

OVERVIEW OF THE OPERATIONAL SERVICE QUALITY IN UAE GOVERNMENT

Rozilah Kasim¹, Salem R. Al Meqbaali²

Faculty of Technology Management and Business, Universiti Tun Hussein Onn Malaysia

¹rozilah@uthm.edu.my, ²salem.almeqbali@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

Government service providers now play a growing important role in the general economy of some countries. The purpose of this study is to determine the operational service quality in United Arab Emirates (UAE) government. Fundamentally, there is a need to identify the issues of impact of government operational service quality towards service quality in the UAE. The most popular model used among general instruments for evaluation of service quality is SERVQUAL, which is being the most effective and mostly used model in service quality evaluation. Service quality is a sort of dimensions that reflects several things, such as reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangible etc. In order to understand the research phenomenon of the operational service quality in UAE government service, this research basically emphasizes on the precedent literatures. Since this is a conceptual paper, this study establishes the need the operational service quality in UAE government service by empirically and theoretically. In depth findings show that, effective measurement of service quality and excellence for various dimensions of Government service could be very useful in the segmentation of customers and the allocation of resources. Government sectors could focus on different customer needs and the service quality dimensions, which are crucial in achieving operational service quality.

Keywords: Service quality, Operational service quality, SERVQUAL, Government, United Arab Emirates (UAE)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

There are a series of meanings for the term “Service Quality” but what is common among these definitions is that all of them define it as a something ‘intangible’. To understand ‘Service Quality’ better, the judgment of service receiver after receiving the service is the indicator. After purchasing, the expected service and the service received are compared by the customers. Judgment about the quality and service excellence with the service delivery and outcomes are made by consumers. Service excellence is an emotional reaction to a distinctive service experience received by customer instead the perception of a customer about the quality is based on a long term cognitive assessment of service delivery of an organization. This research reviews the appropriate literature pertaining to public as service quality in Government. In this study, customers are general public or citizens and service quality is measured through expectations and perceptions of operational service quality in Government. However, general public are the customers of government institutions, customers who are associated with the input and output of the process (Yeo, 2008), which can be categorized into three classes. First, people processing services that the presence of customers is required like healthcare. Second, the possession-processing service which comprises job performance on tangible objects required no presence of customers like repairing a vehicle. Third, services based on information which are value-creating processes, pertaining to data, like banking. The services are processes or activities that are distinguished by two main perceptions, simultaneity and intangibility.

Simultaneity simply signifies the presence of provider as well as customer of service is realized and both perform a role in the attainment of a service. Intangibility signifies that the consequence of transaction of a service is not simply an ownership transfer, like transfer of ownership of physical goods. The quality of the services offered to the customers and provided for them, no matter how excellent or terrible they are, significantly influences the image that is drawn for them through favourable or unfavourable comments made by people.

Government service providers now play a growing important role in the general economy of some countries. Government authorities must treat service sector as a service business that is not secured from these changes and they must implement strategies to save and even develop their businesses. Implementing key success factors is one of the solutions that help Government businesses to maintain and even expand. There are several key success factors for the businesses that are crucial for businesses and implementation of these factors needs great effort from the authorities to get acceptable results in this highly competitive situation. The problem statement of the current study highlights the issues of the impact of government operational service quality towards service excellence in the UAE (Hussain *et al.*, 2016). Fundamentally, there is a need to identify the issues of impact of government operational service quality towards service excellence in the UAE. Once the service excellence, operation efficiency and Public Facility have been recognized towards excellence government service, a list of particular steps can be taken to actualize the development of public sector (Robinson, 1992; Damrath, 2012). Quantifiable results are portrayed as described to every target and must be dictated by the statement of purpose. Obligations regarding actualizing the objectives and targets ought to be built. The key arrangement sorted out through objectives and goals offers an arrangement of quantifiable results which can be assessed.

Furthermore, lack on discussion on government's intervention, policy on service delivery for public sectors in UAE is another problem that appears as academic problem, which means very few academic works have been conducted to address this important issue. This appears as a real gap in this sector. In fact, there is an obvious need to identify the gaps in UAE government service facilities and develop a strategic plan for future service excellence. This particular research also may focus on the clear objectives in light of the capacity of the government to concentrate on particular achievements. Thus, the current research will be very important for rescuing the existing situation.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Various academic writings and relevant materials are reviewed to establish how the operational service quality in UAE government. The review includes the concept of service quality and additional values to be gained upon establishing research setting.

2.1 Service Quality

Definitions of service quality, consequently, focus on encountering the customers' needs and requirements, and how ably the service delivered matches the customers' expectations of it, (Philip and Hazlett, 1997). A number of studies have been carried out, in order to ascertain what conventional service quality dimensions may significantly impact upon quality assessments (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985, 1988; Zeithaml *et al.* 1985). As such the importance of identifying dimensions of service quality was identified in the early years and continues until the current technological advancement stage.

