Abstract of Thesis

Title of the dissertation- “An Empirical Study of the Impact of Training on the Quality of Services of the Tahsildar cadre of the Revenue Department from select districts of Maharashtra and Rajasthan”

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to obtain a better understanding of the extent to which quality service is delivered within the Revenue Department of Maharashtra by drawing on front-line employees and customer perceptions of service quality. The study investigates how closely customer perceptions of service and employee perceptions of customer expectations match. The study also tries to find out the relationship between service quality and training.

The nature of public service provision is changing on account of new strategic approaches to control and delivery. The main underlying objectives are those of increasing value for money and emphasizing the role of the consumer. Responsibilities are more than ever decentralized to service providers whilst overall control remains centralized in the form of various customer charters. Provision of consistent service quality is becoming more difficult in the context of resource constraints and the need to achieve economies of scale. Furthermore, people are demanding more and better services whilst paying the same or less tax. New contractual relations have arisen both in local government and healthcare between purchasers and providers, which have highlighted the need for service level agreements and a focus on customer requirements and service specifications.
The share of service industry is continuously increasing. In 2011 India ranked 10th in the world regarding services GDP with a 58.2 percent share in the GDP. Public administration and defense together have a share of around 6.1 percent in the Indian economy. Maharashtra is one of the States having a higher than all India share in the service sector.

The Tahsil Offices

The Revenue department is one of the largest departments of the Government. On one hand the department collects land revenue and on the other hand it provides a variety of services to the public. It is not a pure service provider but most of its functions are directly and indirectly associated with various services towards the public. The type of services by a Tahsildar office is a ‘Mixed’ service where both face to face and backroom components are involved. It is different from both ‘pure’ services where there is high level of customer contact and a ‘quasi’ manufacturing service where there is no customer contact.

As the times are changing, technology and education are becoming more and more prominent and approachable to the common man; the expectations of the public from the Government Organizations have also changed considerably. People are expecting a better, quicker and hassle free service from the Revenue Authorities. The customer perspective in planning and evaluating the services has to be included keeping in mind the ever increasing demand for better service quality by the public. This research aims at the study of the various aspects of quality of the services provided by the Tahsildar of the Revenue Department.

The study was conducted in two States- Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Data was collected in the form of two questionnaires- a) A modified SERVQUAL questionnaire for the external customers, b) A different service quality questionnaire for internal customers. For better understanding of the perceptions of the customers and service providers, extensive semi-structured group interviews were conducted. Data collected from the interviews added information
valuable for data analysis. SPSS software version 17 was used for quantitative data analysis.

Need for Research

Most of the customer satisfaction literature, published in English, has been related to the private sector where issues of price, value and choice come into play. Little has been published on government services. However, increasingly, there have been efforts to measure and improve customer satisfaction with government or public services, and, to open many of these services up to competition from the private sector. No tools to measure customer satisfactions with public services exist in the research field and no instruments have been identified which focus on measuring Service Quality of the Tahsil offices from the customer’s perspective.

The study thus undertakes exploration of the tool for evaluation of service quality by the customers/public. This study is an attempt to relate service quality, service perception and training and to introduce it for evaluation of the quality of services and its relationship with training of front line employees from Tahsil offices in the Government setup. The study tries to understand the service quality concepts of the internal and external customer through a descriptive-analytical approach.

Scope of the Research

The scope of this study covers the geographical areas of Maharashtra and Rajasthan. Tahsil offices were selected on a non-probability convenience sampling basis. Data was collected on a one to one basis and no questionnaires were mailed or posted to the respondents. The researcher also visited the Revenue Training Institutes from both the States. The period of Research was Years 2008-2013 and the data collection was done during March 2009 to February 2012 in Maharashtra and further up to February 2013 from Rajasthan.
Objectives of the Study

There are four general hypotheses of the study which try to analyze the services of a representative set of Tahsil offices from Maharashtra and Rajasthan in terms of-

a) service quality and its dimensions in relation with the administrative services,
b) determinants of administrative service quality, c) role of training in the quality of services, d) training policy formulation and its effective implementation for better service delivery and customer satisfaction. The objectives of the study support the hypotheses.

Research methodology

This is an exploratory and descriptive type of research which includes surveys and fact finding enquiries of different kinds. The major purpose of this research is the description of the state of affairs as it exists at present. The main characteristic of this research is that the researcher has no control over the responses of the customers, both internal and external. The researcher can only report what has happened or what is happening.

Considering various factors in this study, non-probability, convenience sampling technique was used.

