

**Customer Service and Court Consolidation:  
Are Consolidated Courts Better Able to Serve Their Customers?**

Institute for Court Management  
Court Executive Development Program  
Phase III Project  
May 2001

Marilyn Nelson  
Court Administrator  
Eugene Municipal Court  
Eugene, Oregon

## Table of Contents

I.	Executive Summary.....	i
II.	Abstract.....	1
III.	Introduction.....	3
	Statement of Problem	
	Focus of Research	
	Eugene, Oregon Municipal Court	
	Research Goals and Objectives	
IV.	Literature Review.....	12
	Consolidation of Courts as an Element of Court Reform	
	Court Reform in Oregon	
	Benefits of Court Consolidation	
	Disadvantages of Court Consolidation	
	Changing Focus of Court Reform	
	New Trends from Outside the Courts	
	Applying New Trends to Courts	
V.	Research Methodology.....	54
	Phase One Methodology	
	Phase Two Methodology	
VI.	Research Findings.....	65
	Phase One Findings	
	Phase Two Findings	
VII.	Conclusions and Recommendations.....	101
	Conclusions	

Recommendations  
Implications for Future Study

VIII. Bibliography.....	107
IX. Appendices.....	111
A. Eugene Municipal Court Service Profile	
B. Court and Municipal Telephone Survey Instruments	
C. Defendant and Employee Questionnaire Instruments and Cover Letter	
D. Employee and Defendant Comments from Questionnaires	
E. Example of Spreadsheet with Questionnaire Responses	
F. Examples of Other Surveys	
1. Ventura County, California Comment Cards and Exit Survey	
2. 46 <sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, Michigan Jury Questionnaire	
3. Hennepin County, Minnesota Customer Survey	
4. Overland Park, Kansas Customer Survey	
5. Questionnaire from <u>Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring</u>	
G. “Justice 2020: A Renewed Vision for Oregon’s Courts”	
H. “Next Generation Trial Courts” from Michigan Supreme Court Web Site and Goals and Accomplishments of the 46 <sup>th</sup> Circuit Court	
I. Excerpts from <u>Analysis of Trial Court Unification in California: Final Report</u>	

List of Tables

1. Shasta County Court and Municipal Perspectives.....	68
2. Ventura County Court and Municipal Perspectives.....	70
3. Los Angeles County Court and Municipal Perspectives.....	73
4. 46 <sup>th</sup> Circuit Court and Municipal Perspectives.....	74
5. Berrian County Court and Municipal Perspectives.....	77
6. Telephone Survey Responses Comparing California and Michigan ....	80
7. Defendant Survey Responses.....	
	82
8. Court Employee Survey Responses.....	83
9. Defendant Responses by Offense Type.....	97

List of Graphs

1. Defendant and Employee Responses: How did staff treat you?.....	85
--	----

2. Defendant and Employee Responses: Was staff willing to take time to help you?.....	86
3. Defendant and Employee Responses: Was information provided useful?.....	86
4. Defendant and Employee Responses: How safe do you feel in the courtrooms?.....	87
5. Defendant and Employee Responses: How safe do you feel in the lobby/waiting area?.....	87
6. Defendant and Employee Responses: How easy is it to find the court?	88
7. Defendant and Employee Responses: How easy is it to find where to go?	88
8. Responses by Offense Type: How did staff treat you?.....	93
9. Responses by Offense Type: Was staff willing to take time to help you?	93
10. Responses by Offense Type: Was information provided useful?.....	94
11. Responses by Offense Type: How safe do you feel in the courtrooms?	94
12. Responses by Offense Type: How safe do you feel in the lobby/ waiting area?.....	95
13. Responses by Offense Type: How easy is it to find the court?.....	95
14. Responses by Offense Type: How easy is it to find where to go?.....	96

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Consolidation, or merger in the private sector, conveys an ominous implication for the employees and customers of any service. Employees will immediately worry if their jobs will remain. Customers worry about the quality and level of service they will receive. Will the larger organization be as responsive, as timely, as accessible? Will it continue to deal with customers on an individual basis? These are valid concerns, and ones which courts need to consider when approaching consolidation of judicial services.

Court consolidation has been an important part of comprehensive court reform efforts throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Many states have consolidated to streamline the number of courts, with the ideal being a single court in each judicial district. By the end of 2000 there were five states which had consolidated all courts into one level, achieving a single court in each of their judicial districts, each under the authority of that state's chief justice or judicial council. However, most states continue to have separate limited jurisdiction courts as well as a general jurisdiction trial court. Limited jurisdiction courts are often established in a city or county to hear traffic offenses and minor criminal cases. These courts will also hear violations of municipal ordinances, which may have no counterpart in state law. Other limited jurisdiction courts may exist to deal with specialized areas of the law, such as tax, probate, or juvenile courts. As courts continue to consolidate, the question must be asked how well will they be able to address local issues and focus on customer service needs.

There is no lack of current literature expounding the importance of customer service in public and private sector organizations. While productivity and efficiency, hallmarks of management theory in the first half of the last century, continue to be important, customer service and involvement are now seen as equally important for an organization's success. Since the

1970s courts have come to realize that customer service is an important aspect of how the public views judicial services. As courts continue to consolidate, however, improvement of customer service may not be given the same priority as efforts to streamline operations and create efficiencies.

This study considers five courts that have recently consolidated in Michigan and California, and analyzes how they have been able to address local community concerns and service improvement. Officials from municipalities, which previously had operated their own courts, were also asked their opinion of the services they now receive from the consolidated courts. The study also illustrates how one court has established a benchmark of customer satisfaction with that court's services.

Surveys were used for both phases of the research. Survey instruments were developed for telephone interviews with court staff and municipal officials. A total of 11 telephone surveys were conducted. Written surveys were developed for defendants and employees of the municipal court in Eugene, Oregon. Two thousand defendant surveys were mailed, and over 200 responses were received. All available court employees, totaling 20, received a survey and responded. The telephone survey responses were reviewed to compare responses from court staff and the municipal officer in that court's jurisdiction to see if perceptions were similar or different. Comparisons were made between responses from Michigan and California courts as well, as their approach to consolidation differed. The written surveys were reviewed to compare staff responses to defendant responses, showing some significant differences in opinion. Also, defendant responses were compared by offense type, also showing some differences in perceptions between the different offender groups.

The researcher expected to find a direct correlation between court structure and focus on

customer service. Either consolidated courts would be viewed as large and impersonal, and less able to meet customer service needs, or they would have more resources and be better able to do so. The research, however, did not support a clear correlation between structure and customer service. The data showed consolidated courts are more efficient and generally have increased resources available for service improvement. Service improvements were not necessarily implemented, however. In some consolidation efforts streamlining operations and creating efficiencies were given priority over the measurement and improvement of customer service. In other consolidation efforts, both efficiencies and service improvements were expected outcomes. This study indicated the approach to consolidation may have an impact on a court's customer service focus. Courts studied which clearly identified customer service improvement as a key goal to be achieved from consolidation tended to be more likely to achieve both efficiencies and improvement in customer service. Since the number of courts studied was limited, more research with a larger sample will be needed to draw this correlation.

From an analysis of the findings of this research, there are several suggestions to make to courts as they embark upon consolidation:

1. Prior to consolidation, benchmark customer satisfaction in all affected courts;
2. Involve all stakeholders in consolidation planning;
3. Within the consolidation plan, identify customer service improvement as one of the key goals of the consolidation effort;
4. Report successes and failures openly and on an on-going basis;
5. Regularly check in with the municipalities served to problem solve and improve coordination;
6. Ensure municipalities continue to provide city prosecution services to file complaints regarding violation of municipal ordinances;
7. Guard against employee burn out by regularly communicating with and involving them;

8. Institute a practice of annually surveying court users, stakeholders and internal customers, and measuring progress;
9. Use funds saved from consolidation to implement customer service programs; and
10. Build public trust and confidence by showcasing in the media how the court is better able to serve the needs of the public through consolidation.

As courts strive to improve the public's trust and confidence, providing customer service that meets or exceeds the public's expectations is crucial. The public also demands efficiency and accountability. By following these suggestions during consolidation, a court may be more certain of maintaining a focus on customer service while achieving its efficiency goals.



## ABSTRACT

A focus on customer service is an important strategy of the judicial system's goal of improving the public's trust and confidence in their courts. With the continuing trend of court consolidation to improve efficiency, questions arise as to the compatibility of these two directions - a customer service focus for the courts and a focus on greater efficiencies gained through consolidating courts. For example, do consolidated courts provide improved responsiveness and service to their customers? Are local community needs being adequately addressed in the consolidated court? Can courts answer these questions by surveying their users, and is there a survey methodology which can be replicated and used by others?

This research project and report centers on an assessment of how court administrators, court staff, court users and municipalities view the ability of courts to address customer needs. In jurisdictions with consolidated courts, the research checks perceptions both before and after court consolidation to evaluate benefits to the court's customers. The research also establishes a benchmark of customer service satisfaction in one court, which may be used as a prototype for other courts desiring to solicit internal and external customer input on services.

This study reviews relevant literature on the topics of court reform and consolidation, trends external to courts, and how these trends are affecting the traditional court reform strategies. This report specifically explores the recent trends emphasizing customer service, increased accountability and smaller, more personalized service in both the private and public

sectors. Information is also presented regarding court reform in Oregon, and how this research may influence future reform efforts.

The research was conducted through a series of surveys. Telephone surveys were made of court and municipal officials in five jurisdictions that recently consolidated their courts in California and Michigan. To assess user and staff perceptions of customer service, written surveys were mailed to 2,000 defendants and provided to the 20 staff members of the Eugene Municipal Court. The results of the telephone surveys were analyzed to compare the responses of court administrators to municipal officers regarding the outcomes of court consolidation, specifically in relation to customer service, and to compare the responses from California to those from Michigan. The written surveys were analyzed to compare responses of court staff to court users regarding levels of customer satisfaction. In addition, responses of court users were further analyzed to compare responses of the defendants based on their case type.

The research showed that consolidated courts generally address local community concerns. Many of the consolidated courts surveyed were torn between streamlining operations within their new structure, thereby creating efficiencies, and improving services to customers. The courts with clear direction from their chief justice and state administrative offices were more likely to measure customer satisfaction and implement service improvements. While every court surveyed considered their customers to be satisfied, only half actually solicited feedback from their customers. The research recommends that all courts develop and implement a regular customer feedback program.

## INTRODUCTION

*? ...it is clear that innovation is particularly slow and difficult in the field of criminal law.?*

*--Carl Baar, One Trial Court*

### Statement of Problem

Court reform, as we know it, was defined in the early 1900s by Roscoe Pound. His vision emphasized a hierarchical structure for the judicial system, with the structure promoting standardized practices and processes to achieve highly efficient and productive courts. Courts were to be consolidated, based on a model of one single general jurisdiction trial court and one appellate court for each judicial district. The administration of courts was also to be highly centralized, with centralized rulemaking, statewide administrative support, and the bench reporting to a judicial council or the Chief Justice of the state's Supreme Court. This combination of consolidation and centralization is known as a unified court structure.

This was Roscoe Pound's vision described in his presentation, "The Cause of Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice," given to the American Bar Association in 1906. With some elaboration on his theme, Pound's vision continues to this day to be the model of many states' court reform efforts. While it took decades for Pound's theories to gain wide acceptance, the drive to unify courts gained momentum in the 1950s through the 1970s. Most recently the State of California's Judicial Council has completed its efforts to coordinate the consolidation of that state's judicial system, and retired its advisory committee effective October

2000. To date six states, plus the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico, have successfully achieved a one-level trial court system (Pankey). Many more states have achieved limited consolidation by establishing a two-level trial court system, which includes limited jurisdiction courts along with a court of general jurisdiction.

The court reform movement mirrored management changes in other organizations. The push for greater efficiency and productivity was a hallmark of management theory from the Industrial Age through World War II. Organizations' strategies were rethought by management theorists as they reflected on the success of Japanese industries in the 1960s. While courts across the nation were just beginning to implement Pound's unification vision, general management theories were undergoing a major shift. Rather than focusing on structure and efficiency, leading-edge organizations began to focus on quality and customer service as their key management values.

Public sector management is slow to adapt to societal trends. As noted by Carl Baar in his book, One Trial Court, innovation is particularly slow in justice administration. This is not a new phenomenon. Even in 1906, Roscoe Pound noted, "Our administration of justice is not decadent. It is simply behind the times" (183). Justice administration continues to be behind the times, and continues to be slower to react to changes in management practices and public expectations than other governmental organizations.

The public sector saw benefits of changing management practices to focus on quality and customer service, but struggled in how to implement such changes. In Great Britain, Prime

Minister John Major initiated a Citizen Charter program in 1991. In 1992 Osborne and Gaebler published their watershed book, Reinventing Government, in which they described steps for public sector organizations to develop and implement customer strategies and accountability programs. Their model organization to promote quality and customer service is structured to be highly responsive and to support the achievement of outcomes, rather than a hierarchical organization based on command and control.

Public opinion about large corporations and organizations has also changed over time. There is a growing reaction against "bigness" in all of its manifestations--big government, big schools, big churches, big corporations, big medical care providers. There is a growing desire among the public for more individualized service, more responsiveness, more neighborhood-based services and locally owned businesses. Organizations, both public and private, have felt the impact of users demanding more input and customer-oriented services. People have come to realize that bigger is no longer necessarily better.

Courts did not take notice of this societal trend until the late 1970s. In 1978 the Second National Conference of the Judiciary, held in Williamsburg, Virginia, reviewed court reform efforts nation-wide. The conference attendees discussed a survey regarding the public image of the courts. The survey results indicated substantial public dissatisfaction with court performance. There were several subsequent surveys to gain more insight into this lack of public trust and confidence. For example, Roger Warren in a 1996 article for The Court Manager reported that 52 per cent of the public rated the court system as poor or fair in a California poll conducted in

the mid-1990s (14). This accumulated information from the public regarding their opinions about court services led to the Trial Court Performance Standards Project, begun in 1987, and the eventual publication of the field-tested standards and measures in 1997. These standards are based on outcomes, accountability, providing opportunities for public input and measuring perceptions, not just on measuring efficiency and streamlining internal procedures. While efficiency and structure continue to be important for courts, there is now general acceptance that quality of service from a customer's perspective is just as important, and that courts need to be held accountable for all of these outcomes. Rather than focusing inward to bring about court reform, there is now recognition it will take a broader focus--both internal and external--to build the public's trust and confidence in the judicial system.

### Focus of Research

The focus of this research is to assess customer satisfaction with court services in an era of increased court consolidation. Can courts be large, highly consolidated organizations and still provide a high level of responsiveness and individualized service to their customers? Are local community needs and concerns adequately being addressed in the consolidated court? Surveying a selection of recently consolidated courts, as well as officers of the municipalities in those jurisdictions that previously had municipal courts, provides information on which to base an assessment. In addition to surveying the situation in consolidated courts, this research will also provide a methodology for assessing customer service satisfaction within a particular court, whether or not it is consolidated. The author will describe the development and implementation of a customer service satisfaction survey within her own court. The process and format of the

survey may be used as a model by other courts interested in developing a benchmark of customer satisfaction and then working on strategies to improve that level of satisfaction.

The research questions for this study are:

1. How effectively have consolidated courts been able to meet the service expectations of local communities, as compared to before consolidation?
2. How may a court establish an effective survey program to assess customer satisfaction?
3. What outcomes may be expected from soliciting customer feedback on a regular basis?

### Eugene, Oregon Municipal Court

This research will have several implications for court reform in Oregon, specifically for Eugene Municipal Court where the author is administrator. In order to understand implications of the research, it is first necessary to have a basic understanding of the structure of the court system in Oregon. Oregon has courts funded and administered at the state level, and courts which are funded and administered at the local government level. In 1981, the Oregon State Legislature authorized unification of the two state trial courts--the general jurisdiction circuit courts and the limited jurisdiction (misdemeanor and civil) district courts. The unification was completed in 1983 and district courts were eliminated. There are now 23 judicial districts within the state of Oregon, each with one general jurisdiction trial court reporting administratively to the Oregon State Court Administrator's Office and their elected judges to the Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court. However, Oregon still has numerous limited jurisdiction local courts (municipal and justice courts), funded and administered by the cities and counties which created them by charter. In the local courts judges may either be elected or appointed by local authorities. In

1999 the Oregon State Legislature statutorily granted limited jurisdiction courts concurrent jurisdiction with the state's circuit courts over all violations and misdemeanor offenses.

Defendants may choose the level of court in which they would like their case heard. Although rare, cases may be appealed from a limited jurisdiction court and tried de novo in the circuit court for that judicial district. Eugene Municipal Court is the largest limited jurisdiction trial court in Oregon.

One anomaly in the Oregon court structure exists in the Portland metropolitan area. In the early 1970s the city of Portland and three other metropolitan municipalities voluntarily transferred jurisdiction of their municipal ordinances to Multnomah County District Court. With the subsequent consolidation of district and circuit courts in Oregon, ordinance violation cases are now heard in Multnomah County Circuit Court. For the past two years the cities of Gresham and Portland have been reviewing this arrangement, and considering the feasibility of reestablishing their own municipal courts.

In 1995 the Oregon Judicial Department published Justice 2020: The New Oregon Trail, which outlines its vision of the court system in Oregon. Part of this vision calls for comprehensive court restructuring, including elimination of municipal and justice courts by the year 2020. There was no representation of municipal or justice courts on the Futures Committee which developed the vision for the Judicial Department. The report is currently undergoing review and revision.

With the possibility of future consolidation of limited jurisdiction courts into the Oregon



state court system, the staff of Eugene Municipal Court and other city officials want to ensure that any future restructuring will take into consideration the need to maintain a focus on customer service and the ability to meet local community needs. Eugene Municipal Court is held accountable to the public for the level of customer service provided by the court, and has conducted numerous surveys of court users over the past several years for different services that are provided. Customer service has not heretofore been a factor considered in deliberations about court structure. If this research shows that court consolidation may have a positive or negative impact on the court's ability to provide customer service satisfaction, that information will point out the need to consider consequences to customer service, among other considerations, when making decisions regarding consolidation of courts in Oregon. Using a survey methodology, the Eugene Municipal Court will establish a benchmark of customer service satisfaction to bring to the table in future consolidation discussions. After consolidation, the court may continue to use surveys to measure its continuing ability to provide customer service satisfaction and make operational adjustments as the trends in responses may indicate.

At the direction of its elected city council, Eugene Municipal Court has developed a service profile that is outcome-based and focused on customer service. Service measures and performance objectives, including compiled responses to regular customer surveys, are reported to the Eugene Budget Committee and published annually. The service profile for Eugene Municipal Court is attached to this report as Appendix A. In addition to customer surveys, Eugene Municipal Court conducts regular performance surveys of its judges, prosecutors and indigent defense counsel, as input into contract negotiations for these services.

Implications from this research will provide useful information to any court, such as Eugene, which anticipates future consolidation. Survey results will determine if change in court structure has affected the level of court services to local communities and customers. With information from this research concerning the impact of consolidation in other courts, policy makers will have an opportunity to consider customer service factors along with other factors when deliberating the advantages and disadvantages of court restructuring in their particular situation.

#### Research Goals and Objectives

The research for this project was conducted in two phases, and the goals for each phase were different. The first phase consisted of telephone surveys of other courts and municipalities in jurisdictions that have consolidated court services. Phase two of the research consisted of written surveys of defendants and court employees in Eugene Municipal Court. The research goal in phase one was to determine how courts and municipalities view the ability of consolidated courts to address local community concerns and customer service before and after consolidation. The research goal in phase two was to establish a benchmark level of customer service satisfaction for Eugene Municipal Court.

Research objectives also differ from one phase of the research to the other. Phase one research objectives include a response rate of at least 75 per cent on the telephone surveys conducted. In addition, a 70 per cent favorable or unfavorable rating will be considered a valid

determinant of the ability of the surveyed courts to address local community concerns and provide customer service after consolidation. Phase two research objectives include a return rate of at least 10 per cent on the mailed defendant surveys, and a 90 percent response rate for the written employee surveys. In each of the phase two surveys, at least 70 percent of the respondents rate customer service in Eugene Municipal Court as satisfactory or better.

The balance of this report will explore relevant literature on the topics of court consolidation and customer service, as well as recent trends in opposition to big government and other services. The survey instruments and methodology will be explained and there will be an analysis of survey results. The findings and conclusions of the research will be presented and discussed. End materials, which the author believes may be of interest to anyone researching this topic, will also be included. The report will provide an answer to the question of how court consolidation affects a court's ability to address the concerns and service needs of the local community and customers it serves.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Consolidation of Courts as an Element of Court Reform

*? Multiplicity of courts is characteristic of archaic law.?*

*--Roscoe Pound*

Roscoe Pound is considered by many to be the Father of Modern Court Reform. In his 1906 address to the American Bar Association, ? The Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice? and subsequent presentations, Pound called for sweeping changes in American judicial administration. Some of the reforms advocated by Pound related to court structure. He modeled his idea of a modern judicial organization according to concepts from the Judicature Act of 1873 ? it would be comprised of a single trial court and a single court of appeal (178-80). Carl Baar in his book, One Trial Court, explained that the drive to unify courts came from English legal tradition. The principle of judicial independence behind that drive was first articulated in the 1701 Act of Settlement, and in treatises throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, so that courts are sure to ? uphold the authority of the law rather than any particular ruler or special interest? (115). America?s founding fathers emphasized the principle of judicial independence to protect the courts from corruption. Inefficiency did not become an issue until the Industrial Revolution, Pound?s era. Pound characterized the multi-level court system as duplicative and a waste of resources.

Court unification may be summarized by five distinct reforms:

- consolidated and simplified court structure,
- centralized management of the judicial system,
- centralized rulemaking,
- centralized budget process, and
- unified state financing (Henderson, Significance 5).

This research will focus on the first of these reforms dealing with the consolidation and simplification of court structure. While unification typically means a court system that is both centralized and consolidated, Baar notes that these characteristics, "[ . . . ] operate independently of one another, so that it is possible to have a centralized court system with two or more trial courts, or a unified trial court with a fragmented administrative apparatus?" (One Trial Court 114).

Even though Pound's vision was full unification, this research will look at only one of his proposed reforms.

Pound's recommended reforms were widely debated, and the American Judicature Society was founded in 1913 to encourage court reform. The debate continued for decades over all of the proposed reforms, including the ideal court structure. "A great deal of the debate over unification has centered on whether a particular organizational model is appropriate for the judiciary?" (Henderson, Structuring Justice 1). The design of choice was the single-tier court, which resembled the model most highly favored in industry and other organizations of the time "a highly centralized hierarchical organization, based on command and control. Such a structure would maximize productivity and efficiency." "Concern with efficiency and the rule of law was also used to justify the reformers' preoccupation with standardization?" (Baar, Scope 277). There

was no room for diversity in design of the model court to take into consideration different social and political considerations in individual states. Baar notes in "Scope and Limits of Court Reform" that, "The adoption of classical management principles by court systems presents the paradox of an institution with medieval and ancient origins, based on heavily traditional authority, organizing itself according to the principles of an ideal-type bureaucracy" (277). The court reform movement, which was defined at the height of the Industrial Revolution, mirrored the values and ideal structures of that time.

There was little implementation of court reforms until the 1940s, and the primary reform achieved at that time was establishment of judicial conferences in several states. In 1947 New Jersey's new state constitution included many of Pound's recommendations. Courts in New Jersey became unified, except limited jurisdiction municipal courts continued to exist. Other states followed their lead in the 1950s and 1960s. Consolidation of local trial courts continued into the 1970s with several states establishing a single trial court structure. Yet by November 1973, only eight states had abolished their lower courts (Background 11). The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration-produced Background Papers on National Trends in Unification of State Courts, written in 1973, point to the importance of unifying lower courts because "[...] such tribunals handle at least ninety percent of all civil and criminal actions and exercise a greater impact on the public than any other court does" (10). With such high caseloads, the author of the Background Papers recognized the political and logistical difficulties with court consolidation and admits there had only been piecemeal movement toward court consolidation up until that time. The author points out that even though, "[...] a form of euthanasia is preferable to keeping them

(lower courts) alive with bandages and aspirin, [. . .] the main drawback to this plan is its political unfeasibility? (3). Even so, the author projected total court consolidation in the United States would be achieved between the years 2007 and 2027 (10). The pace of consolidation efforts began to wane after the 1970s, however, and the prediction of total court consolidation by 2027 appears to be unlikely.

One element of court reform that was eagerly implemented by courts from the 1960s through the 1980s was the development of professional court administrator positions. Previously judges would manage their own courts, but their focus was primarily on adjudication and not on the myriad of management issues involved in overall court operations. They were not trained to be managers, and in most cases had little interest in management issues. ? Neither were they particularly interested in handing over these kinds of issues to professional administrators? (Casey 2). As courts became busier and larger, resistance to handing over administrative authority began to erode in the late 1950s. The Los Angeles Superior Court created the first trial court executive officer in 1958. This position was responsible for the supervision and assignment of non-judicial staff, budgeting, and providing statistical information to support court operations. By 1969, sixty positions of trial court administrator had been created. Also in 1969, with the encouragement of Chief Justice Warren Burger, the Institute of Court Management was established to train new court administrators. During the 1970s and 1980s most progressive courts established court administrator positions. Like the position in Los Angeles Superior Court, these positions were responsible for supervising non-judicial staff and budgeting. In addition, they were responsible for planning, program development, customer service, management assistance to judges, record

keeping, security, building maintenance, and all other details associated with court operations.

