

# valueGame

*Case Study*

## **Do Cleaning Services Matter?**

*Prepared by:*

***Scholten Research***

This ValueGame Research was conducted by Scholten&Partners in collaboration with FNV Bondgenoten.

The case study is intended to give readers an idea about some applications of the ValueGame.

## ***ValueGame Case Study – Do Cleaning Services Matter?***

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## **Introduction**

This study investigates the extent of the value attributed by customers to cleaning services.

In the Netherlands, cleaning services contribute significantly to the cost of goods and services. Consequently, the continuous increase in the prices of commodities and wages of skilled labor gave rise to the question “How are cleaning service jobs valued by customers?”

Thus, the premise is that, if customers do not mind staying on a dirty holding area, then there is no need to hire cleaners or spend on maintenance of equipment and supplies.

The respondents were people who spend significant amounts of time in public “holding areas” such as schools, hospitals, airports, etc. To reach the desired number of geographically-dispersed respondents, the online ValueGame<sup>1</sup> was used. Apart from reaching a significant number of customers, the response rate is better than traditional surveys because ValueGame is fun and easy but economical at the same time.

## **What is the value of cleanliness?**

We all have a fundamental idea of what cleanliness is. However, each individual has varying definitions of cleanliness. For example, a mother travelling with her toddler will be very keen on the cleanliness of the airport floor, chairs, and toilets. For a patient, visitor, or staff in a hospital; cleanliness means more than just tidy and orderly, it means the place should be sanitized and germ-free. Cleanliness is intangible but our basic definition of what is clean is indicated in the ambiance of an area.

Because ambiance is a result of how a cleaning services provider executes the cleaning processes, this study aims to help decision-makers know how much they should spend on cleaning services. Thus, it is important to determine if customers correlate good cleaning with the cost of cleaning services.

To measure the importance of cleaning services, Peter Scholten Research effectively conducted, on behalf of FNV Bondgenoten, an investigation using the Value Game. The research was intended to give decision makers – especially the Government – information on whether it is really important to spend on cleanliness.

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<sup>1</sup>For further information about the ValueGame Methodology, please visit [www.valuegame.org](http://www.valuegame.org). The site also contains knowledge materials about the web-based tool.

## **About the ValueGame Methodology**

There is a big difference between satisfaction surveys and the ValueGame Method. Basically, the purpose of satisfaction surveys is to gauge how pleased the customers are on a particular product or service. The ValueGame, on the other hand, measures the degree of interest among customers and not merely their satisfaction on a certain product or service. In other words, customers can be satisfied with a product or service that is unimportant to them. Further, because satisfaction can be influenced by the price, one can be satisfied easily especially when something is cheap. Often, when the price is low, the customers' expectation is also low.

In terms of data gathering, oftentimes, target respondents are not open to answering surveys because they are in a hurry, they wish to be left alone, or they do not want to talk to strangers. Thus, conducting interviews and assisted surveys is a challenge. The ValueGame uses picture cards that looks fun to play with. Also, the link to the ValueGame is simply sent by e-mail. For this matter, respondents can play the game and provide the answers at their most convenient time. Since the method is just sliding ValueGame cards, there is no need to think hard about the answers or the choices.

## **How Cleanliness is Defined**

The cost of cleaning and the cleaning process are invisible. But how is cleanliness rated? When can we say that cleaning service is cheap? When cleaning service is expensive or has more budget, will customers recognize the difference between cheap and expensive cleaning service?

For this research, the ValueGame examines the extent to which cleanliness is appreciated without giving customers an idea about the cost of the cleaning service. Thus, the aspects investigated using the ValueGame are as follows:

- 1) How important is ambiance among customers?
- 2) How much do customers value the work of cleaners?

The research was conducted at transport and healthcare companies. The major participants of the research include Schipol Airport, Erasmus Medical Center, Achmea, and KNMI. Achmea is one of the largest provider of financial services in the Netherlands and KNMI (or the Royal Netherlands Meteorological Institute) is the Dutch National Weather Service.

