



Understanding How Outbound Trainers Build Customer Satisfaction: A Multi-Case Qualitative Study of Outbound Trainers and Their Clients in Batu, Indonesia

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Abstract

Introduction/Main Objectives: This study looks at how outdoor trainers use different methods to boost client satisfaction. Since these programs involve constant interaction, keeping customers happy plays a key role in maintaining repeat business while supporting financial sustainability over time.

Background Problems: The issue being studied involves inconsistent results in outbound training when it comes to meeting client expectations, made more complex by the abstract nature of the service and how much it depends on the trainer's skills. This study asks: From both trainers' and participants' viewpoints, what actions lead to higher satisfaction in these programs?

Novelty: This work fills a missing piece in existing studies through detailed qualitative analysis of how trainers operate offering their viewpoint, which earlier research often ignores despite centering on participants' results.

Research Methods: This multi-case qualitative research gathered information from two skilled outbound trainers and their clients in Batu, Indonesia using semi-structured interviews, observational methods without participation, along with examination of written records. The material was processed through thematic coding techniques.

Finding/Results: The results show a clear pattern of four main approaches to boosting satisfaction: first, tailoring plans after detailed analysis of user needs; also, strong support using inclusive methods; next, deeper connections that go past simple exchanges; finally, ongoing adjustments guided by broad feedback. When trainer and participant views align, it becomes evident that success depends not only on skill but equally on genuine personal engagement.

Conclusion: The key takeaway here, program effectiveness in outbound training hinges on solid instructional design along with the facilitator's skill in promoting group connection and engaging learning. This research offers practical guidance: helping providers improve delivery standards while enabling customers to make smarter choices when picking partners.

Keywords: Customer Satisfaction; Outbound Training; Qualitative Study; Service Quality; Experiential Learning



Introduction

Customer satisfaction is a cornerstone of business success, particularly in the service industry. It is fundamentally defined as the feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting from comparing a product's or service's perceived performance against one's expectations (Kotler & Keller, 2016). In the context of service provision, achieving high customer satisfaction is paramount as it drives client retention, positive word-of-mouth, and long-term profitability. For services like outbound training, which are highly interactive and experiential, satisfaction is intricately linked to the quality of the client-trainer interaction and the perceived value of the learning experience.

In the modern world of work, self-development and team building are crucial for personal and organizational growth. To face competitive business dynamics, organizations continually strive to improve performance, collaboration, and employee morale. One popular method considered effective for this is the outbound training program, an experiential learning format designed to build team cohesion, leadership, and character. Consequently, many companies allocate significant budgets to these programs, expecting tangible results like a more unified team and better communication. However, the pivotal question remains: are all outbound programs successful in satisfying their clients? The intangible nature of the service, high competition among providers, and its heavy reliance on the facilitator's skill mean that customer satisfaction in this context is not guaranteed, with anecdotal evidence and varied outcomes suggesting a wide spectrum of client experiences.

A review of recent literature underscores the ongoing interest in this field. Studies within the last five years have explored various aspects, such as the impact of experiential learning on self-efficacy and team dynamics (Tyne et al. 2024), the adventure-based experiential learning effectiveness on communication skill (Mulder & Bloemhoff 2023), one of them studies the employee perspective of experiential learning benefits (Cardona Triana & Trejos Parra 2020). Nationally, research has also focused on the outcomes of outbound training on employee performance (Prastiwi et al. 2023) and team cohesiveness (Muis et al. 2023). While these studies, including qualitative ones, affirm the value of training and its general factors for success, they predominantly focus on the outcomes or the participants' perspectives. A critical gap remains: a lack of in-depth, qualitative investigation into the processes and strategies employed by the key actors, the outbound trainers themselves to deliberately build customer satisfaction from the client's perspective.

Understanding this process from the insider's perspective is key to uncovering the mechanism leading to customer satisfaction. This study is vital for training providers as it can offer a blueprint for enhancing trainer quality and service delivery. For client companies, it provides a framework for selecting training vendors based on substantive trainer competence rather than just cost or location. For academic literature, this research fills the identified gap by using a qualitative lens to explore the "how" and "why" behind customer satisfaction in experiential training services.