? Trial court administrators [. . .] defined the court much more broadly to include a range of administrative support activities as well as case processing. From their perspective the courtroom was only one of several sources of demands for management? (Henderson, Significance 106).

The advent of professional trial court administrators freed up judges to focus on adjudication and case processing and provided the management structure to focus on efficiency. ? An effective working relationship between the chief judge and the trial court administrator appears to be essential to the ability of court unification to deliver concrete benefits to a court system?

(Rottman and Hewitt 46). Without trial court administrators, significant court reforms would have been difficult to achieve.

In order to support state wide judicial systems, especially in states where some level of consolidation had taken place, state court administrative positions and offices were developed. These state court administrative offices would tie their state?s trial courts together into a single, multi-member organization. Henderson found that there is wide variation between states in the extent of central authority exercised by state court administrative offices. While not involved with the daily operations of the trial courts, the state court administrator may provide standard procedures for the trial courts regarding personnel, budgeting and record keeping, training, and technical assistance. In many states, centralized information systems are provided to support the trial courts and to provide a central data repository to facilitate statistical reporting. ? The most important functional area for a central office appears to be external relations, followed by administrative services? (Henderson, Structuring Justice 65). The state court administrator



is commonly the primary spokesperson for the state's judicial system, and has the ultimate responsibility for ensuring that trial courts are performing well and providing good service to their customers.

Since 1980 there have been a few notable examples of court consolidation and deconsolidation. In 1987 court consolidation was completed in Minnesota, and limited jurisdiction lower courts were abolished. Minnesota is continuing to work on the state financing piece of the unification plan. California has just completed a multi-year process of consolidating its courts. The Los Angeles metropolitan area courts were last in transitioning to the consolidated model in January 2000. In 1996 Michigan initiated six court consolidation demonstration projects, allowing significant local involvement in planning and implementation. According to Kent Pankey from the National Center for State Courts, the six states and two other jurisdictions which currently have a single level trial court are: Illinois, Iowa, South Dakota, Minnesota, California, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, and possibly Massachusetts. Pankey indicates that Massachusetts acknowledges that several units never really functioned as a single court and that they now consider them to be several separate courts (Pankey). There is a tendency for consolidated courts to reestablish limited jurisdiction courts, either on an informal or formal basis, to deal with high volume or specialized cases. ? One tier court systems tend to recreate a limited jurisdiction court by establishing an unofficial lower level of judges and staff who process routine, high volume cases. Juvenile and domestic relations cases also tend to gravitate downwards? (Rottman and Hewitt 26). If eight states had adopted a single trial court structure in 1973, then some of these states, like Massachusetts, must have deconsolidated and reestablished limited

jurisdiction courts over the course of time.

*? If there is a single lesson to be learned from the search of the organization theory literature, it is that there is no one organizational design which is appropriate for all circumstances.? --Henderson, Significance of Judicial Structure*

The ideal model court structure espoused by Pound and other court reformers has seen numerous variations in its application. While only a few states have implemented the ideal single-tier trial court design state wide, many other courts have approached consolidation in ways that more appropriately fit their particular circumstances. Several states have established two-tier systems, which allows for limited jurisdiction courts in addition to the general jurisdiction trial court. In order to achieve this model, consolidation of other levels of courts was frequently necessary. Some states have established special limited jurisdiction courts to handle such specialized matters as juvenile offenses, probate, family courts and drug courts. For efficiency reasons, some counties with low caseloads have voluntarily joined into a single judicial district. For financial reasons, some municipalities have voluntarily transferred jurisdiction for municipal ordinance violations to the general jurisdiction trial court. Thomas Henderson explored several models of court structure in his book, The Significance of Judicial Structure. In his research he found Connecticut to have what he termed a ? union model? structure that was highly consolidated except for probate court, Colorado and New Jersey were said to illustrate a ? federation model,? Iowa had more of a ? confederation model,? and Georgia a ? constellation model? characterized by a lack of consolidation (50). Clearly the ideal standard for the way in

which courts should be structured, as articulated by court reformers since the early 1900s, has not materialized in the way they had envisioned.

Researchers in judicial administration now acknowledge a state's unique characteristics should be taken into account when determining an appropriate structure for its court system. Henderson notes that, "[...] any empirical inquiry into the effect of unification on the judiciary must place the importance of organizational structure within an environmental context. Courts do not operate in a vacuum" (Henderson, Comparative Study 25). While a single-tier trial court structure may look good on paper, in reality it may not fit the circumstances of a particular state. "The legal framework of each state is different and clearly affects the organization of trial court activities. Moreover, the environments of the states vary both in the degree of urbanization and in the sheer size of the states" (Henderson, Significance 94). In addition to the factors Henderson lists, the local legal culture, state politics and resources available to courts in a state are also factors to take into account. However, Carl Baar notes that creative solutions for structuring courts are discouraged; Pound's vision continues to be the ideal for which most states are striving. "The standards (of court reform) have become conventional wisdom, a dominant paradigm for court reform. As a result, creative solutions devised to deal with distinctive managerial and political problems are discouraged in favor of adopting uniform models propounded by national bodies. Court systems have fallen victim to the cookbook analysis [...]. Court problems are no longer defined in terms of the needs of litigants or the rule of law, but in terms of the available structural solutions" (Baar, Scope 284). There continues to be a strong belief that if environmental differences can be overcome and court reforms realized (including

consolidation into a single-tier structure), problems with judicial administration will no longer exist.

### Court Reform in Oregon

*? No strong movement has developed in Oregon to do away with the minor courts and unify them with the state trial courts.?*

*--Bureau of Governmental Research and Service, Transfer of Municipal Court*

### Jurisdiction in Oregon

Along with many other states, Oregon's interest in court reform gained strength in the 1970s. In 1971 Governor Tom McCall created a Commission on Judicial Reform, stressing the need for reforms to streamline judicial organization and administration. In its 1975 final report, the commission urged continued use of district courts, "which provide a forum allowing an inexpensive, prompt, and simple procedure for the adjudication of minor disputes" (Hollis 16). The commission recommended that district courts be strengthened and the jurisdiction of justice and municipal courts be reduced. In the commentary on the recommendations, it is noted that one of the commission members voted in opposition to the recommendation to consolidate the courts. "He argued that removing local control from the people, by the device of restricting the jurisdiction of municipal courts, will ultimately make the people of the state apathetic about their court system" (Hollis 21). The commission's recommendations on consolidation were not implemented, but the dialogue had begun.

Because of an exceptionally strong historical and legal tradition of home rule, Oregon has not fully embraced the notion of a single-level trial court. The Oregon Legislative Assembly consolidated the state's district courts, circuit courts, tax court, and appellate courts into a unified court system in 1983. The court system is known as the Oregon Judicial Department and is state-funded. The Chief Justice of the Oregon Supreme Court is the administrative head of the Oregon Judicial Department, and the State Court Administrator is the chief operational officer who assists the Chief Justice in administering and supervising the state courts. Effective January 1998 the legislature abolished the district courts in Oregon and merged their judges and jurisdiction into the circuit courts. The circuit court is the general jurisdiction trial court in Oregon. Currently there is a circuit court for each of the 36 counties in Oregon, organized into 23 judicial districts, composed of one or more counties. Each judicial district has a trial court administrator. There are also over one hundred municipal and justice courts in Oregon, which are limited jurisdiction courts with jurisdiction over traffic violations and crimes, misdemeanors, and local ordinance violations. Rather than restricting the jurisdiction of the justice and municipal courts as recommended in 1975, the 1999 Oregon Legislative Assembly expanded their jurisdiction over misdemeanors, and gave concurrent jurisdiction over all of these violations and crimes to both the limited and general jurisdiction trial courts. The limited jurisdiction courts exist outside of the Oregon Judicial Department, are not subject to its administrative control, and are locally funded.

In 1995 the Oregon Judicial Department published Justice 2020: The New Oregon Trail, which outlines its vision of Oregon's judicial system in the future. Part of this vision calls for

comprehensive court restructuring, including elimination of municipal and justice courts by the year 2020. Their vision is by the year 2020, "Municipal and justice courts have been gradually phased out and replaced by Community Dispute Resolution Centers [. . .]" (Justice 2020 6). Two of the stated values in Justice 2020 include accessibility of justice (that it be available, affordable and understandable) and public service (that the needs and concerns of citizens are addressed, fairly and efficiently and with dignity). In October 2000 at the fall conference of the Oregon Association for Court Administration, Oregon Chief Justice Wallace Carson, Jr. presented a draft update to Justice 2020, "A Renewed Vision for Oregon's Courts." He explained to the attendees that the Committee on the Futures of the Courts, a standing committee of the Oregon Judicial Conference, met in 1999 to update their vision statement. "Still targeted on the year 2020, the Committee is carefully reshaping the vision to be leaner, more focused, and more accessible " a vision that will help catalyze positive change in the courts at every level" (Renewed Vision 1). In developing this updated vision, the Committee met with an expanded group of justice system stakeholders. However when questioned, Chief Justice Carson admitted that no representative from municipal or justice courts had been invited to participate. Local courts were, however, invited to comment on the draft. In one of the focus areas of the draft document, it states, "The judicial branch has a unified vision for the courts, and every local court has its own strategic plan to achieve that vision" (6). Clearly the updated vision continues to foretell the ultimate elimination of municipal and justice courts in Oregon. The elements of the vision include access to justice (ensuring quality justice for all); the third branch of government (making courts work for people); appropriate dispute resolution (helping people resolve disputes); community partnerships for justice (caring about local communities); and public trust and

involvement (participating in the justice process). The vision statement addresses public accountability of the courts to provide high quality programs and services and to adhere to high standards of practice. It encourages public involvement in the justice process ? as citizens, community members, jurors, volunteers, and users of justice services? (8). It does not, however, specifically invite regular user input into defining their customers? needs and concerns. A copy of ? A Renewed Vision for Oregon?s Courts? may be found in Appendix G.

In May 2000 a Citizens Justice Conference was held in Portland, Oregon. The conference was organized by Circuit Court Judge Ellen Rosenblum from the Fourth Judicial District. The purpose of the conference was ? to engage citizen leaders in the community in a discussion of their priorities for our justice system over the next 20 years? (Moore 7). Information from conference attendees would be used in the update of Justice 2020. A total of 262 individuals attended the conference, reflecting the general public, business, labor, social services, advocacy groups, attorneys and judges, the educational and faith communities, law enforcement, neighborhood associations, as well as state and local elected officials. The top priority needs identified by attendees were:

? Equal access to the courts and legal services regardless of wealth or position in the community,

? Alternatives to prison (e.g. work release, drug and alcohol treatment, etc.) for non-violent offenses,

? Less costly and more efficient alternatives to trials, such as mediation. (Moore 8).

Additional priority needs were identified in each of three topic areas: Children and Family; Public

Safety; and Business, Individual and Property. Attendees also identified a list of prioritized performance expectations, the top five of which were:

1. Courtesy and helpfulness of courthouse staff,
2. Facilities that are accessible to people with disabilities,
3. Giving jurors adequate information and instructions to decide cases,
4. Courthouses that are safe and have adequate facilities for all users, and
5. Judges who are not influenced by public opinion or politics (Moore 10).

This conference was the first effort in Oregon to seek broad public input into the judicial planning process.

#### Benefits of Court Consolidation

*? The direction of effort should be consistently toward unification of court structure and management.?*

*--ABA Standards, Section 1.10 Commentary*

There can be no doubt of many potential benefits that may be achieved by consolidating courts into a single-tier structure. Roscoe Pound identified several advantages in 1906, including cost savings in transferring and duplicating records, savings of judicial time by having fewer appeals, saving research time when the jurisdiction of a case is called into question, and the ability to better balance work load between judges (178-80). Theorists argue that balancing case assignments can help prevent burnout of judges, which may be the case if a judge only hears minor traffic violation cases every day. On the other hand, many types of cases have now become so legally complex, such as probate and juvenile cases, that it may be difficult to expect all judges



to have the level of expertise in these areas to be able to effectively adjudicate these matters.

Thomas Henderson conducted a three-year study of court operations in five states to determine whether court structure affects court performance. Henderson states in Significance of Judicial Structure that, "A more unified judicial system, it is contended, will increase the quality of justice, improve the character of administrative services available, and enhance the integrity of the judicial branch from political interference" (2). The quality of justice may be enhanced by ensuring that judges are legally trained and through centralized rulemaking. Certainly there may be more and higher quality administrative support services available to a court that has centralized its administrative resources. In some cases this will allow economies of scale to be realized or, because of unified budgeting practices, lead to increased funding. Henderson also identifies other benefits from a simplified court structure, such as improved case management, freeing judges from administrative tasks, increased uniformity in judicial operations, and increased internal accountability (18, 21). Within a consolidated court it would be somewhat easier to ensure uniform judicial operations which, along with freeing up judges from administrative tasks, would result in improved case management. Centralized administration of the court, presumably with a centralized data system, would provide the necessary performance information to review accountability. These are all valid statements of potential benefits that may be realized. However, Henderson also notes that, "The benefits commonly ascribed to unification [. . .] are usually linked to centralization rather than consolidation [. . .]" (119). The two primary benefits stated by court reform proponents directly related to consolidation are flexibility in allocating resources and insulating the court from politics.

In 1974 the American Bar Association first published their Standards Relating to Court Organization. This was later updated in 1990, but the standards and commentary relating to court structure remained virtually unchanged. The commentary for ? Section 1.00, Aims of Court Organization? provides the perspective that fragmented courts are an historical anomaly, a product of this country?s socio-economic past. They existed because society was largely agrarian, and areas were sparsely populated with poor transportation and communication. In order for the court to facilitate the delivery of justice, there should be ? [ . . . ] an organizational structure that is unified so that leadership can exercise responsibility for all judicial branch operations and accept accountability for their performance? (2). Once again, these benefits are more closely linked to centralization. Section 1.10 of the Standards specifically recommends a single-tier consolidated court structure. ? The direction of effort should be consistently toward unification of court structure and management? (4). While there is recognition in the Standards that the degree a court achieves consolidation may depend upon local circumstances, courts are encouraged to be persistent in moving toward that end.

#### Disadvantages of Court Consolidation

*? Opponents of unification have countered that such changes will lead to a large, central bureaucracy which will be insensitive to local concerns.?*

*--Thomas Henderson, The Significance of Judicial*

*Structure*

Thomas Henderson conducted the definitive research regarding the impact of court structure by studying court operations in five states over the course of three years. In his research, published in The Significance of Judicial Structure, he found disadvantages and well as advantages coming from court consolidation. While the ABA Standards Relating to Court Organization point out the agrarian history of the country created the necessity of having multiple local courts, Henderson recognizes that an agrarian environment is still the reality in large parts of the country. ? In the sparsely populated areas of these rural states, there is simply inadequate case load to require a large enough judicial and non-judicial staff to permit a high degree of organization [. . .]. The distances to be traveled by users of the court would become excessively large? (95). He points out that the geographic size of a state, the number of counties or judicial districts, and the degree of urbanization within a state are all important factors in how judicial services should be structured. Henderson goes on to assess the potential benefits of unification for rural and urban courts. He asserts that consolidation holds direct and obvious benefits for urban courts. Rural courts may be well served through administrative centralization. However, ? Court personnel in several rural states we visited complained that their state administrative office was only concerned with the problems of big cities? (176). The large bureaucracy of a consolidated court was not sensitive to local concerns.

Henderson determined through his research that the type of adjudicatory process predominant within a particular court has requirements that may affect the court?s organizational structure. In Significance of Judicial Structure, he identified three distinct types of adjudicatory process (66-69). Procedural adjudication is predominant in a general jurisdiction trial court. It is

focused on the rule of law and court procedures, and may be characterized by formal court proceedings. Decisional adjudication is the process used most frequently in limited jurisdiction trial courts, where the focus is more on fact finding. Decisional adjudication is seen in high volume traffic courts, and in courts where a significant proportion of cases are handled with little or no supervision of the judge, such as with hearings officials, a violations bureau, and bail forfeitures. Diagnostic adjudication is frequently the adjudicatory process being used in special jurisdiction courts, such as juvenile, family or drug courts. The focus of this adjudication type is to resolve the underlying problem. Henderson found that each adjudicatory process is defined by a different relationship between the judge and administrator, different kinds of administrative support, and pose different problems in their external relations. He also found that courts employed multiple types of adjudicatory processes, ? Although one type of adjudication is likely to dominate a particular court and, therefore, influence its structure, the other adjudicatory processes will also be employed? (67). The different administrative and procedural requirements of each type of adjudicatory process must be balanced within a court, says Henderson. In Structuring Justice Henderson states that strong local leadership is needed to balance the functional requirements of the various adjudicatory processes, and that ? This local leadership is difficult to establish in the courts of general jurisdiction which tend to be dominated by procedural adjudication? (88).

In his research of courts in Georgia, Connecticut, Colorado, New Jersey and Iowa, Henderson found court performance did not rely upon a highly consolidated structure. The five state court systems he studied varied widely in their degree and form of consolidation. Henderson

states, ? The more consolidated the court, the more difficult the balancing of the requirements of the different adjudicatory processes? (Structuring 78-79). In his research Henderson found that even though a consolidated structure may be imposed, the predominant adjudicatory process will be the determining factor in how court business is actually accomplished, which indicates ? [. . .] there may be functional limitations to trial court consolidation? (Structuring 78-79). Henderson hypothesized, ? If structural variations are significant, there should be important differences in the operation and performance of the courts among these five states? (Significance 50). He did not find significant differences in court operations among the five states, while they were very different in their organizational structure. As a result Henderson found that ? [. . .] it is no longer appropriate to assume that there will be a direct link between structural changes and court performance? (9). At the conclusion of his research, Henderson stated in his findings that consolidation can protect the institutional integrity of a trial court, may improve flexibility in allocating resources and caseload, and may provide assistance to urban courts. Henderson also found that a unified court structure had no bearing on the quality or performance of court operations. ? In the final analysis we could show little direct evidence on the effects of unification on performance measures? (Significance 176).

In his ? Scope and Limits of Court Reform,? Carl Baar considers the difficulties of attaining the desired outcomes of court reform through a traditional approach. One of the original goals of consolidation was to ensure judicial independence in a political environment. The ABA's Standards Relating to Court Organization describes some of the political issues faced

by local courts. ? Sometimes, particularly as to traffic courts, they are little more than appendages of city government, preoccupied with the revenues derived from fines and penalties [. . .]. The result of their position is very often dependency on the expectations of local government officials, procedural bias, and, in some instances, exploitation of the public? (Standards 22). Baar notes that in unified courts, however, ? [. . .] conflicts over the use of power remain, only the arenas and participants have changed. Thus court reform has observed shifts from local politics to state politics [. . .] and perhaps place the courts in an even more hostile political environment? (Scope 278-9). Baar shows that some unified courts have faced serious political conflicts. In New Jersey strong political party machines exerted influence over the judiciary. California?s strong executive branch and Colorado?s strong legislative Joint Budget Committee effectively stymied the judiciary from obtaining needed resources. In Alabama, the legislature put revenues ahead of justice by putting a proviso in the appropriations bill requiring court revenues exceed expenditures. Perhaps judicial independence may be protected by means other than a consolidated organizational structure. Baar characterizes the traditional court reform approach as prescriptive, ? Court problems are no longer defined in terms of the needs of litigants or the rule of law, but in terms of the available structural solutions? (Scope 284).

In summary, there are several potential disadvantages to court consolidation. Henderson showed that consolidation may lead to a lack of sensitivity to local concerns. He demonstrated the difficulty within a consolidated structure to balance the needs of the different adjudicatory processes. Henderson also determined that a consolidated court structure does not improve court performance. Baar further noted that court consolidation does not ensure judicial

independence in a political environment. Baar suggests that, "[...] the emphasis on standardization that has been a hallmark of two generations of court reform is now being questioned by reformers themselves. It is seen today as a factor blocking useful and necessary reform, and hampering creative thinking on new reform directions" (Scope 283). With the traditional reform strategies being questioned, Baar was compelled to look at innovative, new solutions to address court reform.

### Changing Focus of Court Reform

*"Structures, processes, and practices are important to examine, but they need to be assessed in terms of the outcomes courts strive to achieve."*

*--Pamela Casey, "Are We Reading the Dials?"*

Baar recommends three non-traditional strategies for successful court reform in "Scope and Limits of Court Reform." First, the court must stress horizontal rather than vertical linkages. Horizontal linkages stress contact and responsibility of colleagues to one another, rather than the traditional command and control model. Judicial administration through horizontal linkages would group together judges at the same level in courts throughout a state. Baar believes this model will reflect the needs of diverse courts that handle different cases, serve different clienteles, and have different administrative problems. While increasing integration and coordination, it is less bureaucratic than a unified structure. Second, court structure should be on a scale that permits planning and coordination while retaining collegiality. For example, a large state might stress organizing on a regional basis, and a state with large metropolitan areas might create an

administrative structure for a metropolitan court. In this way the court may address the distinct needs of its clientele, whether urban or rural. Baar's third recommendation is to "[...] shift from a consideration of the needs of judges and court administrative personnel to a consideration of the needs of litigants and other members of the public served by the courts" (287). In Baar's opinion, court reform efforts heretofore have been guided primarily by internal concerns. Instead Baar recommends that court reform be guided by the public. He recognizes that outside the organized bar, there is no one group to represent the interests of the general public and advocate for their interests. "Even so, reformers should see court needs from litigants' eyes rather than lawyers' eyes. What do litigants expect when they go to court, or are brought into court? What should they expect?" (288). According to Baar, effective court reform in this day and age requires a mind set for public service and justice which transcends procedural and organizational prescriptions.

The ABA Standards Relating to Court Organization, while emphasizing the opinion that a highly consolidated structure is most desirable, also recognize that in a few court systems two separate levels of trial courts have performed effectively and in cooperation with each other. "If, for practical reasons, a trial court cannot be organized on this basis (as a single unit), it should be organized into a relatively small number of multi-judge districts constituted on the basis of administrative efficiency. In establishing districts for a trial court system, the principal considerations should be population concentrations, trading and other exchange relationships, transportation and communication patterns, and the organizational structure of other agencies and divisions of government. Traditional county and city boundaries, therefore, may remain relevant



for certain purposes? (26-7). This opinion is consistent with Baar's notion of a scalable court structure depending upon clientele needs.

Accountability of the judiciary is increasingly noted as a desired outcome of court reform. Henderson notes in Structuring Justice, "[...] courts are being asked to demonstrate that they are using scarce resources efficiently. These demands for managerial accountability must be balanced against the ultimate objective of the judiciary to deliver justice fairly and equitably. The unification reforms do not guarantee that a proper balance will be struck? (95). Traditional court reform was primarily developed to promote economy and efficiency. Baar notes in "Scope and Limits of Court Reform" that reform efforts focus on structures and procedures rather than substance. "Thus justice is defined as a property of speed and efficiency [...] not of fairness, so that court reformers need not ask about the quality or substance of the justice that speedy and efficient court would provide? (278). The fundamental question of court reform is no longer whether we are doing things right, but whether we are doing the right things.

At the Third National Symposium on Court Management, conducted by the State Justice Institute and the National Center for State Courts in August 2000, Pam Casey spoke to the issue of accountability and court performance. In her address, "Accountability and Court Performance: Are We Reading the Dials?" Casey asks if "[...] the current court system can balance the need to be responsive and accountable to the public with the system's needs for consistency and stability? (1). In other words, can traditional court reform values be expanded to

include the new values of responsiveness and accountability, and can all of these values be balanced. As Casey points out, "Traditional court reforms were focused primarily on fixing the system to make it better for those working in the system. Benefits to the public were assumed?" (8). She recognizes that the perception of good performance changes over time. Situations change, new tools become available, and demand for change will come from outside the industry. As with the private sector in the 1970-80s, performance measurement, a focus on quality, and customer service were themes that took courts by storm in the 1990s. Casey explains that today's courts focus on building the public's trust and confidence by looking at the court from the user's point of view, and by ensuring effective performance through objective measurement toward established standards.

