

Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government:

Conceptual Issues and Perspectives for Consideration

Modeni Mudzamba Michael SIBANDA

ARTICLE

Abstract

Local government in South Africa is no longer exclusively a function of national or provincial government; it is now regarded as a sphere rather than a tier of government. Section 152 of the Constitution of South Africa, 1996 stipulates the objectives of the local sphere of government, among which is ensuring the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner. Poor or lack of service delivery by local authorities has received much media attention of late. Monitoring customer-focused service delivery could therefore be a critically important means to effect quality service delivery in local government. At its core this approach emphasises the treatment of municipal service users and the citizenry as customers. This article contends that conceptually customer-

focused quality service delivery may potentially lever local government authorities out of the poor service delivery rut that has come to render some municipal authorities ineffective and inefficient and hence dysfunctional. At a conceptual level the article grapples with the elusive concept of service quality and the often contested concept of customer and proxy measures for monitoring service quality in the public sector. Citing British and South African customer-focused quality service delivery tools and initiatives, the article interrogates the efficacy of such initiatives and perspectives for monitoring customer-focused quality service delivery in the local sphere of government.

Keywords: Monitoring and Evaluation, Customer-focused, Service delivery, Local Government

INTRODUCTION

Local government in South Africa is regarded as a sphere rather than a tier of government. In the Republic of South Africa, government is constituted as national, provincial and local spheres of government, which are distinct, interdependent and interrelated (*Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996, section 40(1)). A municipality has the right to govern, on its own initiative, the local government affairs of its community, subject to national and provincial legislation, as provided for in the *Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996 (Section 151(3). Two documents that have been especially influential in restructuring local government in South Africa are the Constitution and the White Paper on Local Government Transformation, 1998. In terms of Section 40(1) and (2) of the Constitution, local government is one of the spheres of government that seeks to promote and enhance cooperative government. The White Paper on Local Government, 1998 also articulates that government in South

Africa is constituted as national, provincial and local spheres, which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated.

Section 151 of the Constitution makes provision for the establishment of wall-to-wall municipalities for the governance of the whole country. Section 152 outlines the objectives of local government, among which are ensuring the provision of services to communities in a sustainable manner. The mechanisms through which developmental local government could be achieved are enshrined in section 153 of the Constitution. In relation to municipal service delivery, section 195 stipulates the imperative for efficient public service delivery. This explicitly stipulates that public administration should adhere to a number of principles, including that services should be provided impartially, and equitably and that resources should be utilised efficiently, economically and effectively.

To give effect to the stipulations of the Constitution, legislative and policy measures were undertaken to facilitate transition to the new local government. The *Local Government Transition Act*, 1993 (Act 209 of 1993) constituted the first phase of local government transformation and laid the groundwork for legitimate local government in the Republic of South Africa. Chapter three of the Constitution endorsed promulgation of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 as amended by Act 58 of 1999 and the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000). The core enabling pieces of legislation which marked the final phase of local government reform and restructuring in South Africa included the *Municipal Demarcation Act*, 1998 (Act

6 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

27 of 1998), the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act*, 1998 (Act 117 of 1998), the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act*, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000) and the *Municipal Finance Management Act*, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003).

The December 2000 local government elections marked the end of the transition period and reduced the number of municipalities from 843 to 284 (Reddy, Naidoo & Pillay, 2005:41), which have now been reduced further to 278 after the May 2011 local government elections. Service delivery or lack of it by municipalities has received much media attention. The elevated status of local government and the associated participatory rights of citizens clearly reflect the devolution of policy and authority. However, in spite of the tremendous strides made in democratising local government, poor service delivery and perceived corruption still result in some municipalities being dysfunctional. To be effective in monitoring service delivery, local governments both nationally and internationally are adopting New Public Management (NPM), private sector or market-oriented practices.

Common threads evident in public service delivery reform, especially in the United Kingdom, include among other measures, 'entrepreneurial' local governments that promote competition or quasi-competition between service providers. Such local governments empower citizens by devolving control from the bureaucracy into the community, measure performance, focus not on inputs but on outcomes, are driven by goals and their missions, not rules and regulations, and define service users as customers (Morphet, 2008:66). The primacy of the customer dictates that local government provides services that are responsive to the needs of the customer. A customer-focused approach to service delivery is premised on the setting of sound standards, service delivery plans and targets that achieve measurable outcomes and ultimately customer and citizen needs satisfaction. Conceptually, quality is perceived as a function of accepted quality standards and service delivery plan outcomes and service delivery targets associated with a particular sphere of interest, appropriateness to purpose, through the ability to consistently meet or exceed perceived customer and citizen needs. Further to this, it can be perceived in terms of a local authority's capacity for continuous improvement of processes and systems using feedback from service users as customers.

Similarly, the context of NPM, dissected into its well-known features of an overall vision of targets, measures and frameworks focused on the 3Es, Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness, potentially provides opportunities for monitoring customer satisfaction by focusing service delivery on customer needs and using consultation feedback from customer-focused quality service delivery for continuous improvement of service delivery (Robinson, 1999:85). Best Value (BV)

and *Batho Pele*, if and when cognisant of contextual specificities, can further be employed as critical monitoring tools for promoting the notion of customer-focused quality service delivery. However, it is critically important to note that despite the wide resonance of this term in the private sector, the very concept of customer in the public sector is problematic.