Therefore, this multi-case qualitative research aims to achieve a dual objective: first, to explore and understand in depth the strategies, actions, and processes implemented by outbound trainers in building and ensuring customer satisfaction from their own

perspective; and second, to incorporate the clients' (customers') perspective to understand their experience as well as perception of the satisfaction built by the trainers.

Research Methods

This study employs a qualitative multi-case study design to explore how outbound trainers develop customer satisfaction through their practices, strategies, and competencies. The qualitative approach enables the researcher to capture in-depth insights from the trainers' perspectives, while the multi-case design allows comparative analysis across different training contexts (Yin, 2018).

Two outbound trainers from different outdoor training providers in Batu, Indonesia were selected through purposive sampling based on criteria of professional experience (minimum three years), active involvement in training design and facilitation, and having corporate or organizational clients. To enrich data and ensure triangulation, clients are also selected through purposive sampling based on criteria of maturity (legal age), from each trainer were also interviewed to validate and complement the trainers' accounts.

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, non-participant observations, and document reviews (training materials, client feedback forms, and evaluation reports). Each interview with trainers lasted 20-30 minutes while with their clients it lasted for 10-15 minutes and was audio-recorded with participant consent. Observations were conducted during selected outbound sessions to record trainer-client interaction, facilitation style, and feedback mechanisms. All data were transcribed verbatim and anonymized. The interviews used Indonesian language and occurred in Taman Dolan, Batu, East Java. The trainer informants are the author's mentors, as the author is also involved in the same field while also being a student, therefore the author can gain access to interviewing their clients.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006). The analysis involved five main steps: (1) familiarization with data, (2) coding, (3) developing themes, (4) cross-case comparison, and (5) interpretation in relation to existing literature on experiential learning and customer satisfaction. Triangulation among trainers, clients, and documentation was applied to enhance credibility, supported by member checking and audit trails for dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Ethical clearance was maintained through informed consent, confidentiality assurance, and voluntary participation. Although qualitative studies do not aim for statistical generalization, procedural replicability was ensured by providing transparent documentation of sampling, data collection, and analysis steps, allowing other researchers to reproduce the study design and achieve consistent findings in similar contexts.

Result

Participant Profiles

This research involves two outbound trainers with different characteristics along each of their clients. The first trainer, T1, has 7 years of experience that specializes in handling children participants. The second trainer, T2, has 21 years of experience with a wider range of participants. Both trainer are interviewed alongside their client representative that has used their service.

Table 1. Participant Profiles

Trainer	Experience	Spesialization	Client	Activity Context
T1	7 years	Children & Fun games	Elementary school (C1)	Motivation for 6th grade students before graduation
T2	21 years	All-age groups	Junior high school (C2)	"Suara Demokrasi" & Leadership

Source: Author's Work, 2025.

Strategic planning and customization

Both trainers implemented a systematic approach in program planning. T1 emphasizes theme identification as the planning base;

"Sebelum kita tune in ke kegiatan Outbound... yang harus pertama kali kita tahu... tema kegiatan Outbound dari peserta apa" ("Before we tune into outbound activity... the first thing we must know... the outbound activity theme from the participants")

This gets validation from the client who states the program

"sudah lumayan sesuai dengan tema" ("it's quite in line with the theme") (C1).

T2 does the assessment with more comprehensive approach; *"Saya beri pertanyaan dulu kepada mereka, apa sih kebutuhannya... segi materi, pemilihan tempat, waktu, dan program" ("I ask them first, what are their needs... in terms of material, place selection, time, and program. ") (T2).* Client confirms this suitability:

"Benar-benar mengambil tema suara demokrasi... tepat dengan tujuan kami" ("it really takes on the theme voice of democracy... right in line with our goals") (C2).

Facilitation techniques and engagement

Both trainers respectively use a facilitative approach rather than instructive. T1 position himself as a part of the participants:

"Saya berkegiatan untuk menjadikan saya bagian dari mereka" ("I do activities to make myself a part of them") (T1).

Client proves the effectiveness of this approach:

"Sangat berkesan... kemampuan timbal baliknya atau komunikasinya juga, bahkan anak-anak menerima sangat komunikatif" ("very impressive... either the reciprocal or communication capabilities, even the children received very communicative") (C1).

T2 on the other hand emphasized first impression:

"Saya pecah kebekuan mereka... first impression atau di 5 menit pertama" ("I broke their ice... first impression or at the first 5 minutes") (T2).

