

An Assessment of Service Quality Delivery in Selected Local Authorities in Namibia

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Abstract

This research assessed the service quality delivery in selected Namibia local authorities. The objectives of the study were to assess the levels of service quality, derive strategies that can improve service delivery in the two selected local authorities and to compare the current service levels with service standards/levels. The study employed a quantitative survey design based on the FM-SERVQUAL instrument. A sample of 100 residents from two local authorities, that is, Oshakati and Ongwediva, were drawn on a proportional basis. Systematic random sampling was then used to draw the 50 participants from each local authority. The findings show that 20 service elements were below the service quality level for one local authority and two for the other. Overall, 59 service elements were identified above service quality for both authorities. The findings show that there were 20 service elements identified below Service Quality level for Oshakati and two service elements for Ongwediva town Council. However, 20 service elements in Oshakati town Council and 39 elements in Ongwediva town Council achieved a good service quality level when evaluated at index of the more than 3.0 scale. Overall, 59 service elements were identified above service quality for both Oshakati and Ongwediva town Council.

Keywords

Facilities management, Local authority, Town council, Service quality, Service delivery, SERVQUAL

1. Introduction

One of the most significant challenges facing services organizations today is the provision of consistently high quality services. The delivery of consistent service quality is arguably one of the most vital factors that contributed to the establishment of the credibility and reputation of these organizations in the eyes of the public. It is well recognized that the provision of high quality services can have beneficial effects on the bottom-line performance the organization. Indeed, there is a growing body of empirical evidence suggesting that the provision of top quality services can enhance profitability, improve productivity, increase market share and return on investment, and reduce maintenance costs (Sachdev, & Verma, 2004).

Like many other service organizations, public service organizations (specifically those operating at local government level), are not immune to the pressures to the need to improve the quality of their services on a continuous basis. Municipal Authorities for example, face more daunting tasks than those in the private sector in their efforts to provide excellent services and maintain residents' satisfaction. A wide variety of influences has been bringing about awareness of quality issues, and of concepts such as quality management. Some of these influences arise directly from local authorities' genuine desire to enhance their public image by improving the quality of those services provided to the community, while others come "imposed" or "forced" either by means of public initiatives or through an increase in consumers' awareness of their rights. (Van Ryzin, 2004). Quality is a pivotal factor for the transformation of municipal services and a critical driving force for better residents' satisfaction (Rodríguez, Burguete, Vaughan, & Edwards, 2009).

2. Literature Review

Research in this area has often used the FM-SERVQUAL service quality research instrument, originally developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (Zahari, 2008). FM-SERVQUAL is based on the original SERVQUAL of (Parasuraman, 1988), that is, through mechanism of comparison customers' perceptions of services provided by LAs compared to their expectations of services desired by customers. Several modifications have been done in developing FM-SERVQUAL version. These modifications include the use of an integrated facilities management framework, which involves the measurement of 40 elements of components of human capital, premises management, technology and ICT and working processes.

Access to and the quality of urban services in municipalities is deteriorating, constraining productivity and the LAs efforts to improve living condition. This is exacerbated by poor management of municipal services and the structure of central local fiscal relations, which affect the adequacy of resources or incentives for improving infrastructure and services (Bank, 2000).

Local Authorities in Namibia face many challenges in the provision of quality services. Residents' inadequate financial resources, dilapidated physical infrastructure, and limited residents' participation mainly aggravate this. In addition, human resource issues, declining local economies and rural to urban migration are also a cause of concern (Local Government Reform Position Paper, 2013). It can be concluded that the quality of service delivery by Namibian LAs falls far short of residents' satisfactions and expectations. The current research aimed to assess the current level of service quality delivery provided by Namibian local authorities. The current research presents an assessment of municipal service quality using the FM-SERVQUAL approach.

3. Methodology

A case study design was used because the researcher could only access respondents from Oshakati and Ongwediva local authorities. The study considered the views of the service users (customers) of Oshakati and Ongwediva local authorities. Questionnaires in the form of survey form FM- SERVQUAL instrument were conveniently distributed to 100 residents of both Oshakati and Ongwediva local authorities. In this context, FM encompassed multiple disciplines to ensure functionality of the built environment by integrating people, places, processes and technology.

