

THE EFFECT OF SERVICE DELIVERY IN PUBLIC 'COMMUNITY SERVICE CENTRES': A CASE OF AN EMERGING ECONOMY

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Abstract

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This study investigated public perceptions of the service delivery provided by the Community Service Centres (CSC) of the South African Police Service (SAPS) Durban, South Africa. The study focuses on measuring service quality and service delivery. SERVQUAL was used to compare clients' perceptions against expectations of service quality. Four hundred respondents were surveyed at three community service centres (previously known as 'police stations'), with expectations and perceptions being assessed via the dimensions of tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

The results indicate that in all five dimensions there is a significant negative quality gap, implying that the quality of service received is below what is expected by clients. Improvements are required in all five dimensions if service delivery is to be improved. Actions needed to improve service quality include regular assessment and monitoring of clients' experiences, as well as employees' behaviour.

Keywords: Service Quality, SAPS, SERVQUAL, Client Service, Community Policing, Service Delivery

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of a police force is to provide citizens with an effective and efficient (Sonderling, 2003). The service can be grouped into three characteristics: it is intangible, production and consumption takes place concurrently and the client is the co-producer of the services. Therefore, the client's perception of the service underlies their experience and satisfaction with the service. Essentially, the perceived quality of a service is a subjective judgement of the comparison of the client's expectation of the service and their perception of the process. The process creates an experience when the client (service user) and the employee (service provider) interact and a moment of truth emerges. Due to this subjective nature a service is difficult to assess. As a result, a generic method for assessing service quality known as SERVQUAL scale has been developed (Sarrico, Miguel, Ferreira and Silva, 2013). Police services, globally, are addressing service through a community-oriented approach, which is aimed at enabling them to function more effectively. This involves more creativity and innovation, and working with the private sector in joint partnerships

(Reynecke and Fourie, 2001). The nature of police services is that the service is paid for by taxpayers. As such, the clients visiting CSCs do not pay directly or not at all for services rendered (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer and Shiu, 2006).

The South African Police Service (SAPS) aims to provide a high quality service to the public as is reflected in their strategic plan for 2005 to 2010. To achieve this, SAPS must be accessible to all citizens through improved service delivery in the Community Service Centre (CSC), which previously were known as charge offices. Each police station has one CSC, from which service is delivered to the public when they visit the police station. Unfortunately, these offices are sometimes under staffed, due to staff having to attend to emergencies (Wolvaard, 2007).

To improve service, the first step is to analyse the situation and to identify best practice (South African Police Service, 2005). This includes analysis of any gaps in the CSC service. Various studies have indicated unsatisfactory levels of service. For example, it took, on average, more than 19 minutes to be served at a CSC (Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, 2005). Complaints have been received of poor service from the East Rand Police Service (Schwartz, 2004), and, at the Western Cape

CSCs, people feel unsafe, do not trust members of the CSC, who seem unwilling to help and treat citizens with disrespect (Engelbrecht, 2002)

Management of CSCs are aware of the poor quality of service delivery, but do not understand the reasons for this. Most senior officers feel that the recent demilitarisation of the police has resulted in a lack of discipline, which has then led to this poor service delivery. Clearly, service delivery at SAPS CSCs requires attention. How bad the service level is, the understanding of the concept of service by police officers and the true causes of poor service is unknown. Thus, the research problem can be stated as a lack of understanding by CSC staff of the service delivery process and what 'quality service' means from the clients' point of view.

To help to resolve this problem the following research objectives were set:

- To identify if clients receive the service that they expect in the CSC;
- To assess the care and sympathy with which clients' service requests are handled;
- To identify the factors influencing the clients' perceptions of the CSCs.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The nature of service quality

According to Armstrong and Kotler (2006) a service's quality is difficult to judge because services are intangible, inseparable, perishable and heterogeneous. Service organisations thus use cues and images in their physical designs and promotions to make the benefits of a service more perceptible by clients (Perreault, Connon and McCarthy, 2009). In addition to these tangible efforts, culture is critical to good service. A service culture is one where an appreciation for good service exists. Giving good service is expected and natural and is one of the most important activities of staff in the service provider (Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2008).

Customers satisfaction is determined by comparing the perceived service received against the service they expected or wished for, prior to receiving the service (Rust, Zahorik, and Keiningham, 2002; Lotz, 2009; Harris, 2010). If the service quality received is below the expected level, the customer will be dissatisfied. If the service is at the level expected, the service quality is considered just 'satisfactory'. Where the perceived level exceeds the expected level of service, customers will be very satisfied, or 'delighted' (Kurtz and Clow, 2007). The only meaningful measure of customer service is the customer's perception of the quality of service offered - other measures are irrelevant to the client (Quintana, 2006).

The dimensions of service quality

Service quality is usually assessed as the difference between expected and perceived service levels across five dimensions (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2006), which are:

Tangibles

Tangibility refers to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication

material (Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler, 2008; Bateson and Hoffman, 2011). Tangibles are visible evidence of the quality of the service customers receive that customers are used to judge the service provider. For example, the condition of the physical premises is used as a surrogate measure for the care and attention that they expect to receive from the service provider (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2006).