CONTEXTUALISING SERVICE QUALITY

Service quality has been receiving much prominence of late due to its obvious relationship to costs, financial performance, customer satisfaction and customer retention. Service quality oriented organisations focus on ascertaining customer perceptions of service quality and subsequently devising tools and strategies to deliver the same (Sureshchandar, Rajendran & Anantharaman, 2002:10). Thus to this end, service quality is a critical determinant of competitiveness and a proxy measure and key determinant of value for money. It can help a local authority to differentiate itself from other authorities and organisations and through it gain a lasting competitive advantage. Service quality can further be regarded as a key antecedent to successful customer relationships, and to improved economy, efficiency and effectiveness (Ghobadian, Spellar & Jones, 1993:44). Despite the importance of service quality, the concept is not well developed in the public sector. Thus, in this respect the public sector lags behind the private sector in embracing market-oriented philosophies and initiatives for monitoring and evaluating service delivery. In public service delivery, the concept of service quality is contested. The reason is that conceptually it is often problematic to read a common understanding or universal definition of quality service.

Generally, the notion of quality as value or worth in relation to customer expectations is used to describe the nature of quality as interpreted within the quality management context (Cuttance, 1995:4). Embodied in this notion is the assumption that local authorities produce a product or service which is intended to satisfy the needs of users or customers with quality being the totality of features and characteristics of a product or service that bears its ability to satisfy stated or implied needs. This relativist notion of quality finds resonance in Sallis (1993:13) who perceives quality as a philosophy or methodology, which assists institutions to manage change and to set their own agendas for dealing with the plethora of new external pressures. Used in this sense, service quality is a concept implying 'fitness for purpose', measuring up to specification as well as meeting particular customer needs. A distinction can therefore be made

8 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

between quality as the intrinsic value associated with a service product and quality as meeting of customer or community needs and requirements.

It is, however, worth noting that applied to managing service delivery in local government, while they seem appropriate to service organisations generally, these notions of quality do not necessarily meet all the criteria for quality in the provision of public services. This is precisely so because delivery of public services is a process based on broadly accepted normative and ethical values and guidelines, emanating from the body politic, community and social values, as well as other prescribed guidelines (Cloete, 1998:91-113). Ultimately, quality in local government cannot be isolated from those values, which relate to what is perceived as worthwhile in society. These values provide an ethically justifiable platform for determining and evaluating public service processes and outcomes, which might permeate the orthodox market-oriented notion of a quality culture in service delivery.

The encroachment of politics into the administrative sphere further complicates this quandary. According to Fox and Meyer (1995:98) politics refers to the process of decision making; who receives what, when, where and how; a conflict resolution process which determines the apportionment of resources; the process by which power is applied in order to determine whether and how government is to be exercised in any given area; and/or the apportionment of values. Thornhill (2008:727) writes that politics in the context of local government and municipal administration concerns the:

- allocation of values as weighted by the ruling political party to the available facts
- determination of the relative importance of requests, in relation to the availability of resources, by a community or a particular segment of the municipal community for a particular service
- quantity (e.g. how often rubbish bins are emptied per week) of the service to be provided
- quality (e.g. accepted level of cleanliness of the streets and sidewalks) of the services to be delivered.

In terms of section 151(3) of the Constitution, the political body governing in a particular municipality has the responsibility to oversee the executive actions of the appointed officials acting on its behalf. This, however, does not imply getting involved in the management of the municipality but monitoring the actions to ensure that the stated goals are achieved. Further to this, section 151(2) of the Constitution is reiterated in section 11 of the *Local Government: Municipal*

Systems Act, 2000 (Act 32 of 2000), which emphasises the council's dual authority. Council may legislate by way of by-laws or resolutions (authorising enforceable actions) and has to exercise the executive authority within its area of jurisdiction, including *inter alia* section 11(3). In terms of this enabling section, council has authority for, among other things:

- the adoption of policies, plans, strategies and programmes
- promoting and undertaking development
- establishing and maintaining an administration
- implementing applicable national, provincial legislation and its own by-laws
- providing municipal services
- monitoring municipal service delivery
- preparing, approving and implementing budgets
- imposing and recovering taxes, levies, service fees and surcharges
- establishing and implementing performance management systems
- doing anything within its legislative and executive competence.

The legislative procedure is specifically prescribed in section 12 of the *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* (Act 32 of 2000). Council is required among other things to:

- follow a prescribed procedure
- give sufficient notice to members of the intention to introduce a measure
- publish proposed by-laws for comment (Thornhill, 2008:728).

What this all therefore means is that in the South African context, a council may pass its own by-laws and/or determine service delivery levels applicable in its area of jurisdiction. However, it is also critically important to note that the Minister of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA) or the MEC for Local Government in a province may, at the request of the South African Local Government Association (SALGA), by notice in respectively the *Government Gazette* or the *Provincial Gazette* make standard by-laws for local government. The customer-oriented nature of this process compels a municipality to compile and maintain a register of all by-laws. Such a compilation, called a Municipal Code, must be made available on request to a member of the public and a reasonable fee may be charged for a copy in this regard.

