

EMPLOYEES PERCEPTION ON IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

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Abstract

The study aimed at establishing the critical factors underlying the improvement of service delivery within the Department of Public Works in South Africa by ensuring that key elements of service delivery (cost effectiveness of services, high quality services and timeous delivery of services) are adhered to. Durban Regional Area was selected as the location of study. A total of 100 participants were randomly sampled from a population of 400 employees in the targeted area of study. A questionnaire was used as a research instrument and was administered to all the selected 100 respondents. What emerged from the study is that the Department of Public Works is marred by a number of problems, the biggest problem being the non-existence of an integrated management system, making it difficult to track the stages of services to be delivered and this resulted in huge delays in delivering the services to the clients. The quantitative results showed that the Department has staff members who are suitably skilled for the work rendered, but these skills alone are not sufficient if the Department is lacking in the critical resources required to deliver services. Since Department of Public Works is a technical department, it is recommended that skilled employees such as quantity surveyors, engineers as well as information technology experts be at the forefront of priorities. It is also very important that guidelines, policies and business processes for all sections in the department are well communicated to all staff.

Key Words: Public Service Delivery; Employee Perception; Procurement Challenges

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1. Introduction

Public sector managers around the globe now face a common set of challenges when it comes to meeting the increased expectations of their customers (Dalton, 2013). While these challenges may be consistent in the way they come, the ways in which they are being confronted and the results that are being achieved vary considerably. One of these common challenge faced by every organisation is how to service its customers better. Luthuli (2009) argued that most people are accustomed to the very good or enhanced service delivery provided by the private sector and is worthy the monies paid for. The same people view the public sector as another provider of services, for which they also pay for but in this case in the form of taxes. In order to address this, the public sector must find ways to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery.

Luthuli (2009) further proposed that the Public Service should provide value for money by improving the quality of service (accessibility for all and satisfactory customer experiences and outcomes) and reducing the costs involved in providing those services. The need for a customer-oriented focus coincides with the tightening of government budgets, providing value for money is a core concern today.

This is prompting the public sector to explore new sustainable models for service delivery. These are models that can improve customer experience and outcomes through enhanced service levels at the same or reduced cost (Fourie, 2011).

It must be kept in mind that the public sector does not choose its customers. What is required is to service them and their diverse requirements are another factor driving the need for improving service delivery. To deliver on the customer's promise, public sector organisations must build a connected government. A connected government is one with seamlessly aligning multiple government departments that have customer journey needs. The customer promise is part of the inherent agenda of governance for the public sector and sets out the standard of service that government is required to provide to its customers (Bayat and Meyer, 2004).

Citizens today are more aware of their rights and they have better access to information on public services and consequently have higher expectations of service levels. Since customers have become accustomed to capable private sector organisations providing high levels of customisation and other benefits, they are not prepared to accept that public sector organisations are incapable of improving their own service delivery. They expect a positive

customer experience and better returns on the taxes they pay.

The Department of Public Works which provides comprehensive building infrastructure services to most of government departments in the KwaZulu-Natal provincial administration relies on the quality of its service in order to satisfy and retain its clients. The Department is having challenges with delivering a service to client departments timeously, at a reasonable cost and of an acceptable quality standard. The challenges originate from the lack of capacity and inadequate resources within the Department, which are the key contributing factors in the poor service delivery within the Department. Challenges also stem from the non-existence of an integrated management system, making it difficult to track the stages of services to be delivered, resulting in huge delays in delivering the services to the clients. All these challenges have put the Department under the spotlight as they have resulted in lots of queries and complaints. The Department of Public Works must ensure that it is capable of providing infrastructure needs to government departments by ensuring that processes are followed, systems are in place and that it has adequate resources and capacity to deliver services.

Problem statement: The Department of Public Works in South Africa is having challenges with delivering a service to client departments timeously, at a reasonable cost and at an acceptable quality level. The challenges stem from the lack of capacity and inadequate resources which are the key contributing factors in the poor service delivery within the Department. Challenges also stem from the non-existence of an integrated management system, making it difficult to track the stages of services to be delivered, resulting in huge delays in delivering the services to the clients.