Reliability

Performing the promised service accurately and dependably means the provider can be relied upon (Wilson et al., 2008; Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011). If service is provided as expected, it will enhance the customer's perception of quality (Brink and Berndt, 2010). Reliability is the most critical component of a service, with the customer expecting the service to be accomplished timeously, consistently and error-free each time they interact with the service provider (Schneider and White, 2004).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness involves the service provider's willingness to serve the customers with quick service (Bateson and Hoffman, 2011). It stresses promptness in handling customers' requests, complaints, and problems with attentiveness and speed. Customers become frustrated and angry if they perceive that they are being ignored. Making a customer wait for no good reason influences the perception of poor quality service (Perreault et al., 2009).

Assurance

According to Gronroos (2000), customers need to feel safe when making a transaction. The assurance dimension includes factors such as having the customers' best interest at heart, staff competence, politeness and respect, and effective communication. Arasli, Mehtap-Smadi and Katircioglu (2005: 46) define assurance as the 'employees' knowledge, courtesy and ability to inspire trust and confidence in the customer'.

Empathy

Empathy involves caring and paying individual attention to customers. The essence of empathy is conveying, through personalized service, that customers are unique and special and that their needs are understood (Wilson et al., 2008). Empathy means understanding the clients' problems, doing things in their best interests and providing them with individual and personal attention; it implies approachability and sensitivity (Gronroos, 2000).

Importance of employees in service quality

Because all of the service dimensions can be positively or negatively influenced by staff actions, the role of staff in the service delivery process is very critical (Lovelock and Wright, 2007):

- The appearance of employees, including how neatly they dress, is indicative of the tangible dimension of service quality.
- The reliability dimension of service quality is almost entirely controlled by employees and their actions.

- Customers assess reliability by the actions of frontline employees, and their personal willingness to help customers.
- Assurance is created by employees communicating their personal credibility, thereby instilling trust in the customers.
- Empathy is provided by treating customers as individuals (Lovelock and Wright, 2007).

Measuring service quality

A quality problem is indicated when a negative gap exists between the service level expected by a customer and the service level that customer perceived that they received. Such a negative gap could lead to negative word-of-mouth about the service being spread (Gronroos, 2000). To close such a gap between performance and expectations, it is necessary to be able to measure service performance against expectations. According to Metters, Metters, Pullman and Walton (2006) the best way of understanding the nature and extent of this gap is by using the SERVQUAL instrument with the firm's customers. The SERVQUAL approach has attracted attention in the public sector services (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006).

The SERVQUAL scale has been rigorously developed (Llosa and Orginsher, 2007) and has been used to measure service quality and the service quality gap by many researchers internationally (Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons, 2006). SERVQUAL asks respondents to rate their expectations and perceptions of a specific service (on a scale of from strongly disagree to strongly agree), for each of 22 pairs (expectations and perceptions) of statements about the five dimensions of service performance (Bruhn and Georgi, 2006). For example, the statements relate to the service provider's appearance and dress (tangibles), promises and dependability (reliability), willingness and promptness (responsiveness), knowledge and trustworthiness (assurance), and personal attention and caring (empathy) (Lee and Ulgado, 1997: 41, Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006), Sarrico, Miguel, Ferreira & Silva, 2009).

3. METHODOLOGY

Study design

This study focused on describing the existing situation in three CSCs at one point in time, using a standardised questionnaire with pre-formulated, closed ended responses. The questionnaire was administered to a large number of respondents. Thus, a multiple case study approach, with a descriptive, cross sectional quantitative methodology, was used (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2000: 216).

Population and sampling

The population for the study was people, 18 years and older, who had visited a SAPS CSC in the Durban area. The largest police station community service centres (Inanda, Pinetown and Durban Central) were selected as data collection locations because they receive the greatest volume of complaints. Since actual complaint statistics necessary to create a proportional representation sample are confidential,

it was necessary to use purposive sampling. The selected three stations were chosen as they would provide a very large population from which to select the sample, they reflected metropolitan, urban and rural citizens and the population would be heterogeneous in terms of age, gender, income, ethnicity, etc. (Bertram and Christiansen, 2014). Based on the expert knowledge of one of the researchers, who has worked at all three of these stations, we are confident that these three centres provided sufficient and varied responses to give a representative sample. To sample the visitors to each of the CSCs, convenience sampling was used, based on those respondents who were present in the CSC during data collection. Since the study population size is unknown, and essentially infinite, a sample size of 384 respondents is suggested by Krejcie and Morgan (1970, cited in Sekaran and Bougie, 2013, and Churchill and Iacobucci, 2007).

Data collection

Although a sample of 384 was suggested, a sample of 400 was decided on to allow for any problems such as incomplete or spoiled questionnaires. The survey method was used to collect data (Hair, Bush and Ortinau, 2000) from the following SAPS CSCs:

- Inanda CSC - 200;
- Durban Central CSC - 100;
- Pinetown CSC - 100.

The split of proportions was based on the fact that Inanda is the biggest station in KZN and the fact that Diamantoupolis and Schlegelmilch (1997) suggest a minimum of 100 respondents in each major breakdown. Thus we chose 100 each for Durban Central and Pinetown, allowing Inanda, the biggest station, to make up the remainder.