EVALUATING SERVICE QUALITY

The evaluation of service quality levels is critically important in monitoring service quality and customer-focused service delivery that meets community needs. Service delivery quality can essentially be thought of as a measure of the extent to which the service delivered meets service users' or customers' expectations (Ghobadian *et al.*, 1993:43). However, a shortcoming of this notion of quality is the inherent presupposition that the nature of most services is such that the customer is present in the delivery process. More importantly and worth noting is, however, the perception in this conceptualisation that service quality is influenced not only by the service outcome but also the service process. This perceived quality thus lies along a continuum, unacceptable quality lies at one end of the continuum, while ideal quality represents different gradations of quality and one such point is the satisfactory service quality (Ghobadian *et al.*, 1993:49).

Customer satisfaction in service delivery can thus be modelled as suggested by Ghobadian *et al.*, (1993) in their model of customer perceived quality and hence satisfaction or dissatisfaction in service delivery. The model suggests that: Prior customer + Actual process + Actual outcome = Perceived expectations quality quality quality (**PCE**) (**APQ**) (**AOQ**) (**PQ**)

According to Ghobadian *et al.*'s (1993) model, prior expectations are compared with the actual service delivery process and the service outcome and through this comparison perceived quality is fashioned (Ghobadian *et al.*, 1993:49). The implication is that while PCE is the *a priori* image of what will be received when the customer purchases a service, AQ is the real level of service quality provided. The quality of a service is therefore determined by the CP and not by the perceptions of the providers of the service, the local authority. Hence, PQ is the customer's feel for the quality of the service. It determines the extent of the customers' satisfaction in the delivery of services by a local authority. Using Gobadian *et al.*'s (1993:50) modelling three possible outcomes/scenarios which emanate from this quality service delivery monitoring model can thus be depicted as follows:

- Satisfaction quality, where customer's expectations (**CE**) are exactly met: that is to say, **PCE = PQ**
- Ideal quality, where perceived quality (**PQ**) is higher than customers' expectations: that is to say **PQ > PCE**
- Unacceptable quality, where **PQ** is lower than **CE**: that is to say **PQ < PCE**.

In delivering services, municipalities can either be passive/reactive or strategic/proactive. According to Ghobadian *et al.*, (1993:55) passive quality emphasises planning and control, to minimise customer annoyance, rather than customer satisfaction hence focus and effort is on Herzberg's hygiene factors. In the context of municipalities hygiene factors would place emphasis on aspects such as rationalising functions, structures, legislation and resources, rather than also emphasising the use of non-financial measures such as product quality and customer satisfaction. However, sole compliance with hygiene factors does not ensure customer satisfaction. Alternatively, in strategic or proactive approaches quality is used to differentiate the local authority's service delivery to gain customer satisfaction, rather than mere compliance with legislative requirements, which emphasises basic service delivery.

QUALITY SCHEMES FOR MONITORING DELIVERY OF SERVICES

Monitoring quality assurance is a popular New Public Management (NPM) tool used to track, evaluate and review service delivery performance. In service delivery reviews, the terms of reference for quality assurance often tend to reflect the service quality and customer satisfaction model and the commodity notion of service delivery. Quality assurance tools seek to measure performance, which is then judged against predetermined standards of acceptability. Results-based monitoring and evaluation (M&E) is a powerful public management tool that can be used to help policy makers and decision makers track progress and demonstrate the impact of a given programme or policy (Kuzek & Rist, 2004:1). Evidently, this mirrors a paradigm shift from old public administration to a new public management concerned with previously private sector businesslike approaches to service delivery (Osborne & Gaebler, 1992).

In an attempt to modernise local government, local authorities in the developing world and in countries such as the United Kingdom specifically, have of late been adopting and utilising generic quality service delivery monitoring schemes, particularly the ISO 9000 standards series and Investors in People (IiP) (Investors in People, 1997:24). There are, however, pervasive disagreements and contestations regarding the extent to which these schemes can be transferred to service delivery in the public sector. One such concern, and hence source of considerable contestation, relates to the notion of the concept of quality, the determination of need, and the market approach to public services delivery.

A general lack of consensus has been developing around the notion of the 'instruments', tools or services required to meet needs, thus confusing 'quality'

12 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

with 'qualities'. This article asserts that attributes within a service may be associated with qualities of a good or bad service, but may not necessarily indicate if the service as a whole is of quality. Further, given that the concept of quality is a subjective impression, it is often argued that it is difficult to measure quality service delivery with a great deal of certainty in the public sector. The problem is furthermore compounded by the fact that perceptions of quality are not static, either within the same individual or between individuals.

Considering these contestations of opinion, it is worth noting that, firstly, the concept of quality is subjective; those who tend to control decision making in local government also tend to control how quality is defined. It may thus not come as a surprise that the dominant perspective of service quality is market-driven. Similarly, the second problem reveals the political dimension of service delivery monitoring and quality assurance, where it is assumed that users can express their interests or needs. Systematic identification of service delivery needs often proves to be problematic and many local authorities either opt out of assessment or rely on 'expert' judgement. An explicit example is the disadvantaged or disempowered groups in society/community. These almost always have the greatest service provision needs, yet receive the poorest service delivery. The third problem is that definitions of quality are informed by a dominant commodity perspective, including the implicit relativism and the associated issues of power, politics and control (Investors in People, 1997:24).