Client observes the result:

"Dari ice-breaking pertama sampai game terakhir... semangat yang luar biasa" ("from the first ice breaking until the last game... the spirit was incredible") (C2).

Relationship building and relational integration

Relational aspect became the main difference in building satisfaction. T1 creates family atmosphere:

"Kalau peserta datang dan kita belum siap, berarti kita kalah 1-0" ("when the client has arrived and we were not ready, that means we lost 1-0") (T1).

This results a form of loyalty:

"Menurut saya sangat bagus karena sudah berkali-kali kita merekomendasi T1" ("In my opinion is great because we have recommended T1 many times") (C1).

T2 positions himself as learning partner:

"Kami hanya sebuah media... sifatnya kita adalah saling belajar" ("we are just media... the nature is we learn from each other") (T2).

Client feels this approach:

"Memberi kesempatan anak-anak untuk bisa berpikir, berani menularkan ide mereka" ("gives the chance for the children to think, be brave to express their ideas") (C2)

Evaluation and long-term improvement

Both trainers emphasized different indicators to measure success. T1 uses relational approach:

"Peserta bisa mengenal kami dengan baik dari panggilan nama" ("the participants could recognize us from calling our names") (T1).

While T2 used business indicator:

"Indikator keberhasilan adalah mereka repeat order... rekomendasi ke teman-temannya" ("the success indicators are they repeat order... recommends to their friends") (T2).

However, both trainers face operational challenges. Either C1 and C2 gave input:

"masalahnya cuma di persiapan sholat jumat disana terjadi kemoloran waktu" ("the problem is just when preparing jumat prayers happens to be a time delay") (C1),

"Cuma tadi agak molor aja... kami kira datang sudah langsung mulai, tapi masih menunggu" ("is was just a bit late earlier... we thought it would be straight away, but we still have to wait") (C2).

These statements show the importance of technical aspects in overall satisfaction.

Triangulation: Trainer-client perspectives

Data shows consistency between strategy implemented by trainers and client satisfaction perception. Both clients that interactive communication approach, activity design that suits the needs, and personal relationships built by trainers directly influence their satisfaction level.

This discovery reveals that the success of building client satisfaction in outbound training depends on the combination between technical competence in program designing as well as the ability to build authentic interpersonal relationships.

Discussion

The Integrated Strategic Model for Customer Satisfaction in Outbound Training

Based on research findings and supported by current literature, this study proposes a conceptual model called "Integrated Strategy Model for Customer Satisfaction in Outbound Training". This model synthesizes four core strategies that are interrelated and proven effective in building customer satisfaction, namely: (1) Strategy Customization through in-depth needs analysis that aligns with the findings of (Park et al. 2022) regarding the superiority of the two-predictor model; (2) Facilitation Excellence with a participatory approach supported by (Saalfeld's 2023) research on the criticality of facilitator competencies; (3) Relational Integration that goes beyond transactional relationships, in line with (Cetin's 2020) findings regarding the superiority of experience over quality in predicting loyalty; and (4) Continuous Improvement which

is a multidimensional feedback movement with an evaluation approach that can be optimized through the integration of the Kano model and fuzzy systems (Albuquerque et al., 2024).

These four pillars do not operate in isolation, but form a dynamic, mutually reinforcing system, reflecting the complementarity between the technical and relational dimensions as identified in the ADEPT model (Lee, 2023) and the external competency gap analysis (Saalfeld, 2023). A key contribution of this model lies in its emphasis that the success of experiential training services depends not only on meeting traditional service quality dimensions (Sam et al., 2024), but on the ability to build authentic interpersonal bonds, a dimension that is a crucial competitive differentiator in the Indonesian service industry context. Thus, this model not only strengthens existing theoretical frameworks but also provides an actionable blueprint for practitioners in the field.