An interview timetable was developed to ensure data was collected across all days of the week and all times from 06.00 to 20.00 over a two week period. This was important because there could be different types of problems and different types of visitors at different times and days of the week.

The data collection instrument was Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry's (1993:23) SERVQUAL instrument, adapted to suit this study. The adapted questionnaire included 22 standardised items for the expectations and perceptions sections, with wording adapted to suit the study context. A 5 point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree through to 5 = strongly agree) was used. The instrument was pilot tested with 20 respondents at the Durban Central CSC and was generally acceptable and understandable to the respondents. Slight editorial and grammatical modifications were made to the final draft. SERVQUAL is generally simple and inexpensive to administer and has been validated as a valuable instrument for assessing a firm's service quality. The SERVQUAL model has been used across many industries and geographic regions in service quality research and its validity and reliability is widely accepted (Bebko, 2000: 14).

Data analysis

Following checking, cleaning and coding, data was captured using SPSS Version 17.0. First, descriptive statistics were calculated, using frequencies, tables, cross-tabulations and bar charts. Then inferential

statistics were applied to test reliability (Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha) and the significance of the SERVQUAL findings (2 tailed t-tests).

Validity and reliability

Construct validity was achieved by conducting a pilot study, and by having the questionnaire reviewed by a qualified statistician and two subject

matter experts. Internal consistency of each factor included in the questionnaire was assessed via a Cronbach's Coefficient Alpha statistical test (Kent, 2007: 141).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The biographical profile of the achieved sample is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Biographical profile of sample

		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Age	18-30	155	38.8	31-40	118	29.5	41-55	98	24.5	56+	29	7.3			
Gender	Male	163	40.8	Female	237	59.3									
Educa-tion	Up to Gr 11	99	24.8	Matric (Gr 12)	225	56.3	Degree/ diploma	45	11.3	Post grad	28	7.0	Other	3	0,8
House income (R)	<2500	59	14.8	2500-4500	92	23.0	4501-6500	90	22.5	6501-7500	83	20.8	7501+	76	19.0
Marital status	Single	282	70.5	Married	110	27.5	Widow/ divorced	2.0	8						

This profile shows that the sample is suitably spread across the different categories according to all the profile criteria, thus indicating that the sample is not biased to any particular demographic. Thus, it is concluded that the sample is reasonably representative of the general public.

Reliability of questionnaire

The reliability of the constructs included in the SERVQUAL questionnaire was assessed by means of a Cronbach's alpha test. Reliability is believed to be 'acceptable' with a coefficient of 0.70 or higher (Introduction to SAS, 2007). Table 2 illustrates the coefficients for the five dimensions.

Table 2. Cronbach's Alpha Test

<i>Dimensions</i>	<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Perceptions</i>
Tangibles	0.962	0.887
Reliability	0.981	0.998
Responsiveness	0.980	0.907
Assurance	0.979	0.997
Empathy	0.974	0.945
Overall	0.980	0.988

The overall Cronbach alpha scores (0.980 for expectations and 0.998 for perceptions) show the statistical reliability of the research instrument, with a high degree of consistency in the scoring on each of the five dimensions, for both the expectation and perception categories (all well above 0.8). Overall

reliability is acceptable, which was the expected outcome since the questionnaire is based on the widely used, and reliable, SERVQUAL instrument.

Overall service quality

To investigate the levels of customer services expected and experienced by visitors to the CSCs, we applied the SERVQUAL instrument to assess whether the SAPS CSCs were meeting the service level expectations of clients. Table 3 illustrates scores for expectations and perceptions for each question, grouped into the five dimensions, and the gap scores for each. It is interesting that all questions resulted in negative gaps, implying that for none of the questions did the CSCs meet their clients' expectations. Thus, it can be expected that visitors to the CSCs are, in general, dissatisfied with the quality of service that they receive from the SAPS CSCs. Interestingly, it was noted that previous studies undertaken in Scotland's and Portugal's police services revealed that their citizens were also dissatisfied with their service quality delivery (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006).

A paired 2-tailed t-test is used to determine if the differences between the Expected (E) and Perceived (P) scores are statistical significant. A significant result was set at $p < 0.05$. Table 3 shows that all differences are significant. Clients felt that all aspects of customer service, reflected by the questions, do not match up with their expectations - all gaps are negative.

