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QUALITY SERVICE DELIVERY THROUGH CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

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ABSTRACT

Users of services judge the quality of services according to two criteria: firstly whether services assist them to achieve the outcomes they aspire to and secondly whether services are delivered in ways which empower them. The argument is made that for services to meet the aspirations of customers, customers themselves need to be involved in improving them.

Recognising the importance of customers' judgements of service delivery has been embraced by the Batho Pele principles of putting people first, consultation and redress, as a culmination firstly of the desired effect of services on customers and the manner in which services are provided, as well as describing what the input-process-relationship should be between customer views and service quality. The principle of quality is consequently examined as aspiring to meet what customers expect, as opposed to merely meeting specifications.

If quality management is approached as cyclical in nature, public institutions will realise that evaluation should be based on customer expectations, if they aim to become institutions that are truly responsive to people's needs. If public institutions in this way allow customer expectations to inform standards, the principle will be adhered to that quality is what the customer says it is.

INTRODUCTION

Thinking about the why's and wherefore's of service delivery usually leads one to the concept of the general welfare, which most exponents interpret as the greatest measure of spiritual and material wellbeing of people, or on a basic level, the greatest happiness of the greatest number. The same line of thinking about the duty of the state has researchers to believe that the state renders services to its citizens because it owes them services; that services are due to the citizens by virtue of the rights they hold, as the functions of the state and the rights of its citizens can not be separated. Service delivery

by the state is thus not only necessary for the enjoyment of rights, but also secures those rights and the conclusion can hence be drawn that service delivery is not only a consequence of the rights of persons, it is simultaneously integral to the rights of persons.

THE ROLE OF THE STATE

As regards the rights of persons, a distinction can be made between natural socio-economic, and third generation rights. Examples of natural rights are those to life, liberty, property and fair trial, as well as freedom of movement, association and speech. Socio-economic rights are extensions of natural rights and examples are the right to employment, education, medical care, and an adequate living standard. The rights to peace, development, and a clean environment are examples of third-generation rights. Rights are vested in individuals, but can extend to groups as far as locus is concerned. As to the origin of these rights, they derive from the theory of innateness; rights are inherent in humans being human. Freysen (1999: 60) then speculates that this innateness could thus be the basis of a citizen's ownership of services.

Social contract theory is based on the notion of inalienable human rights and hence on consent. An answer to the question of the basis for government owing its authority to the citizens is found in the concept of popular sovereignty, a corollary to the social contract. Freysen (1999: 60) concludes that the purpose of the state is to promote self-development of the individual and hence the community.

To conceptualise the term service delivery, it is thus necessary to recap the goals and objectives of government. The original goals of government may be summarised as the maintenance of law and order and the protection of the life and property of the individual. The social welfare goal of government is the creation of social security through the provision of social welfare services by government, while government's economic welfare goal entails creating the circumstances in which individuals may be able to care for their own social well-being.

The role of government could thus be defined in terms of its goals. Based on the above discussion, the goals of the modern state would be based on a democratic political system, where the Rule of Law applies, where rational human rights are protected by the constitution, and where governmental interference in the social and economic life of the individual is limited to the utmost minimum; *i.e.* the creation of a good quality of life for all citizens.

To understand the service delivery responsibility of government, it is important to consider the point of view of Dawson (1929: 220) that government departments ultimately exist primarily to render a service to the community.

SERVICE DELIVERY AS A STATE RESPONSIBILITY

Service can be defined as the performance of work or duty by an official or an act of helping others, or power to control or make use of resources, or an organisation or system providing the public with something useful or necessary (The Universal Dictionary 1961: 1394 – 1395). The act of delivery can be defined as producing or performing, handing over, taking goods to the intended recipient, or producing results as promised or expected (The Universal Dictionary 1961: 413). These definitions are adopted by Riekert (2001: 90), arriving at a combined definition which reads as follows: "Service delivery is concerned with the provision of a product or service, by a government or government body to a community that it was promised to, or which is expected by that community".

Hanekom *et al.* (1987: 11) are of the opinion that the real core of public administration is the basic services performed for the public, such as policing and the protection of property. Cloete (1978: ii) adds that governmental institutions are continuously called upon to render with even greater intensity, a larger number of public services.

To execute their functions in order to realise their goals and objectives, governments are bound to supply and deliver public goods and services to their communities. Du Toit et al. (2002: 24) are of the opinion that services refer to the results emanating from the execution of a variety of functions or processes, while public services are considered to be some of the most tangible outputs of administrative agencies (Sharkansky 1975: 334). Service delivery is defined in the Public Administration Dictionary as the provision of public activities, benefits or satisfactions (Fox & Meyer 1995: 118). In the context of governance, consumers (or customers) are those who use the services and products delivered and provided by government institutions (Fox *et al.* 1991: 22).

