



**IMPROVING PROJECT CONTROL PROCESSES**

**By**

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# IMPROVING PROJECT CONTROL PROCESSES

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Alexandros S. Tzotzos



## Curriculum Vitae

Alexandros S. Tzotzos has a bachelor degree in Mechanical engineering from Technological Institution of Chalkida. He has proven working experience as a technician during his practical training in Attiko Metro Operation Company. The major responsibilities were the scheduled maintenance of the electromechanical equipment of the metro stations. From the April of 2008 he works in accident handling of Executive Lease and National Alamo car rental in Greece.

The role is to manage the repair units and the external suppliers all over the Greece in order to be repaired the damaged vehicles. The high quality services to the customers are a must in order to represent the global mother company of National Alamo with excellent and quality way.





## Abstract

This thesis is dedicating to problems that referred with the suppliers and the external partners that cooperate with organizations offering car rental services as a product to the customers. The major aim is to propose new control methods and mechanisms by adopting project control principles and to improve the existing processes.

It is also important to identify and analyze understand problems related with the level of quality of the provided services by rental organizations as well as to achieve the biggest level of customer satisfaction.

The major goal of this study is to propose new methods and proposals for how to change the existing processes in order National Alamo Company be more competitive to the car rental market of Greece.

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## Introduction

One of the most important factors that can lead an organization to the success is a well organized management. Nowadays in a competitive environment and the specific financial circumstances, the adoption of controlling principles is a must for every organization in order to ensure the processes and the methods that have been defined by the organization.

### *Nature of the Study*

The nature of the study is the problems among the organization and the cooperated outsourcing project teams. Specifically the inefficient repair process control allows faults to the processes and as a result of this situation is to provide low quality services to the customers. The major sequences related with customer satisfaction and the possible impact to the tourism of the Greece during the summer period due to the huge increase of travellers. So in this study I will analyze the existing processes of National Alamo and I will evaluate them in combination with the proposed processes of the bibliography. At the same time I will indicate the meaning of providing high quality services by analyzing the questionnaire's results.

*Needs Assessment*

In our days the financial crisis has affected the global market and the finances of the countries. In this specific period there is a huge need for the Greek tourism industry to be supported with all means. The Greek tourism offers about 25 per cent of the gross national product (GNP) per year. So as a part of Greek tourism, the car rental market has to fulfil a part of this need by offering high quality services especially to tourists of Greece. The whole effort is affected by three major stakeholders who are: the customers who decide about the level of quality in provided services, the upper management level of National Alamo company who decide about the internal changes in organization and of course the outsourcing project teams which cooperate with National Alamo for the fleet maintenance. The need of an organization that provides high quality services to their customers and at the same time builds a long term relationship with them, will generate profit for National Alamo company and at the same time will contribute to the financial recovery of the Greek economy.

*Purpose of the study*

The purpose of this study is to identify faults to the existing crucial methods and processes related with controlling outsourcing partners and propose and rebuild new processes for better control of the project in car rental organizations by adopting methods from car industry and specifically from car manufactures.

*Significance to your Work place*

National Alamo is an internationally recognized brand serving the daily rental needs of major airports in Greece. I work as an accident coordinator in technical department of the organization and I am responsible to obtain the whole repair process till the delivery of the repaired vehicle to the customers. The company has a specific structure and processes which they have some faults. As a result of this the car is not delivered to the customer with the appropriate quality. The major aim is to define new processes through this thesis and to propose them for adoption by the upper management level of the organization. Another major issue is to improve the services to the customer which is something to lead to meet their expectations. My expectation is to reach the major aims of this thesis. A major advantage is the authorization of the upper lever management of the National Alamo Company for collecting data from the internal files of the company and their intention for a change the internal processes of the company.

*Relation to the Program of Study*

My thesis will be developed in relation with the following courses of the programme which are: Project Quality Management, Project Planning and Control and Project Management Body of Knowledge.

## Problem statement

### *Problem statement*

The loss of project control during the repair process in car rental organizations due to outsourcing project teams offers low quality services to the customers and as a result of this situation is the customer's discontent.

### *Rationale*

The incomes from the car rental market especially the summer period in Greece are huge because of the global tourist offices reservations. It is important to improve the customer's services in order to provide high quality services and at the same time to avoid bad impacts to the Greek tourism especially the specific period with the existing financial crisis.

### *Objectives*

The objectives will be to develop, define and describe new control processes that are connected with the external partners and suppliers or to improve some of the existing processes of the organization in order to improve the degree of the quality of the provided services to the customer. The implementation of the new processes and the

monitoring of the results is a must in order to address in a continuously way the pains and to make any possible changes.



## Literature review

### *Introduction*

According to Kerzner (2006) an accurate definition of project management is the planning, organizing, directing and controlling the various resources in order to deliver a project on time, with thin budget and with the appropriate requirements. So it is obvious that one of the major principles of project management is the controlling process. It is also mentioned by Kerzner (2006) that the controlling phase is a three-step process of measuring progress of measuring, evaluating and correcting. These three steps referred to the ability of project manager to measure the informal and formal data in order to evaluate them and to take a possible action if it is necessary for correction in the project.

### *Introduction to the control process*

Meredith states (2006) there are many organizations that they don't spend enough time and effort on planning and controlling projects. The project manager is responsible for ensuring the organizational goals and objectives. Kerzner (2006) mentions that in order to effect the above the project manager should have the knowledge about cost control policies. So it is obvious that the project manager should be able to know about cost control, schedule tools and the performance of the project, but the most important issue is the ability of monitoring the data of the project.

According to Meredith (2006) there are three major types of control processes in a project. These control processes are cybernetic control, go or no-go control and post control. But the most important issue is the ability of monitoring the data of the project in so the project manager can identify the possible faults and try to change them. Forsberg, Mooz & Cotterman (2005) underline the fact the project control can be defined as a proactive and a reactive process control which should be a system designed and implemented in order to reduce the risks of the project. The specific system has to be deal with five major elements common to all control systems.

More specifically these elements are: things to be controlled which means that the function must be controlled with specific performance, the controlled standards which is the requirements of the project, control authority which is controlled by a person or an organization, the control mechanism which is the technique of measuring the progress of the project and finally the variance indication which controls the possible violation of the standards.

#### *Developing the appropriate process control*

Forsberg, Mooz & Cotterman (2005) argues that the process controls whether is a proactive or reactive should be characterized by specific features. These control mechanisms should be relevant and their content, benefits and rationale should be clear and accurate. The control mechanisms is a system of processes that should be designed

and manage the risks of the project. Additionally the process control should be work in an efficient way.

It is very important to avoid the tendency to report and measure the information. This information should be distributed to the project team members who require the data in order to take action. The usage of graphs and the summaries can work as a control tool when this action is possible. It also mentioned by the Forsberg, Mooz & Cotterman (2005) that the control mechanisms should be also as simple as possible while implementing their performance. It is important to be said that the control mechanisms may differ according to the situations, the complex and the risks of each project.

#### *Project control tools and techniques*

According to the PMBOK (2004) the major control tools and techniques are: project management methodology which defines a process that aims to the project management team in monitoring and controlling the project work being performed according to the project management plan. The project management information system which is an automated system is used by the project management team in order to control and monitor the performed activities that are scheduled and planned in the project management plan.

The earned value technique is the major measure tool of the performance of the project from the initiation phase to the closure phase of the project. And the last tool is the expert judgement which is used by thee project management team to monitor and control the performed work.

*Monitoring a project and setting up a monitoring system*

McGuire (2000) states that the project manager should be able to monitor the project in order to identify the risks and potential problems related with the project as soon as it possible, to identify when the project's goal don't achieved, to identify cases of constraining, to ensure that contingency plans early occurred and to provide and receive project status at each phase of the project. When the project manager identifies that the goals of the project will not be met, then he is obliged to report the possible risks to the upper management.