Table 3. Expectations, perceptions and gap scores

<i>Dim</i>	<i>Q No</i>	<i>Statement</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>P</i>	<i>Gap</i>	<i>Sig E vs P</i>	<i>No</i>
Tangibles	T1	SAPS CSC has up to date physical facilities and equipment.	4.46	4.07	-0.39	.000	12
	T2	Offices, equipment, physical facilities, communication materials are visually appealing.	4.45	4.06	-0.40	.000	11
	T3	SAPS employees are neatly attired	4.46	4.10	-0.36	.000	13
	T4	Information resources associated with the service (eg signage) are visually appealing.	4.49	3.54	-0.95	.000	9
Reliability	Rel1	When staff promises to deliver the service within a specified time frame, they do so.	4.67	3.35	-1.32	.000	2
	Rel2	When I have a complaint, SAPS staff attends to it in a constructive manner	4.66	3.34	-1.32	.000	2
	Rel3	The service is delivered according to SAPS terms and conditions.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	.000	1
	Rel4	SAPS staff delivers service at the promise time.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	.000	1
	Rel5	Accurate and secure client records are maintained at the SAPS offices.	4.67	3.35	-1.33	.000	1
Responsiveness	Res1	SAPS staffs inform me exactly when service will be performed.	4.67	3.35	-1.33	.000	1
	Res2	Staff provides prompt and timely service to me.	4.67	3.35	-1.32	.000	2
	Res3	Staff is always willing to listen to client's problems.	4.67	3.36	-1.32	.000	2
	Res4	The staff never too busy to respond to problems.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	.000	1
Assurance	A1	The staff makes me feel that they can be trusted.	4.62	3.31	-1.31	.000	3
	A2	Staff is polite and courteous to me.	4.61	3.32	-1.29	.000	5
	A3	Staff reassures me in terms of personal anxieties, concerns and problems.	4.62	3.33	-1.29	.000	5
	A4	The staff should have the ability to do their respective jobs.	4.62	3.32	-1.30	.000	4
Empathy	E1	Staff is sympathetic to my individual needs while respecting my privacy.	4.60	3.31	-1.30	.000	4
	E2	The operating hours are convenient for all clients.	4.61	4.20	-0.41	.000	10
	E3	SAPS provide flexible personalized service to meet my individual needs.	4.61	3.37	-1.24	.000	8
	E4	Staff has my best interest at heart.	4.59	3.34	-1.25	.000	7
	E5	Staff understands the specific needs of their clients.	4.60	3.33	-1.27	.000	6

Although all the gaps are negative, the perception scores are all above 3, which indicates that most respondents had positive attitudes (Agree or strongly agree) about all the statements. However, despite these positive attitudes, their expectations are mostly not met. This indicates that the respondents feel that the SAPS CSCs should be doing even better. The summary of the scores and gaps provided in Table 4 provide some understanding of this phenomenon.

Table 4. Summary of scores by dimension

	<i>Expectations</i>	<i>Perceptions</i>	<i>Gap</i>
Tangibles	4.465	3.943	-0.522
Reliability	4.668	3.344	-1.324
Responsiveness	4.670	3.350	-1.320
Assurance	4.618	3.320	-1.298
Empathy	4.602	3.510	-1.092

Table 4 shows that the expectations for the tangibles dimension is considerably lower than the other four dimensions, while the perception of this dimension is considerably higher than the other dimensions, resulting in a lower gap score. It is interesting to note that this dimension, which relies on non-personal attributes, is considered the most acceptable. All the other four dimensions are reliant on people for provision of the quality of service, and

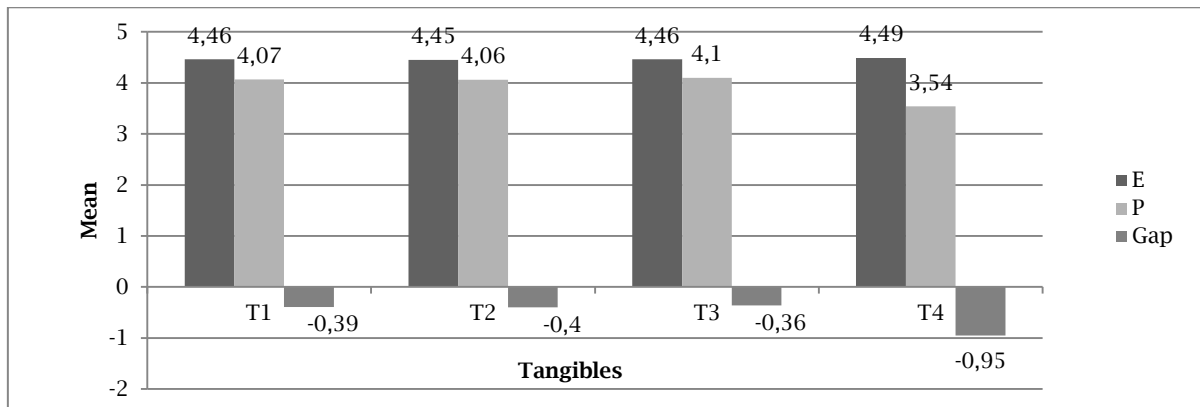
thus it can be concluded that it is the staff of the CSCs who are under-performing and thus not meeting their clients' expectations. It is also interesting to note that empathy, the middle dimension in terms of gap score, has a higher perception score mainly because of a high score for the CSCs operating hours, also a non-personal factor. This reinforces the finding that staff of the CSCs have not provided the quality of service required of them by the SAPS strategy, or by their clients.

Each individual dimension will now be examined and discussed.

Tangibles

Physical facilities, equipment, communication materials, and appearance of the staff and the service environment are the tangible factors that customers notice. As shown in Figure 1, the smallest gap between expectations and perceptions is for "up to date facilities", but all of the gaps are below -1, indicating that this is the least problematic dimension. As mentioned above, these factors are mainly non-personal, and can be seen to be reasonably satisfactory to the clients. However, the largest gap score (-0.95) is for communication materials with regard to the service and the smallest gap (-0.36) for the SAPS attire.

