

SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN PUBLIC SERVICE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES BY STATISTICS SOUTH AFRICA

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ABSTRACT

It is the implementation of laws and the actual provision of services and products that constitutes governance. The programmes of government should thus contribute towards an enhanced quality of life for all. This implies that the outcomes of public administration are aimed at service delivery and the improvement of the general welfare of the people.

The *Batho Pele White Paper* states that the South African Public Service will be judged by one criterion: its effectiveness in delivering services that meet the basic needs of all South African citizens, and the aim of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the principles of the *Batho Pele White Paper*, as a definitive government regulation on service delivery, by the South African public service; specifically by Statistics SA.

INTRODUCTION

The Graeco-Christian perspective on the role of the state essentially argues that the ultimate purpose of the state is to promote the common good. This role includes protection being offered by the accepted governing body, as in exchange for being governed and protected, citizens expect the governing body to maintain an orderly community and protect their interests. Governing institutions thus deliver services because citizens are unable to satisfy all their own needs and the activities of public administration are the logical consequences of the practice of service delivery from the earliest times.

Government and the activities it undertakes to deliver services are the result of political dynamics. Governance is the maintenance of law and order, the defence of society against external enemies and the advancement of what is thought to be the welfare of the group, community, society or state itself. Government is thus responsible for making laws, ensuring that there are institutions to implement its laws, and providing the services and products that these laws prescribe. It is the implementation of laws and the actual provision of services and products that constitutes governance.

The programmes of government should thus contribute towards an enhanced quality of life for all. This implies that the outcomes of public administration are aimed at service delivery and the improvement of the general welfare of the people.

POLICY FRAMEWORK FOR PUBLIC SECTOR SERVICE DELIVERY

In order to implement South Africa's *Reconstruction and Development Programme* (RDP) and its *Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy* (GEAR), government has released a number of White Papers that have bearing on the transformation of the South African public service, with the aim of making the public service more efficient, effective and economical. One of the most important policy documents is the *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery*, or the *Batho Pele White Paper* of 1997 (Notice No. 1459 of 1997). 'Batho Pele' is Sesotho for 'People First' and this title was derived from the motto adopted by the post-1994 public service: 'Service to the People' (Hilliard & Msaseni 2000: 66).

The *Batho Pele White Paper* (Sect. 1.1.1.) states that the South African Public Service will be judged by one criterion: its effectiveness in delivering services that meet the basic needs of all South African citizens. This is emphasised by the following statement: "Public services are not a privilege in a civilised and democratic society, they are a legitimate expectation."

The aim of this study was to evaluate the implementation of the principles of the *Batho Pele White Paper*, as a definitive government regulation on service delivery by the South African public service; specifically by Statistics SA, as a South African government department, or public institution.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Statistics SA aims to produce timely, accurate and accessible official statistics to help advance South African economic growth, development and democracy (<http://www.statssa.gov.za/default2.asp>). Statistical data and information can assist in administering all the generic functions of public administration, namely policy-making; financing; personnel provision and use; organising; determining work procedures and methods; and controlling (Cloete 1998: 86 cf. Pillay 2000: 35). However, the statistical products of Statistics SA are indispensable in especially the policy-making and planning activities of government, government departments, and other public, as well as private institutions. As it has been established that the statistical data and information produced by Statistics SA inform the generic functions of public administration, it can be

accepted that the statistical products of Statistics SA also have a considerable contribution to make towards improved service delivery in the South African public service. It is after all, bearing in mind the definition that public administration is the type of administration that is involved in the conduct of communal or public affairs by the various governmental and other public bodies, efficiency in policy-making; financing; personnel provision and use; organising; determining work procedures and methods; and controlling that will assist in enhancing public service delivery.

This study addresses perceptions displayed by employees at the Head Office of Statistics SA on the extent to which the institution is implementing the principles of *Batho Pele*, through their completion of a questionnaire. Statistics SA was selected for the study, because of its encompassing role as public institution. Statistics SA collects, processes, analyses and publishes economic, social and population statistics. The institution has no direct policy responsibility; however, the data and information it distributes, support policy decisions made by government, the private sector and civil society. Herein then lies the potential of Statistics SA to make a major contribution to the improvement of service delivery in South Africa. Past assessments of service delivery by South African public institutions have also tended to focus only on institutions that serve the public as primary customer, often neglecting to address governmental and other public, as well as private institutions as customers. That government is the primary customer of Statistics SA, serves as a reminder that in addressing the *Batho Pele White Paper* principles, public institutions should not be so focussed on the service delivery needs of external (individual) customers, that they neglect the needs of customers internal to the public service.