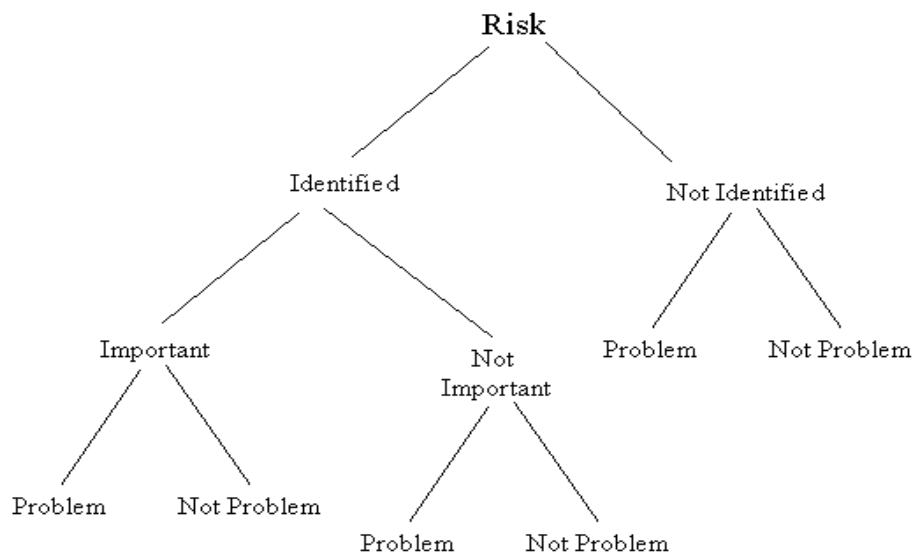


Figure 1: Monitoring the risks chart, (McGuire, 2000)

These types of risks can be identified by project manager and some others may not as figure 1 show. The identified risks can be reported to the upper management if the

project manager decides that are important for the project process. For the identified risks there is a big danger for overlooking them and to generate problems to the project. So there are three paths like figure 1 shows: the risks that identified as important and there is no action by the project manager, the risks that are identified as important and later change into high risks and the risks that are not identified and later become problems for the project.

The project manager has to be able to manage the project during the whole project cycle. So it is important to define and identify the key factors of the project. Meredith (2006) claimed that the best sources of items to be monitored are the risk management plan and the project plan. For the first one the need of monitoring the risks, keeps the project manager and his project team prepared and not surprised in any possible change.

Additionally the project plan describes what is being done according to the schedule. So when it is clear of what are the most crucial factors for controlling a project, the next step is how the project manager should develop a monitoring system. The key for this setting according to Meredith (2006) is to collect the appropriate data. The most usual measuring types for collecting data are the frequency counts, the raw numbers, the subjective numbering ratings, the indicators and finally the verbal measures.

*Global outsourcing nowadays*

Global outsourcing is the strategic use of outside resources to perform activities that are traditionally handled by internal staff and resources. It is a management strategy by which an organization delegates major, non-core functions to specialized and efficient service providers, Corbett M.F (1996). Outsourcing represents the fundamental decision to reject the internalization of an activity, which makes it a highly strategic decision, (Gilley K., 2000; Rasheed A., 2000). The major advantage of global outsourcing focuses on reduction of cost, cheaper labour cost in low cost countries, managing time more efficiency and controlling quality.

Barrar, P. & Gervais R. (2006) claimed that the global outsourcing characterized as a phenomenon that it has to present many challenges. Establishing a global presence can involve processes of managing a complex network of manufacturing distributing and retail sources. It is also mentioned the fact that the organizations have to face the differences in the culture, the language and the legal requirements among the different countries. All these factors create and increase the complexity of the managing and controlling processes.

Although the theoretical foundations for global outsourcing are firmly rooted in the literature, it seems to be difficult for many practitioners to fully take advantage of this practise in reality. A recent case in point is Chrysler's lawsuit against Accenture for not delivering the promised savings when obtaining new suppliers in low cost countries ( Sherefkin and Barkholz, 2008).

*Categories of suppliers*

As it is mentioned from the previous paragraph the global outsourcing offers many advantages both to the suppliers and to the customers. The external partnerships may offer a wide range of distributed services and products through worldwide with low cost. Kerzner (2006) states that there are three major categories of suppliers, an external, an approved and a preferred supplier. The external supplier can be a partner for the first time and the organization usually does not expect a possible cooperation in the future. The approved supplier is a part of a supplier bidding process and it can fulfill the requirements of the project or the contract. The relationship between the supplier and the customer may exist but in a minimum level (kerzner p.337). The last category of the suppliers is the preferred supplier

*Major types of controlling the external partners*

Control is defined as a behavioral, that is attempting to ensure individuals or teams act in a manner that is consistent with achieving desired goals as it is mentioned by Anderson (1985), Jaworski & MacI (1989) and Ouchi (1979). The controlling phase is one of the most important in order to implement the whole process for an acceptable conclusion of the project as well as for any possible change that is going to be done for fixing a fault. Burt, D. & Dobler, D. & Starling, S. (2003) argue that at the specific phase there is a preparation of various plans and documents as well as metrics systems in order to allow the review of controlling process.

The outputs of this phase are used as a data to a control process or mechanism which is characterized a closed-loop system in order to ensure that the actions are executed with the appropriate way at all times and the critical elements of this process are always addressed. These control mechanisms are separated into formal versus informal, Jwarosky (1988). Formal controls are based on written mechanisms that influence behavior through performance evaluation and rewards. In the other side the informal control mechanisms utilize social strategies to reduce goal differences between the buyer and supplier, Harmancioglou (2009).

In the specific journal it is also mentioned that the formal controls are divided in two types, the outcome and the behavior controls, differ based on the degree of supervision, the objectivity of the evaluation procedures, Eisenhardt (1985), Oliver & Anderson (1994), Krafft (1999).

#### *Analysis of formal control mechanisms*

The first type of formal mechanism is the outcome control that is categorized according to the outputs of the project. The major aim of the organization for using this type of control is to evaluate the external partners based on the desired project outcomes and reward them when they achieving them. The possible outcomes could be functional specifications, quality requirements, target implementation and delivering components and parts at the appropriate time.

On the other hand the behavior control mechanism participates and influence the process or the means of goal achievement. The specific mechanism based on the placing



personnel of the organization to the supplier in order to control and monitor the supplier's development methods and processes. So it is obvious that the behavior control mechanism demands more time than other mechanisms.

#### *Informal control mechanisms*

According to the Harmancioglu (2009) the informal controls have been divided on the type of the implementation of these control mechanisms. The first category is to control the whole process by a group of people and the second one is to implement the control mechanism by individual. This group of people focuses on implementation through mechanisms that can eliminate the differences between preferences, transmitting common values, beliefs, culture within the group, Ouchi (1979), Wathne & Heide (2000). The key is to create a strategy in order to settle a relationship that will generate benefits for both parties by organizing regular meetings with executives and giving the chance to the external partner or supplier to determine the goals and the actions that should be achieved.

#### *Outsourcing in automotive industry*

The phenomenon of globalization and foreign direct investment in automotive industry has been grown the last years. Additionally Pfaffman and Stephan (2001) mentioned that since 1990 the automotive manufactures and especially the German original equipment manufactures have externalized a significant proportion of their production. The motivations for the manufactures for outsourcing strategies were the

achieving innovating products, achieving short developing times, competitive prices and high quality products. It is also mentioned the fact that the automotive manufactures, the systematic expansion of geographical scope of sourcing includes two major aspects.

### *Definition of quality*

Many authors state that the organizations around the world will survive only create and retain satisfied customers. The key word in order to success to the specific section is the word quality. According to Hoyle (2007) the word quality may has many meanings: a degree of excellence, conformance with requirements, fitness for use, delighting customers and freedom from defects. Quality in ISO 9000:2000 is defined as the degree to which a set of inherent characteristics fulfils the requirements.