Figure 1. Expected and perceived tangible dimension

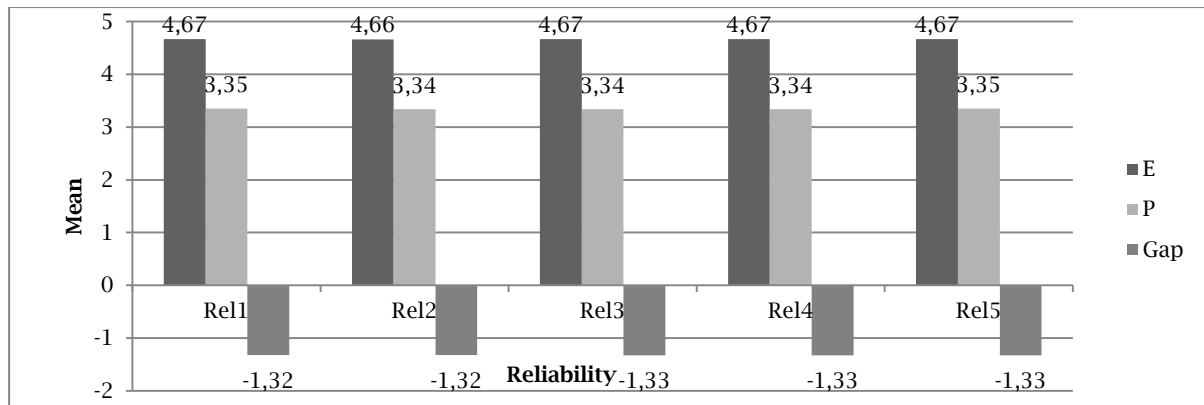


The tangible, visual elements of a CSC are essential to the overall perceptions of the CSC and the SAPS name. Therefore, the CSC should use these tangibles to communicate the perception of a quality service to their clients, thus boosting their image. Many firms also link tangibles with one of the other dimensions to build their service quality strategy (Zeithaml et al., 2006).

Reliability

Reliability is arguably the most important aspect of a service - the customer should know what service to expect and when they can expect to receive it. It involves performing the service as promised, dependably and accurately (Wilson et al., 2008: 84). Figure 2 shows that all the expectations are similar, as are the perceptions. The result is that the gaps in this dimension are almost equally large.

Figure 2. Expected and perceived reliability dimension



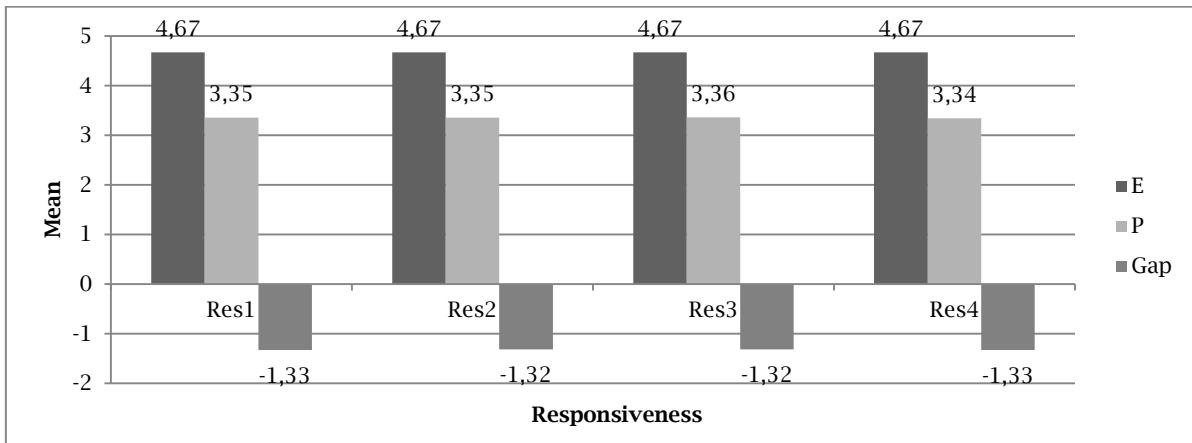
It can be concluded that CSC clients are unhappy with the reliability of the service that they get from their CSC. This is problematic, as reliability is key to how, during the delivery process, customers evaluate whether the quality of service they receive matches the quality of service promised (Bebko, 2000). This finding shows that respondents perceived that the CSCs provide an inadequate service that needs improvement in terms of reliability. According to a study undertaken on the service quality of police services in Portugal, they also experienced negative gaps for reliability and tangibles (Sarrico, Miguel, Ferreira & Silva, 2009).