*"...the courts have been slow to adopt a consumer focus."*

*--Roger Warren, "Customer Service in the Courts?"*

Public trust and confidence in the nation's courts was first identified as an issue in the late 1970s. In 1977 the National Center for State Courts commissioned a survey of 1,900 citizens on their perceptions about state courts and court reform. The study, "The Public Image of the Courts," revealed that the general public had little knowledge of the court system, and did not have a strong level of confidence in the courts. A limited, commercial survey was conducted in 1978, which indicated substantial public dissatisfaction with the courts. The results of these surveys were considered at the Second National Conference on the Judiciary, held in Williamsburg, Virginia in 1978. Conference attendees agreed that courts needed to strive to

improve the public's satisfaction in the judicial system. Between 1977 and 1998, several states conducted state-wide surveys to provide more specific information about public perceptions of court services to help determine where reform efforts were most needed. In 1998 the American Bar Association commissioned another national survey, "Perceptions of the U.S. Justice System." While the 1998 national survey responses were generally more optimistic, the same positive and negative perceptions were reflected in survey responses over the course of two decades. Courts were perceived positively in that judges and court staff were respectful, cases were handled in a fair manner, the jury system works, judges were well trained, honest, fair in making judicial decisions, and protected individuals' constitutional rights. Courts were perceived negatively in regards to accessibility, treatment of racial and ethnic minorities, bias in favor of the wealthy, leniency toward criminals, and political influence. In 1999, the National Center for State Courts commissioned the Hearst Corporation to conduct another national survey, "How the Public Views the State Courts." A total of 1,826 Americans were interviewed by telephone for this survey, and the sampling included at least 600 individuals representing racial and ethnic minorities. The results of this survey were the subject of a National Conference on Public Trust and Confidence in the Justice System, held in May of 1999 in Washington, D.C. The survey responses suggested that public trust is driven by perceptions of how courts reach decisions. If the public believes that courts are equitable and efficient in the way decisions are made, they are more likely to be confident in the justice system. (Casey, Rottman) Unlike the motivating factors behind traditional court reform, "Concern with cost and delay does not appear to influence the rating people have of court performance or their degree of support for the courts" (Rottman 6).

The public's dissatisfaction with the justice system and the cry for increased accountability prompted the development of performance standards and measures. The National Center for State Courts established the Trial Court Performance Standards Project in 1987. Standards and measures were drafted and field-tested between 1987 and 1997, when the Trial Court Performance Standards were published by the Bureau of Justice Assistance. The Standards identified five areas for which trial courts are fundamentally responsible: access to justice; expedition and timeliness; equality, fairness and integrity; independence and accountability; and public trust and confidence. The performance area of public trust and confidence is based on effective performance in the first four areas as viewed through the eyes of its customers. In alignment with the customer service movement of the 1990s, "[...] the Standards specifically look at the court and its work from the user's point of view" (Casey 7). The standards are based on outcomes, accountability, providing opportunities for public input and measuring perceptions, not just on measuring efficiency and streamlining court structure and internal procedures. Courts across the nation are now actively measuring performance and surveying their customers in order to improve services to meet the nationally-accepted Trial Court Performance Standards.

#### New Trends From Outside the Courts

*"Demand for change comes from outside the industry."*

*--Pam Casey, "Are We Reading the Dials?"*

Trends in management theory and practice have existed since the Industrial Revolution over a century ago. Management trends transcend the traditional boundaries between public and

private sector, between business and industry, between nations, and even between church and state. Wherever a function is managed, the management style employed will reflect to varying degrees the prevailing trend of that era. Management trends reflect the particular social and economic values of the time.

There have been three predominant management trends since the early 1900s. Around 1900 the old paradigm of small independent businesses and governmental organizations was breaking down, because it was incapable of dealing with the new realities emerging in industrialized countries. In order to cope with these changes, bureaucracy was invented. Bureaucracy was a new organizational form modeled after the military and the new mass production industries. Max Weber, the German sociologist, summarized the principles around which bureaucracies were structured: they were centralized and hierarchical; ordered by rules; standardized and impersonal; used administrative processes to achieve their goals; and selected employees based on examination (Osborne and Plastrik 16).

1. From 1910 and into the 1930s, at the peak of the Industrial Revolution, management typically was focused on productivity and efficient task completion. This ? mechanistic model? was characterized by hierarchical organizational structures employing a command and control management style. Time and efficiency studies were commonplace (Straub, Warren). In justice administration, this management trend was reflected in Roscoe Pound?s call for court reforms to create a more hierarchical, centrally controlled and efficient court structure. Roscoe Pound was a man of his times, but his recommendations were not widely implemented until the 1960s.

2. With the Depression and the growth of unions, from 1930 and into the 1960s more

businesses and organizations were concerned with their employees. In this ? humanistic model? human resource departments were established. Medical benefits were provided. Organizations focused their efforts on selecting and retaining good employees (Straub). In justice administration, this management trend was reflected in the advent of court administration as a profession, freeing the judge from many administrative duties.

3. After World War II, Deming and other American quality control pioneers were sent to Japan to help rebuild their economy. They employed the quality principles that had been so effective in their work with the U.S. military. In fifteen years Japan became an economic superpower. By 1960 the trend of Total Quality Management was born, and by the 1980s an emphasis on customer service was adapted to American service industries. ? Under the Deming model, the customer is the arbiter of quality. Quality is defined as meeting or exceeding the expectations of customers, and customer satisfaction is perceived as the driving force behind an organization [. . .]? (Warren 11). From 1960 through the 1990s, the ? organic model? of management blended concepts of efficiency with humanism. Quality, outcomes, interrelationships, and customer service characterize the organic model. (Straub). In justice administration, the development in the late 1980s and 1990s of the Trial Court Performance Standards reflects this management trend. This evolution of management theory from the mechanistic model to the most recent organic model can be seen in major corporations, health care, religious organizations and government agencies.

The world is once again in a new social and economic age ? the Information Age. The management systems that were successful in meeting the demands of the Industrial Age will no

longer be adequate. Richard Oliver in The Shape of Things To Come claims that customer service and input are more important than ever. ? From manufacturing to retailing, companies that recognize customer empowerment and respond by getting customer involvement in their business processes are the big winners? (63). He describes today?s customers as demanding instant gratification, global best quality as customers themselves define it to be, customized services, pre-emptive support and maintenance, and global best price. Customers in this century are empowered with information. They demand to be more involved in the market process. They are empowered by self-help and special interest groups, which provide information and a forum for advocacy. Examples of successful customer service initiatives in the private sector include General Motors, Xerox, 3-M, AT&T, Federal Express, and Motorola, who regularly conduct surveys to gauge customer satisfaction (Warren 12). Acxion corporation is obtaining real-time consumer feedback. Nortel has developed customer councils and user groups for each product line. Honda videotapes customer test-drives, which has led to subtle changes to provide greater customer service, for example changing the design of the rear passenger window to facilitate fast food drive-through service. Oliver believes that businesses and organizations in the Information Age will need to be structured and managed to be highly flexible, adaptable, decentralized, have teams with dispersed power sharing, be able to provide personalized service, and focus on customer-defined quality (Oliver 101). Centralized power will be a thing of the past. Oliver uses the Internet as an example: ? No technology, no political, cultural or social force is as dramatically global, yet it has no center? (175). According to Oliver, by the end of the Information Age power will be more equitably distributed, services will be decentralized, and there will no longer be monopolies in technology, economics, business, culture, or politics.

Society is already changing in this direction.

*? The only way to empower Americans is to make America and all of its giant institutions*

*inordinately smaller.?*

*--E.F. Schumacher, as cited in Downsizing the U.S.A.*

Public dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy of large institutions has been growing since the 1960s, and has gained a number of outspoken advocates of this position in the 1990s. Leopold Kohr, cited in Downsizing the U.S.A., says, ? There seems only one cause behind all forms of social misery: *bigness*. It appears to be the one and only problem permeating all creation. Wherever something is wrong, something is too big? (Naylor and Willimon 9). Some see a recurrent trend throughout human history toward separatism and local autonomy after gaining independence from large, centrally controlled organizations. While there is recognition that mergers and consolidations are implemented to gain efficiencies, the loss of personalized service and sense of community are seen as overriding issues. In Downsizing, Naylor and Willimon consider various institutions in today's society that have grown into large bureaucracies-- government, corporations, churches, schools, and health care organizations among others. ? Too often unity is achieved through coercion, collectivism, the military. In the process of perverted human attempts to unify and secure ourselves, we end up destroying community, scattering ourselves, fracturing into a thousand different voices, falling to earth in disaster. Melt down? (7). In somewhat less flamboyant terms, Adams and Brock discuss the consequences of amassed economic power in The Bigness Complex: Industry, Labor and Government in the American Economy. ? Despite the hubris in which it has come to be cloaked, economic power militates



against good economic performance. Whether in its horizontal, vertical, or conglomerate guise, whether wielded by business, labor, or government--or all three in coalition--it tends to undermine efficiency and to obstruct progressiveness. It creates bloated bureaucracies that are an inadequate instrument of social planning and interfere with an intelligent use of society's resources. It is unproductive at best and dangerous at worst? (369). In government and business, in churches and schools, executives are rethinking the efficiency benefits of large institutions.

Many big name American companies downsized in the early 1990s, such as AT&T, General Electric, General Motors, IBM and Xerox. The federal government forced a break-up of the Microsoft Corporation monopoly. Naylor and Willimon point out that organizational growth beyond a certain point creates problems: ? The firm may become unmanageable. As the size of the firm increases, problems of alienation, motivation, coordination, communication, and control become more acute? (Naylor and Willimon 9). They ponder if megacompanies may not someday become extinct. ? Have they become too big, too powerful, too insular, and too self-serving for the good of their stockholders, their customers, their employees, their local communities, and the global environment?? (35). Small businesses are gaining in popularity. For some it is a way to support their local economy, for others it is because of higher quality and more personalized service. Throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s there has been an increase in new U.S. corporations, most of which are small businesses (Wattenberg 257). Naylor and Willimon tout the successes of the small, homegrown, entrepreneurial companies in Vermont, such as Ben and Jerry's, Autumn Harp, Otter Creek Brewing, Vermont Teddy Bear, Green Mountain Coffee, Rhino Foods, Danforth Pewterers, Vermont Butter & Cheese, and Catamount Brewing.

? Without exception, these high-performance companies trade heavily on Vermont?s uniqueness-- its tiny size, its rural nature, its tradition of freedom and democracy, and its strong sense of community. These small firms account for 95 percent of Vermont?s businesses, and employ 85 percent of the private workforce [. . .]. Not unlike Switzerland, the label ?made in Vermont? has become synonymous with quality? (43). These small businesses cater to their customers? tastes, provide excellent service, are socially and environmentally responsible, and sell their high quality products for premium prices. The success of small businesses such as these illustrates changing public values, and provides a high degree of contrast as compared to large corporations.

Since the 1960s there has also been a growing public dissatisfaction with large consolidated public schools. Lack of personalized attention due to large class size has created an assembly-line mentality toward education. Students are viewed as units to be moved through the system. The value of efficiency has overridden that of quality in the education industry. Many schools were consolidated for cost savings. The result was large, impersonal schools with excessive centralization and over regulation to maintain control, and an absence of a sense of community. Naylor and Willimon note that, ? In an economy where creativity and individual initiative may be more valuable than uniformity and punctuality, our present megaschools seem oddly out of sync. Some Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia high schools with over five thousand students have actually been broken up into schools of five hundred students? (102). Another consequence of the consolidation trend in schools has been an increase in number of private schools, charter schools and children who are being home schooled. In these types of schools situations, personal attention and consumer control is maximized.

Churches have also seen consolidations and a public reaction against the resulting large institutions. An example of this trend is the United Methodist Church. In 1968, as a result of a merger between the Evangelical United Brethren and the Methodist Churches, the United Methodist Church was created--which is now the Protestant denomination with the largest number of churches in North America. With a booming economy, corporate America was expanding, the federal government was growing, and it seemed to be an appropriate move to create a more efficient church. However, parishioners found that, ? A bigger church was a more bureaucratic church, a more authoritarian church, a less responsive, adaptive church, and a church in which too little power resided in the local congregations? (Naylor and Willimon 137).

Simultaneously in the 1960s, America saw a huge growth in independent, nondenominational churches, many with younger membership. Naylor and Willimon point out that while older Americans are staunch supporters of institutions, young adults as a group take a uniformly negative view of large institutions, are cynical about politics, and prefer local solutions (145-6).

Another reason independent churches have become so popular is that traditional denominations have not successfully reached out to minorities. ? One reason is the organizational form of (traditional) churches. The corporate, bureaucratic model of organization is white-collar, corporate America through the sixties. Organizational form tends to be culturally specific [. . .] does not fit the needs and the peculiar ways in which different ethnic groups organize themselves? (146). Naylor and Willimon suggest that if traditional Protestant denominations want to minister to ethnic minorities they must encourage more local leadership, organizational and structural diversity, and support local ownership of the church and its mission (146). This illustrates that

organizational structure may be affected by user demographics.

In the field of health care, America has seen a major trend toward consolidation. Naylor and Willimon observe that, "At least in the short run, the entire health care field seems to be headed towards even bigger clinics, hospitals, insurance companies, and drug companies. The large, bureaucratic HMO and megahospital have replaced the personal touch of the friendly, family, neighborhood physician. Medicine is no longer a healing art, but rather a very big impersonal business" (167). The trend toward big medicine began after the Depression.

Andrews, in Profit Fever: The Drive to Corporatize Health Care and How to Stop It, provides a history of the health care industry in America. In 1930 there was virtually no health insurance, and people with financial hardships were frequently delinquent in paying their hospital bills. Hospitals, which were non-profit at that time, had little financial reserves to deal with this situation. In 1930 Baylor University Hospital in Dallas created a health plan for public school teachers. This eventually grew into the health plan known today as Blue Cross. A Health Maintenance Organization (HMO) goes beyond an insurance plan, as it blends insurance with the provision of treatment. In 1942 Henry Kaiser started an HMO at his shipyards in Richmond, California. He retained a staff of doctors to work at his company's medical clinics. Although formally non-profit at that time, the HMO was run along standard business principles. HMOs proliferated in the 1970s and 1980s, with the resulting consequences of "bureaucratic lethargy and managerial arteriosclerosis" (Adams and Brock 372). A growing market attracts profit-seekers. Insurance companies are now the largest provider of managed care health services. "The health crisis is a result of the corporate invasion and the changing relations between the different businessmen

contending for revenue? (Andrews 27). Unlike Kaiser's time, most HMOs now are profit-making ventures. By 1994 enrollment in managed care plans increased to 50 million people, of which 70 percent are enrolled in plans owned by the ten largest firms. The top five managed care insurance companies are: Prudential, Cigna, Aetna, Travelers and Metropolitan Life (27-28). Health care has become a big business, and profit has overshadowed quality medical care.

As with business, education and religious institutions, there has been a growing public reaction against the lack of customer focus in the health care industry. Patients are viewed as units to be handled cost-efficiently as they move through various treatments. Medical treatments are standardized where possible, doctors' office visits have been shortened to 20 minutes, medical procedures and tests have been eliminated where there is no statistical evidence to support doing them. ? When serious illness strikes, though, we want to be treated as someone special. Managed care plans haven't always been able to do that [. . .]. Now that customers and users of HMOs have begun to speak out, the great challenge will be to fix this failing? (Anders 243). Due to numerous complaints from patients and their families about poor quality health care, HMOs set up the National Committee for Quality Assurance as an oversight body in the late 1970s. This action proved to be too little of a response to deal with public dissatisfaction. In California voters put the California Health Security Act on the ballot by referendum. Within 100 days, over one million signatures were collected to put Proposition 186 on the November 1994 ballot. From a total of 22 million registered voters, the signatures collected in that short time frame indicate significant public interest in health care reform. Under the Act, residents would pay 2.5% of taxable income into a single payer fund, and a payroll tax would replace employers'

outlay for health benefits. Commercial insurance companies would no longer manage health care. Unfortunately, big business funded the opposition position in the campaign, and exploited public sentiment against big government to see the measure fail (Andrews 59-60, 105-113). Health care reform has continued to be popular in the polls throughout the presidential campaigns of the last decade.

*? Governments, as we have known them in this century, have a nasty habit of bringing order but destroying community, of forcefully yoking people together, but of destroying interconnectedness.?*                    --Thomas Naylor and William Willimon, Downsizing the U.S.A.

The public reaction against big government is widespread. Those who work in government know that, ? People don?t want big government, but they want the services provided by big government? (Wattenberg 349). This has been a growing trend since the late 1960s, when Robert Kennedy spoke out against big government. In Gallup polls conducted periodically over the years, the number of people who considered big government (rather than big business or big labor) to be the biggest future threat to the country increased from 14 percent in 1959 to 51 percent in 1983 (349). The populace considers big government to be wasteful, mired in bureaucracy, and out of touch with local issues and concerns. The bureaucratic culture of the public sector has been in place so long that, ? The effect is numbing: people caught in the monotonous bureaucratic machinery become unimaginative and unresponsive? (Osborne and Plastrik 258). Customer service suffers in a bureaucratic atmosphere. Ironically, after creating one of the largest government bureaucracies in history, President Reagan made a most eloquent

statement on behalf of downsizing organizations in a 1975 Chicago speech:

I am calling for an end to giantism, for a return to the human scale--the scale that human beings can understand and cope with; the scale of the local fraternal lodge, the church congregation, the block club, the farm bureau. It is the locally owned factory, the small businessman who personally deals with his customers and stands behind his product, the farm and consumer cooperative, the town or neighborhood bank that invests in the community, the union local. In government, the human scale is the town council, the board of selectment, and the precinct captain. It is this activity on a small human scale that creates the fabric of community, a framework for the creation of abundance and liberty. The human scale nurtures standards of right behavior, a prevailing ethic of what is right and wrong, acceptable and unacceptable (Naylor and Willimon 208).

While President Bill Clinton, in his January 1996 State of the Union Address, said, "The era of big government is over," it is interesting to note that the issue of big government continues to be one of the main political platforms of the presidential campaign four years later.

David Osborne and Peter Plastrik note that the cry for governmental reform is not unique to the United States. In their definitive work on public sector reform, Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government, they discuss public sector reform on a global basis. In March 1996 the 24-member Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development held its first meeting on public management. Most of the 24 nations represented faced the same pressures for change: a global economy, dissatisfied citizens, and fiscal crisis. They had similar strategies for dealing with these pressures, which included downsizing the public service, shifting authority to the local level, providing standards for customer service, and measuring performance to ensure public accountability. As Osborne and Plastrik note, "Citizens in the industrial democracies are not clamoring only for cheaper government, they are clamoring for government that works. They want more productivity, but they also want more value [ . . . ]" (11). Unlike the

private sector that exists in a market economy environment, public organizations have a more difficult time making changes because of their political environment. In addition, while a customer focus is vital to reinventing government, the general citizen who may not be a customer is equally important. Customers may measure an agency's performance, but in the public sector the citizens vote and elect the representatives who have authority over the public agencies.

Osborne and Plastrik consider Great Britain's Citizen Charter as a successful example of public sector reform. As an outgrowth of the quality improvement movement of the 1970s and 1980s, Prime Minister John Major launched the charter program in 1991. "Citizens wanted public services to be effective: they wanted the subways and commuter trains to run on time, the mail to arrive in one day, and their children to receive a quality education" (32). Under the Citizen Charter program all public organizations at the national and local level would establish customer service standards, developed with input from their customers, and establish guarantees that the standards would be met. The Citizen Charter articulated six principles or expectations: standards, information and openness, choice and consultation, courtesy and helpfulness, putting things right, and value for money (193). Courts in Great Britain set maximum times for issuing summonses, sending judgments, and keeping witnesses waiting. As a result of Citizen Charters, a national survey indicated customer satisfaction with government services increased from 51 percent in 1991 to 61 percent in 1995 (195). Osborne and Plastrik strive to explain how other governmental agencies can implement similar strategies and achieve similar improvement in public satisfaction.

President Clinton hoped to replicate the success of Great Britain in the United States. In



1993, he issued an executive order requiring all executive agencies and departments to:

- a. Identify the customers who are, or should be, served by the agency;
- b. Survey customers to determine the kind and quality of services they want and their level of satisfaction with existing services;
- c. Post standards of service and measure results against them;
- d. Benchmark customer service performance against the best in the business;
- e. Survey frontline employees on barriers to, and ideas for, matching the best in business;
- f. Provide customers with choices in both the sources of service and the means of delivery;
- g. Make information, services, and complaint systems easily accessible; and
- h. Provide means to address customer complaints (Osborne and Plastrik 195-6).

These were comprehensive but ambitious orders. By 1995, 214 federal agencies had established customer service standards. With a change in the White House in 2000, it will be interesting to see if the move toward greater customer service in the federal executive branch will continue.

Barriers abound. ? The biggest barrier is not resistance, but the pull of other priorities. [. . .] A second barrier is fear of consequences: What happens if a leader sets performance goals, then fails to reach them? Won't his opponent use that against him at election time?? (326-7). Courage is necessary to make change in the public sector, but the potential benefits of establishing service standards and accountability for results outweigh the risks.

#### Applying New Trends to Courts

In order to apply a customer focus to courts, it is first necessary to define the court's customers. In ? Customer Service in the Courts,? an article by Roger Warren for The Court

Manager, Warren defines three types of customers:

- ? Direct customers ? the clients or recipients of services,
- ? Ultimate customers ? the external stakeholders and general public, and
- ? Internal customers ? the employees who rely on the work of other employees to do their jobs.

Warren recognizes that the expectations of direct customers may not always coincide with the expectations of ultimate customers, but in the final analysis it is, ? [. . .] the ultimate customers whose expectations are the most important and at the same time the most difficult to assess and meet? (13). After all, it is the ultimate customer who votes and provides public support for the judicial process. Osborne and Plastrik see a similar division between customer types in compliance organizations. They define the court's primary customer as the general public, as represented by its elected officials. Rather than giving greater importance to the primary (or ultimate) customers, Osborne and Plastrik state that the organization must balance the interests of the various groups toward common goals.

The court can empower each customer group to assist in the court's performance improvement. In order to improve voluntary compliance, the court can involve their direct customers by:

- ? asking them about their satisfaction with services they received;
- ? requesting their assistance in creating the rules;
- ? educating them of what is expected of them;

- ? providing tools to facilitate compliance (such as reminder letters and telephone help lines);
- ? providing choices of methods of compliance (such as fine or community service);
- ? creating incentives and consequences for compliance and non-compliance;
- ? establishing quality standards and a complaint process; and
- ? giving compliers feedback on their level of compliance.

The court can empower their primary or ultimate customers by:

- ? creating forums for the public to identify service issues and priorities in the judicial system;
- ? utilizing public forums to develop goals and implement strategies;
- ? utilizing interested citizens to provide public information presentations or prepare brochures;
- ? providing volunteer opportunities for citizens to assist court clients as they move through the system; and
- ? organizing groups to assist with administering and monitoring community service sanctions or diversion programs for offenders.

The court can empower their internal customers by:

- ? asking about their satisfaction with services they receive from each other;
- ? establishing goals, values and expectations with their assistance;
- ? decentralizing administrative controls and monitoring performance based on results;
- ? establishing site-based management;

- ? encouraging individual initiative to address service problems;
- ? experimenting with creative solutions; and
- ? recognizing exemplary customer service provided by employees (Osborne and Plastrik 199-232). There are many ways in which courts may involve all of their customers to work toward improving services.

Surveying is one way to obtain customer feedback. As Warren notes in his article on customer service, "Courts rarely create opportunities for regular feedback from the public, or from those who use the courts' services, or even from internal customers" (14). The National Center for State Courts found customer service strategies have been very limited in the judicial branch, but state wide efforts have been coordinated in Alaska, Connecticut and Maine. Hennepin County in Minnesota has developed and adopted a quality policy statement, surveyed internal and external customers regarding access issues, and implemented a number of service improvements as a result. As stated earlier in this section, Oregon completed a survey and structured discussion of issues with citizens in the Portland metropolitan area in May 2000. The National Center for State Courts is assisting states in organizing citizen conferences, like the one in Oregon, for general public input on priorities and services. Most states, however, have made no comprehensive effort to survey and get feedback from the courts' users or from the courts' internal customers.

This report will investigate what effects, if any, court consolidation has had on five courts' ability to provide and measure customer service and meet local community needs. It will

also provide examples of ways a court may survey its users and its own employees to find out how to improve its level of service in ways that are most helpful. One may ask why courts should focus on customer satisfaction. Perhaps Roger Warren provided the best answer:

There are, I suppose, lots of reasons. Focusing on internal customers enriches jobs, promotes teamwork, improves communication, develops careers, improves morale, encourages innovation, and enhances the satisfaction of external customers. Focusing on external customers promotes courteous relationships between court employees and users of court services, facilitates access to the courts, and fosters public perceptions of fairness and justice. At the same time, a strong customer focus allows the courts to meet the expectations of the agencies and officials whose support and cooperation are necessary to enable the courts to fulfill their mission to secure justice ? equal justice ? under law (14).

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research for this project was conducted in two separate phases. Phase One research involved case studies of several jurisdictions in California and Michigan where courts had recently been consolidated. Phase Two research involved a user satisfaction questionnaire of defendants at Eugene, Oregon municipal court, as well as an employee questionnaire at that court. This report will describe the research methodology in Phase One, followed by a description of the research methodology in Phase Two.

### Phase One Methodology

#### 1. Research Design

Survey instruments were developed for telephone interviews to determine the effects of court consolidation, specifically its impact on customer service. Both court administrative staff and officials from municipalities were interviewed. The survey instruments were slightly different to capture additional information about current programs being offered by the court. Copies of both survey instruments may be found in Appendix B.

The surveys were tested by a group of students in the Court Executive Development Program, and revised according to the feedback received. The majority of the feedback from the pretest group was to provide more information at the beginning of the interview explaining its purpose, and to provide more clarity in the questions asked, with examples where possible.