### *The characteristics of quality*

As the *Quality Management Essentials* explains that any characteristic or feature is needed to satisfy the customer needs can be defined as a quality characteristic. Some of the major quality characteristics that are mentioned by Hoyle (2007) are: accessibility, availability, appearance, adaptability, cleanliness, durability, flexibility, functionality, maintainability, safety, security, strength, size and others.

But there are some specific characteristics that focus on quality services and are accessibility, accuracy, courtesy, comfort, competence, credibility, dependability, efficiency, effectiveness, flexibility, integrity, responsiveness, reliability and security. It is very important to specify these characteristics and to reach the appropriate level of

planning, controlling, improving and demonstrating the specific features. When the value of these features qualified and quantified, they called products requirements. All the requirements can be called as quality requirements that should be fulfill customer's expectations.

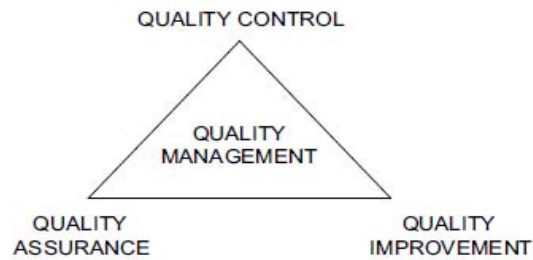


Figure 2: The quality triangle (Hoyle, 2000)

*Quality in automotive industry*

Hoyle (2000) argued the fact that the automotive industry in USA and Europe started to operate quality certification systems and schemes from 1994. The specific quality systems were considered as an extension of ISO 9001, ISO 10011 and EN 45012. In 1996 the automotive industry of USA and Europe adopted the International Automotive Task Force (IATF) which, in cooperation with the technical committee of the International Organization of Standardization (TC 176), developed ISO/TS 16949. The specific system was voluntary but it was adopted and used from the whole automotive manufactures in the globe.

The result from the development and adoption of these quality schemes by the automotive industry was the cascading of these systems to the suppliers and general to the external partners. In our days the automotive industry must be characterized by safety, reliability and production cost. The cost is the factor that leads the car industry to better methods, better processes and better ways of preventing faults to the products. Vehicles are products that should meet customer's expectations and needs but as Hoyle (2000) mentions, the quality does not happen by chance.

So quality systems like ISO/TS 16949 sets a minimum of requirements which if will meet will enable the organizations to satisfy their customers. It is important to be said that the requirements in automotive industry are more demanding than other industries due to the fact that the products should be safe, maintainable, reliable and environmental friendly in the use and disposal.

The car market is very competitive and it is crucial to reduce the cost during the production. So it very important for the car manufacture to organize and to adapt quality systems like ISO/TS 16949 to the suppliers and the external partners of the automotive manufactures. The ISO/TS 16949 contains requirements that define the key characteristics of a quality system in car manufacturing and if these characteristics will not met then expose the organization to many risks. The specific quality system applies to the design, development, production and installation of automotive related products. The standard defines to the suppliers and subcontractors that are going to provide parts or materials, various services like painting, finishes or plating and customer specified products.

All these processes must be implemented monitored and improved. Hoyle (2000) mentioned that “if you are not maintaining or improving quality, delivery, or cost the action you are taking adds no value”. In order to build a checking system about quality, the appropriate way is self analysis. There are some major questions that the upper level management should be able to answer: 1) can we make it ok? 2) Are we making ok? 3) Have we made it ok? 4) Can we make it better? Answering every time to these questions means that the system is always been obtained.

#### *Maintaining a quality system in automotive industry*

The ISO/TS 16949 requires from the suppliers and the external partners to maintain a quality system in order to ensure that the product meets the customer's

expectations and needs. According to Hoyle (2000) in order to maintain a quality system you need to:

- Keep the quality systems documents updated with the needs of the business
- Keep copies of the documents updated with the last amendments
- Keep the staff informed with current processes and policies
- Change processes and policies when a danger is occurred
- Keep the description of the organization compatible with the actual staff relationships and their responsibilities and authorities
- Keep the resources required to implement the policies and procedures compatible with the actual resources available.

#### *Reporting problems to the customer during the quality process*

Hoyle (2000) states that the quality standards in automotive manufactures require that any product or a part of the final product that is lost or damaged or is unsuitable for use, should be recorded and reported to the customer. It is very important to establish the condition of the product before the car manufacture use it or store it. In the case of detecting the car part or the product damaged or incomplete, the part must be placed to a specific guaranteed area and to report the customer for the condition.

If the car part is urgently needed and must be used it to the production line, the customer should be informed for the possible risks in using this part otherwise the vehicle manufacture may be face the sequences. This process of informing about a damaged part

can be developed through a report. The customer is obliged to response and this damage report should contain a statement of both parties as well as an appropriate solution for this problem.

This damage report should contain the following details:

- The name of the vehicle part or a serial number
- The name of the customer
- The date of delivery
- Storage conditions and the place of the storage
- Receipt inspection requirements
- The place of current storage
- The possible date of return to the supplier

#### *Quality in organizations that provide services*

The term of service quality is often used to mean how the customer is satisfied by the provided services as it was described to previous paragraphs. Johnston & Clark (2001) claimed that the service quality is more often expressed as the degree or the level of quality between customer expectation and the perception of the service. So it is obvious that the organization should be worry about the delivered services to the customers.

#### *The customer factor in service organizations*

According to Johnston & Clark (2001) the customer is considered as an input for many service operations and thus it is so important to know how to manage him but also how are we going to meet their expectations. In many cases the customer can judge the organization for the level of quality of the provided services and how these services can be matched up to the requirements. It is very crucial for every organization to success and builds a long term relationship with their customers especially nowadays with the global crisis. It is also mentioned by Johnston & Clark that the major goals for service organizations are to understand what satisfies customers in continually process that should be revised and addressed all the time. It is a fact that the companies that have reputation for excellent service spend money and time for listening their customers with various methods and ways. A good example of this theory is Disneyland that invented a new way for collecting data from their customers in order to asses the data and to move on improvements in their provided services to the customers.

#### *Achieving customer satisfaction*

According to PMBOK ((2004) customer satisfaction is the understanding, evaluating, defining, and managing expectations so that customer requirements are met. Schneider & Bowen (1999) mentioned about customer satisfaction that there are three assumptions about the level of satisfaction. If the customer's perception of the service meets their expectations then they should be satisfied. If the customer's perception of the service exceeds their expectations, then they will be more than satisfied even more



delighted. And the third assumption if the customer's perception doesn't meet customers expectations then the customer may be satisfied, even outraged.

According to Johnston & Clark (2001) it is very crucial to understand and define customer's expectations in order to define, design and deliver the appropriate service at the appropriate cost for the organization. Additionally the encouragement of the marketers in order to try to influence customer's prior expectations so that can be delivered, as well as to understand the appropriate way of managing customer perception during the service in order to achieve the desired quality level of the provided service. A safe conclusion can be that one of the most important factors for the organizations in order to achieve high quality customer services is to define their business as exceeding customer expectations in order to provide always high quality services.

#### *Understanding how customers are satisfied*

Hoyle (2000) states that there are two major methods for understanding customer's satisfaction. The first one is the use of questionnaires and surveys and it is characterized as a quantitative research and it can be structured around some quality factors. The second one is a qualitative method and tend to collect data and at the same time to provide the interpretation of facts by the customers with their own words. It is also mentioned that there are some tools for identifying the level of customer's satisfaction like questionnaires and surveys. These questionnaires can be deployed written or verbal and it a very god tool for soliciting opinions about the company's services and of defining of what customers find important.

Additionally the focus groups, is another tool that comprises groups of about fifteen customers with a trained facilitator in order to discuss with the customers specific aspects of provided services of the organization. Another method is the customer advisory panels that have common processes with focus groups, but are likely meet with a more structured agenda. An also useful method for identifying customer's satisfaction is the new or lost customer surveys. It is a very useful way to find what attracts the customers to the organization and to improve the specific factors and at the same time to discover why they left.