Responsiveness

Responsiveness involves a service provider's commitment to serve its customers in a timeous

manner. Thus, responsiveness reflects the capacity and preparedness of employees to provide a quality, timely service (Bateson and Hoffman, 2011). Figure 3 shows that, as with the reliability dimension, responsiveness expectations are very similar, as are perception scores. The result is gap scores that are almost the same as for reliability. It was found that a service quality study undertaken in Scotland revealed that service quality gap scores were larger than the other dimensions for reliability and responsiveness dimensions (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006). Although the perceptions are above the midpoint of 3 (indicating a majority of clients being satisfied to some degree), the large gaps indicate that clients are not receiving the quality of service they would like.

Figure 3. Expected and perceived responsiveness dimension

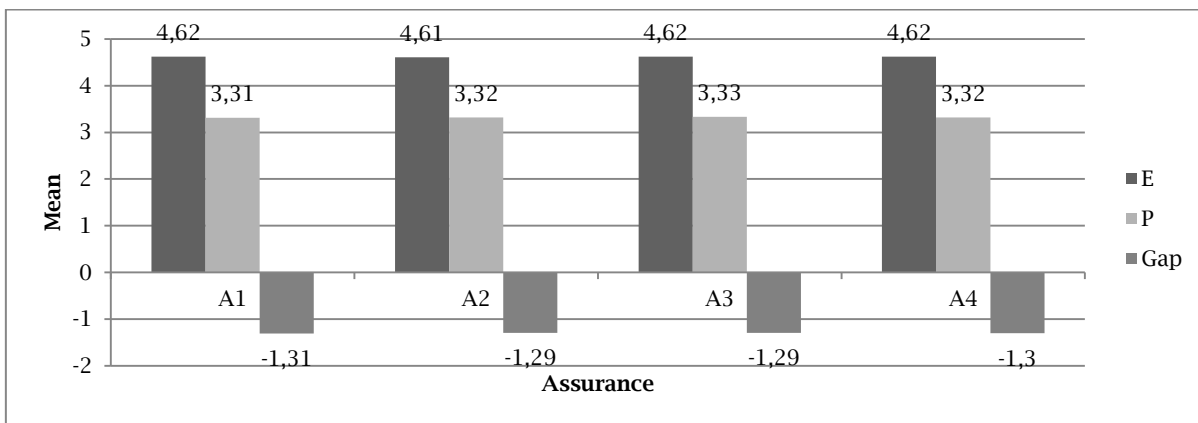


Inadequate responsiveness may be due to incorrect work methods or processes and/or inadequate supervision (Veerasamy, Govender and Pillay, 2013). Zeithaml et al. (2006) maintain that service organisations should be keen to assist their customers, provide prompt service and not make customers wait to be acknowledged. The responsiveness dimension requires the service provider to be flexible and creative in resolving the problems and requests raised by customers. CSCs should develop the ability to deal with each client's unique needs by customizing their services.

Assurance

Assurance relates to the service firms capability to provide their service knowledgeable and politely, while generating trust and confidence in customers. Gronroos (2000) maintains that the staff's behaviour can generate confidence in the organisation. Furthermore, the service provider should ensure that the customer feels safe while conducting their transactions, clearly a critical issue considering the reasons most clients have for visiting a CSC in the first place. Figure 4 shows that, as with reliability and responsiveness, Assurance has high expectation scores and middling perception scores, resulting in large gap scores that are much the same. This, like reliability and responsiveness, shows that clients are dissatisfied across the whole of this dimension.

Figure 4. Expected and perceived assurance dimension



Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2006) stress the importance of politeness, respect and effective communication in building long lasting trust and confidence. Until clients feel assured and safe in the CSC and trust the staff, an acceptable level of satisfaction with the CSC service will never be achieved.

Empathy

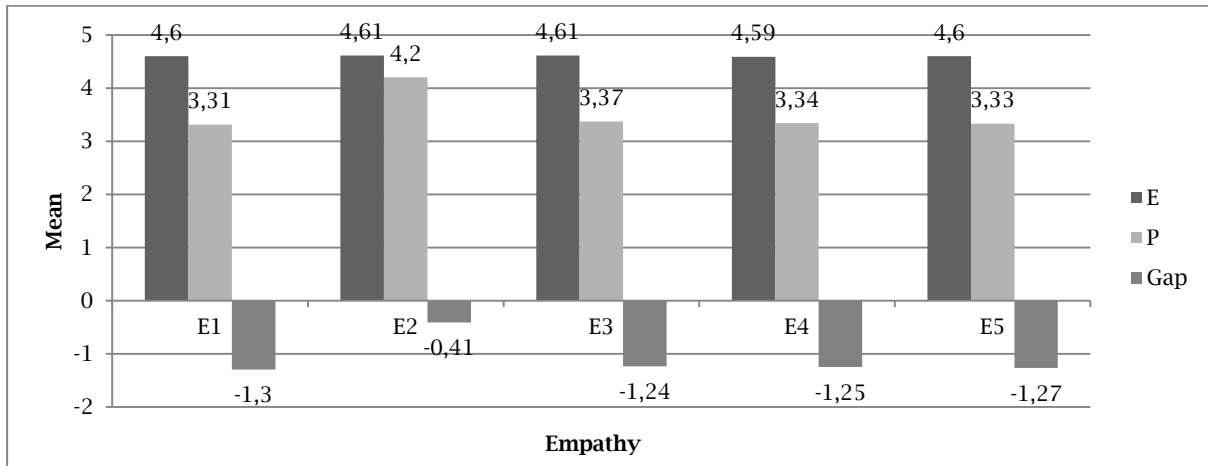
According to Zeithaml et al. (2006) empathy is the ability to feel another person's experiences as one's

own. It involves providing caring and personalised attention, and includes features like sensitivity, approachability and understanding the other's needs (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003). Figure 5 shows that three of the questions in this dimension reflect a similar pattern as the previous dimensions. This pattern involves high expectations, middling perceptions and large equal sized gap scores. This again reflects an overall level of dissatisfaction with the service received. However, question E2 is different, reflecting a perception score that is almost as high as the expectation score. This relates to the