## 2. Sample Group

The National Center for State Courts identified a total of five states plus Washington D.C. that had a single-level trial court structure. In addition, NCSC staff identified that Michigan had seven courts participating in consolidation projects. By contacting the state court administrators office in each of the states with single-level trial courts, the author determined a total population size of 192 single-level trial courts in the United States. This total does not include jurisdictions in other states where individual single-level trial courts may exist, such as in Multnomah County, Oregon. Without a state-by-state survey to determine where these may exist, it is impossible to determine the exact total population of single-level trial courts in the United States.

A sample of these courts was determined by screening for different variables. The time of consolidation was to have been in the recent past, since the survey would be asking for perceptions prior to and after court consolidation.. A five year standard was applied to the list of states with consolidated courts. After too long, memories fade and people change jobs. Only California courts and the demonstration projects in Michigan met this criteria. California courts completed consolidation in January 2000. The Michigan demonstration projects began in 1997. In addition to recent consolidation, sample courts were screened to ensure that there had previously been a municipal court in operation within that jurisdiction prior to consolidation. Municipal officers would also be interviewed to provide the perspective of the local community that is now served by a consolidated court.

A sample of 5 courts was identified for the survey. Three are California courts: Shasta

County, Ventura County, and Los Angeles County. Two are courts involved in consolidation demonstration projects in Michigan: Berrian County and the three-county 46<sup>th</sup> Judicial District. The state court administrators' offices in California and Michigan assisted by identifying the courts to survey. With Los Angeles County being so large and having numerous courts, staff were surveyed at both a branch court and the Superior Court administrative office. In each telephone survey, the court contact was asked to identify a municipal officer from their jurisdiction. In Ventura County, the executive officer of the Superior Court who was interviewed had previously been the administrator of the Ventura Municipal Court. The single interview provided perspectives from both the consolidated court and the municipality. No additional municipal contact was solicited from Ventura County. In all, a total of 10 interviews were conducted: 6 with court administrative staff and 4 with municipal officers. Two additional courts had been initially contacted, but did not respond.

### 3. Data Collection Tools

The telephone survey instruments varied slightly between those used for contacts with courts and those for contacts with municipal officers. A basic script was included at the top of each survey to ensure that each contact received the same information about the purpose of the survey and the manner in which the questions would be asked. The first 7 questions of each survey were the same. For each of these questions the interviewee was asked to respond yes or no from their perspective before court consolidation, and again yes or no from their current perspective. Space was provided to record comments after each question. Questions ranged from cost effectiveness and adequacy of resources to whether the court measured customer



satisfaction and the degree of that satisfaction. A question was also included to ascertain whether the court processed local ordinance violation cases before and after consolidation. In the court survey, contacts were asked to share a copy of any customer satisfaction survey instrument they used. Court contacts were also asked to describe customer service programs their court has implemented, and whether or not they gained opportunities to pursue customer service initiatives with court consolidation. Finally, the court survey requested a referral to a municipal official within their jurisdiction. The municipal official survey included a question asking if they felt their local community had benefited from court consolidation, with an opportunity for explanation.

#### 4. Data Collection

The author conducted the telephone interviews from November 8 through December 5, 2000. The court interviews were set up through an initial contact by e-mail to schedule the telephone interview. E-mail addresses were either provided by the state court administrators' offices or from the membership directory of the National Association for Court Management. This approach provided an opportunity to explain the purpose of the interview and offer a choice of dates and times for the telephone call. It also provided the court contact an opportunity to refer the interview to another person who would be more available. Pre-scheduling the telephone calls facilitated the interviews. Each interview took approximately 20 minutes.

The court contacts provided the names and telephone numbers of municipal officers in their jurisdictions. The telephone interviews with these individuals proved to be more difficult because there was not an opportunity to provide them with advance information about the

purpose of the interview and to schedule a time for it to take place. In some instances, assistance from office staff was helpful to connect with the interviewee. In every instance, it was very helpful using the name of the court contact who had made the referral.

With the two courts not responding to an initial contact, there was a total response rate on the telephone interviews of 83.3 percent. The response rate objective of at least 75 percent was met. The compiled responses may be found in Table 6.

Several unexpected situations were encountered in conducting the interviews and collecting the data. First, it was assumed that the court contacts would not have prior experience as a municipal official. This was not the case in Ventura County. In this situation, since the executive officer of the superior court had previously been the municipal court administrator, both perspectives were obtained in the interview and an additional municipal contact was not sought. Second, the lack of providing advance information to the municipal officials made telephone contact difficult. Using the name of the court contact who had made the referral and the assistance of office staff were helpful techniques. Persistence was the most important factor in reaching the municipal officials. Third, many of the contacts were out of their offices deer hunting, which resulted in a one-week delay in the research schedule. Fourth, the contact at the Superior Court of Los Angeles County was extremely busy. The Executive Officer referred me to the Assistant to the Executive Director. This individual was busy organizing a conference and scheduled the telephone interview three weeks from the initial contact. In all, the time spent collecting data took three times as long as initially projected.

## Phase Two Methodology

### 1. Research Design

To provide a benchmark of customer service at Eugene, Oregon Municipal Court, a defendant questionnaire and an employee questionnaire were developed. The questionnaires were slightly different to capture demographics of the different groups. The defendant questionnaire was mailed to defendants and returned to the court by mail. The court employee questionnaire was distributed with an explanation at a staff meeting. Completed employee questionnaires were deposited in a box for later collection. Copies of both questionnaires may be found in Appendix C.

A mailed questionnaire for defendants was specifically selected in order to provide a “cooling off” period after their court appearance. The researcher’s experience in Eugene Municipal Court is that exit questionnaires and comment cards, while providing an excellent tool for customer input on services, tend to capture the emotion of the moment and reflect defendants’ anger at the circumstances that brought them to the court or the outcome of their case. The survey process was designed to provide a few weeks or months between the court date and the questionnaire to allow a defendant to reflect on their experience at the court in a more objective manner. The time required to select the sample, print and mail the questionnaires and cover letter, ensured that at least one month had elapsed since the most recent court date to the receipt of the questionnaire.

## 2. Sample Group

There is a total of 23 employees at Eugene Municipal Court. Discounting two employees who are on leaves of absence and the administrator who is the author of this report, all of the remaining 20 employees received the questionnaire. Thus, the total population for the employee survey was 23, and the sample was 20.

Eugene Municipal Court handles approximately 20,000 minor traffic violations; 1,000 traffic crimes; 10,000 municipal ordinance violations and misdemeanors; and 80,000 parking violations per year. Most parking violations are closed by bail forfeiture, and the violators have no personal contact with the court. Court staff estimate they see approximately 35,000 total defendants per year.

In order to determine a total population and sample size, the researcher first estimated a desirable number of completed questionnaires for research purposes. The researcher considered a total of 200 completed questionnaires to be a good sample of the court's defendants. A low return rate was probable, however, given the nature of contacts between defendants and the court. A return rate of 10 percent was set as a target, meaning that a total of 2,000 questionnaires would need to be mailed in order to have 200 completed questionnaires returned. To generate a random sample of 2,000 defendant names, a total population of 20,000 defendants was selected from the court's database of closed cases. The population was obtained from the cases closed in the 8 month period before the report was run, and included only defendants with known addresses and docket numbers from the current and previous year.

From the total pool of 20,000 defendant names, data was sorted to remove any case closed by bail forfeiture, deferred prosecution or diversion. This was done to ensure that only cases where defendants had actual contact with the court would be included in the study--cases with guilty pleas, changes of plea, not guilty pleas, and those handled by the violations bureau. Duplicate names were sorted, so that only one questionnaire would be sent to a person even if they had multiple cases. For parking violation cases, duplicate registered owners were sorted for the same purpose. From the reduced pool a query was run to randomly select 2,000 names, reflecting 1,800 court cases and 200 parking cases in order to ensure a balance. The 2,000 defendant names and addresses were saved as a data file.

### 3. Data Collection Tools

Both employee and defendant questionnaires included a demographic question to determine the case type of the defendant and the working location of the employee. The questionnaires then ask 7 similar multi-choice questions, each with check boxes to facilitate selecting a response. A choice of 4 responses was provided. The responses were structured in this manner to force respondents to select a response that was not average or ambivalent. For example, to the question, ? How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court?s courtrooms?? a respondent had the choice of either very safe, safe, unsafe or very unsafe for an answer. The questions were structured slightly differently for defendants and employees. Instead of ? How did the staff at the Eugene Municipal Court treat you?? employees were asked, ? How do your co-workers at Eugene Municipal Court treat you?? The content of the questions were

maintained as similar as possible to allow for comparisons between the two groups of respondents. Questions addressed the quality of the contact with court staff, perceptions of safety, and access. In addition to the multiple-choice questions, an open-ended question was included soliciting suggestions to improve service. On the defendant questionnaire, a second open-ended question was included asking what other information would have been useful to them.

#### 4. Data Collection

The employee questionnaire was distributed at a staff meeting on November 2, 2000. At the staff meeting the researcher explained the purpose of the questionnaire and encouraged staff to take a few minutes on work time to complete it. A drop box was provided for returned questionnaires. All returned questionnaires were received by November 10, 2000. Of the 20 questionnaires distributed, 19 were returned for a response rate of 95 percent. This response rate exceeded the research target of 90 percent. The compiled data may be found in Table 8 and comments in Appendix D.

For the defendant questionnaires, a cover letter was developed. The cover letter explains the reason the court was requesting feedback and expresses appreciation for their time to complete and return the survey. It explains that the information received from court users would be used to make improvements at the court. The data file of names and addresses was merged with a form file of the letter and electronic signature of the court administrator to produce an individually addressed cover letter for each defendant. These were printed on letterhead stationery from Eugene Municipal Court. A copy of the cover letter format may be found in

## Appendix C.

The 2,000 questionnaires and cover letters were mailed with addressed return envelopes that already included metered first class postage. Questionnaires were mailed October 23, 2000 with a return date of November 1 printed on the bottom of the questionnaire. Return envelopes were provided to encourage return of completed questionnaires. Metered postage was used to ensure postage would not be removed from the envelopes and used in other ways. In previous mailings, the court had found that first class postage ensured mail would be forwarded if a forwarding address was known and fairly recent. Bulk class postage mailings would result in 35 percent returned as undeliverable, with half of these having forwarding addresses. With first class postage, a higher percentage of mailed questionnaires actually get to defendants. Number 9 sized return envelopes were used. These could be easily inserted, along with the questionnaire and cover letter, into a standard number 10 sized mailing envelope.

Of the 2,000 questionnaires mailed to defendants, 260 were returned completed, which reflects a 13 percent return rate. Compared to the 10 percent return rate projected, the actual return rate was very good. Most questionnaires were returned within one week. In addition, 366 questionnaires, or 18 percent, were returned as undeliverable. For these, the metered return envelopes were removed for other court uses. Each returned questionnaire was numbered. Data from the questionnaires was entered into an Excel spreadsheet according to the questionnaire number. Excel was selected for its ease of use and for its ability to create a variety of graphs from the data. A sample of the spreadsheet may be found in Appendix E. Written comments would be

entered into a WordPerfect document, listed by the questionnaire number. In this way, both data and comments could be referenced back to the same document for analysis purposes. The compiled data may be found in Tables 7 and 8 and comments in Appendix D.



## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Phase One Findings: Telephone Surveys of Courts and Municipalities

Courts and municipalities were surveyed in three California jurisdictions and two Michigan jurisdictions. The California jurisdictions surveyed were: Shasta County in rural Northern California, and Ventura and Los Angeles Counties, both in metropolitan Southern California. The Michigan jurisdictions surveyed were Berrian County and the 46<sup>th</sup> Judicial District, composed of Otsego, Kalkaska and Crawford Counties. All of the Michigan jurisdictions surveyed are rural.

Shasta County consolidated its courts in June 1998, after California voters approved a constitutional amendment permitting judges in each county to merge their superior and municipal courts into a unified court upon a majority vote of judges from each court. Ventura County had consolidated its courts voluntarily much earlier, in 1989, and was the first county in the state to do so. Los Angeles County, with the largest and most complex judicial structure in the state, was one of the last counties to consolidate in January 2000. The two jurisdictions in Michigan are part of a consolidation demonstration project, begun by the Michigan Supreme Court in 1997. Six counties volunteered to test the court merger concept. The Michigan Supreme Court, while providing specific criteria, allowed each demonstration court to develop its own unification plan, timetable, and organizational structure within a consolidated design. As stated in a November 1995 news release from the Michigan Supreme Court, this approach intended to provide local flexibility in managing case flow and adjusting to workflow changes during the period of

consolidation.

Shasta County findings indicate improvement in several areas post-consolidation. Data from the telephone surveys is provided in Table 1. The court is more cost-effective with a consolidated structure. Supplies and other administrative support have been centralized; staff have been cross-trained; and having a single court location is easier for the public to understand where they need to go. From a management perspective, allocation of staff and budget resources is much more flexible with consolidation. Cross-trained staff are available for several assignments, and may move more easily to other courts within the state. Funding previously had come from both the county and the state, requiring separate budget processes. Post-consolidation the Shasta County is state funded, and the court is allowed to retain any budgeted funds that are not expended as an incentive to cut costs. The county continues to provide facilities for the court.

Customer service in Shasta County has improved with consolidation of their courts. A number of new initiatives have been implemented, some of which were specifically directed by the State Court Administrator's Office. They have implemented a new pro se program to help individuals who are representing themselves. They have instituted a Family Law Facilitator to help families with the court process and forms. Shasta County has also convened a Community Focused Court Planning Team, composed of court leaders, a local attorney and member at large from the public. This team exists to provide input to the court about community concerns and to assist in the development of a strategic plan. Community outreach efforts also include mock trials

and tours for school children. The Shasta County court has recently received grant funding to hold a town hall meeting to obtain input from the public. To date, the court does not have data regarding customer satisfaction with its services, but complaints have been reduced since the courts have consolidated.

The municipal perspective in Shasta County was generally consistent with the court perspective, with a few significant exceptions. Prior to consolidation, the municipal court in the small town of Anderson in Shasta County held court three times each week in the same building as the Anderson Fire District. From the perspective of the municipal official, consolidation of the Anderson Municipal Court into the Superior Court in Shasta County resulted in improvements to both court facilities and staffing. The Superior Court did not see any change in court facilities or staffing levels; the court representative indicated they were insufficient prior to consolidation and continue to be insufficient. The other disparity in responses was that the municipal official disagreed with the court's perspective that the consolidated court addressed local community concerns. Local ordinance violations were not being filed in the Superior Court by the Shasta County District Attorney. Overall, however, the municipal official felt that the local community has benefited from consolidation of court services because the system works better and costs less.

Table 1

Shasta County Court and Municipal Perspectives Before and After Consolidation				
	Court		Municipal	
	Before	After	Before	After
Cost effective	N	Y	N	Y
Facilities adequate	N	N	N	Y
Staffing sufficient	N	N	Y	Y
Resources flexible	N	Y	N	Y
Survey customers	N	Y	N	Y
Customers satisfied	N	Y	Y	Y
Local concerns addressed	Y	Y	Y	N

Ventura County has had the most extensive experience with consolidation of any of the jurisdictions surveyed, since they administratively consolidated in 1989. At that time the Ventura Municipal Court was recognized in the region for its excellent customer service and cost effective service delivery. The Superior Court judges wanted to bring that level of excellence to the Superior Court, and in order to do that they proposed leveraging the expertise of the municipal court by consolidating the courts. They also appointed the Ventura Municipal Court Administrator to the Ventura Superior Trial Court Administrator position. Improvements have been seen in several areas over the past 11 years. Data from the telephone survey may be found in Table 2. While the court had been cost effective previously, it is more so now. Staffing levels and flexibility in assignment have improved. Access for the public has been simplified and improved by having only one court facility. One area that has not improved is the court's ability to address local community concerns. Previously with the municipal court, local ordinance violations were adjudicated. With the consolidated court, local ordinance violations are not filed.

Customer service has improved in Ventura County as a result of consolidation. Previously municipal courts in Ventura County conducted surveys of their customers--both counter surveys and exit surveys. Prior to consolidation the Superior Court in Ventura County did not solicit input from its customers. After consolidation, regular data gathering and measurement of customer satisfaction is now in place in Ventura County Superior Court. Copies of their survey cards in English and Spanish, and questions for exit interviews, are included in Appendix F. With full support of the State Court Administrators Office, a number of community assistance and outreach programs were initiated in the court in the years since consolidation. Examples of a few of these programs are: a radio program on legal issues, mobile self-help center, children's waiting rooms, night court for traffic and small claims, juror appreciation week, and an interagency juvenile justice council. According to the interviewee, the Ventura Superior Court has definitely gained opportunities to pursue customer service initiatives because of court consolidation. They have more financial support for these efforts, more political influence in that the court speaks with one voice county wide, and they are able to recruit and retain creative employees with a customer focus.

The municipal perspective in Ventura County was provided in the same interview as the court perspective. The interviewee had previously been employed by the Ventura Municipal Court. Therefore, no comparison of responses was completed.

Table 2

Ventura County Court and Municipal Perspectives Before and After Consolidation				
	Court		Municipal	
	Before	After	Before	After
Cost effective	Y	Y	Y	Y
Facilities adequate	Y	Y	Y	Y
Staffing sufficient	N	Y	N	Y
Resources flexible	Y	Y	Y	Y
Survey customers	N	Y	N	Y
Customers satisfied	Y	Y	Y	Y
Local concerns addressed	Y	N	Y	N

Los Angeles County is a large metropolitan area. Due to the complexity of the court structure in Los Angeles County, its transition to a consolidated structure took several years to implement. Prior to consolidation there existed 24 municipal courts within Los Angeles County, serving 88 municipalities, in addition to the superior court. Consolidation of all of these courts was completed in January 2000. At this time, the consolidation is primarily administrative and has not significantly affected the operations of the various courts. The municipal courts have been incorporated into the new structure as branch courts overseen by the Los Angeles Superior Court. For this reason, interviews were conducted with staff at the Los Angeles Superior Court administrative offices, with a branch court, and with one of the municipalities served in this jurisdiction.

The administrative perspective at Los Angeles County Superior Court is that consolidation has provided several benefits. Duplication and administrative overhead has been reduced, providing a more cost-effective operation. The consolidation has resulted in more effective allocation of staff resources. There are more opportunities for staff, and several reassignments

have been made. The court continues to address local community concerns. Municipal ordinance violations continue to be filed, since the municipalities use city prosecutors rather than the district attorney to file their cases with the court.

The branch court in Los Angeles County responded that very little has changed as a result of consolidation. The results of the telephone interviews are presented in Table 3. The budget process is more centralized and takes more steps. The hiring process is centralized for the entire county, and it now takes longer to get positions filled. The branch court disagreed with the superior court regarding facilities. The superior court responded that facilities were not adequate before or after consolidation. In this response all 58 court facilities within the county were being considered. The particular branch court interviewed responded that their facility was adequate before consolidation, and continues to be adequate for court operations. At this time the case types at the branch courts have not been changed significantly. Family law, juvenile and probate caseload will be decentralized to the branch courts at some point, but this change has not yet been scheduled.

Customer satisfaction continues to be a focus at the branch court. Surveys were done prior to consolidation and continue to be done, with a satisfaction rating of 80 percent. The superior court also conducted customer surveys and focus groups prior to consolidation. This input showed a high degree of customer satisfaction with the administration of justice, but less satisfaction with customer service. However, since consolidation they have not conducted any formal surveys. For the short term, priorities have shifted. At the direction of the State Court

Administrators Office, the Los Angeles Superior Court is currently involved in organizing a community focused strategic planning effort. However, several other customer service initiatives have been implemented since consolidation. Family law information centers have been established. Branch courts are now issuing restraining orders, improving access to customers for this service. An increase in general trial court departments has streamlined the court process and reduced trial delay. A small claims advisory committee made up of volunteer citizens has been established. Recently a homeless court has been instituted to handle low level criminal matters, warrants and outstanding fines of transient defendants. This has been a cooperative project with social service agencies, which in turn provide community service and skills training to improve the employability of these individuals. The court sessions are held at a downtown homeless mission to encourage participation. In short, while formal surveying of customers has been curtailed due to immediate priorities, the Los Angeles Superior Court has moved forward with several other customer service initiatives.

The municipal perspective in Los Angeles County agreed generally with the perspective of the branch court that serves the municipality, with one exception. The interviewee was unaware of any customer surveying either before or post-consolidation. While defendants may have been surveyed, the interviewee expressed frustration that the municipal police agency was not surveyed to determine how court services could be improved for officers. In particular she noted that communication about court procedural changes was not effective or timely and could be improved. Given the future change in caseload at the branch court level, she also expressed nervousness that coordination between the agencies may decrease as a result.



Table 3

Los Angeles County Court and Municipal Perspectives Before and After Consolidation						
	Court Admin		Branch Court		Municipal	
	Before	After	Before	After	Before	After
Cost effective	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Facilities adequate	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y
Staffing sufficient	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Resources flexible	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y
Survey customers	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N
Customers satisfied	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Local concerns addressed	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

In Michigan separate circuit, district and probate courts continue to be the norm. Municipal and justice of the peace courts were merged into county district courts in 1969. In 1997 the Michigan Supreme Court initiated six projects to demonstrate further court consolidation into a single-level trial court structure. That number has been expanded since 1997 as other counties have become ready to transition to a consolidated structure.

All courts in Otsego, Kalkaska and Crawford Counties have been merged into the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court since the demonstration project was initiated in 1997. Interview data from the 46<sup>th</sup> circuit is presented in Table 4. Due to the merger the Circuit Court gained an additional facility, added security in three buildings, and will obtain another courtroom in December 2000. Administrative overhead and duplicate positions have been reduced. While the court is not cost effective, neither before consolidation nor afterwards, the interviewee noted that the county funding subsidy has decreased by more than half since consolidation. Currently the court is both

state and county funded, although the plan is to move toward full state funding. Allocation of budget and staff resources is flexible and the staffing level, though reduced, is adequate. The court continues to hear municipal ordinance violations, as had the district courts prior to consolidation.

Measurement of customer satisfaction is not a strong focus of the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court. Surveying of customers had not been done before consolidation, and is not being done now. However, it should be noted that a juror survey is being implemented in December 2000. The interviewee was satisfied that while he had dealt with customer complaints prior to consolidation, he had received only positive feedback from customers since consolidation particularly regarding improved access. All court facilities in the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit now handle all case types, so individuals could have their matter handled in the facility most convenient to them. The court has also developed extensive customer services available over their web site, such as payments, guilty pleas and juror excuses.

Table 4

Michigan 46th Circuit Court and Municipal Perspectives Before and After Consolidation				
	Court		Municipal	
	Before	After	Before	After
Cost effective	N	N	N	N
Facilities adequate	Y	Y	Y	Y
Staffing sufficient	Y	Y	Y	N
Resources flexible	Y	Y	N	Y
Survey customers	N	N	N	N
Customers satisfied	N	Y	Y	Y
Local concerns addressed	Y	Y	Y	Y

From comments in the interviews rather than answers to the specific questions, the municipal perspective in the area comprising the 46<sup>th</sup> circuit in Michigan reflected greater dissatisfaction with consolidation than the data indicate. Prior to consolidation each of the three counties in the judicial circuit had a district court. While court sessions were not held in these district courts daily, there were set days and times for these sessions. Attorneys, officers and the public were aware of these court schedules. With a consolidated operation, the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court holds court sessions as needed in the various counties. Judges and staff maintain offices in one location, and travel to the courthouse where a particular session will be held. According to the municipal officer interviewed, court sessions are now held irregularly and less frequently, court staff is spread more thinly, and there is little opportunity for access to court staff when their offices are removed from the county served. The irregular court sessions held in various locations is confusing for the public and for officers who need to appear. In the opinion of the municipal official, there is now a scattered provision of judicial services, and city staff must make additional efforts to coordinate with court staff. Local concerns continue to be addressed as they had been previously with the district courts. Each municipality's attorney continues to file complaints of local ordinance violations with the court rather than relying on the district attorney.

Berrian County in Michigan also consolidated its courts in 1997. The results of the telephone survey are presented in Table 5. While the courts were cost effective prior to consolidation, they are even more so since the courts became consolidated. Staffing has been streamlined with duplicate administrative positions eliminated. Financial resources were flexible

in how they could be allocated both prior to and after consolidation. The county had formed a judicial council prior to consolidation in order to coordinate budgets. Consolidation improved flexibility in staffing assignments somewhat. Local community concerns continue to be addressed in the consolidated court. As with the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit, the municipalities within the Berrian County jurisdiction continue to employ their city attorneys to file complaints with the court of local ordinance violations. The Berrian County Court indicated that with consolidation more judicial time was provided on these types of offenses than previously. The one area in which the court felt a negative impact from consolidation was with their facilities. The court facilities were not adequate prior to consolidation. In merging the district and circuit courts and reorganizing the court structure into divisions the facility problems have been exacerbated. Court staff feel strongly that it is necessary to keep work units within the various divisions together in order to effectively manage them. The current facilities do not allow for this type of physical reorganization to match the administrative reorganization. Extensive renovation and remodeling of the court facilities are underway.

Customer service initiatives and measurement have been given a lower priority while the Berrian County Court deals with its facility issues. The court indicated that some limited survey work had been done since consolidation. These surveys were part of a larger effort by the Michigan Supreme Court, with the assistance of the National Center for State Courts, to evaluate the demonstration projects. Direct customers, the court users, were not surveyed as part of that effort. Court staff are seeing fewer complaints about its services since consolidation, which they assume is a result of improved access for citizens with civil and family law cases. Rather than

these services being provided in different locations, the public can have these matters handled at one location now. Another service improvement is the establishment of a central cashiering office.

