Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development

A STUDY OF THE HOTLINE COMPLAINT SERVICE IN KUCHING CITY SOUTH COUNCIL WITH A VIEW TO MAKING IT MORE EFFECTIVE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

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Kota Samarahan
1998
A STUDY OF THE HOTLINE COMPLAINT SERVICE IN KUCHING CITY SOUTH COUNCIL WITH A VIEW TO MAKING IT MORE EFFECTIVE THROUGH ACTION RESEARCH

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Science

Faculty of Cognitive Science and Human Development
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
1998
DEDICATION

To Mum, Dad, Hubby
&
my dearest sons, Douglas and Christopher
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to sincerely acknowledge the assistance, cooperation and guidance rendered to me by several parties.

Firstly, I wish to thank the Mayor of Kuching City South Council, The Honourable Mr Chan Seng Khiat and the City Secretary, Mr Ng Toh Uit for giving me the permission and support to conduct the study on the hotline in Kuching City South Council.

Secondly, my profound indebtedness to my supervisor, Professor Dr Peter Songan, for his constant guidance and advice in helping me through the journey of completing this thesis.

Last but not least, I thank all members of the action research group and staff of Kuching City South Council for their assistance, cooperation and patience in making this study possible.
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<td>Action Research</td>
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<td>Borneo Development Corporation</td>
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<tr>
<td>DOE</td>
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ABSTRACT

Customer service and customer satisfaction are here to stay. The effectiveness and efficiency of an organisation, be it of today and of the future is dependent on its ability to meet the customers’ needs and expectations.

A study on the hotline with a view to making it more effective was carried out in Kuching City South Council using the action research methodology. The researcher and her 8 AR members selected and invited from various divisions within the council went through cyclical processes of planning, acting, observation and reflection involving five mini cycles. The collections of data were through visits, participants’ observations, interviews and questionnaires. Content analyses and triangulation were used in the data evaluation process.

Findings of the study showed that there is still room for improvement. 59% of the complainants commented that it took the council three days or more to clear their rubbish. 21% complained that their bins had been dragged about and damaged and there was littering around the bins area. Only 36% of the complainants received feedback from the council pertaining to their complaints. 33% of the staff commented that a lot of the complaints and complainants’ particulars supplied by the hotline personnel were insufficient and/or misleading. 58% of the staff called for more trained hotline personnel to handle the hotline.

An on-the-job training involving eight personnel was carried out. The training was to bring about positive involvement and cooperation amongst the personnel in working towards ‘Quality Service’. The outcome of the training included the formulation of the ‘13 Basic Principles of Effective Telephone Handling’ and the creation of the ‘Handbook’ on services provided by the Public Cleansing Division. To improve the complaint tracking system and the effective handling of the complaints, ‘Form A’ was created and implemented. The positive responses from the trainees were reflected through their active participation in the training. The handbook, Form A and the 13 Principles are useful and effective in enhancing their work performance.

The hotline will continue to play an important role in the council. The policy makers and administrators must acknowledge this fact and ensure that the climate for service excellence exists. They could look into the possibilities of making the hotline service more challenging to the staff, providing them with customer service training, giving due recognition and rewards for service excellence and improving the council’s policies and procedures of handling the hotline while intensifying the publicity on the council’s hotline.
ABSTRAK

Perkhidmatan Pelanggan dan Kepuasan Pelanggan merupakan isu yang sering mendapat perhatian orang ramai. Kecukupan dan kemampuan selesaibah organisasi baik sekarang dan pada masa yang akan datang banyak bergantung kepada kepuasananya dalam memenuhi kehidupan dan keperluan pelanggan.