CSC's operating hours, with which clients are obviously very happy. But it should be noted that

this is not a "people" issue - it is a non-person factor, similar to the tangibles factors.

Figure 5. Expected and perceived empathy dimension



The implication of the large gaps for four of the questions, especially also considering the small gap for question E2, is that staff of the CSCs are perceived as uncaring, unsympathetic and not interested in helping clients - a strange finding for staff working in a "customer service centre". Of critical importance for improving service quality is the improvement of staff attitudes towards their clients.

In addition to expectations, perception and gaps scores, Table 3 also depicts the ranking in

terms of importance of each of the questions. The gap scores range from minus 1.33 to minus 0.36. Gap scores are ranked in order to highlight the importance of addressing the gaps to improve service delivery. The dimensions are grouped, in the fifth column, in terms of the gap scores which range from 1 to 13. The South African Police Services managers should attempt improve the quality of services for at least items categorised from 1-5, which are shown in Table 5.

Table 5. Priority service items for attention

Statement	E	P	Gap	No
The service is delivered according to SAPS terms and conditions.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	1
SAPS staff delivers service at the promise time.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	1
Accurate and secure client records are maintained at the SAPS offices.	4.67	3.35	-1.33	1
SAPS staffs inform me exactly when service will be performed.	4.67	3.34	-1.33	1
The staff never too busy to respond to problems.	4.67	3.35	-1.32	2
When staff promises to deliver the service within a specified time frame, they do so.	4.66	3.34	-1.32	2
When I have a complaint, SAPS staff attends to it in a constructive manner.	4.67	3.35	-1.32	2
Staff provides prompt and timely service to me.	4.67	3.36	-1.32	2
Staff is always willing to listen to client's problems.	4.62	3.31	-1.31	3
The staff makes me feel that they can be trusted.	4.62	3.32	-1.30	4
The staff should have the ability to do their respective jobs.	4.60	3.31	-1.30	4
Staff is sympathetic to my individual needs while respecting my privacy.	4.61	3.32	-1.29	5
Staff is polite and courteous to me.	4.62	3.33	-1.29	5
Staff reassures me in terms of personal anxieties, concerns and problems.	4.67	3.35	-1.32	2

The items highlighted/ranked in Table 5 involve the SAPS staff interaction with the clientele. It is apparent that SAPS managers are not monitoring the customer service function at the Community Service Centres sufficiently. Prior to 1994, the corporate culture of the SAPS was to defend and protect the government and its policies, rather than serving the community in which it was based. The primary client was the government. Post 1994, the SAPS mandate was changed to become more customer oriented, aligning its operation to the country's constitution. The SAPS was expected to develop trust by developing relationships through community policing which required co-operation from all stakeholders. The focus of the organisation

is now to engage in visible policing which allows communities to see effective policing in action. However, according to a survey conducted in 2014, 44% of respondents believed that there was no point in reporting crimes to the SAPS (Berndt, in Klopper and Viljoen, 2016). It is apparent that the corporate culture at SAPS is still not customer oriented. The existing customer care/service system needs to be revised to train employees to develop a corporate culture strategy for customer care and community engagement so as to improve the items and dimensions identified in Table 5 for priority attention. The top five items ranked 1 in Table 5 warrant immediate and urgent attention and should

be incorporated in the operational plans which should include monitoring mechanisms.

5. CONCLUSIONS

As previously mentioned, the research set out to achieve the following objectives:

Objective 1: To identify if clients receive the service that they expect in the CSC

As presented in Figures 1 to 5 and Tables 3 to 5, the scores for expectations and perceptions for almost all questions in four of the dimensions (excluding tangibles), and their related gap scores, show high levels of expectations, but mediocre levels of perception. In all but one of the questions in these four dimensions, the CSCs are falling short of their customers' expectations, resulting in a high level of dissatisfaction with the quality of the service provided. Clearly clients expect to be treated politely and with respect by knowledgeable and competent staff who responds quickly, efficiently and sympathetically to their needs. From the fact that the perception scores for most of the questions are marginally above the mid-point, it can be concluded that clients' needs are eventually being met, but not in the way that the clients expect them to be met. The unsatisfactory service provided by staff is emphasised by the fact that clients are generally satisfied with most of the tangible (i.e. non-human) factors. So, the offices, uniforms, furniture, signage, etc. is seen as acceptable, but CSC staff is probably seen as just going through the motions with the clients' problems eventually being solved or their needs eventually being met if they wait long enough. Clearly, the SAPS slogan of '*a responsible, effective and high quality service with honesty and integrity*' is not believed by their clients.