2. Literature review

Frontline workers: Sometimes public sector workers have challenges in delivering the services to the public clients. For example the frontline workers, such as teachers, police officers, nurses or social workers experience stress challenges caused by high workloads when delivering public services to the customers (Tummers et al., 2015). Even though there are ways to alleviate these challenges such as coping, these ways are far below the customer service quality expectations.

E-Governance: According to the ARC (2008), governance is “the exercise of political, economic and administrative authority in the management of a country’s affairs, including citizens’ articulation of their interests and exercise of their legal rights and obligations”. According to Deity (2013), e-Governance is defined as the “transformation of governance with the help of Information and Communication Technologies”. A study on

Information and Communication Technology use in the public health was done in Indian (Prakash, 2015). What emerged from the study is that there was need to shift the design focus in e-Governance projects, especially those that aim to bring about improvements in the public service delivery. In other words e-Governance is the use of information and communication technologies to improve the activities of public sector organisations (Harrison et al., 2012, Osman et al., 2014). E-Governance is about delivering improved services to citizens and businesses through drastically changing the way governments manage information. Governments have been viewed as complex, bureaucratic establishments with a set of information silos that erect barriers to the access of information and make the provision of services frustrating. E-Governance improves the quality of services provided to citizens and businesses while attaining greater efficiency for all participants (Osman et al. 2014).

Good governance may be the right concept which is very important for achieving socio-economic development of any country but on its own it is not sufficient. Effective public service delivery is required as an important instrument to beef up the available good governance (Hassan, 2015). A study done in Bangladesh by Hassan showed that the public sector does not often function according to what the citizens expect. The citizens in that country were not satisfied with the public service delivery system.

Performance Management: Management service delivery on its own in the public sector is not enough without proper or effective employee performance management. Even though most of the public sectors throughout the world have successfully implemented performance management there are significant adverse effects associated with its use (Arnaboldi et al., 2015). These negative effects include low staff morale, the lack of ready-made answers to performance management and demand for public service managers.

Procurement challenges: The public procurement processes are usually to blame for delays in government projects and these have very negative effects on the public service delivery. A study was done by Dzuke and Naude (2015) to investigate procurement challenges that impacted on the public service delivery in Zimbabwe. The research findings showed that there were various challenges in the public procurement process that negatively affected the service delivery. These challenges include:

- lack of managerial, leadership and professional skills,
- lack of appropriated funds from Treasury,
- no accountability in the procurement process and
- procurement policy and procurement function have no strategic recognition in the public sector.

Competitive intelligence: Sewdass (2012), studied competitive intelligence-related strategies, tools and techniques that can be used to gather and analyze information from South African public service departments so as to improve service delivery. The development of a new competitive intelligence-related framework for gathering and analyzing information emerged as the result of the study. This result represents a formal and systematic process of informing managers in the South African public service departments about the very important issues that these public service departments may face in the future.

Public service delivery in South Africa: The South African Government is committed to continually improve the lives of the people through a transformed public service which is representative, coherent, transparent, efficient, effective, accountable and responsive to the needs of all (Dalton, 2013). To bring the vision into realisation, the following mission was adopted (White Paper, 1997). This is creation of a people-centred and people-driven public service which is characterised by equity, quality, timeously and a strong code of ethics (White Paper, 1997).

When the New Government of National Unity took over in 1994, it had a new and different mandate, a new set of beliefs and practices and different expectations from the public. The need for a public service that will meet the demands of the new government and the expectation of the public was evident. This situation warranted that the government reshape the existing public service for its appointed role in the new dispensation (Mashamaite, 2014).

3. Research methodology

The study aimed at establishing the critical factors underlying the improvement of service delivery within the SA Department of Public Works by ensuring that key elements of service delivery (cost effectiveness of services, high quality services and timeous delivery of services) are adhered to. The study further sought to ensure that operational realities (outdated business processes, lack of integrated management system and inadequate resources and capacity) are addressed. The following objectives were formulated for the study.