Table 5

Berrian County Court and Municipal Perspectives Before and After Consolidation				
	Court		Municipal	
	Before	After	Before	After
Cost effective	Y	Y	Y	Y
Facilities adequate	N	N	N	N
Staffing sufficient	Y	Y	N	N
Resources flexible	N	Y	N	N
Survey customers	N	Y	N	N
Customers satisfied	N	Y	Y	Y
Local concerns addressed	Y	Y	Y	Y

The municipal perspective in Berrian County varies significantly from the perspective of the court. While there is agreement that the consolidated court is more cost effective and the facilities inadequate, the disagreement is in the opinions related to staffing and resource allocation. The municipal officer indicated that staff turnover has been extremely high for the past two years. Discouragement and resignations have resulted from employees being forced to change the manner in which they work, or their job assignment, coupled with a low pay scale. The court administration has not worked effectively with individual employees, or their representatives, to mitigate fears and manage the organizational change process. While other courts have seen an increase in opportunities for employees to change assignments, Berrian County Court has seen little of this due to restrictions in their labor agreement. The municipal official indicated that court employees have seen little or no benefit to themselves or the public from the consolidation. One

area that has improved is the establishment of a Family Court, where the same judge and court staff remain with the family as their various matters are heard. The municipal official believes that the court consolidation has been fairly transparent to the public. He also indicated a desire for the Berrian County Court to conduct a survey of its customers, including its employees and officials of the municipalities served so the court may identify concerns that it needs to address.

California and Michigan jurisdictions have approached consolidation and customer service in different ways. In California strong executive leadership was provided over the course of years during which consolidation occurred and afterwards. The courts in California have focused on improving service to the public, as well as improving efficiency. The State Court Administrators Office has provided direction for the courts to survey its customers, to establish a community focus in strategic planning and to implement a variety of customer service initiatives. Officials in the municipalities served have seen a loss in some areas, where local ordinance violations are prosecuted by the district attorney. Local offenses are less likely to be filed with the court. In Los Angeles County, which has not yet fully operationalized consolidation, municipal officials are nervous about the potential decrease in coordination between local jurisdictions and the Superior Court. However, the numerous improvements to customer service outweigh this potential loss and the public feels well served by the consolidated courts. In the Michigan demonstration courts, the implementation of consolidation was left to the individual jurisdiction. The Supreme Court appointed a chief judge in each demonstration project. Each chief judge appointed a trial court administrator for the new consolidated court and a judicial management council, which included a judge from each of the local courts being consolidated. This group of judges and

administrative staff within each demonstration project planned and led the consolidation effort for their local area. The purpose of the demonstration projects, as outlined by the Michigan Supreme Court at its outset, was to overcome barriers to efficiency. Improved customer service, except for the required establishment of Family Courts, was not an explicit goal. California courts were provided clear direction including an expectation of improved customer service; Michigan courts were provided limited direction and no expectation of improved customer service. Table 6 offers a comparison of survey data from California and Michigan courts. More information about the approach to court consolidation in Michigan and California may be found in Appendices H and I.

Table 6: Telephone Survey Responses

Table 6: Telephone Survey Responses																	
	Before consolidation								After consolidation								
	California jurisdictions																Mic
	LA Co. Superior Court Admin.	LA Co. Superior Court Admin.	LA Co. Superior Court Branch	LA Co. Superior Court Branch	LA County Municipal Perspective	LA County Municipal Perspective	Shasta County Superior Court	Shasta County Superior Court	Shasta County Municipal Perspective	Shasta County Municipal Perspective	Ventura County Superior Court	Ventura County Superior Court	Ventura County Municipal Perspective	Ventura County Municipal Perspective	Berrian County Superior Court		
Was/Is the court cost effective?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	
Were/Are facilities adequate?	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	
Were/Are staff resources sufficient?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	
Was/Is allocation of resources flexible?	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	
Did/Does court measure customer satisfaction with services?	Y	N	Y	Y	N	N	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	N	
Were/Are customers satisfied?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	N	
Did/Does court address local community concerns?	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	Y	Y	



## Phase Two Findings: Customer and Court Staff Questionnaires

The responses to the customer questionnaire in Eugene Municipal Court reflect a balance of defendants with different types of citations and employees from each work area. Ten percent of the questionnaires had been sent to parking violators, with a slightly higher percentage (13%) of the responses coming from parking violators. The remaining responses came from individuals with traffic citations (72%) and ordinance violations (39%). This distribution of responses reflects a close correlation to the numbers of these case types handled by the court. Responses to the employee questionnaire came from every work area within Eugene Municipal Court: the courtrooms, front counter/collections, parking, records, and a category of ? other? that included supervisors and administrative support staff. Between 3 and 5 responses were received from each of these areas.

Overall customers responded that court staff treated them very professionally or professionally (94%), were willing or very willing to take time to help them (93%), and provided them with useful or very useful information (88%). Customer responses are compared to court employee responses in Tables 7 and 8 and Graphs 1-7. For each of these questions, employees were very complimentary of the level of service they provide. Staff responded that their co-workers treated them professionally or very professionally all of the time (100%), were willing or very willing to take time to help them (100%), and always provided useful or very useful information (100%). The data either indicates that employees consistently provide better service to their co-workers than to defendants, or that the defendants have higher expectations of service and are slightly more critical of the level of service they receive.

Table 7: Defendant Survey Responses

Defendant Customer Survey (260 responses)				
	Number	Percentage		Number
Question #1: What type of citation did you receive?			Question #6: How easy was it for you to find the court?	
Parking	34	13%	Very Easy	8%
Traffic	187	72%	Easy	14%
Ordinance	39	15%	Difficult	3%
			Very Difficult	2%
Question #2: How did the Eugene Municipal court staff treat you?			Question #7: Once you arrived at Eugene Municipal Court, how long did you wait to see the judge?	
Very Professionally	68	26%	Very Easy	7%
Professionally	177	68%	Easy	15%
Unprofessionally	10	4%	Difficult	3%
Very Unprofessionally	5	2%	Very Difficult	2%
Question #3: Was the Eugene Municipal court staff willing to take your case?			Question #8: How safe did you feel when in the courtroom?	
Very Willing	86	33%	Very Safe	8%
Willing	156	60%	Safe	16%
Unwilling	13	5%	Unsafe	8%
Very Unwilling	5	2%	Very Unsafe	2%
Question #4: Was the information that you received from the court helpful?			Question #9: How safe did you feel when in the courtroom?	
Very Useful	76	29%	Very Safe	7%
Useful	153	59%	Safe	17%
Not Useful	26	10%	Unsafe	13%
Incorrect/Wrong	5	2%	Very Unsafe	3%
Question #5: What other information would have been useful? Responses listed separately.			Question #10: Please provide any specific suggestions for improving court service at Eugene Municipal Court. Responses listed separately.	

Table 8: Employee Survey Responses

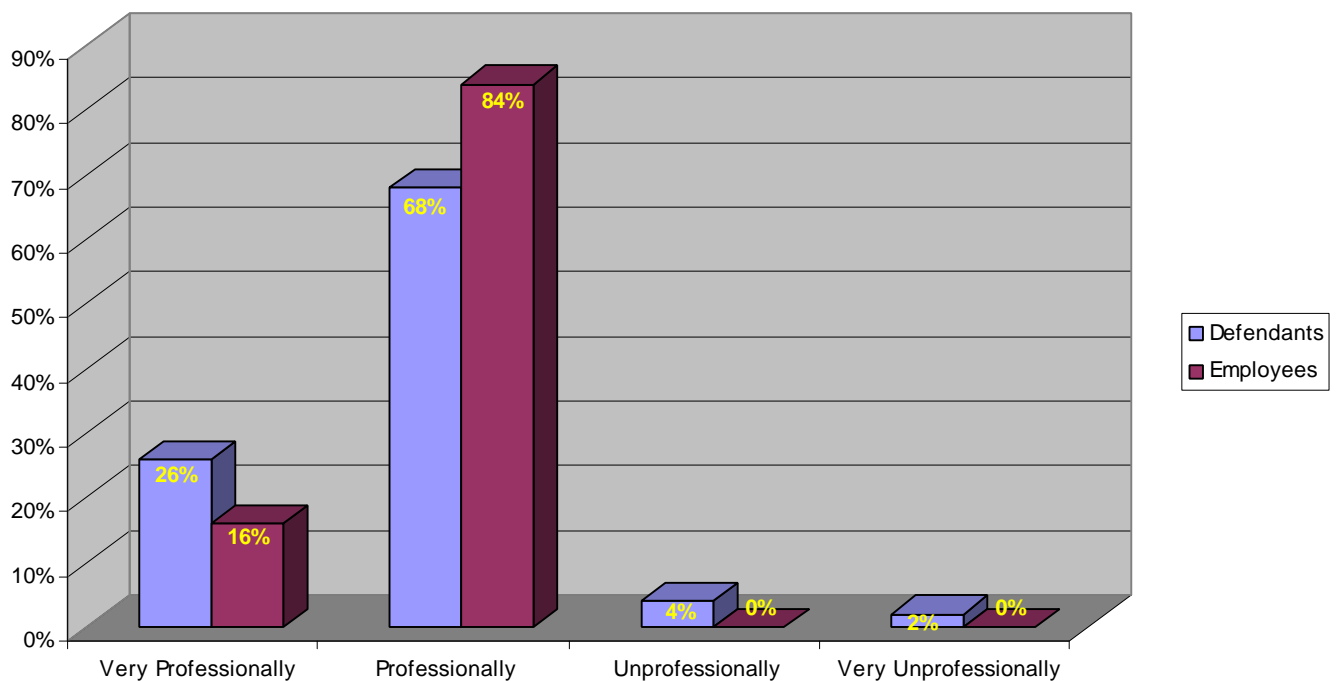
<b>Note: For comparison purposes the sequence of these questions have been modified to correspond to the Defendant Survey.</b>					
Employee Survey (19 responses)					
Question # 8: In what area do you work?	Number	Percentage	Question # 6: In your opinion, how easy is it for customers to	Number	
Front counter/collections	5	26%	Very Easy	2	
Records	4	21%	Easy	10	
Courtrooms	4	21%	Difficult	7	
Parking	3	16%	Very Difficult	0	
Other	3	16%			
Question # 1: How do your co-workers at Eugene Municipal Court treat you?			Question # 7: In your opinion, once customers arrive at Eugene Municipal Court, is it for them to find where they need to go?		
Very Professionally	3	16%	Very Easy	3	
Professionally	16	84%	Easy	14	
Unprofessionally	0	0%	Difficult	2	
Very Unprofessionally	0	0%	Very Difficult	0	
Question # 2: Are your co-workers and supervisors willing to take time to help you?			Question # 4: How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court?		
Very Willing	10	53%	Very Safe	3	
Willing	9	47%	Safe	14	
Unwilling	0	0%	Unsafe	2	
Very Unwilling	0	0%	Very Unsafe	0	
Question # 3: Is the information provided to you by co-workers and supervisors useful?			Question # 5: How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court?		
Very Useful	9	47%	Very Safe	2	
Useful	10	53%	Safe	15	
Not Useful	0	0%	Unsafe	2	
Incorrect or Wrong	0	0%	Very Unsafe	0	
Question # 9: Please provide any specific suggestions to improve customer service at Eugene Municipal Court. Responses listed separately.					

A set of questions was asked of both groups regarding access to the court. In Eugene, Oregon the municipal court is housed within city hall, which is a set of offices built around a central courtyard. Citizens unfamiliar with the location of the court need to rely on signage to find the area of the complex where the court is located. Citizens enter into a lobby area and need to check in with court staff at the counter before going in one of the two courtrooms. Defendants generally felt it was easier to locate the municipal court facility than court employees thought they did. Eighty-six percent of defendants felt it was easy or very easy to locate, while only 63 percent of court employees thought it was easy or very easy for defendants to find the court. The perceptions change when the question shifted to ease of access within the court facility. Court employees perceived it was easy for defendants to find where they needed to go once they were at the court; 90% of employees felt it was easy or very easy. Once again, citizens considered it still easy or very easy to find their way within the court (86%), but less so than employees thought.

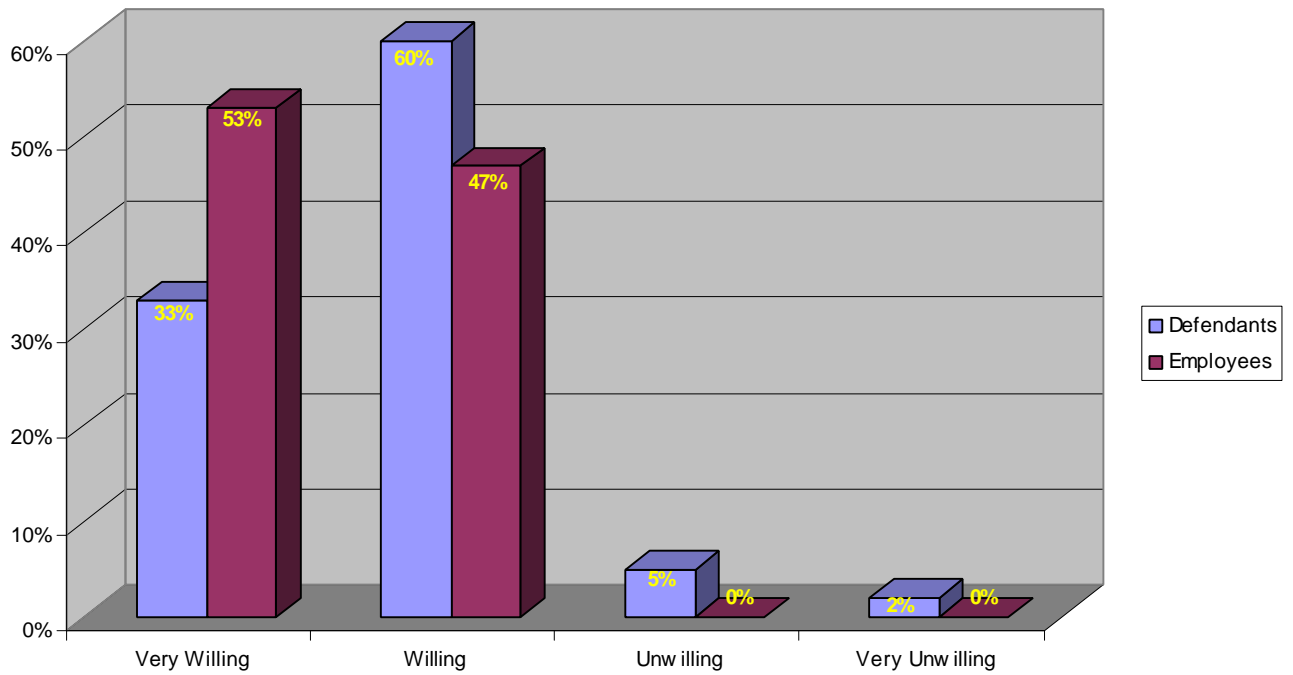
Another set of questions was asked of both groups regarding perceptions of safety. The municipal court in Eugene, Oregon does not have metal screening. Recently and due in large part to citizen comments, the court installed security cameras and hired a security guard. In 1999 the court was remodeled to create a separate counter for parking violators. Since parking violators are frequently hostile, segregating this group of customers from other defendants was an objective of the remodel to maintain a relatively calm atmosphere in both counter areas. The two questions asked refer to perceptions of safety within the courtrooms and within the lobby/waiting areas. In both instances, the customers felt safer than employees. Customers indicated they felt safe or very safe in the courtrooms (95%) and in the lobby/waiting area (94%), while fewer employees felt

safe or very safe in the courtrooms (90%) and in the lobby/waiting area (89.5%). Employees are more aware of security concerns in court settings, and review each defendant's criminal history by computer. They are, therefore, more aware of a defendant's history of behavioral and violent crime. Even though citizens do not have protective glass separating them from other defendants in the courtrooms or lobby areas, neither do they have knowledge of the potential risks.

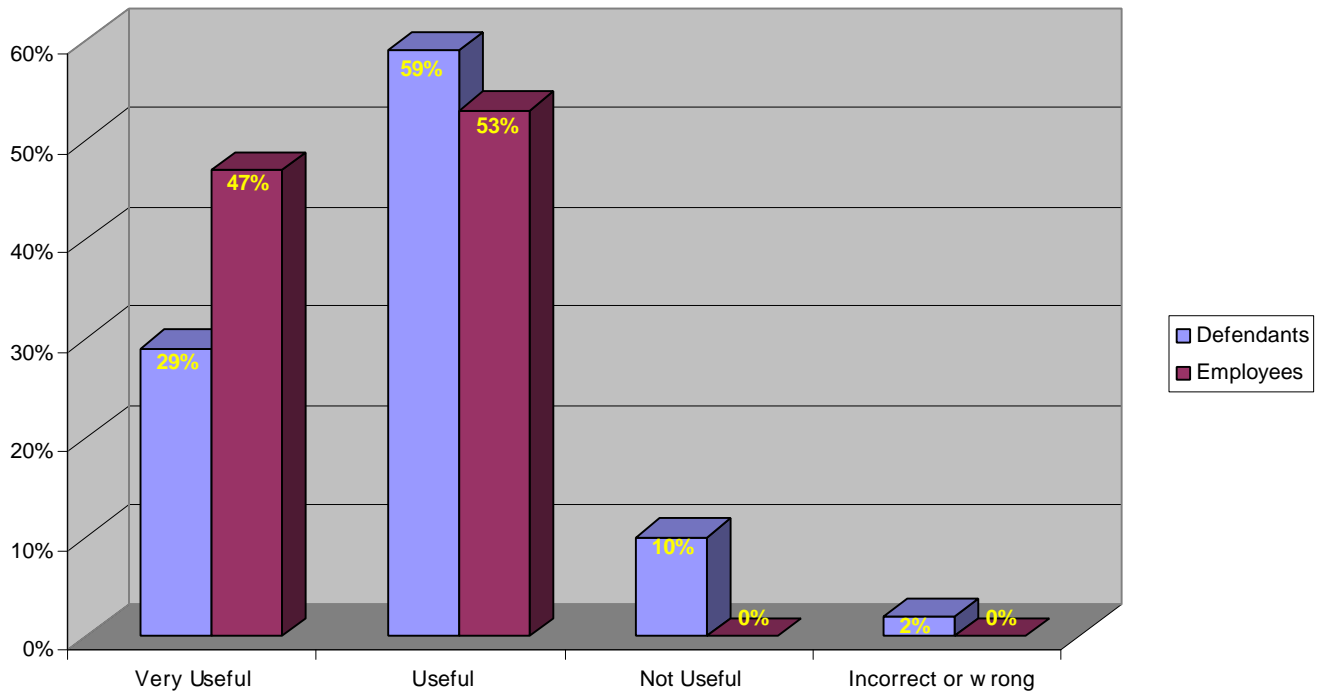
Graph 1. How did the staff (do your co-workers) at Eugene Municipal Court treat you?



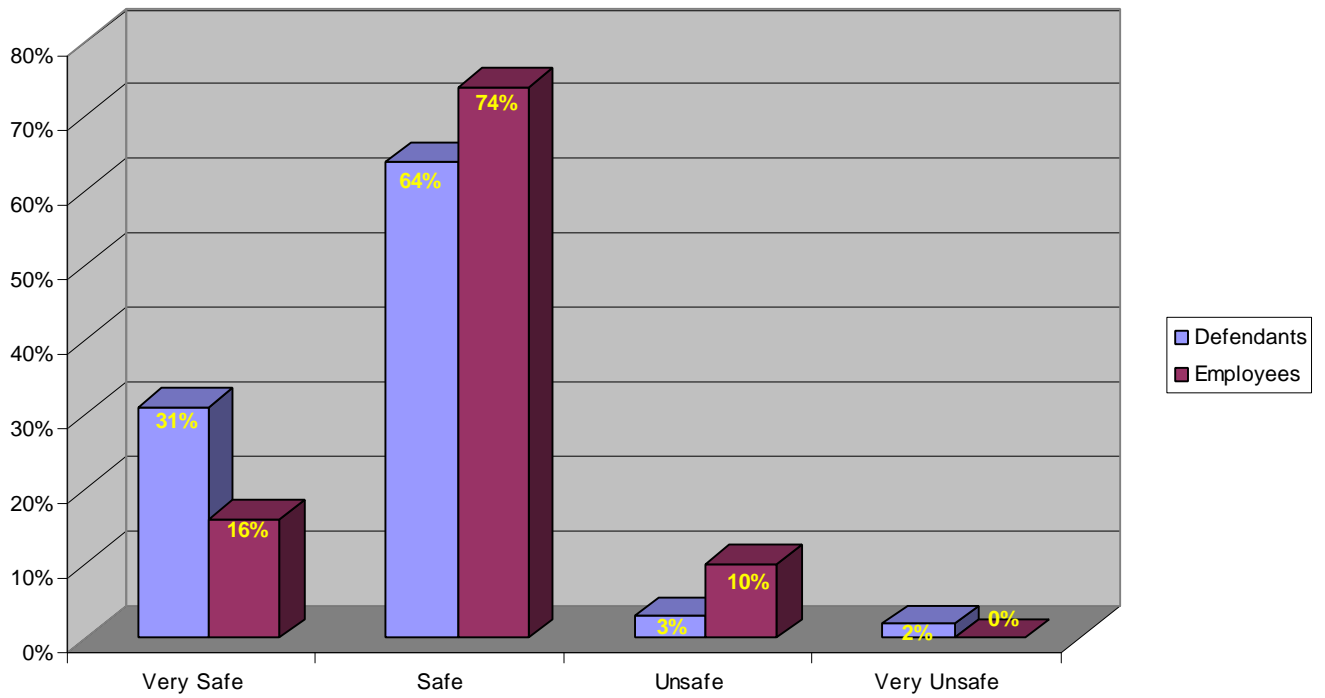
**Graph 2. Was the staff (do your co-workers and supervisors) at Eugene Municipal Court willing to take time to help you?**



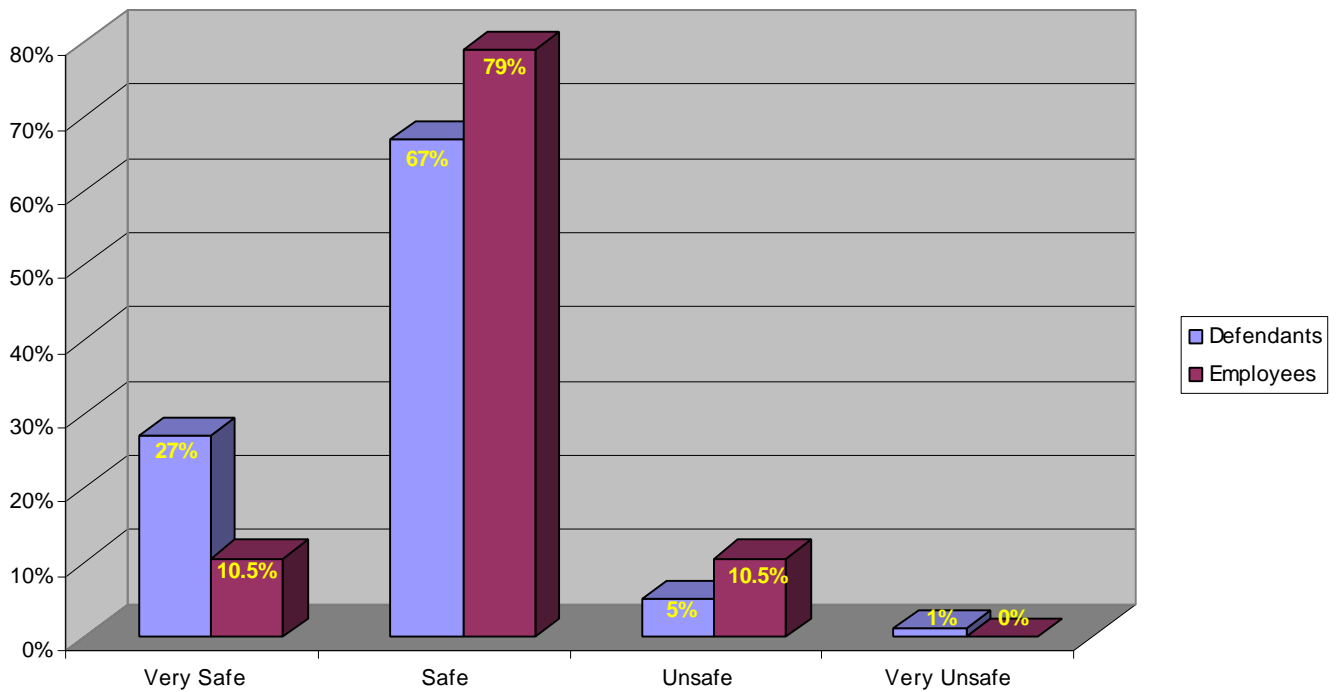
**Graph 3. Was the information provided by Eugene Municipal Court staff ( your co-workers and supervisors) useful?**



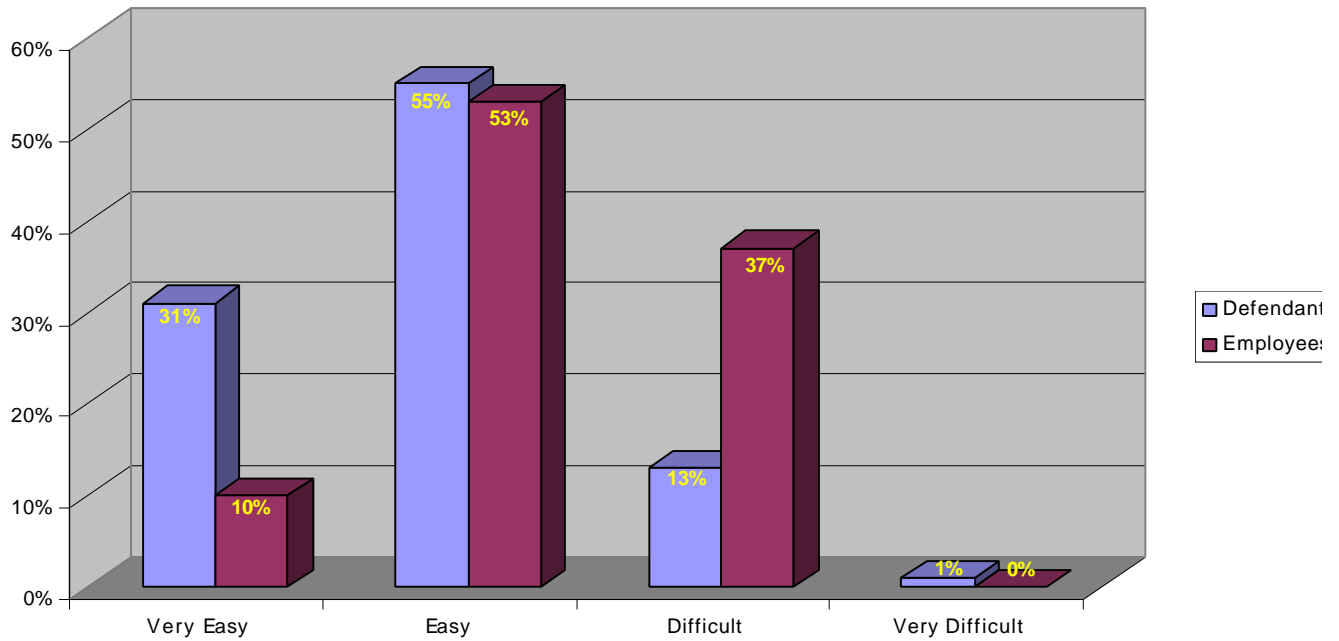
Graph 4. How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's courtrooms?