It is also mentioned that complain or compliment analysis can be undertaken upon customer's contributions, in order to provide information about dissatisfaction. Additionally the critical incident technique or CIT identifies the factors that dissatisfy the customers. Critical incidents are facts or events that contribute to, or detract from a provided service or product performance.

The specific technique usually contains two questions. The first one referred to a situation that the customer felt very satisfied from the product o the service of the organization and he or she will have to describe this situation in a few sentences and to explain why the felt this satisfaction and the second question referred with the case of dissatisfaction.

#### *Assessing customer's satisfaction*

It is very important for every organization to develop and to adopt methods of identifying customer's satisfaction. The next step is to asses the results of these methods. Hoyle (2001) states that satisfaction can be addressed using some of the more qualitative

methods but it can be structured and assessed using either questionnaires and surveys or mystery shoppers. The first method that referred to questionnaires and surveys can be developed using some specific quality factors or those that customers identified as more important for the organization.

The questionnaire is structured from questions that referred with customer's expectations and perceptions of the provided service or product. The major quality factors that are used to the questionnaires are the assurance, empathy, reliability, responsiveness and tangibles. The best known questionnaire and survey method for assessing service quality is Servqual which developed and refined by Parasuramann (1988). The specific questionnaire uses five quality dimensions with twenty two items for perceptions and another twenty two for expectations, using a seven –point Likert scale. A perception gap score is then calculated for each pair of statements. The difference is the SERVQUAL score. The second method

### *Car rental history*

The car rental is a part of many people's travel plans and it is used globally whether is a journey for business or a family journey or for holidays. In all cases the car rental services are extremely helpful for the customers. The car rental history starts at the same time of automotive and motorcar industry development. According to insufficient information, many believe that the first rental company was founded by a man named Joe Saunders. He started operated his small rental company with a T Ford model which was

very famous to the mass in the specific period. It is believed that Saunders rent his cars to his customers and he was charged them for ten cents per mile.

It is also said that the first renter was a travelling salesman who used the specific car to impress a local girl. The first company operated with big success by Saunders and by 1925 the company had depots in twenty five states of America. Another American, the Walter Jacobs started his car rental company but after a few years he sold the specific company to the larger Yellow company owned by John Hertz. In turn Hertz was sold to the automobile organization General Motors and the Hertz is still operated around the globe as the biggest car rental organization. The car rental market started to grown especially after the end of Second World War were the airlines were used by businessmen and so the rental companies. From this time car rental companies have continued to improve, outlets have been settled in every airport worldwide and the competition among the rental companies is huge.

#### *Car rental companies today*

A car rental agency is an organization that rents automobiles for a long or a short term period for a fee. A well organized car rental company usually operates a numerous of local branches and primary located in airports, sea ports, to the centers of cities etc. Car rental companies usually serve travelers, owners of damaged vehicles and industry needs. The rental organizations usually operate a number of fleet vehicles and renting

them to their customers for a fee and with some additional services like delivery/collection of the vehicle.

The car rental fleet can be owned outright which means that the car rental company takes a risk on how the vehicle will be sold after some years of use. Another case is the rental organization to proceed to a buy back agreement with specific automobile dealers. With this way of agreement the car rental company operates the vehicles for specific time period and after that the vehicles will be sold to used car market to dealers.

#### *Car rental companies in Greece*

According to the webpage of the Association of tourist car rental companies of Greece the car rental market in Greece comprises about 2300 car rental organizations and they work about 30000 employees. The vehicle fleet in Greece amounts to 160000 cars of which the 60000 cars are operated under short term rental and the 90000 vehicles to a long term rental. It is estimated that 3, 5 million lease contracts are confirmed every year and the annual turnover amounts to 340 million euro for short term rentals and 400 million euro for long term rentals.

*Methodologies and Procedures Used in the study*

In earlier chapters of this thesis, we have recognized as the purpose of this study methods and process in order to succeed more sufficient and flexible the way of controlling suppliers and the external partners in automotive industry. The research of the literature has focused on four major topics. The first one related with the general project control processes and the methods for controlling the suppliers and the external partners of an organization.

The second topic analyzes the quality methods that are used in automotive industry and specifically to automotive manufactures as well the quality in companies that provide services to the customers. The third element of the literature review develops methods for succeeding and measuring customer satisfaction and tools for assessing the results.

The methodology used in the study is based on a quantitative research through questionnaires. The questionnaires contains questions about customer satisfaction and the level of quality in provided services by National Alamo organization and will be distributed to major car rental stations in Greece. The results will be analyzed through statistical charts. The research is expected to identify the existed level of customer satisfaction of National Alamo as well as the drawbacks in supply system of the organization.

*Introduction to qualitative and quantitative research*

Fryer (2006) states that qualitative research usually examines factors in different academic backgrounds like social sciences, but also in market research and many others sciences. The major aim of the qualitative researchers is to learn in depth the human behavior as well the reason of this behavior. The specific method investigates the why and how of decision making and not just when, where and what.

This method generates information only on particular cases and any more general conclusions are only hypotheses that can be confirmed by quantitative methods. The quantitative research method examines the way of developing and employing mathematical models, theories and hypotheses that concern to phenomena. The process of measurement in this research method is central to quantitative research due to the connection between empirical observation and mathematical expression of quantitative relationships.

This research method is used by social scientists and mathematical sciences and generates information on particular cases, but it can be used to verify the truthiness of hypotheses. In quantitative research statistical methods are used and the process starts with the collection of data that are based on the theory or hypothesis. It is usually collected a big sample data before the analysis can take place.

*Introduction to the case study: National Alamo car rental organization*

According to the web sight of National Alamo the organization was founded by 24 independent rental car agents on August 27 of 1947. It has developed the rental

network from sixty locations to over 2000 locations worldwide. It was the first car rental company to offer one-way rentals for those wishing to rent a vehicle in one town and leave it in another. In 1966, National Alamo car rental operated its regional reservation offices with the “Telex” computer system.

Officially it was the first car rental company to adopt computers into daily reservation operations. Today National Alamo car rental organization is a premium, internationally recognized brand serving the daily rental needs of the frequent airport business traveler through worldwide. National Alamo car rental organization operates in Greece through Executive Lease.

The executive Lease is a leading company in the market of corporate car rentals utilizing at the same time the know-how of Sfakianakis Group of Companies around the car market as the official dealer of Suzuki brand in Greece and the area of Balkans. Executive Lease was founded in 1998 by Sfakianakis Group of Companies and it is operated long term car rentals. In 2003 Executive Lease S.A proceed in buying the rights of National Alamo for Greece and at this time is the exclusive representative of Alamo rent a car and National car hire with a network of 52 branches all over Greece. The car fleet amounts more than 5500 vehicles providing innovative and specialized solutions for more than 1000 companies.

*Drawbacks of National Alamo car rental organization referred to suppliers' control*

The Alamo National car rental organization is a company that provides services to their customers. The specific company is not a car manufacturer or a vehicle repairer.



National Alamo car Rental Company in order to maintain and operate the 5500 car fleet has deployed external partnerships with specific repair units in various places in Greece.

It is also important to mention that another important factor for the operation of the organization is the agreements with car parts suppliers for the supplying the cooperated repair units. It is obvious that during the vehicle repair process the company will have to control with sufficient way the orders and the deliverables referred with the ordered car parts as well as the whole repair process like the assembling and painting the vehicle.

The most common drawbacks at the specific phase are focused on the delayed orders of the car parts or the delayed deliveries to the car repair unit by the suppliers as well as the delivery of an inappropriate car part. These faults generate many faults to repair process and delays to the schedule of delivering the vehicle to the customer.

Additionally one of the major problems is the information of the general progress of the repair of the vehicle due to lack of a general monitoring system and the inappropriate existing processes of National Alamo organization.