The term customer is used interchangeably with the term citizen throughout the *Batho Pele White Paper*. It is however stated that not only the members of society are customers, national and provincial departments have various internal customers such as components and staff within their own organisations, as well as other departments and institutions to whom they provide a service (Du Toit *et al.* 2002: 307). A customer of Statistics SA, for example, can thus be classified as any user/receiver of any product or service provided by Statistics SA. This classification would then include individuals or components both internal and external to Statistics SA, government or government departments, as well as other public or private institutions.

The *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (section 239(b)(ii)) states that the term organ of state includes any institution exercising a public power of performing a public function in terms of the Constitution or any legislation. The classification of Statistics SA as organisational component in terms of Schedule 3 of the *Public Service Act*, 1994 thus effects the constitutional entrenchment of Statistics SA's status as an organ of state, while its legislative mandate was awarded constitutional entrenchment by the adoption of the *Statistics Act*, 1999 (Act 66 of 1976).

In the *Statistics Act*, 1999 the role of Statistics SA is defined as providing statistical information to organs of state, businesses, other institutions and the general public for planning, decision making, monitoring and assessment of policies. Further functions of Statistics SA are to:

- promote co-ordination among statistical producers in South Africa in order to advance the quality, consistency, comparability and optimum use of official statistics and to avoid unnecessary duplication;
- provide statistical advice to government departments; and
- liaise with the statistical agencies of other countries.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE *BATHO PELE* PRINCIPLES

Consultation

Through communication, government ensures that it is not pursuing its own agenda, but rather the general welfare of the broader population, by effecting the democratic principle of encouraging the public to participate in policy-making (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (section 195(1)(e)) *cf.* (Guan 1997: 176-199). One of the most basic reasons for the public service undertaking consultation is that consensus building should be present in almost all public endeavours (Dodoo 1997: 115). Another outcome of participation is that it adds to the legitimacy of policy and prevents resistance to policies (De Vries 1997: 161).

In the Statistics SA service delivery improvement programme, a number of consultation arrangements are discussed, forming part of addressing the *Batho Pele White Paper* principle of consulting the users of services, described by section 4.1 of the *Batho Pele White Paper*. The following is a list of existing user consultation arrangements (Statistics SA 2001c: 9-10):

- advisory councils;
- Statistics Council;
- user consultation workshops;
- provincial users consultation workshops;
- collaboration and partnership initiatives with stakeholders;
- forum of South African Directors-General; and
- provincial offices.

As mentioned, the study also addresses perceptions displayed by employees at the Head Office of Statistics SA on the extent to which the institution is implementing the principles of *Batho Pele*. The issues addressed by way of a questionnaire were selected on the grounds of their direct bearing on the theme of the implementation of the principles of the *Batho Pele White Paper* by Statistics SA. For the completion of the questionnaire, staff members were selected as participants on the grounds of their being situated in sections of the Head Office of Statistics SA regarded as being located closest to the actual point of service delivery, by the time of completion of the questionnaire (April 2002), or on the grounds of their being the employees who are in contact with customers most often.

Despite the number of user consultation arrangements listed in the Statistics SA service delivery improvement plan, there were a number of employees (18,5%) who disagreed with the statement that customers are consulted on a regular basis on what their

needs are. The majority of respondents (81,5%) did however agree that the customers of Statistics SA are consulted on a regular basis on what their needs are.

It is evident that employees' commitment to increased efficiency and effectiveness has not yet been utilised to the full, as 62,9% of respondents indicated that they were not consulted on how to improve customer service. 37,0% of employees differed by stating that they were in fact consulted on how to improve customer service.

The question needs to be asked constantly how service delivery can be improved. It is especially important that those who are closest to the point of service delivery be asked how to improve performance, (Mitchell 1991: 72) whilst offering visible support and encouragement (Fourie 1998: 231).

Setting service standards

Setting targets is normally part of the corporate planning cycle. The corporate plan and the targets that are set should involve the collective efforts of a wide cross section of employees so as to ensure broad ownership of and commitment to the plan and the targets. The plan should review past performance against agreed upon targets, analyse prospects for the future, review available options and propose a broad strategy for the future (Doodoo 1997: 120).