Kajian ke atas talian khidmat di Majlis Bandaraya Kuching Selatan (MBKS) berawal untuk meningkatkan lagi kebersihanan perkhidmatan ini. Satu pautan bertindak diubahkan untuk membantu penelitian dalam kajian ini. Randah penyelidikan tindakan yang melibatkan lima siri; kitaran mini telah dijalankan dengan melalui proses pewajaran perancangan, tindakan, pemerhatian dan refleksi. Data dikumpul dengan cara pemekaran peserta, temuduga, saiz selektif dan lavatan ke agensi lain. Untuk mengesahkan data tersebut teknik analisa kandungan dan triangulasi digunakan.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan masih banyak usaha yang perlu diambil untuk meningkatkan mutu perkhidmatan dan kebersihan talian khidmat di MBKS. 50% pengguna mengatakan bahawa MBKS mengambil masa tiga hari atau lebih untuk mengusir sampah mereka. 21% daripada mereka mengatakan bahwa tong sampah mereka telah dibersihkan dan didosokkan. Sampah yang tercecer sebegini menggorsarkan persekitaran. Hanya 26% pengguna mendapat maklumat cairan mereka daripada pelak majlis. 35% daripada kakitangan memberi kontak bahawa biar buat aduan yang dibekalkan oleh petugas talian khidmat itu tidak lankap atau salah. 38% daripada kakitangan merasai supaya lebih banyak petugas yang terdedah disidakan untuk mengendalikan talian khidmat.


Talian khidmat akan terus memainkan peranan yang penting di MBKS. Pelak pembuat dasar dan pengurusan seharusnya mengatur hakikat itu sekaligus memastikan wujudnya suasana dan persekitaran kerja ke arah perkhidmatan cemerlang. Usaha pala diambil untuk menyediakan perkhidmatan talian khidmat lebih merancang. Dalam usaha ini pengkajian dan pengetahuan wawasan harus diberi kepada kakitangan yang berkisar. Langkah juga perlu diambil untuk memperbaiki dasar dan prosedur pengendalian talian khidmat disamping meluaskan publisiti mengenai perkhidmatan talian khidmat MBKS kepada orang awam.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.0 Introduction

Customer service is ever changing. The perception of the service, which customers receive, is dependent upon their expectations. When the treatment, which the customers receive, meets or is better than their expectations, then they will perceive that as "good service."

Times have changed. Once it was sufficient just to provide a human service regardless of how good that service was. But now, with greater concern for efficiency, effectiveness and quality in public services, it is not enough just to provide a service; it must be demonstrated to be of sufficient quality and standard in order to justify its continuing existence. One of the influences that has brought about an increased concern for quality is the rise of importance attached to "customer satisfaction". According to Sierra Customer Response Data (1997), customers today have a higher expectation of quality products and services. The cost of retaining an existing customer even with an intensive customer service is small compared to the cost of gaining a new customer.

The overall effect of involving the entire organisation in resolving customer problems is very beneficial. Management's commitment to their customers, employees and suppliers is at the core of quality (Morehouse, 1996). When problems are solved and quality is high, a greater sense of customer service is achieved and as a result a pride of accomplishment is realised throughout the organisation. Resolving customers' complaints to the satisfaction of the customers will spell success for the organisation. Similarly, when a customer calls with a problem, it is an opportunity to bond a relationship or shatter an image (Sierra Customer Response Data, 1997). The organisation and its management should therefore ensure that this is taken care of in the most effective and efficient way.

1.1 Background of the Study

The role of the Malaysian Civil Service today is rapidly changing and vastly expanding in response to the changing national development. The Civil Service is undergoing a paradigm shift (Ahmad Sarji, 1996). The importance of redefining the boundaries of operations of the Civil Service cannot be over-emphasised. In order to embark on the journey towards developing a quality culture, the key component in these efforts under the new paradigm is the focus on "quality" and "productivity" in order to improve the service delivery.