*Drawbacks of National Alamo car rental organization referred to the quality of provided services.*

After the completion of the repairs of the vehicle the car is delivered to the customers in order to use it again. In the specific phase many faults are occurred that are the consequences of the previous face like problems that are related with the external parts of the vehicle, electronic indicators at the control panel of the car, dirty passengers cabin. The lack of a final inspection process generates quality problems to the provided

services of National Alamo as well as a feeling of insecurity about the quality of the vehicle repair process.

Furthermore questions from the customers that can not be answered by the employees of the car station may generate stress and anxious feelings to the customers.

*Drawbacks of National Alamo car rental organization referred to customers' satisfaction*

In the previous paragraph was mentioned the fact that inappropriate control of external suppliers and partners generate problems to the maintenance and repair processes. As a result of this is offering low quality services in combine with other factors that will be identified through a quantitative research that will take place to major car stations of National Alamo in Greece. All the above generate a feeling of dissatisfaction to customers.

*Research*

As it is mentioned to the previous chapter the research will be developed with the help of the quantitative research method. The questionnaires designed by author and contain questions that related with customer satisfaction and the level of quality in the provided services of National Alamo organization. The questionnaires were distributed to major car rental stations and more specifically to Athens airport station, Athens center station, Kifisia station, Heraklion airport station, Chania airport station, Rhodes airport station, and Rhodes downtown station as well Thessaloniki airport station.

The questionnaires were distributed to the specific car rental stations due to the big amount of reservations at the period of 20<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> of May of 2010. The 70% of the customers it is calculated that are tourists or business people from the abroad. It is very important for National Alamo organization and the author to be informed about the current level of satisfaction and the existing level of quality in services to the customers because the car rental market represents a big part of the Greek tourist earnings.

It is necessary to identify the pains of the specific organization through this research in order to upgrade the strength and the dynamic of National Alamo and at the same time the Greek tourism especially in this difficult financially period. The questionnaire was consisted of 20 questions and divided in three major aspects. The first category of the questions referred to general questions about the National Alamo organization, the second category of the questions related with the level of the quality of the services that National Alamo Company offers to their customers.

On the specific category of questions is given the weight of the research, because the results of these questions will be analyzed and will be used to develop the possible proposals for National Alamo organization. The third category of questions related with the time the customers use National Alamo services and indicates the kind of relationship between the company and the customers.

Additionally the customers at the end of the questionnaire can write their general comments. These comments in combine with an interview from customer service department supervisor will provide information about the customer's complaints as well as to specify the kind and the percentages of the complaints. It is expected that the

quantitative research through the questionnaires in combine with the data of the customer's service department of National Alamo Company will generate an outcome that will focus on what changes should be done in order to control the external suppliers and partners better by setting specific processes and tools, and how these processes will increase the level of quality in services to the customers and to build a long term relationship.

The results of this research will be analyzed through statistical methods and the findings will be evaluated to the next chapter. It will also be reported to the customers' service department and to the upper management level of National Alamo company as well as the author's recommendations and proposals.

## Results

The results of the questionnaires were answered by the customers of National Alamo Company and analyzed with statistical tools and methods in order to identify the drawbacks of the organization to existing processes, tools methods, policy and strategy and to improve the existed as well to propose new methods for controlling external partners and to improve the quality of the provided services to the customers.

The major aim is for the organization to be more competitive to car rental market. According to appendix B the first question related with the level of overall satisfaction of the customer for National Alamo Company. This is a general question that can provide information to the organization for a general opinion of the company. According to appendix B and the figure one, the 12 % of the customers answered that the overall satisfaction was excellent, the 30 % was very good, the 40 % was good, the 12 % was fair and only the 6 % that the overall satisfaction was poor.

The results of the specific question indicates the majority of the customers are satisfied by the services of National Alamo company, but there is a 40 % percent of the customers which is enough big that are just satisfied and it is possible to lose the specific percentage by purchasing services to another competitive car rental company. So it is very important to increase the satisfaction of the customers who are just satisfied and to try to win the trust of the customers that are not satisfied. The second question related with the recommendation of National Alamo Company by the customers to a relative or to a friend or to a partner.

The appendix B and the results of the second question of figure two, mentions that the 40 % of the customers are extremely likely to recommend the company to other people, the 20 % of the customers answered that are very likely, the 30 % answered that they just are likely and the 10 % of the customers answered that they are not so likely to propose National Alamo to someone else. It is obvious that the general intention of the customers is to propose National Alamo services to other people.

Additionally there are a 10 % of the customers that is not likely to recommend the National Alamo Company to others and this factor should be improved in order to increase the percentage of new customers by the recommendations of the existed customers. The third question analyzes the intention of the customers to repurchase rental services from National Alamo Company in the future.

As it is appeared in figure three of the appendix C, the 10 % will definitely use rental services, the 25 % states that have a very good intention, the 40 % of the customers mention that they have good intention for using rental services again and the 15 % will think seriously the fact of repurchasing services again from National Alamo Company.

The fourth question examines the quality of the relationship with National Alamo Company, considering all the customers' experiences with them.

The answers according to figure with number four of appendix C, states that the 25 % of the customers characterized excellent the quality of the relationship, the 25 % answered very good the quality, the 30 % thinks good the quality of the relationship and the 20 % of the customers consider as fair the quality of the relationship with National Alamo Company. The results of this question indicate the fact that the 50 % of the

customers according to their experiences with the organization consider fair and just good their quality of relationship with the company.

The quality of the relationship indicates the contact or the guidance with the personnel in an undesirable fact with the rented vehicle, the communication with representatives of National Alamo, the possible charges after the end of the rental. So it is very important for the customer that enjoys a high quality level of a relationship with National Alamo Company in order to meet customers' expectations, which is a requirement for a long term relationship with the customers.

The fifth question examines the services of the personnel to the customers. The answers of the question five as the appendix D and figure five indicates that only the 15 % of the customers characterizes excellent the services of the personnel of National Alamo. Another 20 % of the customers answered that the services are very good, the 35 % states that the services from the personnel are just good, the 25 % thinks that the services are just fair and the 5 % of the customers assessed the services of the personnel as poor.

Evaluating the results of this question I can conclude that there is a big percent of customers that are dissatisfied with the services that offered by the personnel of National Alamo company or they just characterize as good the services. These answers and these percentages indicate that personnel of the organization may be characterized by lack of experience or lack of training. Both of the causes should be faced by National Alamo Company by organizing seminars for the personnel and try to set the appropriate teams with new and experienced personnel working at the same shifts.

This is very important factor for improving the quality and time of serving the customers. The sixth question examines the rate of the online car hire system, that the customers can realize reservations through the website of the company. The results of the question six in the figure six of the appendix D shows that the 15 % of the customers consider as excellent the on line car hire system, another 20 % answered that the system is very good, the 25 % of the customers think that is just good, the 21% characterizes as fair the system, the 5% of the customers finds the system poor and the 14 % of the customers don't know about the reservation system of National Alamo Company.

The results states the fact that probably the online car hire system of National Alamo Company needs changes or improvements that is going to make easier the use for the customer. Another fact that is evaluating through the answers is that a 14 % of the customers don't know about the online car hire system. So it is very important for the organization to advertise the online car hire system or to inform the customers to car stations and to proceed to a discount policy when reservations realized through the website of the company.

The seventh question related with the status of the vehicle fleet of National Alamo Company. According to the answers of the figure seven in appendix E shows the fact that only the 15 % of the customers consider that the vehicles are excellent, the 30 % of the customers state that the vehicles are very good, the 25 % of the customers characterize the status of the car fleet as good, another 20 % thinks that the vehicles are fair and the 10 % indicated the status of car fleet as poor.