In addition, while the study is being conducted in four locations, the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science also agreed to participate in the research. The results of the study will be included in this report.

## **The ValueGame Methodology**

Most of the time, respondents hesitate to provide a truthful answer when they are asked to directly place a price on a product or service. First, they fear that the researchers are measuring their price threshold. It is a challenge to get accurate answers on their willingness to pay for a product or service. Second, they are suspicious that they will be asked to pay for something after the conversation; or that eventually, they will have to pay more than usual in the future for the same product or service.

With the ValueGame, the perception of value is measured against reference products and services that are relevant to the respondents.

To measure the perception of value in this research, respondents were asked to rank a product or a service in terms of priority or usefulness to them. Once the target respondent clicks on the link, two categories of digital cards with picture and description will be displayed on the screen. The impact card(s) is about what they would like to achieve (i.e., for themselves, for their community, for the environment, etc). For this particular case, the impact card is a picture of a clean holding area or a clean working environment. The product cards, on the other hand; are pictures of products and services that the respondents already use or buy, such as cakes, television, magazine subscription, health club membership, etc.

However, how do we make sure that we design the right cards?

It is important to first conduct a focus group discussion to determine the products and services that are relevant to the target respondents. After the relevant products and services are identified, the actual or approximate cost of each of the specified product or service is determined through an actual trade check.



To ensure the accurate interpretation of the results, Professor Paul de Beer<sup>2</sup> was involved in the analysis.

## Results

The value perception about cleaning services was found to be high across the organizations that were investigated. The results are discussed as organization-specific case studies, as follows:

### Schipol Airport

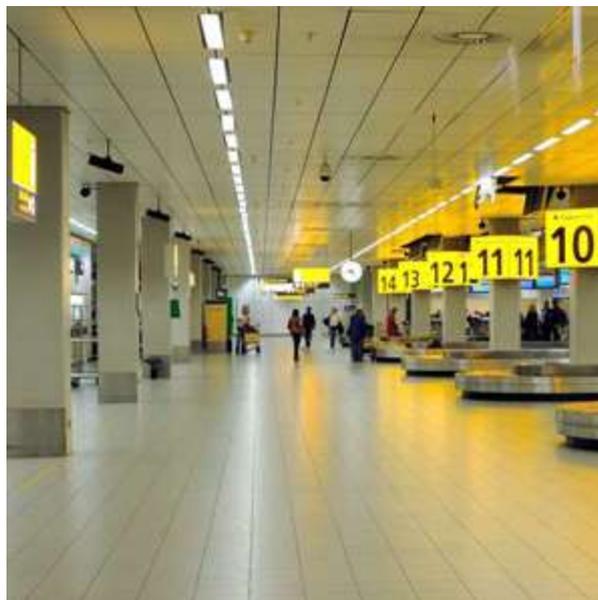


Figure 2. Cleanliness and ambiance of Schipol Airport

The case of Schipol Airport illustrates a good valuation model. When compared to other services, the security in Schipol Airport has more importance than cleanliness (or ambiance). The security services at Schipol Airport is highly valued not only by local passengers because security is the most important concern for all passengers worldwide.

However, housekeeping is still regarded as significant, though the appreciation is indirect. Based on the results of the ValueGame-based research, the appreciation per participant of a clean airport is pegged at 8 Euros per trip. Because Schipol Airport holds around 48 million passengers per year, the resulting value justifies the need to spend on cleaning services.

The ValueGame-based result coincides with the result of the passenger satisfaction survey conducted by the Airport Service Quality (ASQ). In ASQ's research,

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<sup>2</sup> Professor Paul de Beer is an Extraordinary professor (Henri Polak Chair) at the University of Amsterdam. He is also the Director of the Scientific Centre for Trade Unions, the Castle and the Amsterdam Institute for Advanced Labour Studies (AIAS) of the University of Amsterdam.

passengers were asked about the factors that would enhance their experience at the airport. The ASQ research report is provided in Figure 3 below. Based on ASQ's findings, participants rated the cleanliness of the airport as the most important after the ambiance.