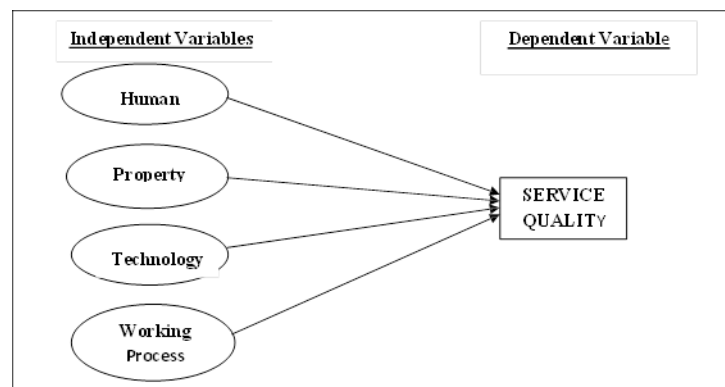


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

The relationship between independent variables and dependent variable used in this study acted as the conceptual framework, as illustrated is in Figure 1.

This study selected two (2) local authorities to participate in this study. A sample of 100 households (50 per local authority) was drawn from the town council ratepayers' database. The population was stratified into low, medium, and high-density residential areas. Systematic random sampling was used to draw the participants in each stratum. The sample addressed maximum variability in participants' experience, background, and location in relation to quality of service delivery in their respective locations or suburbs. In doing so, the study provided a full and rich understanding of the experience of residents in different stratum. The respondents were urban community as well as service recipients who live in LAs' area. The urban community was considered as the best party to evaluate the LAs' service delivery system.

The approach taken to collect the data was in utilizing a survey form of FM - SERVQUAL instrument by interviewing participants from each of the two local authorities. In summary,

1. Population is stratified into low, medium and high residential areas with the assistance of the office of the CEO
2. A sample of 50 ratepayers from each LA is drawn on a proportional basis; a systematic random sampling will be used to draw the participants in each stratum.
3. A FM – SERVQUAL survey form in electronic form is send to the Chief Executive Officers or PA of the 2 Local authorities participant.

The next section discusses the results of the research.

4. Results and Discussions

The aim of the study was to measure service quality of the two participating local authorities using the FM-SERVQUAL instrument. The SQ in the two LAs was measured through SQ's six service dimensions, i.e. responsiveness, reliability, professionalism, empathy, tangible, and assurance. The FM-SERVQUAL survey was conducted using 50 respondents from Oshakati Town Council and another 50 respondents from Ongwediva Town Council. The data collected from these respondents is the one that was used to determine the measurement of the elements of services. The quality index of each of the elements of services was determined using statistics tests on the data collected from Oshakati and Ongwediva communities. The Quality Index QI is calculated using the following formula:

$$QI = \sum SD / N$$

where, QI = Quality Index; SD = rating of quality on services dimension by respondent; N = number of respondents from the community (sample size from the community).

4.1 Measurement of Service Quality According to Service Components

The performances of services by component resources for both Oshakati and Ongwediva Town Councils are presented in this section. We discuss the acceptable quality levels concerning the different service components. The analysis of the results discussed are presented accordingly.

4.2 Human Capital

Figure 2 shows the results of human capital components. It can be seen that 6 service components met the 3.0 acceptable quality index scale, while 4 service components were below the acceptable level service quality in Oshakati town Council. The results indicate that residents' perceptions of service quality are lower than the respondents' expectations of what the Oshakati Town Council should be doing for them. However, the residents of Ongwediva rated all 10-service elements on human capital components as achieving the minimum acceptable SQ level. These results indicate that residents' perceptions of service quality are meeting their expectations of what the Ongwediva Town Council should be doing for them.