Customers as the users of services are as concerned about the nature of services as they are about what those services can help them achieve. Services should be a means to and end and that end is a better quality of life.

A BETTER LIFE THROUGH QUALITY SERVICES

Thornhill & Hanekom (1995: 195) state that 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 and Mitchell (1991: 72) supports this by adding that public institutions should constantly strive towards improving their service delivery. There is no such thing as 'arriving' when it comes to service delivery.

Gilbert (2004: 7) defines quality as the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bear on its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. This definition can be summarised as consistent conformance to customers' expectations, as opposed to fitness for purpose. Deming (1986: 34) draws the same distinction by considering quality as "delighting the customer"; establishing a direct link to personal experience, as opposed to conformance to specification. Even though governments impose some services on people for the common good and ration others, the challenge of delighting the customer should lead to better treatment and possibly better outcomes than simply conforming to specification. If the users then are actively involved in developing specifications, the service is even more likely to at least meet expectations, if not actually to bring delight.

The primary objective of quality management is thus to create and maintain a system of practices and procedures that will assure that an institution's services satisfy its

customers. Grenier (1988: 1) is of the opinion that customer satisfaction is achieved by economically delivering services that meet customer requirements and Ovretveit (1992:2) describes quality as fully meeting the needs of users of a service, at the lowest possible cost to the institution, within the directives set by authorities.

At this point it is important to establish clarity on the customers that are referred to. Riekert (2001: 88) states that all citizens making use of a particular service are in fact customers and that a customer can be defined as a person with whom you must deal, or a person or institution who buys goods and services. The term customer is used interchangeably with the term citizen throughout the *White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery*, or the *Batho Pele White Paper* of 1997 (Notice No. 1459 of 1997) (herein after referred to as the *Batho Pele White Paper*).

QUALITY MANAGEMENT FOR IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

Based on the definition of quality established earlier, quality approaches with a customer focus are emphasised, rather than approaches like quality assurance, which can be defined as the prevention of quality problems through planned and systematic activities, emphasising systems and procedures, rather than outputs or outcomes. In effect the quality assurance approach means that perfect systems can be developed – to produce goods or services that nobody wants or needs (Oakland 1989:10).

Customer focussed quality approaches involve programmes and actions which emphasise the importance of the customer – users, citizens and communities as opposed to the service. Under these approaches programmes range from conventional customer-care training to all services that are labelled as "customer first".

Total Quality Management (TQM) is one such philosophy that aims to inspire the behaviour and interactions of people in work situations, through their attitudes, aspirations and motivations, to produce quality service (Pike & Barnes 1996: 54). The main concern in TQM is self-improvement and group-improvement through team building and commitment to more efficient working practices and all three of the basic TQM models (process analysis, integrated and charismatic) focus on the customer in order to determine what actions the institution should take in order to improve itself. TQM aims to gradually change people's behaviour towards the tasks they perform and their attitude towards other people. TQM can thus be summarised as a process of change with the following characteristics (Gilbert 2004: 1):

- focus on customer expectations;
- prevention of problems;
- building workforce commitment to quality; and
- open decision making.

In order to grasp the link between quality management and improved service delivery, it is essential to refer to the philosophy underpinning quality management – continual improvement, and the cultural change which it can bring about, meaning that the desire is always to firstly perform better than the specification and secondly to always persist in improving on own past performance (Gaster & Squires 2003: 321).

QUALITY MANAGEMENT AS A PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Apart from quality being essential to the survival and growth of any institution, the philosophy of continuous improvement can aid the public service in fulfilling its service delivery or welfare function in that it addresses the management challenge of increased outputs with limited means to meet the ever-increasing needs of society.

The methodology of continuous improvement involves analysing the pattern of demand for a service, paying particular attention to understanding the causes of successes and failures. An improvement statement is then prepared using data such as public consultation results and complaints, as well as internal data and information. This identifies variations and indicates what is to be improved, such as reducing task time or error rate. Performance measures also need to be developed for these factors. The entire system or process is to be examined, that is, from the effects of inputs on the system to the results as outputs and the level and nature of satisfaction of customers as feedback. The system is to be flowcharted and redesigned on the basis of an analysis of which actions are essential and which could be changed or omitted. The effects are monitored using agreed performance measures. From then on the process is repeated so that improvement is indeed continuous. In terms of feedback, the size of the gap between expectations (as input) and experience (with output) is what produces high, medium or low levels of satisfaction with service quality. When aiming to determine what influences customer satisfaction, research has shown that customers as service users judge the quality of services according to two criteria: firstly whether the services will help them achieve the outcomes they aspire to, and secondly whether services are delivered in ways that empower them (Evers *et al*. 1997:78).

