant Result	X			X		X

be implemented as soon as feasible. The affect of cultural differences in the process of feedback collection does not pose a constraint when selecting a feedback model for the student population. It was noted, however, that cultural differences may have an affect on certain feedback models when the population studied is not the students of the College.

CHAPTER 4

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

In order for an organization to know if it is providing a service that its customers desire, it must obtain feedback. This process of feedback gathering has become popular and useful in all areas of industry and business. One of these business areas is academia. It is important for all institutions of higher education to know whether their studies and learning environment are providing what their customers, the students, desire and need.

To obtain this knowledge, or information, it is important for the academic institute to gather data for the purpose of feedback. The feedback can be accomplished via three main methods. These methods are surveys, interviews, and focus groups.

The operating environment of a university or college is an important consideration in the selection of a model for gathering feedback. This operating environment in effective provides constraints for the model to operate within. The focus of this study was the American College of Management and Technology which is established in Dubrovnik, Croatia. Consequently, the constraints imposed on a feedback model in this environment are the financial budget of the College and the affect that cultural differences can have in the gathering of data.

From this background, the hypothesis of this study was generated. It reads as follows: “This study is expected to show that there is an effective feedback model that the American College of Management and Technology in Dubrovnik, Croatia, can utilize to gather relevant data from its students”.

To prove the hypothesis, historical research was undertaken on the effects of cultural differences in data collection and on the three feedback methods. The historical literature

review concentrated on the advantages and disadvantages of each feedback model. These limitations and potentials were then summarized into general and specific characteristics. Further analysis identified each characteristic as either a strength, or a weakness of each model. The environmental constraints were then used as a filter to identify which model best fit the operating conditions of the College.

The evaluation showed that the survey as a method for feedback gathering is the most cost effective model for generating a statistically significant result. This fits within the financial operating constraint of the College. The research on the affect that culture plays in data gathering showed that all three models were an effective means for collecting feedback from student age respondents in Eastern and Central European countries. In essence, the data gathered from this Croatian group using any one of the three models, would be no more or no less significant than if it had been gathered from a North American group of students. For this age group culture does not effect the results. However, if the respondents are not student age, and not attending university, the effectiveness of each model to generate valid results could vary.

These results would suggest that the hypothesis can be validated. The survey method of data gathering is an effective model for the American College of Management and Technology to utilize, given it measures significantly more strengths and fewer weaknesses than the other two models.

The information generated by this study could be limited by the extent of the historical literature review. A thorough review was conducted, but it is possible that literature exists that would lead to a different conclusion. Although the findings are significant for the

college under study, and maybe for other institutions in Central and Eastern Europe, their application to other cultures may be limited.

To conclude this project, the researcher would recommend that all three of the models can be utilized to some extent in the collection of data. Focus groups and interviews can play a complementary role even though the survey was shown to be the best feedback model for the College. A small focus group or a limited set of interviews, at a cost within the College's budget, could be conducted to generate, or validate the questions used in the survey.

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