The process poses challenges and requires that service delivery standards be included in an effective performance management system. The statement is further made that using performance measures set during the planning stage will help to monitor improvement in service delivery (Statistics SA 2001c: 14).

The focus of the performance measures used in Statistics SA is to determine the extent to which the institution progresses towards achieving set performance targets, by monitoring quality, quantity, access, and timeliness (Statistics SA 2001c: 14):

- Quantity measures the number of statistical outputs produced.
- Timeliness measures whether the outputs are released within the expected time-frame.
- Access measures how the statistical outputs are made available and disseminated, and the number of users who receive them. The aim is to increase the number of users who access the outputs thereby ultimately increasing usage of statistics.
- The quality of statistical services is measured by conducting user satisfaction surveys that have the potential to show the level of user satisfaction with the services provided. Attempts to use a predetermined set of quality indicators such as adhering to international standards and having the right sample size have not been successful as such indicators have proved to be insufficient and often debatable.

All employees confirmed that they know exactly what is expected of them according to service delivery standards of quality, quantity, time and cost. Results showed that 85,2% of respondents agreed with this statement completely, while 14,8% agreed to some extent. Internal communication of service delivery standards could thus be deemed successful.

Out of the total number of respondents, 40,7% indicated that they experienced the opposite of what is generally advised in terms of setting standards, i.e. that employees have to be involved in the process – they stated that they were not involved in setting service delivery standards, while 59,2% differed by expressing that they were involved in the process. The importance of involving employees in the setting of standards lies therein that besides the creation of awareness of standards, assurance is obtained of employee agreement with standards, as employees ultimately set the standards themselves. Employee involvement in the setting of standards thus ensures ownership of the standards, responsibility being taken for actions and pride in a process jointly established by employees.

Even though 40,7% of employees indicated that they were not involved in setting service delivery standards, a much higher percentage of 85,1% regarded service delivery standards as being challenging but realistic. Only 14,8% of employees disagreed.

Even though the greater majority of employees (85,1%) regard service delivery standards as being challenging but realistic, a smaller percentage (70,3%) of respondents gave an indication that their performance according to service delivery standards is monitored regularly. Some 29,6% of employees made it known that their performance according to service delivery standards is not monitored regularly. The monitoring of standards is essential not only to expose deviations, but to ensure that targets set out in official policy documentation, such as the *Statistics Act, 1999* and the departmental budget, are met.

Increasing access

Management has to set targets for increasing access to services for existing, new and previously disadvantaged groups, giving effect to the constitutional principle of service being provided impartially, fairly, equitable and without bias (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996* (Act 108 of 1996) (section 195(1)(d)). Barriers (physical, distance, or cultural) that could prevent full access to services have to be identified and programmes have to be set for removing these barriers. Time frames have to be set for the implementation of programmes and the progress thereof monitored. Partners have to be identified who can assist in eliminating barriers and increasing the availability of services. Efforts have to be coordinated with partners and results monitored (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2000/2001: 6-7).

In the Statistics SA service delivery improvement programme, a number of forms and channels of service delivery are discussed, forming part of implementing the principle of increasing access as described by section 4.3 of the *Batho Pele White Paper*. The existing forms and channels of service delivery utilised by Statistics SA are (Statistics SA 2001c: 12):

- print and electronic media;
- data on diskettes and CD-ROMs;
- the Statistics SA website, which provides the following customer services:
 - on-line services and products;
 - an on-line ordering facility;

- a searchable database;
- an on-line archive;
- contact details of all the provincial offices and the head office; and the
- library.

Forming part of implementing the principle of increasing access as described by section 4.3 of the *Batho Pele White Paper*, is a discussion in the Statistics SA service delivery improvement programme of a number strategies to remove barriers to access to services and ensure optimal utilisation of statistics services in South Africa, ensuring that the democratic requirement is satisfied that policy decisions taken are in deed based on the true and accurate composition of society and the tendencies prevalent in it. The strategies identified are (Statistics SA 2001c: 11):

- statistical literacy training;
- establishment of a national statistics system (NSS); and
- increasing and diversifying marketing initiatives.