The answers shows that the 30 % of the customers are not satisfy with the vehicles they rent, and another 25 % thinks that the status of the vehicles is just good. These results indicate that the main product of National Alamo Company that provides to their customers is identified by the customers in moderate condition. The status of the vehicle fleet may be cause due to the inappropriate maintenance of the vehicles or to inappropriate repairs.

It is also very important to deliver clean and tidy the vehicles to the customers. Another important factor is the average of age of the vehicles that the organization provides to the customer. A newer vehicle fleet provides safety and quality to the customers. The eighth question examines if the charges of the rental respond to the contract agreement.

According to the figure eight of appendix E, the 20 % of the customers believe that the rental charges respond with excellent way to the contract agreement, another 25 % answered that respond very good, the 40 % states that the rental charges respond in a good way to the agreement and finally a 15 % of the customers think that they are just fair. The results indicate that many customers may have complaints about the charges.

This fact mentions the need for a very careful explanation of the terms of the rental by the personnel of National Alamo Company as well as the sufficient way that the terms are defined to the rental contract. The specific aspect is crucial for the organization in order to prove in any time to their customers that National Alamo Company operates with a clear and sufficient way without small words to the contracts. This is also a requirement to build a close and truth relationship with the customers.

The next question identifies the duration of using rental services from National Alamo Company by the customers. As the results shows in figure nine of appendix F, the 34 % of the customers answered that have used the rental services less than six months, the 26 % of the customers state that have used the rental services for more than six months but less than one year, the 15 % of the customers replied that have used the rental services for one to three years, the 13 % of the customers answered that have used the services for over three years and finally there is a 12% of the customers that are new for National Alamo Company and they have never used rental services from the specific company before. The results lead to the conclusion that over the 50 % of the customers have used the rental services from National Alamo for one year.

It is very crucial for the company to ensure that the specific number of customers will increase the use of rental services for longest time. Additionally the 12 % of the customers are new and it is a must to acquire them and to add them to the long term customers. The tenth question identifies the frequency of customers using rental services fro National Alamo Company.

According to the answers of the customers of question ten in figure ten of the appendix F the 30 % of the customers stated that they use the National Alamo rental services once per week or more, the 20 % of the customers answered that they use the rental services two to three per month, the 30 % of the customers use the services once per month and finally the 20 % of the customers use the rental services less than once per month.

The eleventh question compares the offered rental services of National Alamo Company with other car rental companies. The results from the question eleven as the figure eleven of appendix G indicates, proves the fact that only the 15 % of the customers consider much better the offered services than other's rental company, the 45 % of the customers stated that the services are somewhat better, the 30 % of the customers believe that the rental services are about the same than other car rental companies and the 15 % of the customers answered that the offered services are somewhat worse than other rental companies.

The results from this question are very important for the organization. The 30 % of the customers that believe the offered services are the same is a danger for the organization thinking of the hard competition among the rental companies. So it is very important for the organization to ensure that provides to the customer high quality services in order to maintain the relationship and to improve the existing in order to avoid the loss of customers to a competitive car rental company.

The competition is a threat for the organization and the personnel should identify and use the strengths of the company to disincline the threat of competition. The twelfth question examines the time and the response of the personnel to serve the customers. Based on the figure twelve as it is indicated in appendix G, the 70 % of the customers answered that they were immediately were served and greeted by the personnel of National Alamo Company as well that they got in and out quickly.

The 30 % of the customers expressed a different opinion about this question. The answers in the specific question indicate that the biggest percent of the customers were

immediately served and left for their destination. But there is also a 30 % of the customers believed that did not served immediately. It is very important to adopt a just in time system in order to serve the customer in the appropriate time, considering that the customer is a traveler and may be very tired.

In this situation the information and technology systems must be operate in appropriate way in order to support the just in time effort.

### *Reflection of the results*

As it was mentioned to the previous chapter by analyzing the questionnaires' results, most of the customers of National Alamo Company believe that they enjoy good rental services in a general way. But there are many faults that identified through this quantitative research. The first fault that occurred is the lack of training of the personnel in car stations in some cases.

The specific drawback generated a bad impact to the customer by made him feeling stressed and dissatisfied. So the organization should concentrate on training of the personnel by organizing seminars.

This action will improve the operation of the car station as well as the way of customer handling and the offered services to the customer totally. Additionally problems related with information and technology systems were occurred through this research. As a sequence of these problems were the delays of the customer in getting in and out quickly to the car station. An upgrade to the computers systems as well as the up dates to

the software systems and to the network systems would improve the time of serving the customer.

Additionally complaints related with the status of the vehicle fleet were occurred by the customers and identified through this research. The results for this aspect should be assessed by the management of National Alamo Company as a possible investment by buying new cars for the vehicle fleet. By this action the customer will feel more safe and the effort that the company offers high quality services. The general results of this research reflects to a need for a long term business strategy of the organization in order to proceed to changes to internal processes of the company and even more to the whole culture of National Alamo Company management.

As a sequence of these changes the organization will provide high quality services to the customers and will try to build a long term relationship with them by meeting their expectations.

#### Conclusions and recommendations

It is clear that the quantitative research identified many faults to the operation of National Alamo Company. The major problems occurred to quality of the provided services o the customers as well as to the control of external partners. The results indicated the fact that organization fulfills customers' expectations in a big percent, but the need for the huge difference in offered services to the customers due to the competition is a must.

By improving the methods and mechanisms for controlling the external partners in maintenance and repair process, the National Alamo organization success the best level of quality in its offered product to the customers which is the vehicle. Another major factor is the change of business strategy of the upper management of National Alamo in order to invest on new vehicles, to trained personnel and to new network and technology systems.

The National Alamo Company should expect the returns of investments to a long term period. I would recommend to the upper management of National Alamo in order to achieve the major aims and goals that have been identified to this thesis to set central monitoring system for controlling the external partners and suppliers as well as to monitor the possible risks of the whole repair and maintenance process.

This monitoring system can be combined with a supply chain management policy by the organization. I would also definitely recommend to National Alamo organization to adopt some major quality principles and methods like these the car manufactures use during the assembly processes. These principles should be adopted and deployed to every cooperated repair unit of National Alamo all over the Greece.

The expected result related with the empower of National Alamo organization to car rental market as well as to the development of Greek tourism that offers about the 18,1 % of gross national product of Greece and occupies the 19% of Greek working vacancies. The growth and the development of this part of tourism will help to the recovery of Greek economy especially in this difficult period for Greece.

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## Appendices

## Appendix A

## Questionnaire



On a scale of 1 to 5 where 1 represents "Extremely dissatisfied" and 5 represents "Extremely satisfied," how would you rate your level of overall satisfaction with National Alamo Company?

- 1    2    3    4    5    DK/NA/RF
- 

How likely are you to recommend National Alamo Company to a friend or relative?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How likely are you to repurchase services from National Alamo Company?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How would you rate the overall quality of your relationship with National Alamo Company, considering all of your experiences with them?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How would you rate the overall services from National Alamo personnel?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How would you rate the on line car hire system?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How would you rate the car status of our fleet?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

Do the final charges respond to the contract agreement?

- Excellent
- Very Good
- Good
- Fair
- Poor
- DK/NA/RF

How long have you used our rental service?

- Less than 6 months
- More than 6 months but less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- Over 3 years
- Never used

How often do you use our rental services?

- Once per week or more
- 2 to 3 times per month
- Once per month
- Less than once per month

Thinking of similar services offered by other car rental companies, how would you compare our services offered to them?

- Much better
- Somewhat better
- About the same
- Somewhat worse
- Much worse
- Don't know

How would you rate your most recent visit to our store on:

	Excellent	Very Good	Average	Poor	Unacceptable
Polite and respectful employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The training of our employees	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Getting in and out quickly	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

When you first arrived at the store, were you immediately greeted or acknowledged by an employee?

Yes No

Location of car station  
.....

Date  
.....

Customer's name and signature  
.....