If the before mentioned definition of quality as consistent conformance to customers' expectations is considered, determining the quality of a service could be as simple as asking customers regularly how satisfied they are (Gilbert 2004: 8). Thus, no public institution today should seek to assess the quality of services without drawing on the experience of those who use the services, as both government policy and good practice require those who use services to be consulted about and involved in their development and improvement. It is the experience of those who use the services that is the ultimate test of their quality and sustainability. Services, after all, exist for users – that is their prime purpose and function (Gaster & Squires 2003: 176).

In addition, users of services supplied by public institutions in a democracy are often empowered to act as regulators or to elect or appoint regulators to act for them. As taxpayers and voters, customers are also suppliers of economic and political resources. For this reason, the preferences and views of citizens as consumers may have important consequences for the functioning of public institutions (Schwella *et al*. 1996: 22). Therefore 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); with consensus building referring to a condition in which the majority of participants can live with the end result of what society decides will define sustainability (Warner 1997: 417) .

However, when aiming to implement the continuous improvement process by seeking customer feedback, public institutions should keep in mind that citizen involvement is not an end in itself, but rather a means of effecting the required changes in the outcome of services.

CURRENT POLICY MEASURES THAT SUPPORT CUSTOMER INVOLVEMENT

When asking what measures have been put in place for citizen or customer involvement in the South African public service, note has to be taken of Section C.1 of the *Public Service Regulations, 2001,* (Notice No. 21951 of 2001) which states that a service delivery improvement programme should:
- contain consultation arrangements with a department's actual and potential customers; and
- stipulate a system of mechanisms for complaints.

Furthermore, 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.

The treatment of citizens, as the users of public services, as customers will not be enforced successfully if customers are not consulted on an ongoing basis. Consequently, the *Batho Pele White Paper* requires that all users of public services be consulted about their needs, priorities and standard of services required (Riekert 2001: 84). The principle of consultation (*Batho Pele White Paper:* Section 4.1) requires that citizens be consulted about the level and quality of the service they receive and should, where possible, be given a choice about the services that are offered. Citizens should thus simply be asked what they need (Hilliard & Msaseni 2000: 68). This principle also calls for the consultation of the public on how products and services can be improved. Hence, through communication, government ensures that it is not pursuing its own agenda, but rather the general welfare of the broader population (Guan 1997: 176-199) and through consultation, clarity can also be obtained on what the average citizen considers affordable (Hilliard & Msaseni 2000: 68).

Citizen involvement requires some effort to build up credibility, confidence and equality (Beresford & Croft 1993: 36). Even if citizens as users are not involved in the design of the monitoring process, their views should still be canvassed as an essential part of quality management, because if services are to meet the aspirations of customers, they themselves need to be involved in evaluating and improving the services in question. In summary, to measure the quality of service delivery, customer feedback must be obtained and utilised,

as customer satisfaction must be the goal that drives quality assurance efforts (Gaster & Squires 2003: 95).

The principle of remedying mistakes and failures is also known as redress (*Batho Pele White Paper:* Section 4.7) and it calls for public service institutions to enable people to indicate when they are not entirely satisfied with a product or service and for the public institution to apologise, provide a full explanation and act swiftly to rectify mistakes. Redress further implies that citizens should, apart from a remedy, receive a sympathetic, positive response.

The argument is that governments are bound to make mistakes and corrective action hence needs to be taken when mistakes do occur. However, the importance lies in learning from past mistakes, so that they are not repeated (Edwards 1997: 238). The *Batho Pele White Paper* (Section 4.7) specifies that in remedying mistakes and failures a complaints system should be reviewed and improved regularly according to the following requirements:
- The public institution should be responsive to the real needs and justified expectations of the citizens.
- Mechanisms should be put in place for review and feedback.

The principle of remedying mistakes and failures is also known as recovery which implies acknowledging that the institution made a mistake, apologising, fixing the mistake, and doing more than is required or expected. Customers are more likely to feel that the institution cares about them if the institution endeavours to remedy mistakes as soon as possible after they occurred (Hessler 1991: 55-56), but in support of the principle of continuous improvement above all, complaints should be used to actually improve services (Pricewaterhouse Coopers 2000/2001: 10-11 *cf.* KwaZulu-Natal Provincial Administration 2000: 38).

IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY BEYOND *BATHO PELE*

No consensus exists on a definition of public sector quality. The most satisfying combination seems to be that of the four dimensions of quality: the technical (what?), the non-technical (how?), the environmental (where?), and the democratic dimension (for whom?). This means that a quality service needs to (Gaster & Squires 2003: 253):
- do what it was designed to do, meeting the requirements of those for whom it was designed;
- be provided in such a way that the relationship between those providing the service and those receiving it, makes the experience of the core service better or at least more acceptable;
- be provided in surroundings that are efficient and easy to understand and give the message to external and internal customers that they are valued; and
- involve citizens as customers from beginning to end.

A service that conforms to the abovementioned requirements has a good chance of being reliable, providing useful and relevant information, in a timely, accessible and

helpful manner. These characteristics, set within the four quality dimensions are some of the aspects of public services that have been shown to be highly valued by the public, providing a good starting point for analysing the present state of services.

A fundamental measure of quality is the satisfaction a customer experiences with a process and its outcome. The principle steps through which Six Sigma quality initiatives measure customer satisfaction are (Tennant 2001: 54):

- identify customers;
- clarify core processes and their relevance to customers;
- gain insight into current process and quality weaknesses;
- identify customer needs and convert them into requirements;
- transform requirements into actionable "Critical to Quality" (CTQ) characteristics; and
- monitor ongoing performance.

Six Sigma emphasises both general customer information and feedback, as well as highly specific information, to lead to firm CTQ specifications, which then drive quality improvement and the measurement of success. According to Six Sigma the key to success is to pay very careful attention to customer feedback. The raw, verbatim information gathered is termed the "voice of the customer" and one of the more complicated stages in a Six Sigma quality programme involves gathering a sufficient quantity of customer information of sufficient quality and then converting such material into sensible and useful conclusions (Kristensen *et al.* 2002: 281).

The main reason why institutions conduct any form of customer research is to find out how satisfied customers are. The aims of such an activity would generally be to quantify customer satisfaction, to look for areas of concern and to make a choice between alternatives in service features.

Excellent quality is associated with satisfied customers and customer satisfaction comes from fully meeting deep-seated customer needs and requirements. It is therefore vital to capture the essential characteristics of services that either directly or indirectly give rise to customer satisfaction, and to list these as well-defined customer needs and requirements for each process. This step can be difficult to carry out, since often customers themselves are not consciously aware of their own needs and requirements and it is important to fully explore all aspects of a process to locate every conceivable element that affects customer satisfaction. Major problems with service quality often arise because customer needs are overlooked or taken for granted. Safety and accuracy, for example, are always vital to good service and are critically important to almost every customer of any process, and failure to deliver as expected dramatically curbs customer satisfaction and hence, quality. For this reason, more institutions are realising that customer expectation can be surpassed by providing solutions to needs customers were not aware of or had no expectation of being met by the process (Fornell 1992: 13).

Customer needs and requirements such as "lack of queuing" in themselves do not generally align well with real process issues that are measurable and open to change and improvement. One of the difficult aspects of the Six Sigma approach is the appropriate translation of often intangible customer "wants" to firm and measurable

CTQ characteristics with defined numerical limits and targets. Only when an institution has arrived at a set of well-defined CTQs can the process of quality measurement and improvement begin in earnest. Scientific and repeatable measurement is the basis of the Six Sigma approach and it is necessary to determine a list of CTQ characteristics for the process that are not only measurable, but also actionable. Such customer needs as "speed" and "no queuing" must be converted into CTQs such as "takes no more than five minutes to be served" (Juhl et al. 2003: 329).

CONCLUSION

What is being advocated is that the South African public service will only be ensuring quality service delivery when it goes beyond a simple consumerist approach to where citizens are claiming their rightful place as consumers with a real and equal say in decisions which affect their lives. Because when asking the question whether continuous improvement is sufficient, the short answer is "no". There are instances when simply improving on existing processes is not sufficient. That is why public institutions must also foster innovation, so that new services can be developed and new ways of delivering them can be identified and put in place. There needs to be a willingness to respond to needs identified from the citizen perspective, not the institution's, and to develop new services or service delivery options to meet them.

The success of the Six Sigma approach to customer quality depends entirely upon the ability to link CTQs forward to potential process improvement and back to customer satisfaction. Only when this is achieved is it possible to action process change that can be both measured and guaranteed to have an impact on quality. If targets are measurable, it will be possible to determine how often they are not attained and perhaps also why. It will also be possible to change the process and measure improvement, but more importantly, the customer research conducted will have shown that this relates directly to customer need and thus directly affects satisfaction with the process and consequently overall quality.

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