MEASURING AND IMPROVING SERVICE QUALITY

Soft and Hard Service Quality Measures:

- Customer-defined standards and measures of service quality can be grouped into two broad categories: soft and hard.

- Soft measures are those that cannot easily be observed and must be collected by talking to customers, employees, or others.

- SERVQUAL is an example of a sophisticated soft measurement system.

- By contrast, hard standards and measures relate to those characteristics and activities that can be counted, timed, or measured through audits. Such measures may include how many telephone calls were abandoned while the customer was on hold, how many minutes customers had to wait in line at a particular stage in the service delivery, the time required to complete a specific task, the temperature of a particular food item, how many trains arrived late, how many bags were lost, how many patients made a complete recovery following a specific type of operation, and how many orders were filled correctly.

Soft Measures of Service Quality:

Companies need to establish ongoing listening system using multiple methods among different customer groups. A single service quality study is a snapshot taken at a point in time and from a particular angle. Deeper insight and more informed decision making come from a continuing series of snapshots taken from various angles and through different lenses, which from the essence of systematic listening.
Key customer centric service quality measures include total market surveys, annual surveys, transactional surveys, service feedback cards, mystery shopping, analysis of unsolicited feedback, focus group discussions, and service reviews. Among other soft measures are the following:

- Ongoing surveys of account holders by telephone or mail, using scientific sampling procedures to determine customers satisfaction in term of broader relationship issues
- Customer advisory panels to offer feedback and advice on service performance
- Employee surveys and panels to determine perceptions of the quality of service delivered to customers on specific dimensions, barriers to better service, and suggestions for improvement.

**Hard measures of service quality:**

Hard measures typically refer to operational processes or outcomes and include such data as uptime, service response times, failure rates, and delivery costs. In a complex service operation, multiple measures of service quality will be recorded at many different points. In low-contact services, in which customers are not deeply involved in the service delivery process, many operational measures apply to backstage activities that have only a second order effect on customers.