The public sector, like the private sector has recognised the fact that it operates in an era where the customer is paramount. The goal of the organisation is to create a culture where quality and productivity improvement is seen as a way of life - a mind set in the organisation. According to Ahmad Sarji (1993),

This mind set should be characterised by the internalisation of values like the concern for cost, timeliness, meeting targets, innovativeness and most certainly, responsiveness to the customers we serve. People are no longer content to just grumble and receive below par services from the Civil
Service. They rightfully expect in fact, demand faster and higher quality services. (p. 201)

As the State of Sarawak gears itself up to achieve the developed status set forth in Vision 2020, the role of the Civil Service in developing the state has become increasingly vital which demands a more proactive, reactive and efficient organisation. To succeed at their ever-changing roles, members of the Civil Service are required to be constantly on their toes, continually improving the execution of their duties and the quality of their services to the public that they serve.

This point was highlighted by a former Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Environment, Mr. Nga Tek Si who reminded the Local Councils to act based on the overall interests of the public (The Sarawak Tribune, 1994). The Local Councils must have the capacity and ability to meet the challenges of rising expectations of the public for the provision of high standards and quality services. In order to create a culture of excellence in providing quality services to the public, the Local Councils had been advised to pursue and undertake the practice of Total Quality Management (TQM). The concept of TQM was introduced on the premise that there is always room for improvement.

In a statement made by the Honourable State Secretary of Sarawak, Datuk Hamid Bugo, all the civil servants in the state were called to be mindful in delivering efficient and quality service to the people. The people's expectations on the Sarawak civil servants have increased over the years and in the next century, more challenges are expected not only in the private sector but also within the government agencies (Sarawak Tribune, 1997).

Change is happening everywhere. The new Civil Service must be prepared to change. The need to change is seen as a vehicle to move towards the status of a fully developed nation by the year 2020. The old practices and systems of doing things no longer serve its purpose. Every member in the organisation must therefore be inculcated with the practice and culture of doing the right thing right the first time, on time, all the time, always striving for improvement and always satisfying the customer.

There has been a plan by the government to go even a step higher by pursuing and achieving ISO 9000 certification for the civil service. ISO 9000 is an essential tool for monitoring the quality of performance in the civil service. It is an international series of standard that specifies in detail good management practices for delivering quality goods and services to customers. The Honourable State Secretary, Datuk Hamid Bugo believes that Sarawak will be one of the first, if not the first to gain ISO 9000 accreditation. The ISO 9000 and TQM acts as a means to continuously enhance the quality public performance of the civil service and motivates it to aim for nothing less than providing excellent quality of goods and services to its customers. It is only then that the civil service can become, as Datuk Hamid Bugo described as the "elite members of society" (Rakan Sarawak, 1997).

Moves like restructuring of the organisation and re-engineering are progressively introduced into the various government departments and the moves towards computerisation and information technology are gaining rapid momentum not only among the private sector but also the public sector. Communication links within the civil service have been set up to make the civil service more accessible to the public. This link is extended to the government agencies with the intention of providing better, prompt effective services to the members of the public - a
breakthrough and challenging role and issues that are taken into consideration under the study.

The rapid and changing needs of the times have given Kuching City South Council new challenges. Today, the City Council is faced with a strong sense of urgency to be constantly proactive in order to adapt itself to the new situations and in providing the best services to the public and the ratepayers within its area of jurisdiction.

The Kuching City South Council launched the hotline system in April 1997 for several reasons including that of providing the public with a channel to voice their complaints so that necessary actions can be taken. It was also deemed as a tool to measure the present performance of its services. Since it was quite new, there was no study or procedure set up to gauge its effectiveness. However, there are some simple guidelines where the hotline staff after receiving the complaints are to forward them to the respective divisions for action and the results are relayed back to the complainants.

The study was carried out as the council gears itself up to meet the challenges of Vision 2020 and the state’s vision of a new Civil Service. There must be additional guidelines and procedures for auditing whether the hotline system needs to be improved, in what manner is it deficient and how can it be improved?