Objective 2: To assess the care and sympathy with which clients' service requests are handled

As mentioned, clients expect to be treated politely and with respect by knowledgeable and competent staff who respond quickly, efficiently and sympathetically to their needs. The large gaps for all items in reliability and responsiveness indicate that staff is not efficient, they do not deliver the service at the time promised or in a constructive manner. They do not react promptly and give the impression of being unwilling or too busy to serve clients promptly and properly. This inefficient service could be due to staff lacking knowledge or due to their having a poor attitude towards the general public. This study is not able to identify which of these reasons are applicable.

The high gap scores for assurance and empathy indicate that CSC staff does not care much about their clients. They do not show sympathy or understanding for people often in difficult situations, and seem unable to provide a service personalised to the individual client's needs. They do not appear polite and courteous to the people they are serving and do not go out of their way to build trust with the clients. It is questionable therefore whether they are competent to act as CSC officials.

As mentioned above, the staff are not living and applying the intentions of the SAPS strategic plan of an efficient and effective service, as would be expected of customer service officials. Clearly clients are not treated with care and sympathy in the majority of cases.

Objective 3: To identify the factors influencing the clients' perceptions of the CSCs.

As discussed above, the tangible aspects of the CSCs are generally felt to be satisfactory, mostly meeting the clients' expectations. Thus the tangible factors can be seen to be positive, or at worst, neutral, and not playing any role in the overall negative perception that clients have of the CSCs.

The main factors affecting the perceptions that clients have of the CSCs are those relating to the staff of the CSCs - practical abilities, efficiency, attitude to the client and attitude to the job.

Staff is slow to attend clients and when they do, service is slow and often not achieved at the time promised. Clients are not informed of what is being done or when it will be completed. Staff often appears to be too busy to serve the client.

Dealing with the police often makes citizens uneasy or nervous, and polite and courteous treatment would help to overcome clients' personal anxieties and concerns, especially for people who do not respond well to authority figures. Showing sympathy and indicating that you are there to help the client and have their best interests at heart is necessary when operating in a customer service role.

Of course, these characteristics of kindness, sympathy and helpfulness may not be the characteristics that are emphasised in the recruitment for, and activities of, a police officer outside the CSC. Thus part of the problem might be that police officers should not be staffing the CSCs. Maybe they should be staffed by civilians who are selected and trained for the customer service role.

Therefore, the SAPS Strategic Plan should focus on inculcating customer orientation strategies to improve the overall quality of service. A marketing manager should be appointed at each community service centre to ensure that clients visiting the centres are satisfied with the service delivery.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CSC MANAGERS

Since the weaknesses identified are primarily related to staff behaviour, rather than the non-personal factors, it is recommended that systems and training in service quality be implemented to encourage CSC staff to become more customer oriented, as follows:

- SAPS should establish measures of performance based on client satisfaction. These should be monitored regularly by an independent assessor, for example, a market research company, in order to continually aim at closing the service gap.
- The quality of a service starts with education of those responsible for providing the service. Training in customer service for all staff at all levels is necessary to facilitate changes in behaviour and attitude, but particularly for those who work in the CSCs. This, and the following two recommendations, should significantly assist in reducing the service gap in assurance and empathy.

- A social support programme should be developed, including team building and programmes to incentivise staff to perform at high levels. Top management should publicly recognize employees who provide excellent client service, including exposure in the monthly SAPS journal.
- SAPS should maintain stronger links with their employees. Policies that facilitate better staff competence, and that help staff to understand what good client service is, will assist to develop the employees' full potential and furthermore will create a happy work environment. Satisfied staff produces satisfied clients. Such policies should include performance management, goal setting and learning and development.
- Ideas and information on service delivery problems, and how to resolve them, should be shared by Management via internal communications. Better communication with, and between, CSC staff should stress the crucial nature of service quality, thus improving reliability and responsiveness.

7. LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Limitations

Like all research, our study has some limitations. The research is essentially a multiple case study, obtaining data from only three CSCs, in only the KZN province - therefore the findings cannot be generalised to all CSCs in the whole of South Africa. However, since the sampled CSCs were amongst the largest in KZN, we are confident that the findings would be similar in other CSCs in the KZN province. A further limitation is that the sample is slightly skewed towards younger people and females. Younger females might receive different treatment, or they might perceive the treatment they do receive differently compared to males or older people. For example, older males might be more assured and self-confident in a police station.

Further research

To build on this research similar studies should be conducted in CSCs in other provinces, and in other urban and rural areas, to identify if these findings can be generalised across South Africa.

Additional research is needed to identify whether the clients' demographic profiles influence their expectations of, and perceptions towards, the service they receive at CSCs. For example, do males get treated differently to females, and therefore develop different expectations and perceptions of the service provided by a CSC?

This study focuses on the perceptions of CSC clients, identifying numerous weaknesses in the CSC operations. It would be worthwhile to research these issues from the CSC staff viewpoint in order to help identify the underlying causes of the weaknesses, and to identify how they could be rectified.

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