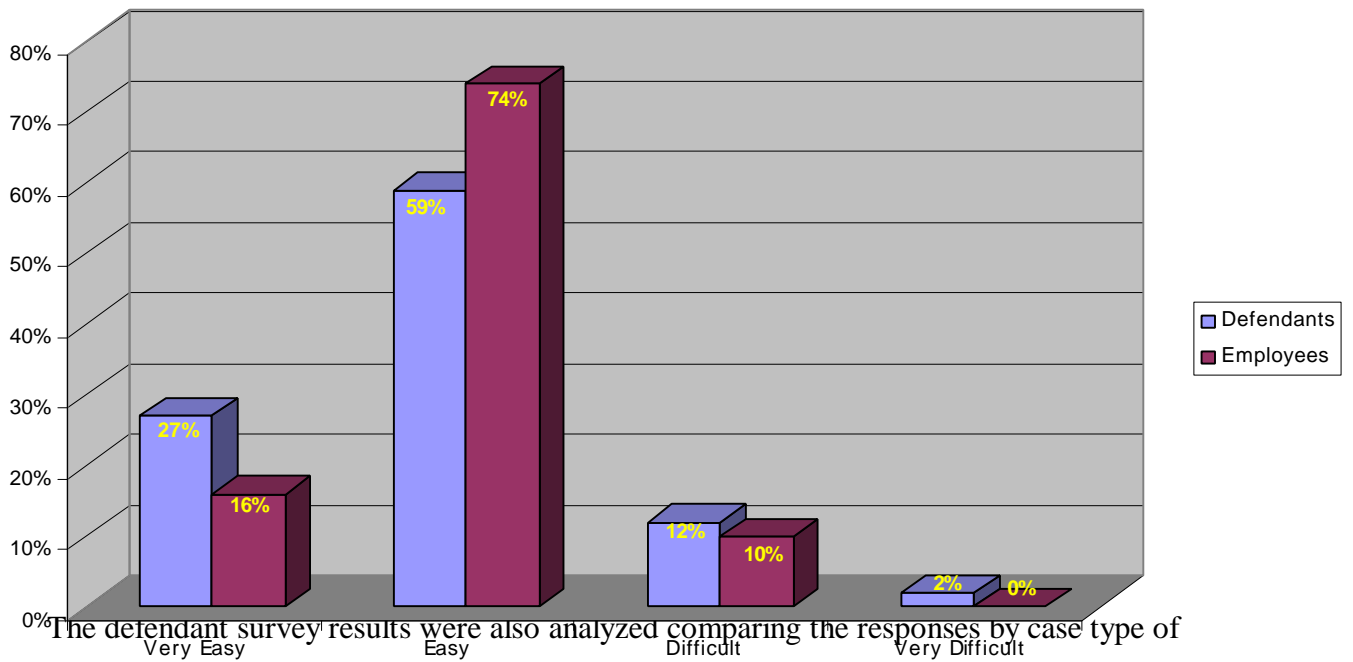
Graph 5. How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's lobby/waiting area?



Graph 6. How easy is it for customers to find Eugene Municipal Court?



Graph 7. How easy is it for customers to find where they need to go once they have arrived at Eugene Municipal Court?



The defendant survey results were also analyzed comparing the responses by case type of



the respondent. The three primary case types in Eugene Municipal Court are: parking, traffic and ordinance violations (which include animal violations). At Eugene Municipal Court the researcher's experience is that parking violators tend to be the most hostile of the three offender groups, ordinance violators are typically repeat offenders, and traffic offenders are generally reasonable and representative of the community at large. Responses by case type are compared in Table 9 and Graphs 8-14.

The first set of questions was analyzed to determine if the different groups of offenders had different perspectives on how they were treated by court staff. While most respondents in each group of offenders considered their treatment to be professional or very professional (at least 89% for each offender group), the responses indicate that more ordinance violators felt they were treated unprofessionally or very unprofessionally (11%) than parking or traffic violators (8% or 6% respectively). Regarding willingness of court staff to help customers, again a large majority of each offender group rated staff as willing or very willing to help them (at least 89% for each offender group). While each group responded they felt court staff was unwilling or very unwilling to help them to some degree (8% for parking offenders, 6% for traffic offenders), the highest dissatisfaction was noted from ordinance violators (11% unwilling or very unwilling). In responding to the question about usefulness of information provided by court staff, a significant number of both parking and traffic offenders felt the information they received was very useful (36% and 31% respectively). By comparison, only 12% of ordinance offenders indicated information was very useful. While fewer ordinance violators were as complimentary as the other offender groups, when comparing combined ratings of information being useful or very useful,

each offender group's ratings were very similar (between 80% and 88%). Parking offenders were most likely to find the information not useful (20%). Traffic violators had a small percentage of respondents who considered the information provided by court staff to be incorrect or wrong (4%).

The data indicates that the three groups of offenders have different levels of satisfaction with their treatment from court staff. While all groups generally indicated satisfaction with the treatment they received, a significant number of ordinance offenders were less willing to rate services at the highest level. In addition, a greater percentage of ordinance offenders rated their treatment by court staff low in professionalism and willingness to help. Ordinance offenders were the least likely of the three groups to be satisfied with services provided by court staff. More research is necessary to assess the nature of the interactions between court staff and ordinance offenders. One may assume that the frustration of staff in dealing with repeat offenders translates into a dismissive communication style. However, repeat customers may have higher expectations of service.

Parking offenders were slightly more inclined than traffic offenders to rate staff low in professionalism and willingness, but not as low as ordinance offenders. A significant number of parking offenders were unhappy with the information they received from staff. More research will need to be done to review the information provided by court staff. In Eugene Municipal Court policies for parking violations are more rigid than for traffic offenses. While a person with a speeding citation may use the Violations Bureau to receive an automatic fine reduction based on

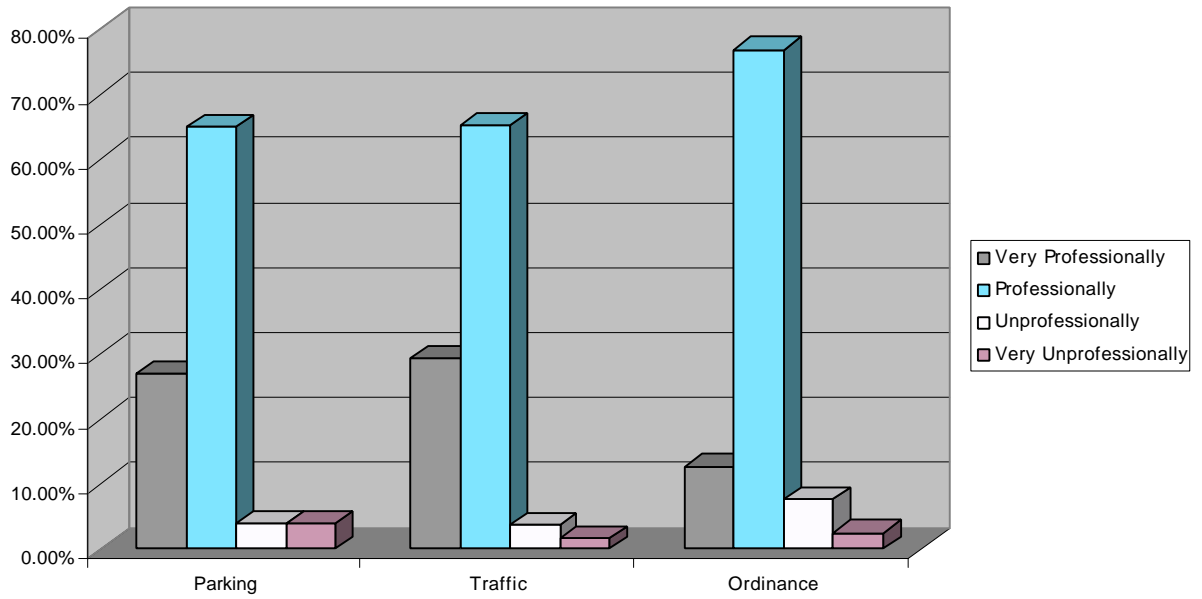
driving history and without seeing a judge, a parking violator must either pay the fine up front when requesting a review or appear before a judge to request a reduction. One reason parking offenders may be less satisfied with information they receive is that the options to request dismissal or reduction in fine are less convenient than with other offenses.

Another set of questions was asked of defendants regarding access. In general each category of offender indicated it was easy or very easy for them to find the court (at least 85% in each category). A slightly larger percentage of traffic offenders than the other offenders considered it difficult or very difficult to find the court (15% as compared to 13% for parking and 11% for ordinance offenders). The difference may be attributed to the fact that while they were cited within the city limits, many traffic offenders live outside the city limits and are unfamiliar with the Eugene downtown area where the court is located. Once the offenders arrived at the court, a higher percentage of parking offenders found it difficult or very difficult to find where they needed to go (19% as compared to 15% for traffic and 11% for ordinance offenders). This may be attributed to a recent remodel that created a separate public counter for parking offenses, next door to the main court entrance.

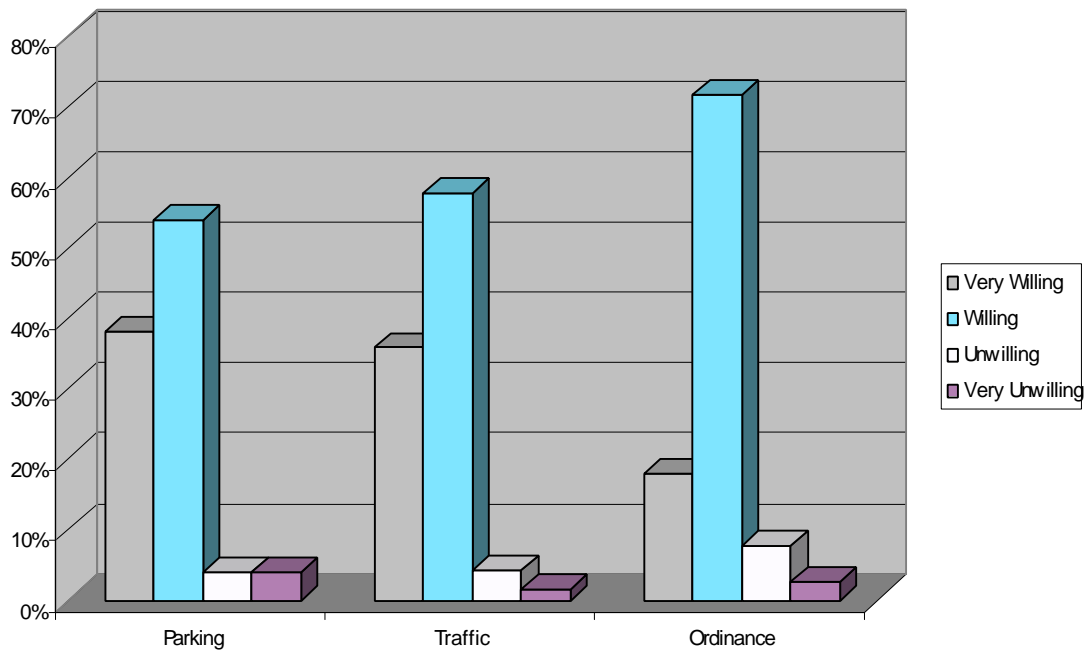
A third set of questions was asked regarding perceptions of safety. Far fewer ordinance offenders felt safe or very safe in the courtrooms than the other two groups of offenders (83% as compared to 93% for parking and 96% for traffic offenders). The ordinance offenders, however, generally felt safer in the court's lobby and waiting area (91%) than they did in the courtrooms. Both the parking and traffic offenders generally felt safe or very safe in both the courtrooms and

the lobby area. However, unlike the ordinance offenders each of these groups felt slightly less safe in the lobby area than in the courtrooms. Ten percent of parking offenders felt unsafe in the lobby, where only 7 percent felt unsafe in the courtrooms. Six percent of traffic offenders felt unsafe or very unsafe in the lobby, where only 3 percent felt unsafe or very unsafe in the courtrooms. This may be compared to 9 percent of ordinance violators feeling unsafe or very unsafe in the lobby, and 17 percent feeling unsafe or very unsafe in the courtrooms. The ratings from ordinance violators may be due to the fact that there is a wide variance in criminal history of these offenders. In Eugene Municipal Court college students charged with Minor in Possession of Alcohol are arraigned and tried in the same court session as repeat offenders charged with Criminal Trespass, Menacing, Prostitution, and other behavioral crimes. During the court session, the judges tend to deal with the Minor in Possession matters last to provide these offenders an opportunity to learn about the court process. By the time these individuals leave the courtroom to deal with matters at the counter, most of the other defendants have already been served.

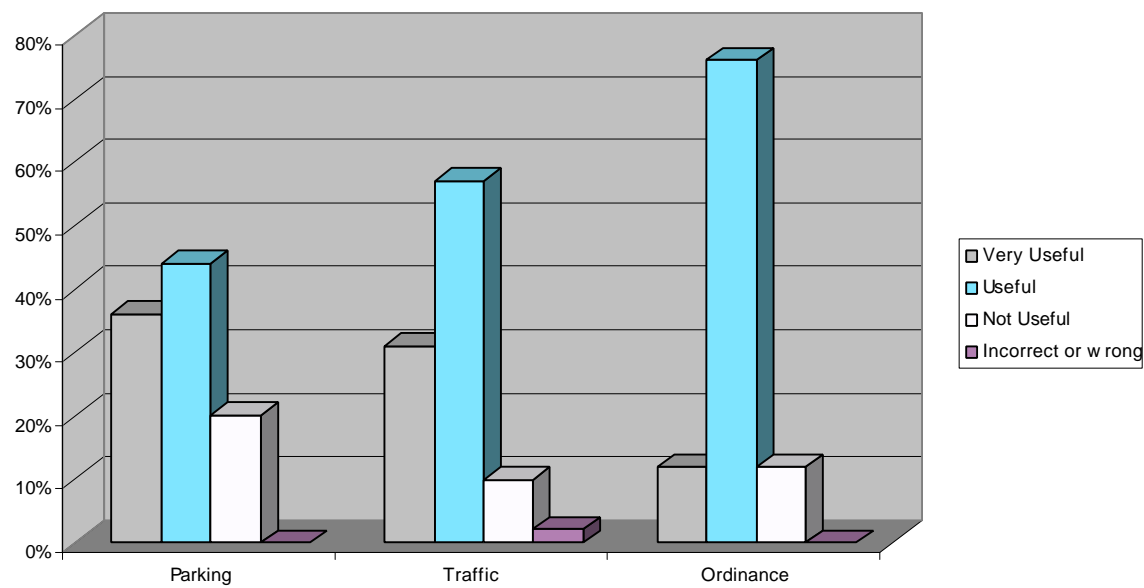
**Graph 8. How did the Eugene Municipal Court staff treat you?**



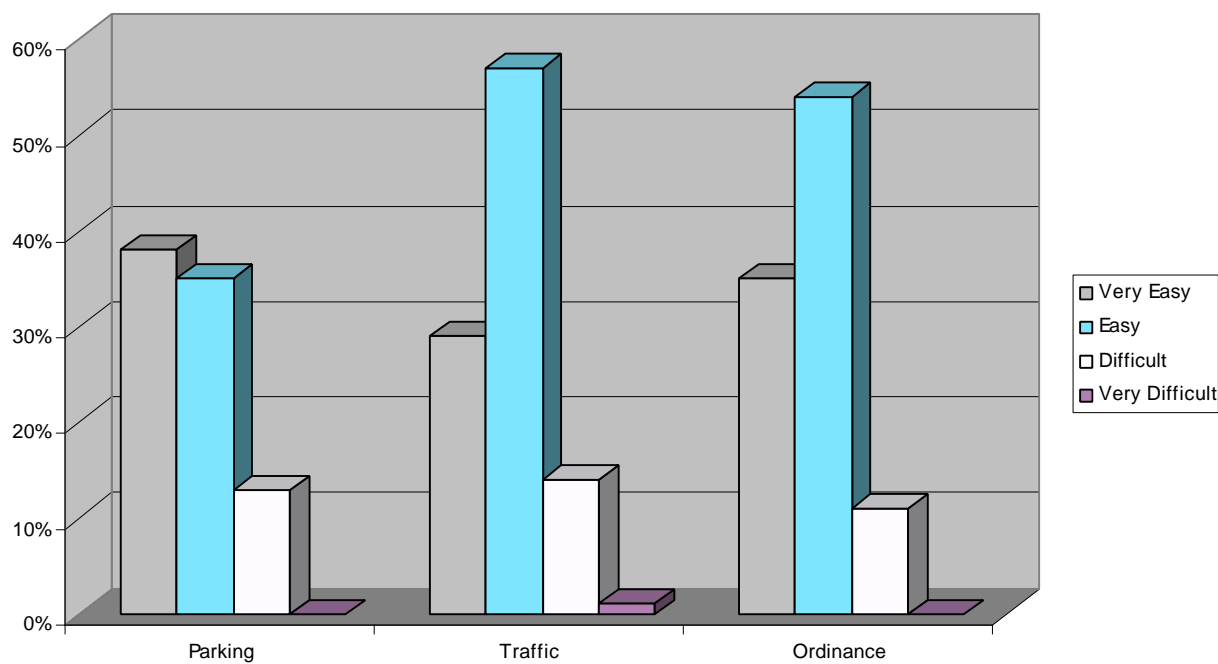
**Graph 9. Was the Eugene Municipal Court staff willing to take the time to help you?**



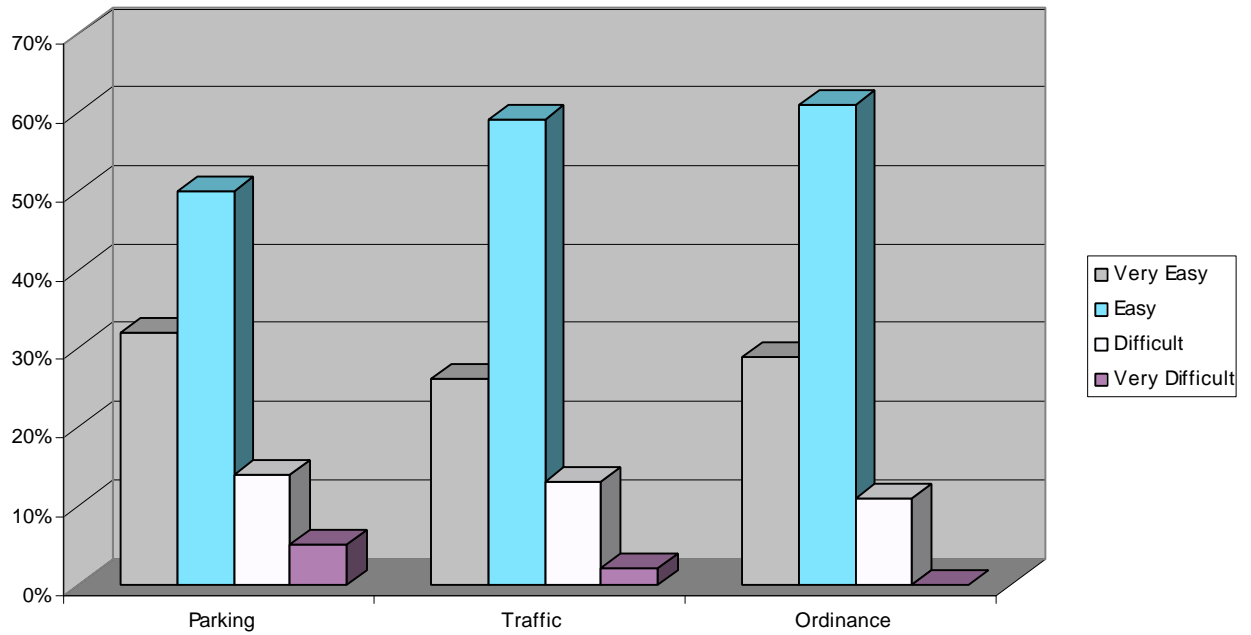
**Graph 10. Was the information you received from the Eugene Municipal Court staff useful?**



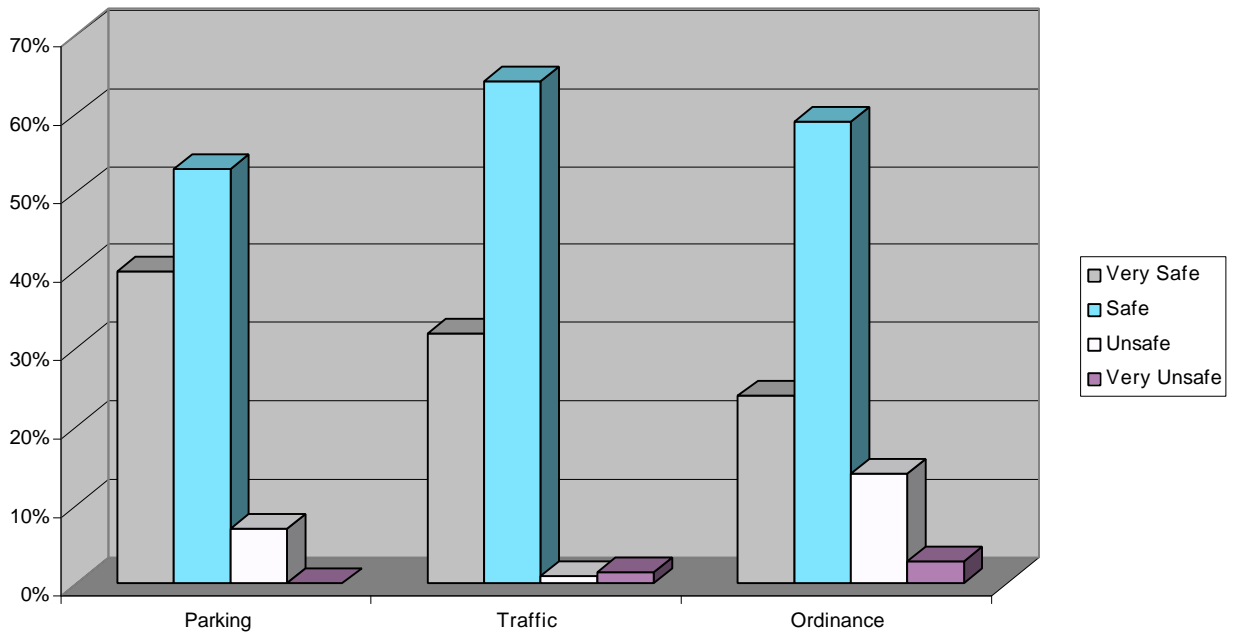
**Graph 11. How easy was it for you to find the Eugene Municipal Court?**



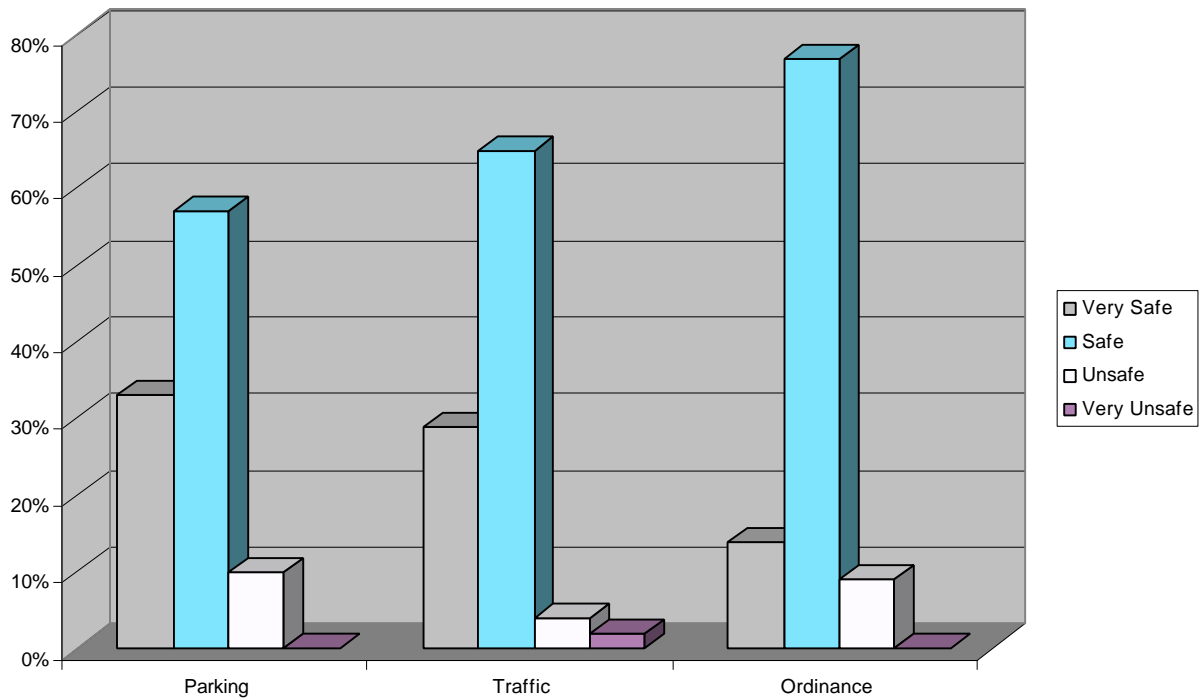
**Graph 12. Once you arrived at Eugene Municipal court, how easy was it for you to find where you need to go?**



**Graph 13. How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's courtrooms?**



**Graph 14. How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's lobby/waiting area?**



The main differences in customer service satisfaction between parking, traffic and ordinance offenders in Eugene Municipal Court may be listed as:

1. Ordinance offenders were less satisfied than the other groups with court staff professionalism and willingness to help them.
2. A significant number of parking offenders felt the information they received was not useful.
3. Traffic offenders had some difficulty finding the court.
4. Parking offenders had some difficulty finding the parking office.
5. Ordinance offenders felt some risk to their personal safety in the courtrooms.