The above mentioned discussion can be regarded as showing the commitment of Statistics South Africa to implementing the *Batho Pele* principle of increased access. However, appraisal of Statistics SA's implementation of the *Batho Pele White Paper* principle of increasing access (Section 4.3 of the *Batho Pele White Paper*) was further examined through the before mentioned questionnaire.

A majority, i.e. 85,1% of employees indicated that they are aware of targets set by Statistics SA for increasing access to its services for all customers. Only 14,8% of respondents believed that this was not true.

Ensuring courtesy

Relating to, amongst others the constitutional principle of human dignity (Section 10), the most important traits of the public employee should be total commitment or loyalty to the public good, strict avoidance of conflict of interests, and self-restraint. The public servant should maintain a balance between commitment to the public good and obedience to administrative and political superiors (Dror 1997: 17).

The performance of employees who deal directly with customers has to be monitored continuously and performance that falls below specified standards should not be tolerated. Service delivery and customer care should be included in all training programmes. Managers have to demonstrate that they are personally committed to the ideals of the *Batho Pele White Paper* by encouraging, monitoring and enforcing good customer care (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000a: 35).

Treating customers with courtesy and politeness should be covered in a code of conduct. Codes of conduct should address standards of courtesy and adherence to the codes must be monitored regularly, which includes accessible complaints handling systems being put in place (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000a: 35). The results of this measurement should be used in devising steps to address under-performance.

Courtesy is related to ethical behaviour, as highlighted in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (section 195(1)(a)). Public employees' conduct should be above reproach in the exercise of their official duties. They should be free from vested, selfish interests and are therefore expected to display altruistic behaviour. One of the essential qualities a public employee should possess is integrity, ensuring that public interest is placed above own interest, a principle without which the South African democracy can not expect to continue advancing in the next decade and beyond (Jean-Pierre 1997: 565-572).

Keeping in mind that the majority of respondents indicated that they were not consulted on how to improve service delivery, the statement can be made that not only should employees be encouraged to suggest ways of improving customer service, but these suggestions should also be taken to heart. The manager should ensure that he/she receives feedback, both positive and negative, on the level and quality of services being provided at the frontline. Indicators also have to be devised to measure customers' perceptions of courtesy, as well as steps taken to address the problems identified (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2000/2001: 7-8).

All employees confirmed that they treat the customers of Statistics SA with respect and courtesy, encompassing the constitutional requirements of equality and culture (Sections 9, 30 and 31). The number of respondents agreeing with this statement completely was 96,3%, while only 3,7% agreed to some extent. The majority of Statistics SA employees thus understand their role as public servants, that is not as officials, but servants of the public, the citizens, or the voters as source of the mandate of government.

A majority of 66,6% of employees confirmed that their conduct towards customers is monitored regularly, while 33,3% of respondents indicated that this was not true in their case. Even though all employees indicated that they treat all customers of Statistics SA with respect and courtesy, the answers of 18,5% of respondents implied that their conduct towards customers is definitely not monitored regularly, thus negating the requirement of quality control.

Providing more and better information

Kaul (1996: 149) emphasises the necessity for accurate and unbiased reporting, as this strengthens the climate of openness and public accountability, with the relationship between accountability and transparency also reaffirmed by the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (Section 195(1)(f & g)). Information should be provided in a manner that is most suited to the needs of the particular users of a service and at intervals most convenient and useful to these users. The following is an appraisal of Statistics SA's implementation of the principle of providing more and better information, as incorporated under section 4.5 of the *Batho Pele White Paper*.

A majority of 59,2% of respondents were of the opinion that all customers of Statistics SA are aware of what services the institution delivers and how to go about accessing them, while 40,7% of employees disagreed. A majority of 70,4% of respondents were of the opinion that customers are kept updated on changes in Statistics SA and its services,

with 55,6% of them just agreeing to some extent. A minority of 29,6% of employees seem to believe that customers are not kept updated on changes in the institution and its services.

Existing and potential customers have to be consulted on what information they require and how this can best be provided. Statistics SA is still to draft, publish and disseminate a service commitment charter covering aspects customers were consulted about. The charter should be readily available to all customers. Checks have to be put in place for ensuring that information is reaching and being properly interpreted by all those who need to see it (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2000/2001: 8-9).