Appendix B

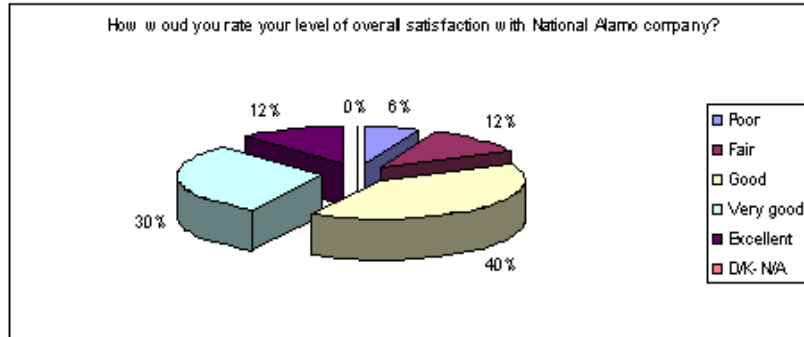


Figure 1. Question's 1 results

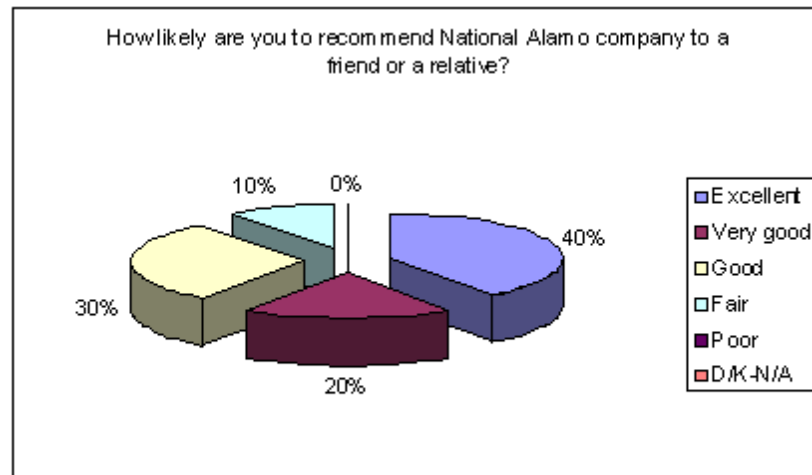


Figure 2. Question's 2 results

Appendix C

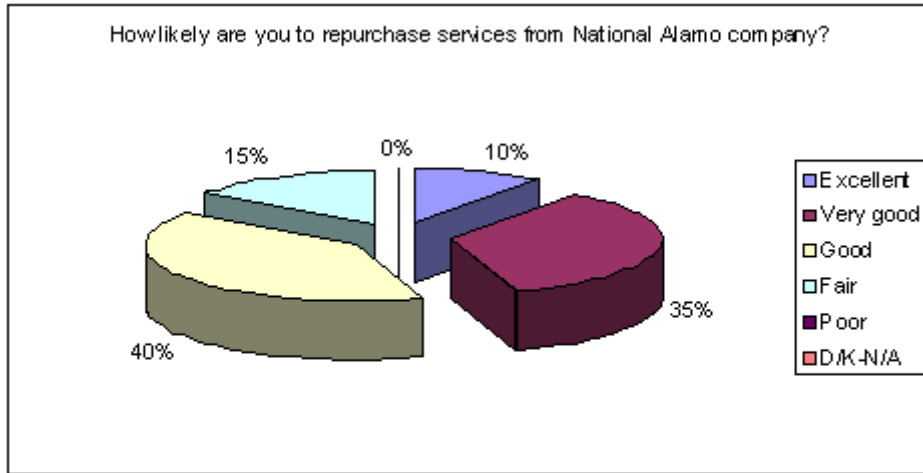


Figure 3. Question's 3 results

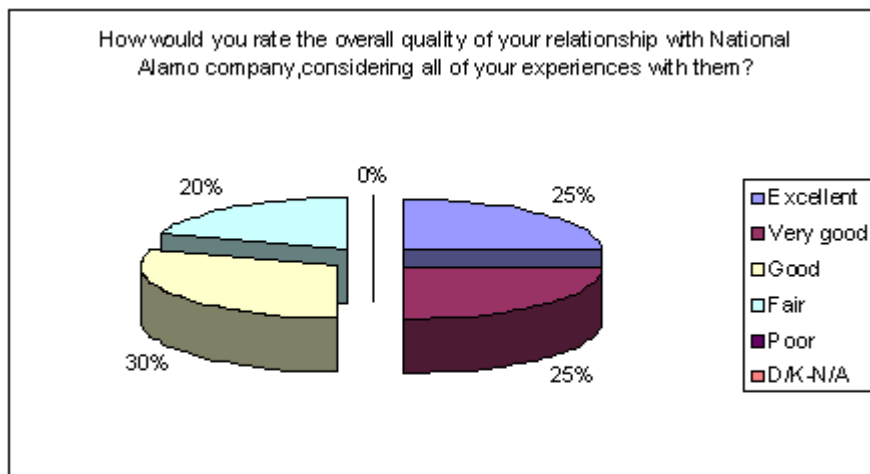


Figure 4. Question's 4 results



Appendix D

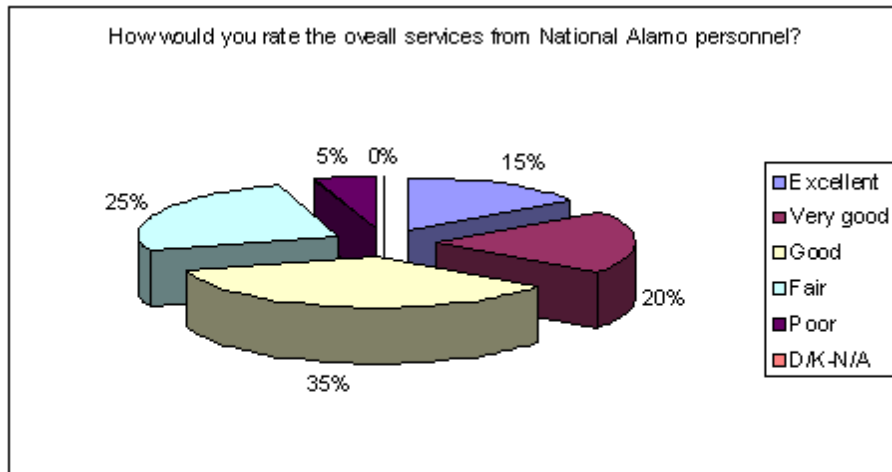


Figure 5. Question's 5 results

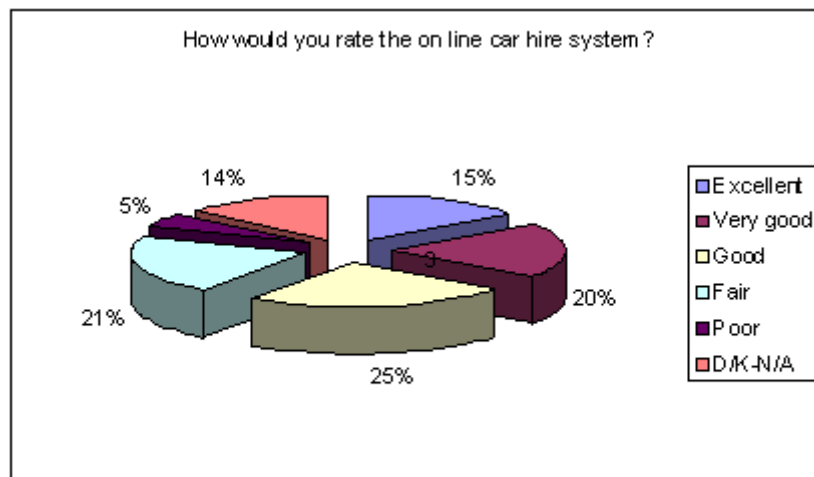


Figure 6. Question's 6 results