Given that the usefulness of generic principles of ISO 9000, 9002 and liP in local government service delivery have generally been established and acknowledged, especially in the United Kingdom (Lintell & Morris, 2001:416), this article deems it critically important for the interrogation of their efficacy. ISO 9002 and liP monitoring standards have been used by local authorities to manage the delivery of services. Although new versions of the respective standards have been proposed and keep evolving, the essential character of these standards has remained (Investors in People, 1997:24) and this will suffice for the purposes of the ensuing discussion.

MONITORING THROUGH ISO 9002 AND INVESTORS IN PEOPLE

According to liP UK (1997:24), while ISO 9002 directly focuses on organisational systems and processes for purposes of quality assurance, liP is concerned with training and development of employees in order to improve performance and competitiveness and has more diffuse links with quality improvement. As a standard the liP is designed to improve performance and secure competitive

advantage; it gives a planned approach to setting and communicating goals and developing people to meet these goals (Investors in People UK, 1997:2). Strategic links can also be forged between ISO 9000, 9002 and wider quality assurance schemes, and Total Quality Management (TQM) conceptual frameworks (Lintell & Morris, 2001:417).

ISO quality assurance standards, consisting of ISO 9000, 9001, 9002, 9003 and 9004, have further been found to have relevance to local government service delivery given that they are based on the concept that certain minimum characteristics of a quality management system could be usefully standardised, in order to give mutual benefit to service providers and 'customers' (recipients of services) alike. In essence, ISO 9000 describes the guidelines for use of a particular standard, whereas ISO 9004 describes guidelines for establishing an internal quality management system within the broad context of TQM. Within this perspective, ISO 9001, 9002 and 9003 could be viewed as generic monitoring standards containing minimum requirements for establishing and maintaining a documented quality system that instils confidence in customers. The intended products or services that meet customer requirements are described as contractual standards between 'supplier' or 'service provider' and 'customer' (Rao Tummala & Tang, 1994:28-30). The core concepts driving the contractual standards are defined by Rao Tummala and Tang (1994:18) as embodying the core values:

- Fact-based management
- People participation and partnership
- Design quality, speed and prevention
- Strategic quality planning
- Continuous improvement
- Leadership
- Customer focus.

Experiences from the use of ISO standards especially tend to suggest that their use is positively correlated with raised performance in service delivery (Rao Tummala & Tang, 1994:34). It should, however, be noted that a wholesale and uncritical importation of these approaches to the South African local government context can be fraught with problems. This is because the standards are not explicit; one reason is, for example, that the investment of time, staff and finance were worthwhile in most European ISO application contexts. These areas are critical issues of concern in local government and municipal administration in South Africa. In response to flaring tensions government, through the Ministry of Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs (CoGTA), among others,

14 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

commissioned a national study on the state of Local Government. This assessment culminated in the Local Government indaba in October 2009, wherein a draft strategy was unveiled and subsequently approved by Cabinet in December 2009. This culminated in the comprehensive Local Government Turnaround Strategy (LGTAS) underpinned by two important considerations. The first is that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to municipalities is not useful or acceptable. Each municipality faces different social and economic conditions and has different performance levels and support (IMESA, 2010:43). The two pronged overarching aim of the LGTAS is thus to:

- restore the confidence of the majority of the people in their municipalities, as well as in the primary delivery machine of the developmental state at a local level
- rebuild and improve the basic requirements for a functional, responsive, accountable, effective and efficient developmental local government (IMESA, 2010:43).

It has, however, not been convincingly established whether the ISO monitoring standards can be a stepping-stone to Total Quality Management in service delivery in local authorities. One reason is that, while, for example, the qualification for the ISO 9000 certificate has been widely acknowledged to have some useful elements, adherence to ISO does not in itself ensure that a local authority will be a quality leader in terms of service delivery. To achieve quality service delivery, municipalities may need to look further and incorporate tried and tested best practices.

The LGTAS may potentially provide this window of opportunity given that it is to be managed through a national coordinating unit in CoGTA, which will serve as the nerve centre for implementation. A critical task of LGTAS is that agreements have to be reached with each province on the launch programme in the context of the different provincial needs and capacities (IMESA, 2010:45). This is aimed at providing guidance on ensuring that municipalities are supported in preparing and implementing their own tailor-made turnaround strategies, which must be incorporated into municipalities' IDPs and budgets. Thus the implementation of the LGTAS will present the entire country and all communities with an opportunity to work together with their municipalities in improving and accelerating service delivery. The LGTAS will also reinforce the good and best practices in municipalities while, at the same time, ensuring that the root causes of problems affecting municipal performance are confronted effectively.

This in essence requires that performance agreements be reached between and are agreed to between the Minister for CoGTA and local government MECs in the provinces. Agreements will also have to be reached between local government MECs and the executive mayors and mayors. This model is thus indeed a new and creative way of running government with the objective of improving service delivery and deepening democracy, which has never been experienced in South Africa before.