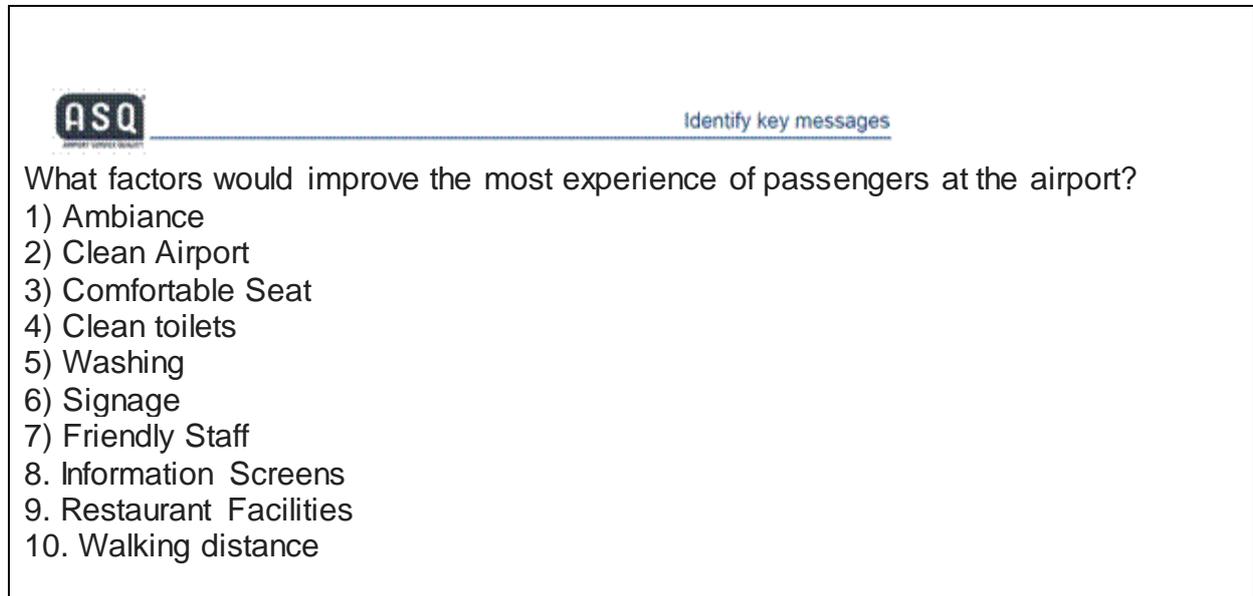


Figure 3. Result of the research conducted by the ASQ

### Erasmus Medical Center

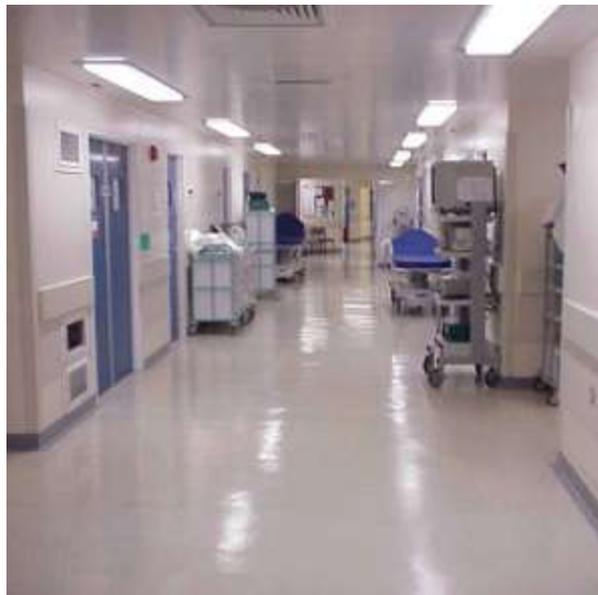


Figure 4. Cleanliness and Ambiance of a hospital

Almost everyone would like to avoid hospitals. To be able to make it a more pleasant experience, it is important to know what is valued in a hospital setting apart from

proper diagnosis and appropriate medical care. Is it entertainment, security, ambiance, or cleanliness? Let's see what the study conducted among former patients and staff of Erasmus Medical Center has to say.