Increasing openness and transparency

Being open and transparent implies letting customers know how an institution is achieving the promised standards of service delivery as service provider and how non-delivery is addressed. This would for example entail annual reports to customers, as well as regular progress reports, basically providing customers with any and all information they are entitled to receive. Information to be included in an annual report is the number of employees, what the performance was measured against targets for improved service delivery, financial savings, and increased efficiency. Resources consumed, income received, and targets for the following year should also be addressed and the report must be widely published (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000a: 37 *cf.* Hummel 1994: 493).

Ngouo (1997: 490) is of the opinion that developing a culture of transparency in the public service guards against antisocial and avaricious activities, while Guan (1997: 167-170) is convinced that transparency “helps to keep the public service clean, effective, and free from nepotism and corruption”; aspects receiving increasing attention as the South African public service aims to nurture democratic service delivery.

Part of the process of openness and transparency is accountability (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (section 195(1)(f)). Kaul (1996: 134) believes that accountability is emphasised to ensure that monitoring systems are strengthened. Mountfield (1997: 74) provides a distinction between accountability and responsibility, where accountability is defined as the obligation on political office-bearers to explain to the legislature “what went wrong”, what action has been taken to correct it, as well as prevent it from happening again. Accountability is subsequently defined as taking the blame as well as facing the political consequences.

Increasing openness and transparency and providing more and better information are intended to not only benefit the customer, but also the institution. Increased numbers of access points to services relieve pressure on existing service points. Measures for service delivery and dealing with informed customers are less time-consuming than attempting to satisfy the needs of uninformed customers. However, implementation of the two principles mentioned does not automatically eliminate mistakes. The *Batho Pele White Paper* principle dealing with the consequences of something going wrong in the implementation of any of the other principles is remedying mistakes and failures, discussed below.

Remedying mistakes and failures

The principle of remedying mistakes and failures is also known as recovery. Recovery implies acknowledging that the institution made a mistake, apologising, rectifying the mistake, and doing more than is required or expected. Customers are more likely to accept that the institution cares about them if the institution endeavours to remedy mistakes as soon as possible after they occurred (Hessler 1991: 55-56). Appraisal of Statistics SA's implementation of the *Batho Pele White Paper* principle of remedying mistakes and failures yielded the following results.

For the first time the response of the majority of employees was to disagree with a statement made in the questionnaire. A majority of 51,5% of employees disagreed with the statement that Statistics SA is measuring customer satisfaction. As opposed to this, 48,1% of employees believe that Statistics SA is indeed measuring customer satisfaction. From the response of the majority of employees, it seems that Statistics SA is not yet testing customer satisfaction by way of e.g. surveys, or comment cards. However, the fact that almost half of employees are of the opinion that Statistics SA is indeed measuring customer satisfaction, could point to a situation where such measuring may have been undertaken, but that those employees disagreeing with the statement are not aware of it. If this is the case, then the existence and functioning of customer satisfaction measurement has not been publicised widely enough within the institution.

Even though a majority of 51,8% of employees disagreed with the statement that Statistics SA is measuring customer satisfaction, 55,5% of them are aware of the system through which customers can register complaints. A minority of 44,4% of respondents are not aware of the existence of such a system. It stands to reason that if customer satisfaction is measured, possible problems in service delivery could be anticipated, so that it is not necessary for a dissatisfied customer to register a complaint before someone becomes aware of a problem.

The majority (55,5%) of employees confirmed that Statistics SA has a system in place through which customers can register complaints. The effectiveness of this system was verified by the same percentage of respondents agreeing with the statement that complaints are referred to the relevant official and handled swiftly. Again the complement of respondents disagreeing with the statement was 44,4%. As mentioned before, if an attempt is made to measure customer satisfaction, the number of complaints regarding service delivery should decrease, as possible problems could be anticipated before they actually arise. However, measuring customer satisfaction will not automatically eliminate all potential problems. The same applies in the implementation of the other *Batho Pele White Paper* principles. The successful implementation of the principles of consulting the users of services, setting service standards, increasing access, ensuring courtesy, providing more and better information, and increasing openness and transparency will not automatically eliminate the need for remedying mistakes and failures.

Once more confirming the effectiveness of Statistics SA's customer complaints system, an even larger majority of employees (62,9%) agreed that complaints about service delivery in Statistics SA effect changes which prevent the same mistakes from being made again. Only 37% of respondents did not agree.