It should be noted that for this to succeed, emphasis should be placed on the importance of effective coordination, accountability and efficiency in the delivery of services across the three spheres of government. This implies that the new approach will also need to ensure that there is an alignment among the three spheres of government to ensure a seamless implementation, cooperation and support (IMESA 2010:45). To this end benchmarking can be used to seek best practices from other local authorities. Benchmarking enables local authorities to look outward and promotes the breaking of paradigms by providing an appreciation of how exemplary organisations conduct their service delivery processes (Naidoo, 2007:58).

MONITORING THROUGH BENCHMARKING AND BALANCED SCORECARDS

Apart from adopting quality models such as the ISO standards series and IIP, disseminating best practice and providing performance benchmarks has also become a basis for adding consumer and citizen interests into service delivery. Benchmarking can be used by South African local government authorities to seek out best practices from other organisations. Benchmarking seeks out best practices and allows a local government authority to set performance targets based on an assessment of the gap between its own practices and best practice (Naidoo, 2007:57). Benchmarking, however, requires creativity and innovation in that best practices need to be modified to suit a local authority's own specific situation.

The Balanced Scorecard (BSC) initially developed and refined by Kaplan and Norton is a key local government service delivery monitoring tool which can be a multi-dimensional framework for describing, implementing and managing strategy at all levels, linking objectives, initiatives and measures to an organisation's strategy and to its outcomes. The BSC framework provides a methodology to assess management decisions, and measures to gauge improvements (MacAdam & Walker, 2003:877). BSCs can, however, be limited by a lack of measures, information and data collecting systems, leading to ineffective objectives in some cases. Furthermore, a lack of adaptation to suit

16 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

specific local government contexts may lead to overly simplified views of key issues such as customer, citizen and stakeholder needs (MacAdam & Walker, 2003:890).

Notwithstanding this concern, the BSC can be a useful tool which links local government operations to strategy on an ongoing basis. Thus a BSC can be as much about reconciling competing priorities and goals to produce a balanced set of perspectives as about performance management and control. The BSC is a key tool for monitoring customer-focused quality service delivery. The combination of strategic and operational improvements enables more effective benchmarking in cases where benchmarking is supported by strategic improvement initiatives. A major strength in the BSC and benchmarking framework is its ability to help translate strategic objectives and the IDP and budgets into tangible improvements in operations at service delivery level. The BSC could thus be successfully used in local government as a service delivery monitoring tool to clarify and translate vision or strategy, communicate and link strategic objectives and measures, plan, set targets, align strategic initiatives and enhance strategic feedback and learning (MacAdam & Walker, 2003:879). At a comparative level, the introduction of the Best Value (BV) regime in British local government in 1997 serves to highlight the critical importance and need for benchmarking and monitoring public services delivery in local government. Conceptually, BV is premised on the famous '3Es' Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness (Armstrong, 1997:2).

MONITORING SERVICE DELIVERY FOR ACCOUNTABILITY USING BEST VALUE

In the United Kingdom (UK) value for money with its core concepts of the three Es came to typify the UK's central government attitude towards local government cultural reform, accompanied by massive structural and cultural change in local government service delivery (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994). The BV regime came into being for all English local authorities in April 2000 and in Wales three months later (Wilson & Game, 2002:338). It was introduced by the UK government in the White Paper Modernising local government: In touch with the people (DETR, 1998) and it replaced Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) (MacAdam & Walker, 2003:875). The concept of BV has as its main goal the improvement of service quality delivery. Its key principles are accountability, transparency, continuous improvement and ownership (Bowen, Pearl, Cattell, Hunter & Kelly, 2007:63).

Accountability ensures that simple, robust information is used to demonstrate performance. Transparency requires decisions to be open and transparent, with evidence of clear reasoning. Service delivery ownership permits anyone with an interest in local authority services to be involved; it further denotes a reciprocal relationship between public service delivery and its stakeholders. A continuous improvement encourages local authorities to ask questions of themselves, questioning whether they are achieving goals and outcomes and if they could do better in future (Bowen *et al.*, 2007:63).

Furthermore, the concept of BV advocates that local authorities should demonstrate the four 'Cs' of BV, namely: Challenge, Compare, Consult and Compete, and produce performance plans and action plans. According to Bowen *et al.*, (2007:64) 'Challenge' refers to the reviewing of the approach to services and ensuring that stakeholders are benefiting and as such is the most significant in that it encourages local authorities to rethink how they are providing and delivering services. 'Compare' ensures that performance is analysed and benchmarked using key performance indicators (KPI).

'Consult' serves to ensure that stakeholders are involved and 'Compete', involves the local authority subjecting itself to external competition if in-house services are not performing as expected.

The four Cs of BV also closely link with the three Es (Bowen *et al.*, 2007:64). 'Economy' relates to the careful management of resources to achieve lower processes and higher productivity. According to Wilson and Game (2002:336), it further relates to inputs and is concerned with minimising the cost of resources involved in producing any given standard of service. Bowen *et al.* (2007:64) are of the view that 'Efficiency' has to do with making the most efficient use of resources, processes and procedures. It is therefore essentially concerned with the relationship between inputs and outputs and the attendant relationship to outputs. It can be deduced that efficiency is not, as is often wrongly presupposed, a measure of cost, but of the relationship of output quantity and quality to the cost of inputs. It is about getting more or better for less by either minimising inputs in relation to outputs, or maximising outputs in relation to inputs or both. 'Effectiveness' ensures that the actual performance meets planned performance. It is therefore essentially a concept which shows a relationship between intended and actual outputs or between outputs and outcomes.