Being in a hospital is both stressful and boring. For this matter, patients need entertainment such as the television, access to the internet (WiFi), and perhaps, a reading table. But if cleaning services and ambiance are compared to other aspects attached to hospitalization, the ValueGame-based research identified the following:

- Patients see the task of cleaners to be as important as that of the nursing staff;
- The ambiance and the cleanliness of the hospital is more important than the transportation (or ambulance) services to and from the hospital;
- The quality medical attention from the doctors and the availability of lying-in areas are more important than the cleanliness of the hospital;

However, based on the focus group discussion conducted among the staff of Erasmus Medical Center, the availability of parking spaces is an urgent concern. The Center is at heart of downtown Rotterdam and the parking slots for visitors and staff are limited. Parking is especially important among staff on night shift. Despite this fact, cleanliness is still chosen by target respondents as more important than parking availability.

Furthermore, now that fitness is a hype, what is more important for respondents, cleanliness or a fitness center? Well, your guess is as good as ours! Across the respondents, the availability of a fitness facility is three times less valued than cleaning services.

## **Achmea and KNMI**

How important is cleaning services among a particular group of people who practically stay in the same building or same room for a least 40 hours a week?

Based on the results generated through the ValueGame, cleaning services are highly appreciated by respondents from Achmea and KNMI. In both case studies, cleaning services ranked second to the Information Technology (IT) help desk. This result is remarkable because among the perks and privileges which a company can offer to staff, cleaning services is the least visible.

In this day and age, offices can no longer do away with the IT helpdesk because of the demand for troubleshooting skills for software and hardware servicing. However, offices operate with other important aspects such as security services, employee training, fitness facilities, etc. Companies also provide benefits such as Christmas gifts and various one-time bonuses.

Based on responses of the participants from Achmea and KNMI, working in a clean facility is the second most important aspect after the IT helpdesk. Cleaning is followed by training, telecommunications, fitness, and so on. Surprisingly, one-time extras such as a Christmas gift and other one-time bonuses scored lower than cleaning services.

To summarize, employees of both Achmea and KNMI highly appreciate working in a clean environment.

### **The Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science**

*FNV Bondgenoten wanted to conduct this study among government agencies because the Government is one of the major clients of cleaning services. The Ministry of Education, Culture and Science agreed to conduct the study in their agency. After the ValueGame-based research was conducted, the outcome of the investigation – according to Agency's Spokesperson – was that cleaning is highly valued, "and therefore, there is a need for the Agency to allocate more budget for cleaning services."*

### **Conclusion**

The study generally enjoyed high participation rate among Schipol Travellers, former patients of Erasmus Medical Center, office staff, as well as members and non-members of FNV. The number of participants engaged in the study was more than adequate since the research garnered an average response rate of 40%.

What the ValueGame is specifically looking for is how customers value the work of cleaners compared to other products and services across situations and environments.

The process of cleaning is invisible. Therefore, the services rendered by cleaners will not be valued correctly especially now that companies and organizations are implementing austerity measures to manage the cost of their operations. The ValueGame is an effective way to measure the extent of which workers, travelers, and patients love well-maintained facilities, ambiance and unpolluted environment. Through the ValueGame, customers' perception of the value of the work of cleaners in comparison with other professions was effectively measured.

The invisibility of cleaning services combined with the huge competition for budget allocation and existing austerity measures have impacts to the salaries and wages of cleaners in the Netherlands. Therefore, this research gives an idea about the possible effect of budget cuts on cleaning services. Workers, travelers, and patients do not like a polluted and disorganized surroundings. This research showed that cleaning services is highly valued by many people across organizations and settings, even in comparison with other professions.

In short, end users across all sectors examined the value of the work of cleaners as much as they value the work of professional staff, especially on healthcare. However, cleaners should work hard to ensure that they satisfy the quality definition of customers about a clean, well-maintained, and sterile environment.