The links between the necessity for remedying mistakes and failures and the other *Batho Pele White Paper* principles become apparent again when the last principle is considered. The statement could be made that if employees are dedicated to providing customers with the best possible value for money, mistakes and failures could decrease. However, the fact has to be reiterated that even though the *Batho Pele White Paper* principles are inseparable, the successful implementation of one of the principles, does not necessarily guarantee the successful implementation of the next.

Getting the best possible value for money

Concentrating on improving effectiveness and efficiency (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Act 108 of 1996) (section 195(1)(b)) where no additional resources are required could be useful, but it would be more useful to aim at achieving the same or improved quality with fewer resources. Savings should also be ploughed back into improving services (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000a: 43). Addressing the *Batho Pele White Paper* principle of best value immediately involves budgeting, such as matching the budget with programmes for improved service delivery and keeping within the budget. Public institutions need to re-evaluate the unit costs of their services and aim to lower prices to a level most acceptable to the customer.

Commitment to increased efficiency and effectiveness for improved service delivery in Statistics SA was displayed by an overwhelming 92,6% of employees stating that they always aim to improve service delivery in their workplace, by e.g. undergoing service delivery related training. Only 7,4% admitted to the opposite; the majority of employees thus displaying a clear commitment to the constant improvement of service delivery.

Besides being related to the attitude of employees and being a combination of other *Batho Pele White Paper* principles, the principle of value for money should be considered against the background of the following statement. In the public sector the endeavour should always be for action which will lead to the improvement of the quality of service rendered by public institutions. The endeavour should be for efficient administration in the form of goal realisation, the thrifty utilisation of resources and the equitable division of resources among groups and programmes (Thornhill & Hanekom 1995: 195).

Seen against the clear commitment of the majority (92,6%) of employees to improved service delivery, the statement could be made that more employees should have been exposed to capacity building and development for increased efficiency and effectiveness. However, just more than half (55,5%) of respondents indicated that they have or are scheduled to receive service delivery related training, but this was not the case for the complement of 44,4% of employees.

The commitment of the majority of employees to increased efficiency and effectiveness was also emphasised by the positive acceptance of institutional changes, a rare trait amongst employees in a relatively young democracy such as South Africa. The majority (70,3%) of employees indicated that they believe that the organisational transformation and restructuring envisaged for Statistics SA will improve service delivery, whilst only 29,6% of respondents disagreed. As the majority of employees have indicated their com-

mitment to improved service delivery, the percentage of respondents stating that the organisational transformation and restructuring envisaged for Statistics SA will not improve service delivery, could be attributed to factors such as a resistance to change and fear of the unknown.

Service to the people and the customer concept

As a customer can be defined as a person who buys goods or services and a client as the user of a service (The Oxford Dictionary and Thesaurus 1995: 265, 353), it should be realised that customers of public institutions can be divided into various categories. Public institutions may serve direct or indirect customers, primary or secondary customers or even internal or external customers. The main issue is that not only members of the public are customers of public institutions, but also colleagues, other departments, as well as suppliers (KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000a: 31). Institutions that are highly regarded in terms of customer service are those where extraordinary customer relations are practised throughout the institution, regardless of whether the customer is outside the institution or is an internal customer (Hessler 1991: 57).

The *Batho Pele White Paper* (Section 1.3.3) states that to treat citizens as customers implies:

- listening to their views and taking account of them in making decisions about what services should be provided;
- treating them with consideration and respect;
- making sure that service is always of the highest quality; and
- responding swiftly and sympathetically when standards of service fall below the promised level.

One of the recommendations proposed in terms of implementation of the *Batho Pele* principles, is greater customer care. Especially in terms of internal customers.

CUSTOMER CARE

The customer care or service approach as part of the “quality movement”, is designed to improve relationships with and ways of handling customers. The aim, similar to that of a quality improvement programme, is to consider the customer's perception of the service and to use those perceptions as a base point from which to make improvements (Baines 1996).