BV principles emphasise sound governance, performance improvement, measurement and monitoring and continuous improvement and competition (Curry, 1999:180). Curry further points out that the customer and citizen focus in BV aims to improve access, responsiveness and accountability at all levels of the

18 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

service delivery process, with better publicity of local authority decisions, policies, services and performance. Standards of customer-focused service delivery are to be improved to levels comparable with best practice and people are more readily involved in decision making, service design and service delivery reviews. Sound strategic management connotes setting a clear direction for the local authority as a whole, linked to a process of continuous improvement, which can be assessed and measured. Within this conceptualisation, performance improvement measurement and monitoring must be established in the local authority with an emphasis on continuous improvement, monitoring and evaluation (M&E), assessing and measuring performance at strategic, service and local levels. Sound management information systems are thus of critical importance in this endeavour. This means that performance data must be robust and clearly understandable. According to Curry (1999:180-181), benchmarking performance at the local authority level helps in the achievement of measurable service improvement and defined activities need to be reviewed on a regular basis.

BV is therefore underpinned by the principle of continuous improvement, which requires local authorities to challenge themselves on strategic and operational priorities and approaches to service provision and existing working practices. BV presents challenges to local authorities by providing frameworks for rethinking what local authorities do and how, combined with a culture of continuous improvement. Within its overall framework, BV emphasises the role of sound management as a means of delivering quality service and service improvement and service delivery. Service delivery plans thus require each local authority to critically assess their current performance, to specify and set out the key features of BV grouped under broad criteria, and to ensure that each service delivery programme within the local authority implements performance improvements (PIs) that are necessary for the delivery of best value services.

In the UK the focus of BV is to develop best practice in service delivery at the local level to encourage innovation (Webb & White, 2002:7) and the main additional consideration for BV is to achieve more democratic accountability. A customer-focused approach has a positive impact on public officials because it makes them more accountable. BV thus has been one of several critical features of planned local government reform in the UK. It arose as a response to perceived problems of variable quality, lack of clarity in direction, and lack of coherence and cohesion in service delivery. The elements of BV are, however, not new. The revived interest in rational planning, policy review, the enabling authority and customer responsiveness are also not new phenomena to British local government policy. As with other policies and initiatives, BV is consistent

with the NPM approach to managing public services that evolved throughout the 1980s and 1990s and BV can best be seen as representing little more than a further repackaging of that approach (Hood & Jackson, 1994:478). BV, however, was much more than simply a replacement of Competitive Compulsory Tendering (CCT), it applied to all local authorities in the UK. It was underpinned by the principle of continuous improvement and it requires local authorities in the UK to challenge themselves on strategic and operational priorities, approaches to service provision and existing working practices. The UK's BV drive is encouraging as a best practice in that it links local government service delivery to quality models such as Benchmarking, ISO 9000 and liP. It can therefore be recognised as a suitable method through which local government can demonstrate BV by providing an impetus to benchmark and to deliver improvement (Wilson & Game, 2002:338).

APPLICABILITY OF BEST VALUE: SOUTH AFRICAN CONTEXT

Section 1 of the *Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* (Act 56 of 2003) (MFMA) defines the service delivery and budget implementation plan as a detailed plan approved by the mayor in terms of section 53 (1)(c)(ii) for implementing a municipality's service delivery plan and the implementation of the annual budget, which must include service delivery targets and performance indicators for each year. In this regard, a customer-focused quality service delivery could be strategically rendered by using service delivery plans encapsulated in municipal IDPs. These must, however, be responsive to the needs of residents and service delivery measured against budget implementation plans.

Ward councillors representing local residents, 'customers', can thus articulate needs and advocate municipal services to satisfy the needs of residents as customers in respective wards. In terms of section 56 of the *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998* (Act 117 of 1998) needs of the municipality must be identified and the mayor must recommend the best way to render services to the maximum benefit of the community (Vatala, 2005:227). Thus in this respect, the South African government has fundamentally committed itself to transforming service delivery to improve the lives of citizens. The customer-focus construct is in the South African context constructed within the framework of a 'People First' discourse, commonly referred to as *Batho Pele* (Diphofa, 2002:24).

MONITORING CUSTOMER-FOCUSED SERVICE DELIVERY: THE LESSONS

The term *Batho Pele* comes from the Sesotho language and its literal English translation is 'people first' (Russell & Bvuma, 2001:245). *Batho Pele* is set out in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (Government Gazette No 18340) dated 1 October 1997. This White Paper advocates that departments deliver responsive, quality services according to eight national service delivery principles referred to as the *Batho Pele* principles.

The ultimate aim of this public service delivery transformation initiative in South Africa is to improve service delivery and emphasise the criticality of a customer or citizen focused ethos in public service delivery and monitoring. The White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery, 1998 (*Batho Pele*) provides a practical framework and implementation strategy for the transformation of service delivery, to encompass the recipients of services. It focuses on 'how' services are provided, allows 'customers' or citizens to complain and advocates a continuous improvement strategy in the quantity and quality of services. It also focuses on customer needs and responsiveness. Thus, *Batho Pele* principles reinforce a customer's right to complain. Furthermore, they reinforce a customer's right to courteous behaviour, transparency and openness at all times. The *Batho Pele* principles also emphasise redress, especially when a customer is not satisfied with the service provided.