Table 9: Defendant Responses by Offense Type

Customer Survey by Offense Type: (not all responders answered all questions)							Question #6: How easy was it for you to find Eugene Municipal Court?			
							Parking			Traffic
							#	%		#
							%		%	
							#		#	
Question #1: What type of citation did you receive							Very Easy	9	38%	5
							Easy	12	35%	10
							Difficult	3	13%	2
							Very Difficult	0	0%	
	34	13%	187	72%	39	15%				
Question #2: How did the Eugene Municipal court staff treat you?							Question #7: Once you arrived at Eugene Municipal Court, how easy was it to find where you needed to go?			
							Very Easy	7	32%	4
Very Professionally	7	27%	55	29%	5	13%	Easy	11	50%	10
Professionally	17	65%	122	65%	30	77	Difficult	3	14%	2
Unprofessionally	1	4%	7	4%	3	8%	Very Difficult	1	5%	
Very Unprofessionally	1	4%	3	2%	1	3%				
Question #3: Was the Eugene Municipal court staff willing to take time to help you?							Question #8: How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court lobby/waiting area?			
							Very Safe	6	40%	4
Very Willing	9	38%	67	36%	7	18%	Safe	8	53%	9
Willing	13	54%	108	58%	28	72%	Unsafe	1	7%	
Unwilling	1	4%	8	4%	3	8%	Very Unsafe	0	0%	
Very Unwilling	1	4%	3	2%	1	3%				
Question #4: Was the information that you received from the Eugene Municipal court staff useful?							Question #9: How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court lobby/waiting area?			
							Very Safe	7	33%	5
Very Useful	9	36%	55	31%	4	12%	Safe	12	57%	11
Useful	11	44%	102	57%	26	76%	Unsafe	2	10%	
Not Useful	5	20%	17	10%	4	12%	Very Unsafe	0	0%	
Incorrect/Wrong	0	0%	4	2%	0	0%				
Question #5: What other information would have been useful? Responses listed separately.							Question #10: Please provide any specific suggestions to improve Eugene Municipal Court. Responses listed separately.			

The Eugene Municipal Court has begun to use this data to develop strategies for improvement. A budget proposal to contract for a security guard in the courtroom was developed and given preliminary approval by the Eugene Budget Committee. New signage in city hall and in front of the court is being installed to help users find the parking office. Staff is reviewing information on directions to the court provided to traffic offenders when they are cited.

The court is also in the process of developing a web site, which will include directions to the court and updated information about parking violations. Court staff will review with the judge the possibility of creating a reduced fine program for parking violators with good records. The court will also be clarifying expectations with court staff on treating customers equitably, and providing regular training on customer service. Finally, the survey results will be reported in the annual budget for the City of Eugene, and compared to satisfaction levels from previous years.

The goals of this research were to assess the ability of consolidated courts to address local community concerns and provide customer satisfaction, and to assess the level of customer satisfaction in Eugene Municipal Court. Research objectives included: (1) a response rate of at least 75 per cent on the telephone surveys conducted; (2) a 70 per cent rating from the survey data on the courts' ability to address local community concerns and provide customer service after consolidation; (3) a return rate of 10 per cent on the mailed defendant surveys; (4) a 90 per cent return rate on employee surveys; and (5) a 70 per cent response rate of satisfactory or better from defendants on customer service in Eugene Municipal Court. All response rate objectives were met or surpassed. On the telephone surveys, 72 per cent (8 out of 11 interviews) of the respondents indicated the consolidated courts did address local community concerns. The

respondents who replied negatively were in jurisdictions where the district attorney chose not to file minor offenses. On customer service, 100 per cent of the respondents indicated that their customers were satisfied, but only 55 per cent (6 out of 11) had surveyed customers to support this assumption. Therefore, it is inconclusive whether or not this part of the objective was met. Finally, the defendant survey at Eugene Municipal Court indicated that 94 per cent of respondents felt court staff treated them professionally or very professionally, 93 per cent felt staff was willing or very willing to help them, and 88 per cent of the respondents felt the information court staff provided them was useful or very useful. Each category exceeded the 70 per cent objective, and it may be determined from this data that defendants were generally satisfied or very satisfied with the services they received.

## CONCLUSIONS

### Conclusions

This research assessed customer satisfaction with court services in courts that have recently consolidated, and provided a sample methodology for courts to conduct internal and external surveys to assess their own level of customer satisfaction. There has been no previous effort to analyze the impact of court consolidation on customer service. The research found that consolidated courts varied in their ability to address local concerns and improve customer service. The data indicate there may be a correlation between the manner in which consolidation was approached and the priority given to improving customer service. If customer service improvement is identified as a specific outcome of the consolidation process, it appears that the

courts focus on efforts to achieve that outcome. The research indicated that California courts were more successful in their efforts to improve customer service throughout the transition to a consolidated court structure than the Michigan courts surveyed. Additional research will be necessary to determine if this correlation is accurate beyond the five courts studied.

The research also assessed the level of customer service satisfaction with the municipal court in Eugene, Oregon. Defendants and employees were surveyed, and their responses provided extensive information to assist the court in identifying areas where internal and external customers felt well served as well as areas where improvements could be made. Court staff and defendants differed in their opinions. Defendants were somewhat more critical than employees with the services received, and felt safer than employees. Different groups of defendants had different opinions about the court services they received.

1. Ordinance offenders were less satisfied than other court users in their interactions with court staff, and many of them felt unsafe in the courtrooms.
2. Some parking offenders had some difficulty finding the parking office, and did not find the information provided to them to be useful.
3. Some traffic offenders had difficulty in finding the court.

Court leaders have developed strategies to address service improvement so that it will affect the areas where customers feel improvements should be made.

This research illustrates a methodology that any court may use to assess its level of customer satisfaction, and a way in which to analyze the data. When customers are regularly

surveyed, the court has objective data with which to assess whether or not the strategies it has implemented have resulted in improvement in perceptions of service. Customers feel they have a voice in the services they receive. When improvements are seen, public trust and confidence will be enhanced. Involvement is particularly important to employees, and particularly when going through organizational change. High employee turnover may result when employees are not involved, as was the case with Berrian County Court.

The research questions were not completely answered, but indicate some trends that future research may clarify.

1. How effectively have consolidated courts been able to meet the service expectations of local communities, as compared to before consolidation?

Most of the courts surveyed have been able to meet local service expectations when consolidated.

In most instances, the transition to a consolidated structure has been transparent to the public.

The courts generally are more cost effective and provide improved access to the public. In Michigan local ordinance violations continue to be filed in the general trial court, because the municipalities use their own prosecutors to ensure that these violations are filed. In California local ordinance violations are less likely to be filed in the general trial court, because the district attorney gives priority to more serious offenses. In California efforts are underway to develop teams of stakeholders in each county for community-focused strategic planning. In Michigan the consolidated courts do not invite involvement of local citizens in their planning efforts.

2. How may a court establish an effective survey program to assess customer satisfaction?

This research has provided extensive information and illustration of a survey methodology to be used with defendants and employees in any court. The amount of information obtained from this survey shows that it is an effective program to be used regularly to assess customer satisfaction and identify areas for service improvement. Interviews with municipal officials indicate that stakeholders in the local criminal justice system should not be neglected in soliciting input regarding satisfaction with court services. While the survey methodology illustrated in this research did not include surveying stakeholders, it could easily be expanded to include them.

### 3. What outcomes may be expected from soliciting customer feedback on a regular basis?

Regular customer feedback, if used to improve services, may result in several outcomes. It is objective data on which to develop budget and program recommendations. It can show over time if there is a change in the perception of services as a consequence of organizational changes, such as consolidation. It can improve communication and coordination between criminal justice stakeholders. It can provide employees a channel to provide input during organizational change, and offer creative suggestions at any time, thereby demonstrating their value to the organization and encouraging retention. It provides an on-going forum for court users to identify areas where service improvements would be most meaningful for them, and over time improves the public's trust and confidence in the judicial system.

### Recommendations

This researcher recommends that all courts develop and implement a regular customer feedback program, to include direct court users, stakeholders and employees. Establishing a benchmark level of customer satisfaction and identifying areas where service improvements are

needed will help guide the court in its strategic planning. If a court is moving toward consolidation, it is important for the transition leadership to explicitly state that improved customer service is a desired outcome of the consolidation. Having data to benchmark levels of customer satisfaction prior to consolidation will allow future measurements to assess the impact of consolidation on customer service perceptions within that jurisdiction.

From the findings of this research, several suggestions may be made to courts embarking upon consolidation:

1. Prior to consolidation, benchmark customer satisfaction in all affected courts;
2. Involve all stakeholders in consolidation planning;
3. Within the consolidation plan, identify customer service improvement as one of the key goals of the consolidation effort;
4. Report successes and failures openly and on an on-going basis;
5. Regularly meet with officials from the municipalities served to problem solve and improve coordination;
6. Ensure municipalities continue to provide city prosecution services to file complaints regarding violation of municipal ordinances;
7. Guard against employee burn out by regularly communicating with and involving them;
8. Institute a practice of annually surveying court users, stakeholders and internal customers, and measuring progress;
9. Use funds saved from consolidation to implement customer service programs; and
10. Build public trust and confidence by showcasing in the media how the court is better

able to serve the needs of the public through consolidation.

By following these suggestions during consolidation, a court may be more certain of meeting local needs and meeting or exceeding customer service expectations.

In conducting this research, the researcher would have done some things differently in hindsight. Some suggestions are offered to assist others in their research.

1. When developing questionnaires and surveys, consider how the data will be compiled and presented. The telephone surveys used in this research asked for ? yes? or ? no? responses, and comments. As a result of this design, it was difficult to compile and present the data. Graphic presentation of the data was precluded.
2. When responses to questionnaires given to different groups will be compared, ensure that the questions are in the same order. This will facilitate data compilation for comparison purposes.
3. Ensure adequate time is planned for telephone interviews. Planning and scheduling the telephone interviews ahead of time greatly increased the rate of contact. Cold calls require numerous call-backs in order to reach an interviewee, and should be avoided if possible.
4. Avoid attempts to contact interviewees during holiday or hunting seasons.

### Implications for Future Study

As courts strive to improve the public?s trust and confidence, providing customer service that meets or exceeds the public?s expectations is crucial. The public also demands efficiency and



accountability. This research found that consolidated courts are more efficient and generally have increased resources available for service improvement. However, in some consolidation efforts streamlining operations and increased efficiencies have been given priority over the measurement and improvement of customer service. In other consolidation efforts, both efficiencies and service improvements are expected outcomes. Future study will be required to analyze whether or not the approach to consolidation has a significant impact on the court's customer service focus. Data from this research tends to indicate there may be a correlation, but a larger sample of jurisdictions will need to be studied.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adams, Walter and James W. Brock. The Bigness Complex: Industry, Labor, and Government in the American Economy. New York: Pantheon, 1986.
- American Bar Association. Standards Relating to Court Organization. Chicago: ABA, 1990 ed.
- Anders, George. Health Against Wealth: HMOs and the Breakdown of Medical Trust. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.
- Andrews, Charles. Profit Fever: The Drive to Corporatize Health Care and How to Stop It. Monroe, Maine: Common Courage Press, 1995.
- Baar, Carl. One Trial Court: Possibilities and Limitations. Ottawa: Canadian Judicial Council, 1991.
- . ? The Scope and Limits of Court Reform.? The Justice System Journal 5 (1980): 274-290.
- Bureau of Governmental Research and Service. Transfer of Municipal Court Jurisdiction in Oregon. Eugene: U of Oregon P, 1980.
- Bureau of Justice Assistance. Trial Court Performance Standards with Commentary. Williamsburg: NCSC, 1997.
- Carson, Wallace P., Jr. ? Justice 2020: A Renewed Vision for Oregon's Courts.? Fall Conference of the Oregon Association for Court Administration. Best Western Oceanview Resort, Seaside. 15-17 October 2000.
- Casey, Pamela. ? Accountability and Court Performance: Are We Reading the Dials?? Third National Symposium on Court Management, conducted by the State Justice Institute and

- the National Center for State Courts. Atlanta. 13-19 Aug. 2000.
- City of Gresham, Oregon. Municipal Court Feasibility Study. Gresham: Gresham City Council, 1999.
- Connellan, Thomas K. and Ron Zamke. Sustaining Knock Your Socks Off Service. New York: American Management Assn., 1993.
- Curtin, John J. and Thomas Zlaket, eds. ? Summary of Critical Issues and Potential Strategies Submitted by Participating State Teams.? Proceedings of the National Conference on Public Trust and Confidence in the Justice System, conducted by the ABA, Conf. of Chief Justices, Conf. Of State Court Administrators, and League of Women Voters. Washington. 13-15 May 1999. 1-6.
- Fruin, Richard. Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring: A Working Manual. Chicago: ABA, 1999.
- Garcia, Patricia A. Road Maps--User Friendly Courts: Customer Service in the Courthouse. Chicago: ABA, Office of Justice Initiative, 1999.
- Goldschmidt, Jona and Ira Pilchen. User-Friendly Justice: Making Courts More Accessible, Easier to Understand, and Simpler to Use. Chicago: Amer. Judicature Soc., 1997.
- Haines, Candace A. ? Municipal Court Feasibility Study.? Memo to Gresham City Council, Oregon. 10 August 1999.
- Hatry, Harry P. and John E. Marcotte, Therese van Houten, Carol H. Weiss. Customer Surveys for Agency Managers: What Managers Need to Know. Washington D.C.: Urban Institute Press, 1998.
- Henderson, Thomas A. The Significance of Judicial Structure: The Effect of Unification on Trial Court Operations. Washington D.C.: Natl. Inst. of Justice, 1984.

- Henderson, Thomas A., Carl Baar, Randall Guymes and Neal Miller. A Comparative Study of State Court Organization. Washington D.C.: Natl. Inst. of Justice, 1980.
- Henderson, Thomas A. and Cornelius Kerwin. Structuring Justice: The Implications of Court Unification Reforms. Washington D.C.: Natl. Inst. of Justice, 1984.
- Hollis, Orlando J. The Governor's Commission on Judicial Reform: Final Report. Salem: Oregon Judicial Department, 1975.
- Kerwin, Cornelius M., Thomas Henderson and Carl Baar. "Adjudicatory Processes and the Organization of Trial Courts." Judicature 70.2 (1996): 99-106.
- Lahey, Mary Anne, Bruce A. Christenson and Robert J. Rossi. Analysis of Trial Court Unification in California: Final Report. San Francisco: American Institutes for Research, September 2000.
- Lane, Ron. "Beyond the Vision: Using the Trial Court Performance Standards to Improve Customer Service in Trial Courts." The Court Manager 13.2-3 (1998): 14-18.
- Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. Background Papers on the National Trend in the Unification of State Courts. Detroit: Michigan Supreme Ct., 1974.
- Lawton, Robin L. Creating a Customer-Centered Culture: Leadership in Quality, Innovation, and Speed. Milwaukee: ASQC Quality Press, 1993.
- Lockhart, Daniel C., ed. Making Effective Use of Mailed Questionnaires. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1984.
- LoSardo, Mary M. and Norma M. Rossi. At the Service Quality Frontier: A Handbook for Managers, Consultants, and Other Pioneers. Milwaukee: ASQC Quality Press, 1993.
- McNamara, Lynn. Letter to Mark Landauer. 7 July 2000. League of Oregon Cities, Salem.

- Martin, John A. and Brenda J. Wagenknecht-Ivey. "Courts 2010: Critical Trends Shaping the Courts in the Next Decade." The Court Manager 15.1 (2000): 6-15.
- Michigan's One Court of Justice: Next Generation Courts. Michigan Supreme Court. 8 December 2000 <[http://www.supremecourt.state.mi.us/next generation/](http://www.supremecourt.state.mi.us/next_generation/)>.
- Moore, Thomas L. External Evaluation of the 2000 Citizen Justice Conference, May 2000, Portland Community College. Wilsonville: Herbert and Louis, 2000.
- Naylor, Thomas H. and William H. Willimon. Downsizing the U.S.A. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997.
- Neely, Richard. Why Courts Don't Work. New York: McGraw, 1982.
- Oliver, Richard W. The Shape of Things to Come: Seven Imperatives for Winning in the New World of Business. New York: McGraw, 1999.
- Oregon Judicial Department. Justice 2020: The New Oregon Trail. Salem: OR Judicial Dept., 1995.
- Oregon Revised Statutes. Chap. 221.339. 1999.
- Osborne, David and Peter Plastrik. Banishing Bureaucracy: The Five Strategies for Reinventing Government. Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997.
- Pankey, Kent. E-mail to the author. 26 Sept. 2000.
- Papworth, John. "The Best Government Comes In Small Packages." Putting Power In Its Place: Create Community Control. Comp. and ed. Christopher Plant and Judith Plant. Philadelphia: New Society, 1992.
- Pound, Roscoe. "The Causes of Popular Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice," (1906). Rpt. in Proceedings of the National Conference on the Causes of Popular

- Dissatisfaction with the Administration of Justice, conducted by the Judicial Conference of the United States, Conference of Chief Justices, and the American Bar Association. St. Paul. 7 April 1976. 3-25.
- Rottman, David B. ? Public Perceptions of the State Courts: A Primer.? Third National Symposium on Court Management, conducted by the State Justice Institute and the National Center for State Courts. Atlanta. 13-19 August 2000.
- Rottman, David B. and William E. Hewitt. ? Trial Court Unification in the 1990s: Themes and Concerns.? The Court Manager 11.3 (1996) 25+.
- Sale, Kirkpatrick. ? Free and Equal Intercourse: The Decentralist Design.? Putting Power In Its Place: Create Community Control. Comp. and ed. Christopher Plant and Judith Plant. Philadelphia: New Society, 1992.
- Spendolini, Michael J. Address. Conference on Customer Measurement: How to Satisfy and Retain Your Most Important Customers. American Management Association. Wells Fargo Conference Center, San Francisco. 24-25 September 1998.
- Straub, Daniel H. ? Leadership.? Court Executive Development Program 2000 Phase III: Management in the Courts and Justice Environment. Institute for Court Management. National Center for State Courts, Williamsburg. 26-29 June 2000.
- Sudman, Seymour and Norman M. Bradburn. Asking Questions: A Practical Guide to Questionnaire Design. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1982.
- Warren, Roger. ? Customer Service in the Courts: Responding to the Cry for Justice.? The Court Manager 11.3 (1996) 11+.
- Wattenberg, Ben J. The Good News Is the Bad News Is Wrong. New York: Schuster, 1984

## APPENDICES

- A. Eugene Municipal Court Service Profile
- B. Court and Municipal Telephone Survey Instruments
- C. Defendant and Employee Questionnaire Instruments and Cover Letter
- D. Employee and Defendant Comments from Questionnaires
- E. Example of Spreadsheet with Questionnaire Responses
- F. Examples of Other Surveys
  - 1. Ventura County, California Comment Cards and Exit Survey
  - 2. 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, Michigan Jury Questionnaire
  - 3. Hennepin County, Minnesota Customer Survey
  - 4. Overland Park, Kansas Customer Survey
  - 5. Questionnaire from Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring
- G. “Justice 2020: A Renewed Vision for Oregon’s Courts”
- H. “Next Generation Trial Courts” from Michigan Supreme Court Web Site  
and Goals and Accomplishments from 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court
- I. Excerpts from Analysis of Trial Court Unification in California: Final Report

## APPENDIX A

### Eugene Municipal Court Service Profile



## APPENDIX B

### Court and Municipal Telephone Survey Instruments

TELEPHONE SURVEY OF COURTS  
Nelson  
Research Project

Marilyn

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Court: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I am working on a research project for ICM relating to court consolidation and customer service. I am defining consolidation as transferring local court caseload to a general jurisdiction trial court, with the subsequent elimination of the local courts. I will be asking a series of questions about the ability of your court to provide services. For each question I will ask you to respond from your perspective about your court before it consolidated, and then ask the same question from your perspective after consolidation. Thank you very much for taking the next 10 minutes to answer these 11 survey questions.

	BEFORE		AFTER	
1. Was/Is the court cost effective? (Bring in sufficient revenue to cover costs?) Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
2. Were/Are court facilities adequate? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
3. Were/Are staff resources sufficient for court operations? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
4. Was/Is the allocation of resources flexible? (Can staff or budget be used in areas where needed?) Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
5. Did/Does the court measure customer satisfaction with its services? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N

6. Were/Are customers satisfied with court services?      Y      N      Y      N  
Comments:

7. Did/Does the court address local community concerns (e.g. ordinance violations)?      Y      N      Y      N  
Comments:

8. If you measure customer satisfaction and use a survey instrument, would you be willing to share a copy?

9. In what customer service initiatives has your court been involved (e.g. self-help centers for pro se litigants, public education presentations)?

10. Did your court gain or lose opportunities to pursue customer service initiatives with court consolidation? Explain.

11. Please provide me with a contact in a municipality within your court jurisdiction where there was a municipal court prior to court consolidation (e.g. City Manager, Police Chief, Mayor).

THANK YOU.

## TELEPHONE SURVEY FOR MUNICIPAL OFFICERS

Marilyn Nelson Research Project

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ City: \_\_\_\_\_

Position: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

I am working on a research project for the Institute for Court Management. This survey will help in my research on court consolidation and customer service. I will be asking a series of questions about the municipal court which no longer exists in your community. For each question, I will ask your opinion of the municipal court services before consolidation, and then ask the same question about the court services you currently receive. Thank you very much for taking the next 10 minutes to answer these 8 survey questions.

	BEFORE		AFTER	
1. Was/Is the court cost effective? (Bring in sufficient revenue to cover costs?) Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
2. Were/Are court facilities adequate? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
3. Were/Are staff resources sufficient for court operations? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
4. Was/Is the allocation of resources flexible? (Can staff or budget be used in areas where needed?) Comments:	Y	N	Y	N
5. Did/Does the court measure customer satisfaction with its services? Comments:	Y	N	Y	N

6. Were/Are customers satisfied with court services?      Y      N      Y      N  
Comments:

7. Did/Does the court address local community  
concerns (e.g. ordinance violations)?      Y      N      Y      N  
Comments:

8. Do you feel your local community has benefited from the consolidation of court services?  
Why or why not?

THANK YOU.