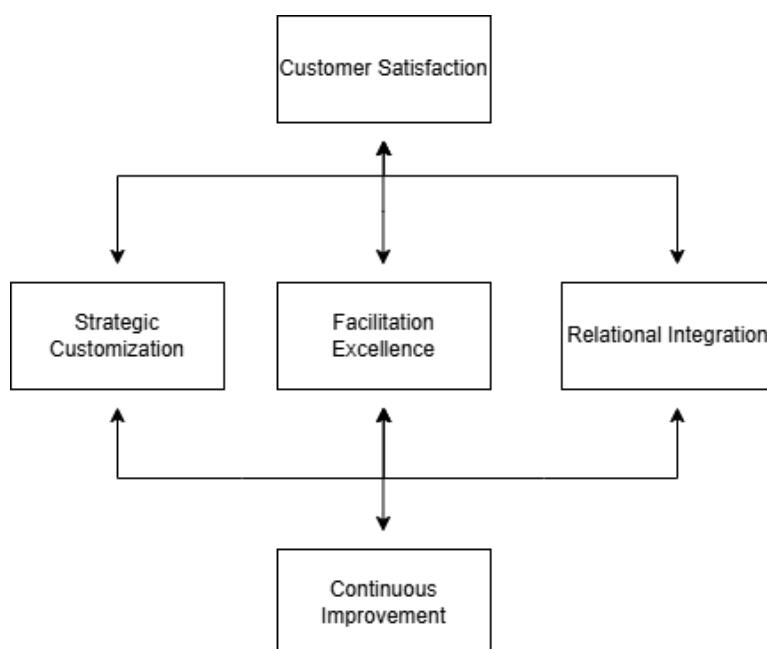


Figure 1. Integrated Strategic Model for Customer Satisfaction in Outbound Training
Source: Author's Work, 2025.

Strategy configuration to Build Customer Satisfaction in Outbound Training

The research findings reveal a comprehensive strategic configuration for building customer satisfaction in outbound training services, consisting of four interrelated core strategies: strategic customization, facilitation excellence, relational integration, and continuous improvement. This configuration aligns with the ADEPT model (Lee, 2023), which emphasizes the integration of delivery, environment, and product aspects, but with a particular emphasis on the experiential learning context in Indonesia. Among these, strategic customization serves as the fundamental pillar upon which the others are built.

The findings indicate that both trainers applied strategic customization principles through in-depth needs assessments. T1 emphasized theme identification as the basis for design: "Before we tune into the outbound activity... we must first know... what the participants' outbound theme is," while T2 conducted a more comprehensive assessment covering aspects of materials, location, time, and program. This approach aligns with the findings of Park et al. (2022) regarding the superiority of a two-predictor model that considers both expectations and actual performance.

The integration of the Kano model with a fuzzy approach (Albuquerque et al., 2024) is relevant to confirming the importance of mapping service attributes in outbound training. The finding that T1 focused more on adjustments based on participant age, while T2 focused on synchronizing needs with field conditions, indicates variations in the implementation of strategic customization that can be optimized through this framework. This meticulous, client-centric planning forms the essential foundation that enables the effective application of the subsequent strategies, facilitation, relational building, and improvement.

Facilitator excellence as participant engagement driver

Both trainers demonstrated an effective facilitative approach to maintaining participant engagement. T1 employed the technique of "welcoming participants as one of them," while T2 emphasized "making a first impression in the first 5 minutes." This finding is consistent with Chen's (2024) research on the determinants of satisfaction in outdoor activities, which highlights the critical role of guide/facilitator competence.

The effectiveness of this facilitation approach is also reinforced by Saalfeld's (2023) findings regarding trainer competency gap analysis, which identified facilitation skills as a critical area influencing client satisfaction. The two-way communication pattern employed by both trainers aligns with the principles of experiential learning (Blanchard, 1998) but with contextual adaptations that strengthen the empathy and responsiveness dimensions of SERVQUAL.

Relational integration as competitive difference

The analysis reveals that relational integration is the most significant competitive differentiator in building client satisfaction. However, its implementation showcases a fascinating strategic variation between the two trainers, which can be categorized as relational depth versus relational breadth.

T1 specializes in creating intense emotional bonds and a familial atmosphere. His strategy begins the moment participants arrive, guided by the philosophy that

"If participants arrive and we are not ready, it means we start 0-1 down."

This statement underscores his belief that preparedness and welcoming are the bedrock of the client-trainer relationship. His approach is centered on integration:

"I conduct activities to make myself a part of them."

The success of this deep relational strategy is measured through profoundly personal indicators, such as when

"Participants can recognize us well by calling our names."

The impact of this relational depth materializes as remarkable long-term client loyalty, as attested by his client (C1):

"In my opinion, it's excellent because we have recommended T1 many times... Since the first year, since 2019."