The *Batho Pele* principle of service standards thus sets important benchmarks for monitoring service delivery in all departments and state entities. It seeks to achieve this ideal by setting a baseline for customers to complain when service standards are not met. The seventh principle, for example, is quite explicit about the nature of redress customers are entitled to. It states that if the promised standards of service are not delivered, citizens should be offered a speedy and effective remedy, and when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response. The whole notion of *Batho Pele* demands a new approach to handling customers and citizens; many public servants often see complaints as an irritation and intrusion in their working lives. Where complaints procedures do not exist, they often tend to defend or justify a department's problems. By offering redress, *Batho Pele* not only appeases irate or unhappy customers, but aims to change the mind-set of service providers from a preoccupation with the processes of service delivery to a focus on deliverables and outcomes. It thus puts in motion a process of improving service delivery and ultimately continuous improvement and quality service delivery.

While the White Paper on Transforming Public Services, 1998, among other things, stipulates that the public service would strive to provide services that are

accessible, responsive, efficient and of good quality (Diphofa, 2002:24), evidence from a survey on compliance with the *Batho Pele* principles (Public Service Commission, 2000:17) suggests evidence to the contrary; customers are often not consulted about the level, quality and choice of service delivery they would expect. Another matter of concern is the fact that measurable targets are usually not specified to increase access to services, and in the case of the *Batho Pele* principle of ensuring courtesy, very few departments put a courtesy charter in place, in which courtesy standards are specified. According to the Public Service Commission (2000:110) and contrary to *Batho Pele* principles and vision, redress as promised is often not delivered. If this finding is anything to go by, the practice is grossly inconsistent with the *Batho Pele* requirement to provide citizens with full, accurate information about public services they are entitled to receive.

Given this scenario, the service delivery monitoring model representing perceived quality ($PCE + APQ = AOQ + PQ$) can be applied in the determination of satisfaction quality, ideal quality and unacceptable quality, where in the case of the later $PQ < PCE$ (Ghobadian *et al.*, 1993:50). The effect is that this potentially impacts on service delivery and policy implementation outcomes, especially the *Batho Pele* principle of value for money, the requirement that services should be provided economically in order to give citizens the best possible value for money. To further provide citizens with 'voice' and 'exit' options, it may be desirable that citizens and service users be given rights and opportunities to shop around for their preferred service provider (O'Flynn, 2005:10). Public-Private-Partnerships (PPPs) and service delivery compacts between local authorities, communities and other stakeholders who may render public services, may be desirable avenues for opening windows of opportunity for 'voice' and 'exit' options in South African municipalities. At a practical level, the LGTAS, which hinges on key interventions under clearly delineated strategic objectives, can further promote

and enhance the institutional integrity of municipalities and construct a robust social compact on local government, where all citizens, including public officials at all levels, those in the private sector, trade unions, professional bodies and traditional leaders, are guided in their actions and involvement by a common set of governance values.

CONCLUSION

Sections 152 and 153 of the Constitution outline a developmental mandate of local government. Within this mandate the executive authority of a local

22 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

municipality has to determine the best way, using partnerships, programmes and services to render services to the maximum benefit of the community. The customer-focused service delivery monitoring approach is conceptually new in the public sector as it tends to treat the citizenry as customers. However, the most critical objectives of this approach are the improvement of public sector service delivery through, among other things, consulting users of services, setting service standards, increasing access to all facilities, ensuring courtesy when dealing with citizens, providing more useful information, increasing openness and transparency, rectifying mistakes and failures, providing the best possible value for money, enhancing accountability, encouraging innovation, rewarding excellence and forming wider partnerships with the community. Quality service delivery and monitoring standards are therefore critical components of an effective and responsive local government.

A choice often has to be made based on often contradictory values embodied in customer-focused quality service delivery: a difficult choice between affordability and the needs of the community. Ward committees also enter this complex equation in that they seek to ensure democratic participation and as such drive the determination of residents' needs. By and large, the primacy of the customer dictates that local government authorities provide services that are responsive to the customer, the citizen or service user. Enhanced accountability is also effectively realised and enhanced by building partnerships with civil society and the community. A customer-focused approach, this article has argued, can positively impact on public officials as it makes them more accountable for their actions and inactions. The requirement to demonstrate consultation particularly provided the voice of customers and citizens in the BV review processes. A close convergence thus conceptually exists between NPM and the normative values and principles of BV and *Batho Pele*. Emerging from this article is that 'entrepreneurial' and modernised local government encompassing service delivery monitoring tools such as BV and *Batho Pele* can be useful tools, among others, for achieving the developmental goals at local government service delivery level as well as promoting quality service delivery. For local government to be more effective accountability, transparency and responsiveness as well as commitment and trust from local government role players are necessary. Monitoring performance targets, standards and outcomes could go a long way in enhancing the rendering of customer-focused quality service delivery in local government.