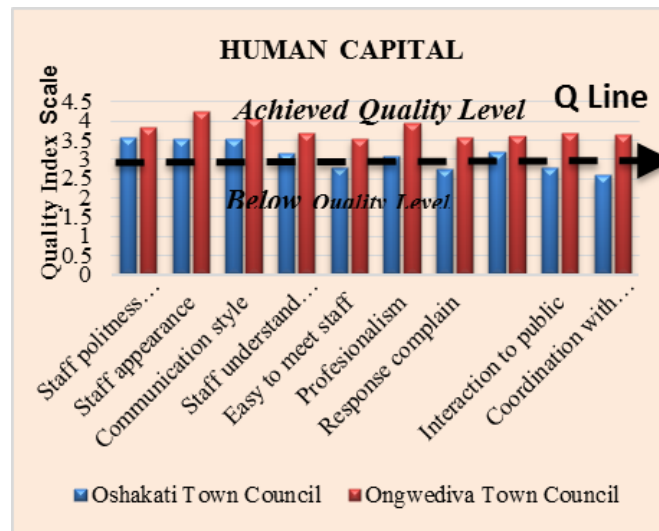


Figure 2. Index Qualities on Human Capital

4.3 Technology and ICT

Figure 3 shows the results of technology and ICT components. The results indicate that there are four service elements that were below the acceptable quality level Oshakati and the other six were above the acceptable quality level. However, the Ongwediva residents rated all ten items as achieving the minimum acceptable service quality level. Therefore, results indicate that expectation of residents is equivalent to perception.

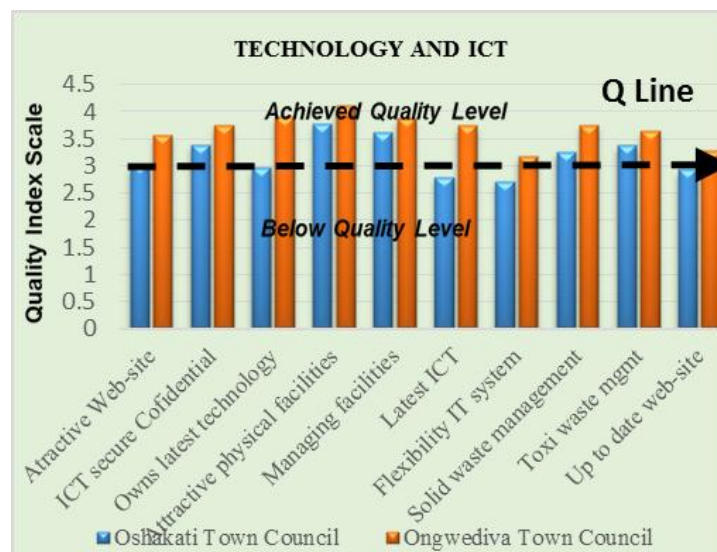


Figure 3. Quality Index on Technology and ICT

4.4 Property Management

As illustrated in Figure 4, the findings show that the property management service quality in Oshakati show that residents are satisfied with (6) service elements out of ten. However, the Ongwediva the residents' are happy with the service quality regarding property management in their city since all their ratings were found to be above the scale 3.0.