3.1 The objectives of the study

- Review the overall service delivered by the SA Department of Public Works in terms of capacity and resources.
- Identify the deficiencies in service delivery that could be preventing the Department from delivering efficient and effective services to its clients.
- Eliminate project management constrains which will contribute to improved service delivery.
- Identify the gaps in business process that could be resulting in customer queries or complains.

3.2 Participants and location of the study

This research was conducted in the Durban Regional Area (DRA). The total study population was made up of 400 employees. Of the 400 employees, 100 participants were selected by simple random sampling. Simple random sampling was used because it gave equal of being selected to all the elements in the population.

Table 1. Sample size

Category	N	Male	Female
Managers	25	16	9
Departmental Officials	75	30	45
Total	100	46	54

3.3 Construction of the research instrument

The study used a questionnaire as the research instrument. The questionnaire was made up of 20 questions and had two main sections A and B. Section A was mainly on the demographics while Section B was made up of Likert 5 point scale type of questions on service delivery.

3.4 Pretesting and validation of research instrument

The questionnaire was tested on 10 participants in DRA but not from the 100 selected for the main study. The necessary changes were made.

3.5 Reliability of research instrument

The Chronbach's alpha coefficient was found to be 0.718 which indicated that the research instrument was reliable.

3.6 Administering the questionnaire

A total of 100 Questionnaires were hand delivered to all the 100 participants in the Durban Regional Area. Respondents were given two weeks to complete the questionnaire and those who were not able to complete were given some extra time to do so. Queries or clarification on some of the questions were handled at the point of collection. As a result all the questionnaires were completed giving a response rate of 100%.

3.7 Limitations

If resources could have allowed us to have a complete enumeration of the entire population in the Durban Regional Area the results could have given a true reflection of the study. Unfortunately this was not possible because of the resource constraints and as a result only 100 respondents were used in the study.

3.8 Ethical Considerations and Limitations

In carrying out the study it was crucial to ensure that ethical issues were taken care of. Before the study could be done permission had to be sort in the form of an ethical clearance from the University. Measures were taken to protect the autonomy of respondents and to prevent social stigmatisation and secondary victimisation of respondents.

3.9 Data Analysis

The data obtained from the respondents was analysed using SPSS package, version 21.0. The results were presented as tables.

4. Presentation of results and discussions

4.1 Capacity and resources

Table 2. There is adequacy of staff complement for the workload in the Department

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	24
Disagree	46
Neutral	2
Agree	23
Strongly Agree	5
Total	100

Agree: 28 Disagree: 70

Table 3. There is adequacy of resources to deliver services on time and cost effectively

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	17
Disagree	54
Neutral	14
Agree	3
Strongly Agree	12
Total	100

Agree: 15 Disagree: 71

Table 4. There is staff skill suitability for the work rendered

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	9
Disagree	17
Neutral	9
Agree	38
Strongly Agree	27
Total	100

Agree: 66 Disagree: 26

Table 5. Staff is provided with sufficient training to carry out their duties

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	17
Disagree	46
Neutral	26
Agree	8
Strongly Agree	3
Total	100

Agree: 11 Disagree: 63

Table 7. The Department has sufficient quantity surveyors for projects

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	15
Disagree	63
Neutral	11
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	5
Total	100

Agree: 11 Disagree: 78

Table 8. Department has sufficient engineers for engineering jobs

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	14
Disagree	57
Neutral	20
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	3
Total	100

Agree: 9 Disagree: 61

Table 8. Department has sufficient IT professional

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	14
Disagree	58
Neutral	20
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	2
Total	100

Agree: 8 Disagree: 72

4.2 Departmental strengths and deficiencies in service delivery

Table 9. Policies, procedures and processes are well communicated and in place to ensure on time procurement

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	29
Disagree	52
Neutral	11
Agree	6
Strongly Agree	1
Total	100