List of References

- Armstrong, H. 1997. *Principles of Best Value, news release*, London, HMSO. Audit.
- Bowen, P., Pearl, R., Cattell, K., Hunter, K. & Kelly, J. 2007. The role of value management in achieving best value in public sector service delivery in South Africa: A research agenda, *Acta Structilia*, 14(2): 58-75.
- Cloete, J.J.N. 1998. *South African public administration and management*. Pretoria: Van Schaik Publishers.
- Curry, A. 1999. Case studies: Innovation in public service management. *Managing Service Quality*, 9(3):180-90.
- Cuttance, P. 1995. A question of quality. Paper presented at the ACEA International Conference, Sydney, 2-5 July.
- Diphofa, M. 2002. Projects and programme management – beyond tools and techniques, *Service Delivery Review*, 1(2):24-26.
- DETR 1998. *Modern government – in touch with the people*. London: Department of the Environment Transport and the Regions.
- Dunleavy, P. & Hood, C. 1994. From old public administration to new public management., *Public Money and Management*, 14(3):9-17.
- Dwivedi, O.P. & Mau, T. 2009. (ed). Comparative and development administration in Canada: A preliminary assessment and call for action. In O.P. Dwivedi, T.A. Mau, & B. Sheldrick. *The evolving physiology of government: Canadian Public Administration in Transition*, Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press:312-357.
- Dwivedi, O.P. & William, G. 2011. (ed). Public Administration: State of the discipline, a historical odyssey, In O.P. Dwivedi, *Public administration in a global context: IASIA at 50*. Bruylant Bruxelles: Group De Boeck:21-52.
- Fox, C.J. & Meyer, L. 1995. *Postmodern public administration: Toward discourse*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ghobadian, A., Spellar, S. & Jones, M. 1993. Service quality concepts and models. *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 11(9): 43-66.
- Hood, C. & Jackson, M. 1994. Keys for locks in administrative argument. *Administration and Society*, 25(40):467-488.

24 Monitoring Customer-focused Quality Service Delivery in Local Government

- IMESA, 2010. Developments in municipal management, *Municipal Management*, July: 43-45.
- Investors in People UK (IiP). 1997. *Towards world class performance investors people*. London, UK.
- Kuzek, J.C. & Rist, R.C. 2004. *Ten steps to a results-based monitoring and evaluation system: A handbook for development practitioners*, Washington DC, USA: World Bank Publications.
- McAdam, R. & Walker, T. 2003. An inquiry into balanced scorecards within Best Value implementation in UK local government, *Public Administration*, 81(4):873-892.
- Naidoo, P. 2007. Service delivery excellence: Benchmarking local government, *Management Today*. March:58-62.
- O'Flynn, P. 2005. Throwing our hard earned cash at public services is no answer. *Daily Express*. Tuesday, January 4:10.
- Osborne, D. & Gaebler, T. 1992. *Reinventing government: How the entrepreneurial spirit is transforming the public sector*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- Reddy, P.S., Naidoo, P. & Pillay, P. 2005. Local democracy and developmental local government in South Africa beyond the first decade: Quo vadis? *Africunus*, 35(2):40-52.
- Robinson, L. 2003. Committed to quality: The use of quality schemes in UK public leisure services. *Managing Service Quality*, 13(3):247-255.
- Russell, E.W. & Bvuma, D.G. 2001. Alternative service delivery and public service transformation in South Africa. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 14(3):241-264.
- Sallis, E. 1993. *Total quality management in education*. London: Kogan Page.
- South Africa (Republic). 1995. *White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service*, 1995. Government Gazette 168338. Pretoria: Government Printer.
- South Africa (Republic). 1996. *The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa*, 1996. Pretoria: Government Printers.
- South Africa (Republic). 1998. *Local Government: Municipal Structures Act, 1998* (Act 117 of 1998). Pretoria: Government Printers.
- South Africa (Republic). 2000. *Local Government: Municipal Systems Act, 2000* (Act 32 of 2000). Pretoria: Government Printers.
- South Africa (Republic). 2003. *Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003* (Act 56 of 2003). Pretoria: Government Printers.

- Sureshchandar, R.N., Rajendran, C. & Anantharaman, R.N. 2002. Determinants of customer-perceived service quality: A confirmatory factor analysis approach. *Journal of Service Marketing*, 16(1):9-34.
- Talbot, C. 2001. UK public services management (1979-2000). Evolution or revolution? *Journal of Public Sector Management*, 14(4):281-303.
- Thornhill, C. 2008b. The executive mayor/municipal manager interface. *Journal of Public Administration*, 43(4.1):725-735.
- Rao Tummala, V.M. & Tang, C.L. 1994. Strategic quality management. Malcolm Baldrige and European Quality Awards and ISO 9000 Certification: Core concepts and comparative analysis, *International Journal of Quality and Reliability Management*, 13 (4):8-38.
- Webb, J.G.V. & White, F. 2002. *Review of Best Value in local government*, The Nottinghamshire Research Observatory Occasional Paper Series No 2.
- Wilson, D. & Game, C. 2002. *Local government in the United Kingdom*. (3rd ed.). New York: Palgrave MacMillan.

AUTHOR'S CONTACT:

M.M. Sibanda

Department of Public Administration
University of Fort Hare
Email: MMudzamba@ufh.ac.za