The best customer-related programmes go further than a simple concentration on the customer and recognise the fact that, especially in large organisations, intermediate departments or sections involved in the supply of a service are themselves customers of the primary providers. There is a front line in which employees have direct contact with the final receivers of the service, and then a series of interfaces within the organisation where one employee (or a team) provides an internal service to another. There is thus a customer chain which stretches back from the end (external) customer to the point at which the product or service is designed and specified. The front-line service can only

be improved and maintained if all the other service points are improved and maintained in support. The front-line service is the nearest to the customer, but it has to be borne in mind that this service is not necessarily the largest determinant of perceived good service. The aim is to get employees to accept "ownership" of services and problems that arise in delivering them and to accept responsibility for improving the services and solving those problems. The issue of ownership relates to the principle mentioned earlier that South African public servants should embrace this role of theirs, as opposed to viewing themselves as public officials (Baines 1996).

Most customer-care training is targeted on customer-facing employees. This is understandable, since this is regarded as the point of service delivery. The danger in this approach is that customer care becomes a simple tactical issue when, it should in fact be strategic. Customer care is a management issue. It should be part of an overall organisational strategy, not a "bolt-on" benefit which can be won through a short training course. So it has to start at the top, i.e. management. Genuine customer care is a by-product of internal relationships and culture. The way customers are treated is closely allied to the way employees feel about their jobs and the situation in which they do them. This atmosphere, which is a feature of every organisation, is reflected at all levels but is cascaded from the top. Hence, as stated earlier, it is a management issue. Customer satisfaction is unlikely to happen by chance and the effective manager ensures that it never is left up to chance (Morris 1996).

Well-managed organisations commit time and resources to clarifying their vision and mission. Invariably, their mission statements contain reference to customers, with the best ones reinforcing the place of internal, as well as external, ones. While the statement is important, the culture which is required to support it is crucial. Effective managers focus on producing a caring culture for all the stakeholders involved in the achievement of mission. And, since culture is a reflection of behaviour, words are not enough. The manager must be prepared to "walk the talk" (Morris 1996).

Management behaviour at all levels is a key element of effective customer care. For better or worse, managers become role models for their teams. Their behaviour towards their employees, or internal customers, will be reproduced by those same employees in their dealings with their customers. It matters little that those dealings may be with colleagues. Internal care eventually has a rippling effect on customer-facing employees. The manager should not believe that he/she has no impact on customer care because he/she never has any contact with customers (Morris 1996).

As mentioned before, an inverted pyramid is a useful way in which to assess the role of top persons in achieving a customer-focused organisation. Managers support the efforts of their entire team while having little direct customer contact, in most cases. Their job is to commit their organisation to a customer-satisfaction mission and empower their team to deliver it. Once the mission is agreed upon, it has to be communicated both clearly and regularly. It must become a belief and value for the organisation rather than the latest initiative or bright idea from management. This will only happen when management behaviour towards internal customers and reinforcement of standards at all levels are seen to happen (Morris 1996).

The ultimate challenge for organisations, and therefore for managers, is to exceed their customers' expectation regarding service. But this is only half of the problem. Unless managers can motivate their teams to want to give the necessary level of service, nothing will change. Genuine commitment from managers is highlighted by behaviour and is quickly apparent to employees (Morris 1996).

Statements about improved customer care are cosmetic until the organisational vision and mission, plus the beliefs and values that underpin the culture, become truly customer centred. Customer care training should target real understanding of customer requirements. This means involving managers in research aimed at understanding both internal and external customer views. Only by taking part can employees really begin to appreciate the situation (Baily 1996).

CONCLUSION

Public institutions should constantly strive towards improving their service delivery. There is no such thing as 'arriving' when it comes to service delivery. It is also important to remember that customer expectations do not stand still. What was yesterday's delightful surprise is today's norm.

Managers should aim inspire the following way of thinking about service delivery and specifically customer care in their staff:

- What the customer perceives and needs is real, not policies, rules and regulations.
- Don't try to guess what customers want, ask them.
- Attitude is the first key to customer satisfaction. Behaviour is a choice.
- Customers are not interruptions of work, they are the reason for it.
- Customers are not always right, but they are always... the customer.
- Employees can enjoy their job. Not because it is easy. Not because there are no difficult people or frustrations. But because they are professionals.

Finally managers need to keep the following in mind themselves:

- Do not think of them as customers, think of them as people.
- Do not tell customers about institutional problems, resolve theirs.
- Give employees the motive, and their skills might be surprising.
- Managers cannot force employees to give customer care.

And above all, all institutions claiming to have attained efficiency in service delivery, need to remember that: Customer care is not about meeting expectations, but about exceeding them.

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