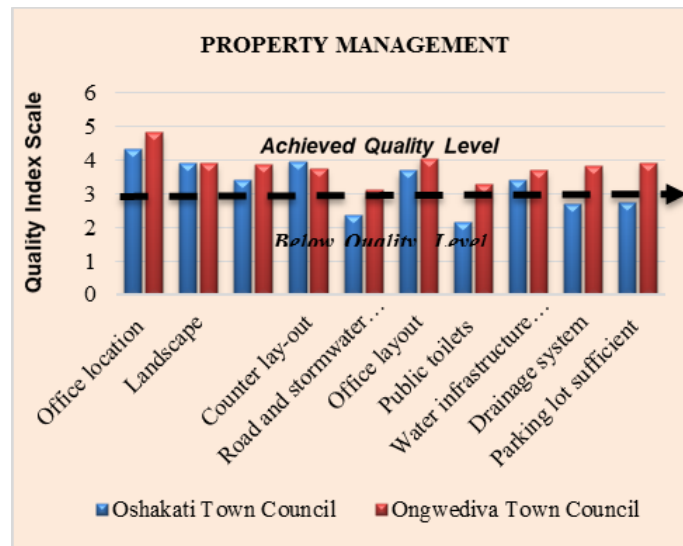


Figure 4. Index quality on property Management

4.5 Working Process Component

The results in Figure 5 show that the perceptions and expectations of the residents of Oshakati about the working process component indicate that one service element achieved the minimum acceptable SQ level, while nine were rated as not meeting the SQ level anticipated by the residents. On the other hand, Ongwediva residents rated eight service elements above the acceptable minimum SQ level, while two items were rated as achieving an unacceptable SQ level. Once again, it appears that the residents of Ongwediva are more satisfied with the service that they are getting from their council as compared to those of Oshakati.

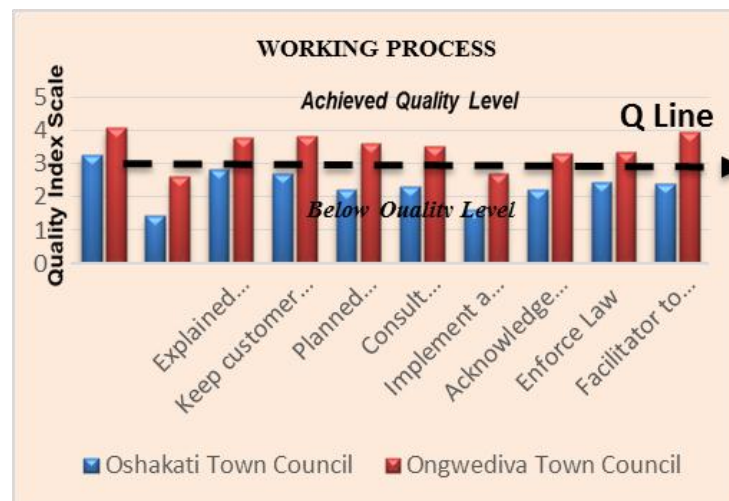


Figure 5. Index quality on work Process Component

5. Conclusions

Based on the findings, it can be concluded that 22 service elements were identified as being below the acceptable service quality for both Oshakati and Ongwediva Town Councils. However, 20 elements in Oshakati Town Council and 38 elements in Ongwediva town Council services achieved a good and acceptable service quality levels as indicated by an index of more than 3.0. Overall, 58 service elements were identified above the acceptable service quality for both Oshakati and Ongwediva Town Councils. Based on the finding, it can be concluded that the quality of service delivery by Oshakati town council is satisfactory; however, the residents have more concerns with regards to the working process component. However, the quality of services delivery of Ongwediva Town council is above

the minimum acceptable service quality level. The results thus reveal that there are some areas where the councils are doing very well and there are some areas where councils need to improve service delivery to meet customers' expectations. It is recommended that the two local authorities should adopt the following major strategies to improve service delivery in the service dimension that are below the minimum acceptable service quality levels:

1. Total Quality Management (TQM) to provide the linkage between a customer-focused organization, quality service delivery, and residents' satisfaction
2. Lean Six Sigma
3. Organization strategic management
4. Increase residents' participation in the affairs of the local authority and partnerships with the community in service delivery.
5. Flexible response to service user complaints.
6. Adoption of modern technology and continuous improvement.
7. Implement preventative maintenance plan on road and storm water and sewerage.
8. Introduce and display Client Charter
9. Increase more parking lots that are public.
10. Enforcement municipal laws and legislations

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Biography

Michael Mutingi is a Senior Lecturer in Industrial Engineering at the Namibia University of Science and Technology, Namibia. He is also a Senior Visiting Research Associate at the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He obtained his PhD in Engineering Management from the University of Johannesburg, South Africa. He also holds a MEng and a BEng in Industrial Engineering from the National University of Science and Technology, Zimbabwe, where he served as a Research Fellow and a Lecturer in Industrial Engineering. Michael Mutingi also served as a Research Associate at the National University of Singapore, Singapore, and a Lecturer at the University of Botswana, Botswana. His research interests include operations management, quality management, multi-criteria decision making, and operational excellence in healthcare. He has published one book and more than 90 articles in international journals and conference proceedings.