Services are identified as processes, deeds and performances (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000). Therefore, services can be unique, although intangible and due to their intrinsic qualities, it will distinguish them from goods. One operational means of differentiating strategies and accomplishing competitive advantage involves superior service quality (Yang & Fang, 2004). Most of the products available in the market are a combination, consisting of either; intangible services or tangible goods.

Many definitions emerged in service quality, such as service quality is defined as the service discrepancy level between customers' normative expectation for service and their perceptions of service performance (Parasuraman *et al.* 1985). This is the most widely used definition in service quality. Zeithaml and Bitner (2000) distinguish services as processes, deeds and performances. As such services have their own intrinsic qualities which differentiate them from goods. Service quality is termed as the result of the comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the service that has been performed in reality (Grönroos, 1984; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985; 1988). This discrepancy will eventually lead to service excellence or dissatisfaction towards the service.

Government sectors are not simply competing in traditional public services, but have similarly expanded the extent of competition to an e-service with Government's operation services (Gonzalez *et al.*, 2004). Service quality has become the most powerful competitive weapon and a great differentiator, which many leading service organizations possess (Berry *et al.*, 1985) and has been identified as a critical success factor for organisations to develop their competitive advantage and enhance their competitiveness (Rod *et al.*, 2009).

2.2 Measurement of Service Quality

In investigating these discrepancies, Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1985), affirm that service quality can be assessed by measuring the "gaps" and the discrepancies between what the customer expects and what the consumer perceives about what he receives. According to this paradigm, when customers go through a product, they compare their prior expectations with the quality they have experienced, which leads to an emotional reaction evidenced in the satisfaction/dissatisfaction with the products or services purchased. According to service quality, it is a measure of the degree to which a customer's expectations matches with the service delivered (Lewis & Booms 1983).

The most popular model used among general instruments for evaluation of service quality is SERVQUAL, a well-known scale developed by Parasuraman *et al.* (1985, 1988). The main attributes were: reliability, courtesy, tangibles, responsiveness, competency, assurance, access, credibility, security and understanding Parasuraman *et al.* (1988). In later research, the author came out with 5 attributes replacing the original ten, which comprise the foundation of a global measurement for service quality, SERVQUAL Model (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). Extensive study on service quality conducted by researchers Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithaml have intended the notion that it is possible that service quality can be measured (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988, 1991, 1994).

Service quality by tradition refers to the quality of all non-Government-based customer experiences and interactions with companies. The SERVQUAL model being the most effective and mostly used model in service quality evaluation, an adaptation of this tool has been modified to incorporate the e-commerce context. As such it resulted in the emergence of the e-SERVQUAL model. The e-SERVQUAL model (Zeithaml *et al.* 2002) is a conceptual model of service quality for e-retailing services. The model consisted of 7 service quality characteristics: reliability, privacy, compensation, efficiency, fulfilment, responsiveness, and contact.

Service quality is a focused evaluation of specific dimensions of service that reflects the customer's perception, which are: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, tangibles. Satisfaction, on the other hand is influenced by perceptions of product and service quality, personal factors and price as well as situational factors which is more inclusive, (Zeithaml & Bitner 2003).

2.3 Conceptual Model of Service Delivery

There were many criticisms of the SERVQUAL model, Cronin and Taylor (1992) and Teas (1993) questioned and criticized the effectiveness of SERVQUAL in evaluating service quality and the measurement of service quality through the questionnaire in SERVQUAL. They further argued that service quality based on the expectation-performance gap derived from Parasuraman *et al* (1985, 1988) is deficient, since much of the empirical research supported performance-based measures of service quality. This has more explanatory power than measures that are based on the gap between expectation and performances. Kang and James (2004) argued that SERVQUAL does not focus on other attributes of service but rather focuses more on the service delivery process, such as service-encounter outcomes (i.e. technical dimensions). All these researchers are of the view that SERVQUAL measurement does not suffice the technical attribute of service. However Parasuraman *et al.* (1994) claimed that the main purpose of measuring service quality is to diagnose the service shortfalls which need attention and that they are the major practical benefit of the SERVQUAL model.

In addition to substantiate for the current research, other studies have displayed the exclusion of expectations in measuring of service quality. With this development away from utilizing expectations, the theoretical background of service quality is shifting from expectancy disconfirmation to the theory of reasoned action. Current research affirms that expectations are not well founded in e-service quality (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Malhotra 2002), which implies further that perceptions solely, should be the basis for measuring e-service quality. The current study followed the equal basis of measuring consumer perception only. In an online service, if the expectations, reduced by experience, are covered, a “gap” would not exist and the service quality will be satisfactory although the perception is low, perception expectation can vary as per the computer efficacy levels of the individuals.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

In order to understand the research phenomenon of the operational service quality in UAE government service, this research basically emphasizes on the precedent literatures. Furthermore, to establish the need the operational service quality in UAE government service, more than one hundred academic papers and materials were reviewed from the background of service quality from which thirty eight was found to be more relevant to the phenomenon understudy. Therefore, the review involved about thirty eight academic writings and materials.