This demonstrates that deep relational investment can forge bonds that last over a decade.

In contrast, T2 cultivates relational breadth by positioning himself as a learning partner and facilitator. He explicitly rejects the role of an instructor:

"Not a teacher. We are merely a medium... The nature of our relationship is that we learn from each other."

His approach focuses on the ability to "deliver and translate" learning values and create a space for participants to grow. His client (C2) validates the effectiveness of this method, highlighting how the trainer

"Gives the children a chance to think, to be brave in expressing their ideas."

The tangible business outcome of this partnership strategy is growth, measured by concrete business metrics like "repeat orders" and "referrals to their friends."

This fundamental distinction demonstrates that "relational integration" is not a monolithic concept. T1 builds a competitive advantage through loyalty and client retention based on deep emotional connections. Meanwhile, T2 achieves a competitive edge through network expansion and a reputation as a democratic facilitation expert. Both styles are equally valid and powerful, and the choice between them can be strategically aligned with target client segments, trainer personality, and business positioning. This finding strongly supports Cetin's (2020) theory that in experiential services, the 'relational experience' often proves to be a more decisive factor for satisfaction and loyalty than technical quality alone.

Continous improvement as sustainable drive

The two trainers implemented continuous improvement through different mechanisms. T1 used the relational indicator "name calls," while T2 used the business indicator "repeat orders and recommendations." This difference reflects the multidimensionality of satisfaction measurement, as identified in Vü & Ha's (2022) study on training service quality.

The text-mining technique proposed by Mejia et al. (2021) can optimize the evaluation systems of both trainers, particularly in capturing qualitative feedback. The timeliness issues expressed by T2's clients confirm the importance of maintaining reliability as a fundamental dimension of SERVQUAL (Sam et al., 2024).

Convergence and Divergence of T1 and T2 Strategies

Comparative analysis reveals a fascinating pattern of convergence in fundamental principles but divergence in strategic execution. Both trainers demonstrate convergence in their unwavering commitment to client-centric customization, aligning with Park et al. (2022) on the importance of expectation-performance alignment. They similarly embrace facilitative approaches over instructive methods, validating Saalfeld's (2023) emphasis on facilitation competence. Most notably, both recognize relational investment as non-negotiable, supporting Cetin's (2020) findings on experience superiority over pure quality.

However, strategic divergence emerges in their implementation pathways. In relational integration, T1 pursues depth through familial bonding, generating remarkable loyalty since 2009, while T2 develops breadth through learning partnerships, driving business growth via referrals. Their engagement styles differ fundamentally - T1 employs integration-based immersion ("becoming part of them"), whereas T2 utilizes structured-entry facilitation ("first 5 minutes"). This divergence extends to success metrics, with T1 prioritizing relational indicators (name recognition) and T2 emphasizing business outcomes (repeat orders).

This convergence-divergence pattern offers crucial theoretical insight: while service quality fundamentals are universal, their strategic implementation can be contextually adapted. Practically, this provides trainers with validated pathways for developing signature styles while maintaining core service excellence principles.

Conclusion

This study successfully identifies a comprehensive strategic configuration for building customer satisfaction in outbound training, comprising four core elements: strategic customization through in-depth needs assessment, facilitation excellence with participatory approach, relational integration beyond transactional relationships, and continuous improvement via multidimensional evaluation. Theoretically, this research contributes a contextualized model that extends the ADEPT framework and SERVQUAL dimensions by emphasizing the critical role of authentic interpersonal relationships in experiential learning, particularly within the Indonesian cultural context. Practically, these findings offer actionable guidance for trainers to develop their signature style, for institutions to design balanced competency development programs, and for client organizations to establish more substantive vendor selection criteria based on demonstrated strategic capabilities rather than mere cost considerations.

However, this study is limited by its sample size of two trainers and its exclusive focus on the educational sector, which affects the generalizability of findings across different industry contexts. Future research should therefore expand to corporate and government training settings to validate and refine the proposed model. Additionally, the development of a quantitative measurement instrument based on these qualitative findings would enable large-scale testing of the strategic configuration's effectiveness. Such research could incorporate text-mining techniques for more efficient analysis of participant feedback, ultimately contributing to a more robust understanding of service

quality dynamics in experiential training services across diverse socioeconomic environments.

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