Agree: 28 Disagree: 70

Table 10. Clients receive the service on time

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	71
Neutral	11
Agree	13
Strongly Agree	2
Total	100

Agree: 15 Disagree: 74

Table 11. Projects are completed within budgets

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	6
Disagree	22
Neutral	11
Agree	42
Strongly Agree	19
Total	100

Agree: 61 Disagree: 28

Table 12. There is awareness on all property defects reported by clients

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	9
Disagree	37
Neutral	9
Agree	31
Strongly Agree	19
Total	100

Agree: 50 Disagree: 46

Table 13. There are very few queries or complaints from clients

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	37
Disagree	29
Neutral	6
Agree	16
Strongly Agree	12
Total	100

Agree: 28 Disagree: 66

Table 14. There is very low or no corruption in the Department

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	36
Disagree	38
Neutral	1
Agree	14
Strongly Agree	11
Total	100

Agree: 24 Disagree: 74

4.3 Integrated Management System for Projects

Table 15. Use of an integrated management system will improve service delivery

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	3
Disagree	6
Neutral	10
Agree	47
Strongly Agree	34
Total	100

Agree: 81 Disagree: 9

4.4 External service providers

Table 16. External service providers are paid on time

	Frequency
Strongly Disagree	28
Disagree	52
Neutral	11
Agree	4
Strongly Agree	5
Total	100

Agree: 9 Disagree: 80

5. Conclusions

The analysis of the results from the primary data collected from the members of staff and management at the national Department of Public Works confirms that there are a lot of deficiencies within the Department. The Department needs to focus on putting resources in place in order to create an enabling environment for the staff to deliver services in an effective and efficient manner.

The majority of the staff agreed that the capacity in the Department is not sufficient for the workload being undertaken by the Department. This results in the staff at the Department being stretched and constantly fatigued, and thus not being able to deliver to the best of their ability. The Department is not to blame for this as it cannot compete with the private sector in attracting top engineers and other high quality professionals.

The majority of staff also confirmed that an integrated tracking system is critical for the Department, and that its absence is the reason for the major delays in procurement of services in the implementation of projects on time and in paying service providers on time. It is therefore crucial for the Department to have an integrated system in place for the proper management of projects. The absence of an integrated system creates silos within the Department. Each section creates their own Excel spread sheet in order to try and manage the work that comes through to their section.

The absence of an integrated management system in the Department has further escalated the challenges due to the fact that the staff cannot track anything being executed in the Department. The service providers who are providing departmental services are not being paid timeously because of the long and unnecessary processes that are being followed in order to pay the service providers.

South Africa as a country is embarking on encouraging emerging entrepreneurs because they are the source of job creation in the country. It is therefore a huge embarrassment that a critical department such as the Public Works Department contributes towards destroying the service providers by not paying them on time. The integrated management system is very important as a means of ensuring that the Department delivers an efficient and effective service.

The Department of Public Works is a technical department and it is imperative that skilled employees such as quantity surveyors and engineers, as well as information technology (IT) are at the forefront of their priorities. It is a risk for the Department not to have these skills because projects must be correctly estimated and critical projects must be supervised and signed off before they are handed over back to the Department. IT skills assist with developing the latest technological advancements needed by every organisation to remain competitive.

It is also very imperative that guidelines, policies and business processes for every section are well communicated to all staff, and that all concerned

are comfortable that these are implemented correctly so that there is no audit queries or complains which will plague the Department unnecessarily.

Even though there are no specific cases of corruption in Department, the employee perception on corruption is a bit high. Corruption is a disease that is not confined to South Africa only and is very difficult to treat. The Government of South Africa is trying its best by putting measures or systems to make the corrupt activities very difficult in all departments.

There is need to explore some of the traditional or cultural ways of serving clients in queues. When people arrive at a sangoma's or traditional chief's homestead they explain their problem before joining the queue. Sangoma is a South African name for traditionally healer. The traditional chief or sangoma way is an excellent way of serving clients since the service provider will be ready for the query or complain at the time of serving. These cultural ways must be studied as possible ways of handling queries and complains.

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