4.0 FINDINGS

There were numerous studies conducted specifically to identify service quality dimensions most appropriate to Government’s operation. Despite some of the service quality dimensions being significant to Government sector as well, studies have discovered additional dimensions pertaining to UAE Government’s operation. However, the dimensions also could vary in different countries, especially due to cultural factors, the Government access and the demographic factors. Service quality is a concept that has stimulated substantial interest in many studies (Wafaa and Abderrezzak, 2014), particularly in the public sector.

For the delivery of financial services, the increased importance of information and communication technology has led to the growing interest of managers and researchers and in Government’s operation quality issues. There are global concerns as how best to measure and manage service quality as the acceptance of Government’s operation is growing rapidly all over the world. Unlike physical goods, the task to establish accepted service quality dimensions for intangible services is a tedious process. With the infusion of technology it has further complicated researchers to arrive at a universally acceptable model.

A direct contact with technology such as Government's operation enhances the perception of customers of having greater control of their needs. Research has identified new dimensions of service quality in case of technology-enabled services, which is a deviation from the traditional service quality dimensions, such as communication among customers, content, mass customization, automated search, information acquisition, and ease of use.

SERVQUAL model by Parasuraman (1985) captured the following variables, consisting of tangible, reliability, assurance, responsiveness and assurance; however the tangibility is replaced by Website Interface and interaction, as the physical interaction does not prevail in Government's operation. Besides, reliability in the Government's operation concept is the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). In the virtual service, it is vital to make customers to trust that the organization is delivering what is promised (Li and Suomi, 2009). Lee and Lin (2005) emphasized in their study the importance reliability, by the information technology-based service.

As discussed earlier, responsiveness is the willingness to respond to customers' needs and provide prompt services when required (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1988). In fact, responsiveness persists as a significant dimension towards a traditional as well as a Government's operation context.

Assurance is the knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to instil trust and confidence (Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). The results revealed in the study of Zhengwei (2012), that Assurance is more significant and important than security and privacy. Assurance in British Government sectors implies the polite and friendly staffs, provision of financial advice, interior comfort, eases of access to account information and knowledgeable and experienced management team (Sadek *et al.*, 2010). This may differ significantly in other places, particularly UAE, where there is prominence in the assurance dimension. Moreover, empathy is the individual attention provided to the customer and it is evident even in the Government's operation context.

5.0 CONCLUSION

While service quality is the ultimate goal of any organisation, according to Grönroos (2000), he brings a different perspective which could be very vital. He mentioned that it is important not to exceed the satisfaction level too much, since if it exceeds the customers' expectations, it will be even higher the next time which is human nature. This will result in a spiral effect, where the risk of service failure increases. As such he mentioned that, it is important that the service quality level is increased gradually, to avoid the risk of customer discontent in the future. Many research indicated that service quality is the difference between the perception of the performance and the expectations. The difference between the two is typically measured simultaneously despite evolving at different points in time. The work carried out by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, between 1985 and 1988 stipulates the basis for the measurement of service quality:

- By using the gap between the customer's expectation of performance and their perceived experience of performance, which renders the measurer with a satisfaction "gap," which is quantitative and objective in nature.

Work done by Cronin and Taylor (1992), propose

- The "confirmation/disconfirmation" theory of combining the "gap" described by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry as two different measures (expectation and perception of performance) into a single measurement of performance according to expectation.

Effective measurement of service quality and excellence for various dimensions of Government service quality could be very useful in the segmentation of customers and the allocation of resources

(Kotler and Keller 2006; Parasuraman *et al.* 1988). Government sectors could focus on different customer needs and the service quality dimensions, which are crucial in achieving service excellence.

At the inception of Government's operation, it was used merely to disseminate information and knowledge. Subsequently, its application was widened for many other purposes, such as on-line access to customer accounts and other features. Government's operation is predicted to revolutionize and transform the traditional public industry. From an operational perspective, public services are easily digitalized and automated and, thus, lend themselves to the Government (Elliot and Loebbecke, 2000) the potential competitive advantage of the Government for government sectors mainly rests in the areas of satisfaction of consumer needs and of cost reduction. It should basically be a 'win-win' situation for both government sectors and customers.

A key element of service excellence in the public industry is the nature of the relationship between the customer and the provider of the products and services. Some government sectors continuously add additional self-service technologies, even prior to testing the impact on customer perceptions. Offering more products via Government's operation does not merely contribute to the satisfaction of the customers. Too many details on the website can complicate matters to many customers. This may be a potential reason for the lack of interest in customer's adopting Government's operation. In fact, online public users are less likely to leave their government sectors and it appears to be the retail channel that is especially promising in enhancing customer loyalty: online public users are less likely to switch their checking account provider than their offline counterparts. This indicates there is potential for UAE to move towards implementing Government's operation services.

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