Appendix E

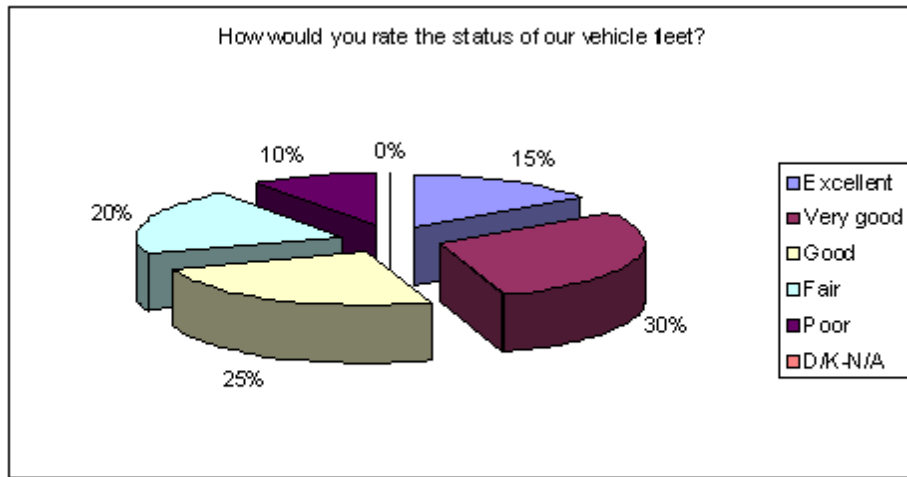


Figure 7. Question's 7 results

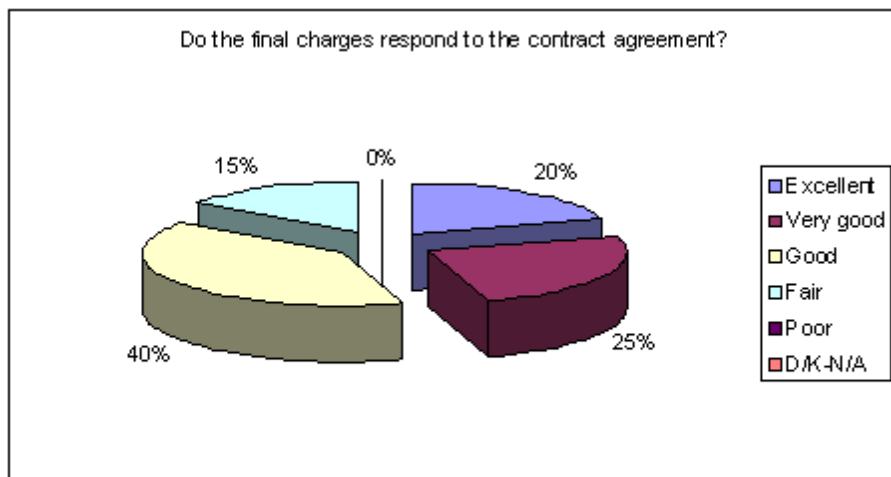


Figure 8. Question's 8 results

Appendix F

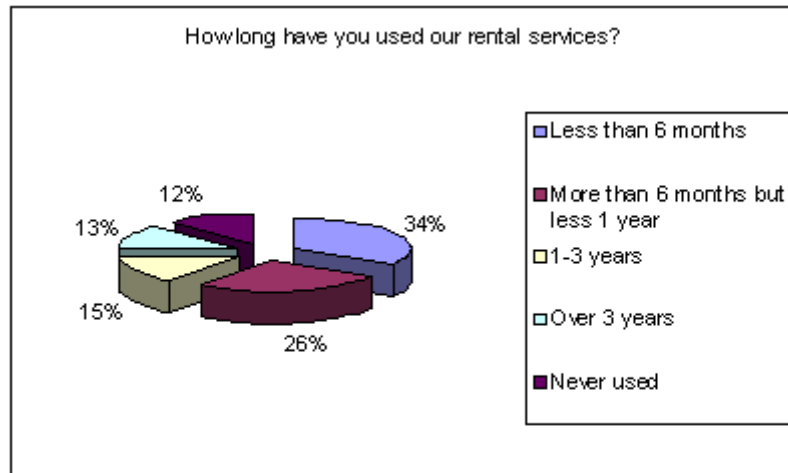


Figure 9. Question's 9 results

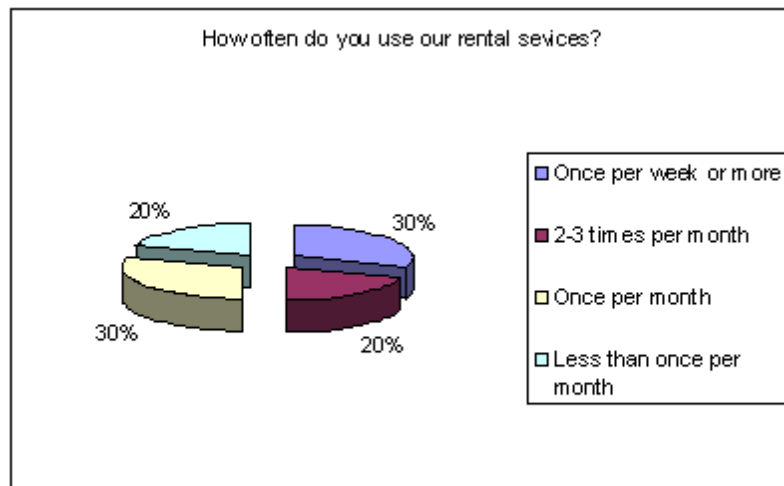


Figure 10. Question's 10 results

Appendix G

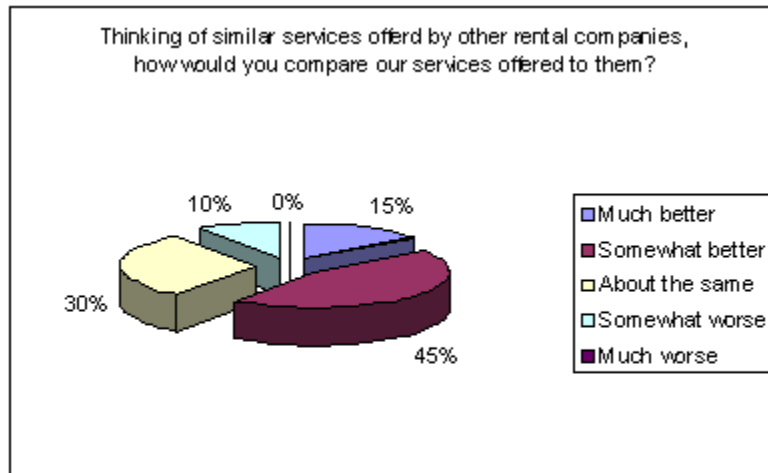


Figure 11. Question's 11 results

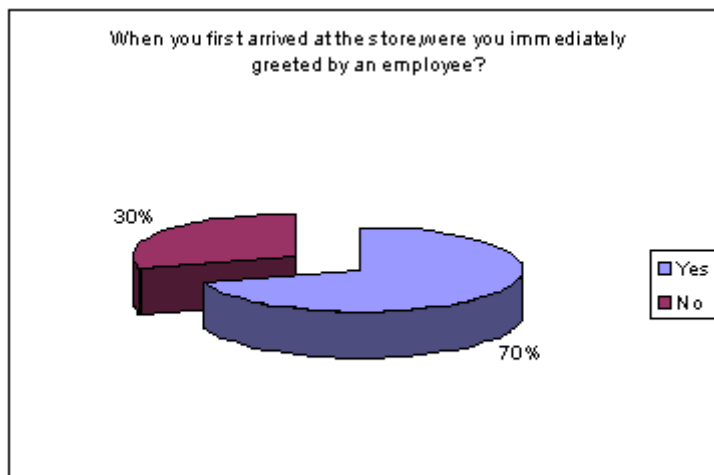


Figure 12. Question's 12 results