## APPENDIX C

Defendant and Employee Questionnaire Instruments and Cover Letter

Personal cover letter on letterhead

Defendant's name  
Defendant's address

The staff of Eugene Municipal Court have been working to streamline and improve services. We already have made several changes in our service delivery, and recognize the importance of continued improvements. We are committed to a process of constant improvement to provide the best possible service to the public.

As a person who has had contact with the Court recently, we are asking you to help us evaluate the services you received. We need your input to identify the service areas in need of immediate improvement, and which are satisfactory as they are. Your comments also will help us plan for long-term changes that will make it easier for the public to work through the judicial process.

Attached you will find a Eugene Municipal Court User Satisfaction Survey. Please complete the survey and return it in the attached envelope, or you can fax it to us at 682-5417.

We will use the information you provide to make changes that will really count. Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.

Marilyn Nelson  
Court Administrator

## City of Eugene Municipal Court User Satisfaction Survey

**Please check the appropriate box.**

1. What type of citation did you receive?  
Parking                      Traffic                      Animal/Other Ordinance
2. How did the staff at the Eugene Municipal Court treat you?  
Very Professionally      Professionally      Unprofessionally      Very Unprofessionally
3. Was the Eugene Municipal Court staff willing to take time to help you?  
Very Willing              Willing                      Unwilling                      Very Unwilling
4. Was the information that you received from the Eugene Municipal Court staff useful?  
Very Useful              Useful                      Not Useful                      Incorrect or Wrong
5. What other information would have been useful?  
  

---

---
6. How easy was it for you to find Eugene Municipal Court?  
Very Easy                      Easy                      Difficult                      Very Difficult
7. Once you arrived at Eugene Municipal Court, how easy was it for you to find where you needed to go?  
Very Easy                      Easy                      Difficult                      Very Difficult
8. How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's courtrooms?  
Very Safe                      Safe                      Unsafe                      Very Unsafe
9. How safe did you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's lobby/waiting area?  
Very Safe                      Safe                      Unsafe                      Very Unsafe
10. Please provide any specific suggestions to improve service at Eugene Municipal Court.  
  

---

---

**Please return your survey in the enclosed postage paid envelope  
by November 1.**



## City of Eugene Municipal Court Employee Satisfaction Survey

1. How do your co-workers at Eugene Municipal Court treat you?  
Very Professionally      Professionally      Unprofessionally      Very Unprofessionally
2. Are your co-workers and supervisors willing to take time to help you (e.g. get papers to you in a timely way, answer questions, help with coverage)?  
Very Willing      Willing      Unwilling      Very Unwilling
3. Is the information provided to you by co-workers and supervisors useful?  
Very Useful      Useful      Not Useful      Incorrect or Wrong
4. How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's courtrooms?  
Very Safe      Safe      Unsafe      Very Unsafe
5. How safe do you feel when in Eugene Municipal Court's lobby/waiting area?  
Very Safe      Safe      Unsafe      Very Unsafe
6. In your opinion, how easy is it for customers to find Eugene Municipal Court?  
Very Easy      Easy      Difficult      Very Difficult
7. In your opinion, once customers arrive at Eugene Municipal Court, how easy is it for them to find where they need to go?  
Very Easy      Easy      Difficult      Very Difficult
8. In what area do you work?  
\_\_\_\_ Front counter/collections      \_\_\_\_ Courtrooms  
\_\_\_\_ Records      \_\_\_\_ Parking  
\_\_\_\_ Other
9. Please provide any specific suggestions to improve customer service at Eugene Municipal Court.

---

---

---

---

**THANK YOU.**

**Please return this survey in the drop box by November 3, 2000.**

## APPENDIX D

### Employee and Defendant Comments from Questionnaires

## **EMPLOYEE SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**QUESTION #9: (Please provide any specific suggestions to improve customer service at Eugene Municipal Court.)**

### **COMMENTS**

3. More recognition to employees for a job well done. "Employee of the Week," "Kudos" to co-workers. Management team to show value of employees by asking for their input when changing procedures and an individual's job tasks.
5. Make sure the waiting time for people appearing for TSR's (settlement conferences) is reduced. Many defendants spend up to four hours just waiting.
11. I think the remodel has been great for the court. It has really opened up the lobby, making it much more comfortable for the employees and defendants. One concern is the fact that it is so hard to hear the defendants. This is a source of frustration for defendants and employees.
12. Generally, I feel Eugene Municipal Court staff are exemplary where customer service is concerned. For the most part, people leave here as pleasant as possible. And if they are angry, 9 times out of 10 they explain they're angry at the situation, not us. I think that reflects well on our customer service.
13. I think everyone does an excellent job.
16. Better ropes or queuing in lobby to direct lobby people to counter in an orderly fashion.

## **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**NOVEMBER 2000**

### **QUESTION #5 (What other information would have been useful?)**

#### **COMMENTS**

3. None.
4. None.
5. The method of paying reduced traffic fines without going to court.
7. None that I can think of.
8. Better directions as to where to go, better phone correspondence with questions.
12. Information about the nature of judgeships - elected? appointed? term? life?
15. The woman I talked to was very informative & friendly.
19. All staff responded at all times in a courteous, friendly, non-judgemental manner.
31. It could have been conveyed in a friendlier, more socialable manner.
36. Could use more staff to avoid long waits.
38. Not applicable. Been there, done that.
45. I'm not sure the choice of paying the ticket w/possibility of lowering the fine AT THE CLERK'S WINDOW was listed on the citation.
48. Very upset over frivolous citation - staff was tolerant.
50. More organization.
53. What would be involved in a court appearance. I felt the clerk was not well informed, therefore unable to provide info that would have been helpful to me.
54. Time. Dates.
57. How to get DMV to enter address changes in the computer - I got address sticker for license, BUT!
61. What are the chances of the judge reducing the tickets.
64. Safety tips of an animated kind. Free beverages?
66. A phone line to reach somebody instead of a message.
69. This was the first time I was informed by a police officer that I could go to pay for my ticket & receive a reduction. Maybe this inf. Could be made public. eg. Register G.
73. Telling me I was mistakenly pulled over.
75. Well the only thing I have to say is that it would not to you just don't charge homeless.
77. How to lower fines for 1/10 of the population thats on food stamps.
84. The amount of time or number of people at the hearing. That would help to plan accordingly.
89. That after 4:00 was a busy time for paying fines.
97. I can't think of anything else. I got everything I needed.
103. Perhaps to know the format/setting a little better i.e. explaining yourself in front of everyone was embarrassing - & I was a bit unprepared for that part.
108. It was a pleasant experience given the cause.
110. Where to park.
120. I felt a reduction for such a minor offence.
122. What information?
123. One piece of paper with w/all my requirements clearly stated in a time format.
131. Payment plans.

134. No comment.
142. Provide explicit guidelines on behalf of the judge as to what actions are necessary to obtain a clean record after the very brief hearing.
144. The remodeling in progress made the lobby chaotic & confusing as to what/where to go.
147. That I wouldn't have to see the judge that a court clerk could look at my record and reduce my charge.
149. I hadn't had a ticket in 10 years. The young office who gave me the ticket was very polite but not particularly helpful. I wish I had known I could have gone anytime to pay the ticket to have it reduced at the ticket counter instead of taking time off from work to go do that. The citation doesn't indicate that anyway & all the other people in line didn't know that either. We all lost pay in time off from work to do this. Not very efficient at all!
151. Where the cops put speed traps & what time of the day they have nothing better to do than harass people.
157. The girls at the window are very nice and I always pay my fines.
164. Nothing.
169. None.
172. Not sure.
175. The court should not hand out information it is unclear about!
180. I'd like to know before these tickets double then redouble that an unpaid ticket exists.
181. Correct answers to my questions. They were uninformed. Later, when they found out their errors, they turned nasty!
185. Some kind of direction map in entry way of building or the open part of the buildings.
187. Parking, better directions to court on ticket I received.
190. None.
198. No additional police officers to keep from having a tax increase.
203. The specific law related to my violation before entering the court.
204. The information was useful but not complete for details. Need a "floor chart" for directing to areas of concern.
211. I was given a ticket which did not apply to the situation and was thrown out - so train officers better.
212. You shouldn't ask people to help you after you accuse them of something.
215. Why the officer felt the need to harass me.
218. It would have been useful to know that notarized statements could not be used as testimony prior to trial.
220. Correct information would be nice.
223. None, except to tell us what the fees were for that were above the amount of the ticket was written.
228. None. They went out of their way to make sure I had all the information I needed in the first place.
236. Where to park?
240. Payment options, the fact you are required to pay on the date of court.
243. I just paid a ticket off.
251. Check I.D. Where you live.
254. When I called to get a fax number it took 3 transfers just to get an answer. (3 different

people)

256. The judge dismissed one of the charges. I paid the fine and then weeks later I got a letter saying I owed money. I called and tried to explain it to her and she was very rude. Told me I knew I owed it and then hung up on me!!

## **CUSTOMER SATISFACTION SURVEY**

**NOVEMBER 2000**

### **QUESTION #10 (Please provide any specific suggestions to improve service at Eugene Municipal Court)**

#### **COMMENTS**

2. Better proposed budget plans for fees less costs for tickets.
3. The lines to pay tickets were extremely long. Please allow more payment counters.  
Separate serious offenders from lesser.
4. Can't think of anything at this time.
5. When sending out surveys, refer to me as a citizen victimized by the state, not as a customer.
6. If things aren't broke don't fix them.
8. Some staff members behaved rudely (at a time when you're not ready to deal with it), cashiers remained on the phone while working with you. Short staffed?
9. Suite numbers could be more visible and a little large print.
10. All people were waiting in a narrow corridor before being shown the appropriate station . i.e. the one I went to for payment and the other apparently for discussion/plea - whatever; perhaps more separation between the two would be appropriate.
12. Hold court after work hours eh? My citation was for failure to wear a seat belt. In the whole process the most courteous and professional person I encountered was the City of Eugene police officer - EXCELLENT!
14. Parking not very easy to find.
16. I appreciated being notified that I had not sent in my parking penalty fee.
19. Just a compliment - my interaction with the court was the best interaction I've ever experienced with a public agency or department.
22. You need to take small payment. You want it all at once. Some of us have small incomes. Thank you.
23. I wish there had been an ATM nearby!
25. Get better judges that will make impartial decisions.
31. I know you are short of funds, but a little bit of beauty wouldn't be a waste..plants, some magazines, pictures on da walls...
34. Very long lines waiting to pay fines after we saw the judge.
37. More seating in waiting area. Info packets.
38. Parking voucher.
43. 1-Thanks for the survey. 2-Larger/more separated waiting area. Some elderly folks had to stand and move around for quite awhile to pay fine - near the front door area, in front of pay desks.
44. Not sure about where to report to or which line to be in before going into courtroom.
45. You could have traffic court at the lunch hour so we wouldn't miss work.
46. Records I had already paid a citation and you still put a warrant out for my arrest.
47. Map the locations of the courtrooms in the entrance.
48. Court was not problem, judge lenient - still had to pay \$40 on Soc Sec and a widow.

Citation uncalled for.

51. There was an incorrect court date on my ticket. I called in four times to understand what to do. No one could help me and were very difficult to deal with. It was very frustrating.
52. Charge less! More employees/faster at peak times (1pm)
54. No improvements A good court.
57. Parking (south of courthouse) booth was unattended # 7/45. Arm would not go up. Caused traffic to back up in street & 5+ minute delay.
59. I was in the Municipal Court during the remodeling phase.
61. None.
62. The people were really nice and it was a lot faster & easier than I had anticipated & I can't think of anything specific that would improve it.
64. Little booklets regarding safety & its maintenance, maybe with a character that learns the hard way every time. Make it violent.
65. There is one guy who I think works as the court clerk. He is very rude and unwilling to even listen to what I had to say. See #2 #3.
66. A deferred sentence program for MIPS would be a necessary addition.
71. I have no suggestions at this time.
73. Do not issue me anymore tickets.
75. I think your Eugene police officer should look out for real criminals, not some guy drinking a beer on the curve. There's a lot more business out there than a harmless drunk. You guys went to halo school. You all should to look ???
77. Lower cost for poor people even 50 bucks is shoes for 3 kids. Why don't you help us?
81. It would have been nice if directions or a map was provided.
84. Have more staff to help people coming out of court.
88. My contact with the court was only by mail, not in person, so I can't answer most of these questions. I wrote to the court after receiving a ticket in a City parking structure, to explain that I had a monthly permit but failed to display it. Court staff responded quickly and fairly.
89. It was during your remodel. I paid the fine in a temporary, tiny office that was overcrowded and uncomfortable.
90. Parking problem.
91. If a person is willing to plead guilty with explanation, and want to be sentenced that day - it should be available. It's a waste of time & money to make unnecessary court appointments.
94. Needed to check on a court date from a long distance telephone and spend a long time on hold.
97. I don't have any problems with the service as it is. Everything was satisfactory.
99. Signs!! If there were signs telling me which courtroom I needed to go to would of been a great help. Instead I had to go to two different officers to direct me.
102. Me & my brother had to wait till nearly the whole courtroom was empty to speak with the judge. Our citations were for riding our bikes through LTD station at night. We did not even know it was against the rules. I wish that the judge could've seen us 1<sup>st</sup> because it was such a minor offense. - Thank You -
103. I think you guys do very well — I'm not sure how you would make a public explanation of a fault easier. It felt like church — & the judge was God!! But all in all — the court



- staff were fine, if a bit blunt in manner. This was my first time in the courtroom.
104. No more pigs.
  105. There's nothing to suggest, the staff is excellent. Thank you.
  106. Seating in waiting area was limited. At times, no seats were available.
  108. I did the "good driving record" short cut and paid the reduced fine after work.
  110. I should have received a "warning" because it was a "new" no right turn intersection and sign — very small sign. It didn't help that the clerk said she turned several times before she noticed the sign either! I shouldn't have had to pay or get the ticket.
  111. Phoned and delayed court — letter received stating did not appear at court after new court date made.
  120. No comment.
  122. The court is fine. It's the police officers that need an adjustment. Their puffed up, cocky attitude is unnecessary and outright wrong!
  123. Coffee & donuts would be nice
  124. My hearing was scheduled for 8:30 a.m. but according to the clock in the courtroom, I got called up at 8:20.
  125. I was only exposed to the office — paying a traffic ticket.
  127. Maybe a payment plan for tickets instead of paying in one lump sum. The same day I was in court for a MIP there were three girls that were at the same place I was when I received my MIP and they had to pay 20 less than I did. I know \$20 is much of a difference but it should be the same for everyone regardless.
  133. Dropoff box (exterior) for paying parking tickets. Not always workable to drop off during 8-5, yet would appreciate off hours dropoff to save a stamp. Thank you.
  134. No comment. Good job! Thank you for being concerned on how the public feel.
  136. None. Service was fast for me.
  141. Better parking.
  142. Don't patronize me...The very root of our justice system is based on \$, not right and wrong.
  144. I felt slightly "yanked" around. What was expected (of me) was not clear.
  145. Find more professional phone staff. Because they are quite rude.
  146. Better job staggering lunch breaks — particularly the people who have to take "boots" off of cars. Also a 70.00 boot fee for a 70.00 outstanding debt seems more like a mob payoff than a fair and reasonable fine.
  147. You could put the court staff up front and waiting room in back, felt a little unsafe while in the waiting room!
  149. Court is OK, last time I was on jury duty things went well and everything was explained wonderfully.
  151. The ticket was difficult to read. Highlighting/making bold the cost area and the info phone # would be less stressful.
  152. Decrease the waiting time, perhaps give out less traffic violations so police can focus on real crimes of violence and theft, or maybe decrease the police officer quantity, so they have to actually fight crimes instead of victimless offenses. Or maybe I'll just organize a petition for the upcoming election to reduce the amount of cops on the streets stealing tax payers money by enforcing outdated posted speed limits!
  157. Just fairness in the courts, & streets.

158. I paid my ticket at the violations desk. I didn't go to court. This was convenient for me because I work nights and my 8:AM hearing would have been difficult to attend.
164. More seats — but definitely need more parking nearer - free parking!
165. Service was fine.
167. I recall having a very pleasant exchange with the clerk who took my payment.
169. None
172. Make the lobby area (where you pay your bills) bigger & better seating.
173. Just a kudos to the "greeting balif" — both times that person was very helpful in directing the flow of traffic - friendly & efficiently. P.S. It generally is not a "fun" time to go to court but when the staff is informative & friendly, the experience can even be pleasant! Keep up the good work!
175. It is shameful that a fine city has such an awful looking court — the nasty things scratched into the wooden pews/chairs encourage the behavior I described above. The court should reflect order and respect. It does not when graffiti is allowed! These men were not the least bit intimidated by the court or the judge. I think it would be an excellent use of community service hours to have criminals sand and refinish the wood in the courtroom. Also, a baliff or security guard at the back of the courtroom would be helpful in keeping order (there was none the day I was there.) It would also be nice to have the court remodeled/updated; right now it looks like a court you'd see in a border town/poorer community. But that's not nearly as important as removing the graffiti and protecting the dignity of the court! Thank you for sending this survey; it's a great idea.
180. We mail the fines in when we learn of them.
181. Train your employees. Do not have them give out false information! HORRIBLE HORRIBLE EXPERIENCE! Overall grade: F
184. I don't like standing outside the court house but that is more due to the lack of security outside the room.
185. I can't say that if I were surrounded by characters who made me feel uneasy, I would feel safe with an older lady at the door & everybody else behind glass. Then no I wouldn't feel safe.
187. It would have helped me to receive specific directions and parking locations on the actual ticket I received.
188. Every thing work fine.
190. I would like to see big boards that could show where the different areas are. It was a little difficult to find where I wanted to go.
191. I mailed my fine in because I forgot to walk over & drop it in the pay slot. Then I was told that was no longer even an option!! Do you really feel these .33/metered return envelopes are a proper use of funds? I don't. The surveys should be in your lobby.
193. I feel very safe just a little odd.
196. Paying for my ticket was enjoyable as it could be — staff did a good job.
197. You guys spend too much time to giving a ticket. Be productive. Cops just looking for speeding car and parking meter which indicate "0" instead of keeping safe. Shame on you!
199. The only problem was trying to cash my paychecks to pay my fines with no Oregon ID.
200. My only contact — that I can think of — is paying my parking tickets on time. No personal contact.

202. Not so much of a “stiff” judge. I got the citation the week (the day given) I got back after my mom passing away.
204. Thank you for the opportunity to respon to this survey.
206. Tell the judge (that judged me) not to be an asshole to the people before him.
207. In listening to other cases I found the judge to be fair & to explain well.
209. I have only dealt with E.M.C. through the mail.
210. PLEASE put parking tickets in plastic covers on rainy days! THANK YOU!
212. Don't have cops lie on the stand.
213. Who was guilty (over) — for my arrest, taken to Lane County Jail. Spent Sat. Sun Monday for no reason. The Judge would not give me a reason for the arrest, or why I spent 3 days in Russia in Lane County Jail. I lived at 1944 City View at the time of this ticket. The police office sat backed into a drive way on the school grounds (Map drawn) off City View St. I had lived there from Sept. 1996 — never had any trouble - with anyone - with 2 months I was stopped 3 times finally on Dec. 17 1999 - when he stopped me I was - stopped at the IHOP 2130 w 11<sup>th</sup> Restaurant. I was told I was making 37 miles in a 20 mile zone — I stopped for the light at City View - W 11<sup>th</sup>. Just past where the officer was sitting there is a 25 mile zone. When I got to Court the new ruling was that I was making 37 per hr. In a 25 mile zone. If you look a the drawing- the officer told me I was driving to fast in a school zone. The footage from 18<sup>th</sup> St. to where the officer was hiding is not that far - but in Court the hearing officer said, “Quote” you were in a 25 mile zone at 37 per hr. Do I trust police - Sorry - I spent 3 day's in Jail in June 1997 (June 28, 29, 30) on Monday, I was found not guilty - no charges
214. Arrange to have fines paid by credit card. Most people don't walk around with amount of cash needed to pay fines. People are inconvenienced when they don't have cash or a check readily available — and may have to come back to pay fines.
217. Additional parking around the university??
220. I was charged incorrectly and am not pleased with staff or their so called service.
223. The experience was fine.
225. Everything seemed efficient to me.
226. My unpleasant experience (the ticket) was made more tolerable by the courtesy of the staff. They were both knowledgeable and friendly — most helpful.
228. Keep the staff you have even if you have to raise their wages. They are well worth it. If I had to ‘grade’ the effort and friendliness, plus the courteousness of everyone there, I would be forced to give them an ‘A++’! It's never fun to have to go to court, but these staff members made it as extremely pleasant as possible.
236. The whole time everyone was very nice, and the judge was very respectfull, unlike the angry policeman I had to be subjected to. He was rude and disrespectfull and should not be allowed to treat people that way, his little man complex was abvious.
239. Better signs from front of bldg to court.
242. Hope not to pay a return visit.
244. Judge spend a fair amount of time lecturing about driving techniques before hearing cases. Since this is not what I came for, I felt she was wasting my time.
246. I was scared to death that the first deadly earthquake in the area could happend & we would all die. P.S. I don't think Eugene needs a tidal wave-proof courthouse, either.
247. Needs a post board of alternates to paying fines. Payment schedules should be posted,

etc.

- 248. Citizens should not have to stand in lines just to ask a question. As it was my 1<sup>st</sup> time in municipal court I did not realize I would wait afterwards in order to pay my fine. I finally found someone to answer that I could return on my lunch hour to pay. I'm an honest hardworking citizen. My time is very valuable. I felt like I had to pay a "wait" fee & a "time" fee as well as a \$\$ fee.
- 250. I paid my fine before going to court the lady who helped me was great!
- 251. First in. First out.
- 256. Train people better! I ended up paying for that dismissed portion of my ticket because I couldn't get thru to them and that woman treated me like dirt! I was actually mad enough I told my husband I would like to sell our home and leave the Eugene City limits because I'm sick of being treated rudely by the court people! I even went down in person and they just kept saying you owe and wouldn't even look up the orig. judge's order!!!!!!
- 257. Your extortion process was quick, streamlined & more satisfactory than the oppressive judge scene.
- 259. I was a victim of a Eugene police speed trap. You want to streamline the court? Call 'em off!
- 260. When I was in court I got a \$10.00 parking ticket 5 minutes before I got to the car. You should have parking validation if one receives a ticket for parking while in court.

## APPENDIX E

### Example of Spreadsheet with Questionnaire Responses

1.	2.	3.	4.	# 5	6.	7.	8.	9.	# 10
Parking Traffic Animal/Other	Very Professionally Professionally Unprofessionally Very Unprofessionally	Very Willing Willing Unwilling Very Unwilling	Very Useful Useful Not Useful Incorrect or wrong	Comment	Very Easy Easy Difficult Very Difficult	Very Easy Easy Difficult Very Difficult	Very Safe Safe Unsafe Very Unsafe	Very Safe Safe Unsafe Very Unsafe	Comment
1	1	1	1		1				
2	1		1			1	1	1	
3	1				1				
4	1					1		1	
5	1						1		
5	1					1	1	1	
6	1						1		
7	1					1	1	1	
8	1	1			1		1		1
9	1		1		1	1	1	1	
10	1				1			1	
11	1					1	1		1
12	1					1	1	1	
13	1					1		1	
14	1					1	1	1	
15	1					1	1		
16	1						1		
17	1					1	1		1
18	1						1	1	
19	1		1		1	1	1	1	
20	1				1	1	1	1	
21	1					1	1	1	
22	1					1	1	1	
22	1				1		1	1	
23	1						1	1	
24	1					1	1	1	
25	1					1	1	1	
26	1					1	1	1	
27	1					1	1	1	
28	1	1			1		1	1	
29	1					1	1	1	
30	1					1	1	1	
31	1					1	1	1	1
32	1					1	1	1	
33	1					1	1	1	
34	1					1	1	1	
35	1				1		1	1	
36	1					1	1	1	
37	1				1		1	1	
38	1				1		1	1	
39	1					1		1	
39	1					1		1	
40	1				1		1	1	
41	1					1		1	
42	1					1		1	
43	1					1		1	
44	1				1		1	1	
45	1					1	1	1	
46	1				1		1	1	
47	1				1		1	1	
48	1					1	1	1	
49	1					1	1	1	
50	1					1	1	1	

## APPENDIX F

### Examples of Other Surveys

1. Ventura county, California Comment Cards and Exit Survey
2. 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court, Michigan Jury Questionnaire
3. Hennepin County, Minnesota Customer Survey
4. Overland Park, Kansas Customer Survey
5. Questionnaire from Judicial Outreach on a Shoestring

## APPENDIX G

“Justice 2020: A Renewed Vision for Oregon’s Courts”



## APPENDIX H

“Next Generation Trial Courts” from Michigan Supreme Court Web Site  
and Goals and Accomplishments from the 46<sup>th</sup> Circuit Court

## APPENDIX I

Excerpts from

Analysis of Trial Court Unification in California: Final Report

Abstracts