The sample size was calculated as 126 for each category of customers. Hence there were at least 126 completely filled questionnaires collected from each group of customers. Out of these numbers, the number of useful filled questionnaires is as follows-

External customers from Maharashtra- 150
External Customers from Rajasthan- 127
Internal customers from Maharashtra- 163
Internal customers from Rajasthan- 160

The research was carried out on the basis on both primary and secondary data collected from both Maharashtra and Rajasthan.
Primary data was collected through structured questionnaires filled by willing customers and semi-structured group interviews of more than 300 customers. The questionnaire was designed in English and was translated into Marathi and Hindi. The questionnaire consists of scales to identify perceptions of customers about the services provided by the Tahsil office. The questionnaire was designed in a way that contained closed-ended questions. A typical SERVQUAL questionnaire was applied for the pilot study which was an exploratory research. Changes were made in the questionnaire on the basis of results of the pilot study. Only perception data was collected in the actual research.

Secondary data was collected from various sources like the official websites of the State Governments, other websites, Training Institutes, Books, Journals, Government Resolutions (GRs).

Given the purpose of the current study, survey methodology was used to develop a measure of the perceptions that service experiences create in the minds of customers. The results of the survey provided data to study the dimensions of service quality from the viewpoint of customer satisfaction. Additional responses were collected through extensive semi-structured group interviews of the internal as well as external customers especially from Maharashtra.

The variables under study correspond to the five generic dimensions of service quality as follows: Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy. Two additional dimensions were added to the questionnaire depending on the target population - internal or external customers as:

- Training- effectiveness, duration, policy and

- Overall Satisfaction with service, job, training.

Data analysis included performing several statistical computations to analyze the data collected to generate substantial evidence to prove the proposed hypotheses. Data collected was processed, analyzed and interpreted with the help of the SPSS software version 17. The Z test for population proportions was applied using SAS.
Based on the broad objectives, the hypotheses were formulated and to test them, a questionnaire was designed. By administering this questionnaire to the respondents and thereafter by the tabulation and analysis of the responses, each of the hypotheses was statistically tested and validated.

The factor analysis, correlation analysis, multivariate linear Regression analysis along with Z test for population proportions were used for the purpose of testing the hypothesis. These are the popular tests in social sciences, management and research. The regression analysis and correlation analysis was done in order to find out the interdependence and relationships among the variables. The Pie charts, Bar charts and tables were used where necessary.

Findings of the research

Finding 1- The quality aspects of the services provided by the Tahsil offices fall into three dimensions-

Employee Behavior- Knowledge, skills and attitude of employees. Attitude implies - responsiveness, promptness, readiness to solve customer problems, provide information.

Tangible- The infrastructure like toilets, waiting area, equipments, cleanliness, employee appearance, employee availability.

Employee attitude- Psychological attitude pertaining to happiness and punctuality.

Finding 2- It is found that satisfaction with job is a primary function of training. It is also found that the customer satisfaction primarily depends on the knowledge and skills of employees which improve with training.

Finding 3- Employee knowledge and skills are the major contributors to customer satisfaction and also employee satisfaction with their job. Tangibles are required for better service delivery but they act as hygiene factors as their provision or non-provision has little effect on employee satisfaction.
**Finding 4**- Comparison between the training structure and policies of the two States shows that mere existence of a policy is not sufficient in order to improve the service quality. The existence of a training policy needs to be supported by strong policy implementation and a robust infrastructure.

**Conclusions**

The study concludes that

a) The dimensions of service quality of the administrative services differ from the five dimensions as devised by the SERVQUAL instrument;

b) Employee satisfaction is greatly dependent on employee training;

c) Customer satisfaction is an outcome of employee knowledge and skills and attitude to help the customers;

d) Training plays an important role in the improvement of service quality but not without the support of non-training interventions (infrastructure and tangibles) from the organization.

**Contribution to the Body of Knowledge**

The research has contributed to the pool of knowledge in the following ways-

1. The study has added its contribution to the validation of the service quality construct to another set of services; it offers some application to the management of administrative services, especially the Revenue Tahsil offices; it also provides guidelines for policy development for employee training and administrative reforms to certain extent.

2. A model of three dimensions of service quality expectations of the customers is an addition to the research on a different dimensionality of service quality than the five SERVQUAL dimensions. Though the dimensions apply to Tahsil services the customer preferences differ. The difference is reflected in the reduction in dimensions.
3. A model of service quality is the student’s contribution to the pool of knowledge.

4. A suggestion for public private partnership model for better service management

5. A structure for policy for training of employees of Revenue department along with a mission statement for the State Training Policy

6. An application of the Deming’s 14 principles of quality to the services of Revenue Department is a contribution of the researcher.

**Limitations and Future Research Directions**

There are some obvious limitations in the present study. These limitations also give rise to opportunities for further in depth research and investigations.

The results of the study apply to Tahsil offices in Maharashtra in general and the same cannot be applied to other offices within the Revenue department without further investigative study.

There is a scope for improvisation in the scale for internal customers. It will be taken up as a part of further research to refine the scale for internal customers or service providers of administrative services.

The present study focused on consumer satisfaction on the basis of various dimensions of service quality. There are various models of service quality which were not tested due to the time constrains and future studies could be done by focusing on other models.

The objectives of the study were focused on the study of service quality. They did not provide a scope to study the details of the high levels of stress found in the employees. It may be taken up as a separate in depth research.