1.2 Context of the Study

The Municipality of Kuching comprised an area of six and three quarter square miles. The Municipality was accorded City status on 1 August 1988. This status made it the third City in Malaysia after the Federal Capital of Kuala Lumpur and Ipoh, the state capital of Perak. The historic date also saw the administrative division of the City divided into Kuching North and Kuching South. This is where the Kuching City North Council and the Kuching City South Council derive their name. Kuching City North covers a significant part of the central areas of downtown Kuching and the new areas across the Sarawak River. Kuching City South covers areas to the east of downtown Kuching and some new areas to the South comprising an area of 61.53 sq. km.

The City Council plays an important and active role in the social and economic development of the State Capital and performs the following functions:

(i) provide and maintain roads, bridges, sewers and street lighting;
(ii) regulate and control the erection of buildings and other structures;
(iii) provide and maintain public parks and recreational facilities
(iv) provide, control and regulate markets;
(v) license, control and regulate various enterprises;
(vi) deal with removal and disposal of household and industrial wastes; and
(vii) other services which included the "hotline".

The hotline service in Kuching City South Council is provided to facilitate members of the public and the ratepayers in communicating with the council on matters relating to its services. The complaints, suggestions and comments from the public and ratepayers would enable the council to improve and/or rectify its services thereby improving its efficiency. By this the council hopes to achieve a higher standard of service and increase its list of services to the public and the ratepayers.
1.3 Statement of a Problem

The effectiveness of a hotline service depends on how well the council is able to meet the expectations and needs of the complainants. Satisfaction with the service by the complainants is mostly influenced by the willingness and the speed the complaint is resolved, the credibility and the reliability to perform the promised service and the ease in making their complaint.

The rate of complaint since the implementation of the hotline has been increasing and this trend is most obvious in the scavenging services. There had been requests from the public to improve the service in the local papers and from the Local Ministers. With the customers' expectations on the rise, the council needs to be more professional in its approach in handling and resolving the complaints. But very often, very little thought has been put into ensuring that a conducive service environment, which stimulates the council's effectiveness, is in place. With the increased expectations and demands, the right service culture must exist in order for the council to achieve quality and excellence in its services. The staff must be proactive with the right mindset to want to provide the best.

This study attempts to answer the following questions:
(i) How effective is the present hotline in handling the complaints with reference to Kuching City South Council scavenging services?
(ii) How can the existing hotline system be improved?

1.4 Objectives of the Study

As a review on the existing hotline is conducted, we should be able to know whether the present system is effective or not and suggest ways to improve it, thereby making it more effective and efficient in terms of meeting customers' needs and expectations.

More specifically, the objectives of the study are:
(i) to determine the council's present level of performance in complaint handling;
(ii) to determine staff awareness of the hotline and customer satisfaction so as to provide better services;
(iii) to identify the problems and cause(s) that deter the staff from effective handling of the hotline;
(iv) to determine the effectiveness of training in motivating the staff towards service improvement; and
(v) to suggest ways to further improve the hotline.

1.5 The Conceptual Framework in this Study

Effective complaint service means meeting the customers' needs and expectations. In order to boost the council's image and generate positive word of mouth from the complainant or customers, they must be happy with the services provided. This can only be achieved when there is a good and positive service culture in the council. The top management should give their full support and commitment to the staff in their endeavor and strive for quality service. They must set clear-cut policies in line with the council's service vision, mission and objectives. There must be clear guidelines on the work processes and procedures so that the tasks carried out by the staff are in line with the objectives. To ensure work quality
and productivity, specific and effective standards and measurement of performance must be set and well communicated to the staff within the organisation. The staff must be well trained and qualified with the correct and positive mindsets to adapt themselves to the changing environment and pressures. Any job well done should be recognised and rewarded in order to motivate the staff and enjoy continuous improvements in the council.

At the end of the day there is quality service and improved work practices in the council. The element of HRD in bringing about staff or individual development and improved work and learning culture will lead to improve social reforms and better standards of living. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

1.6 Assumptions in the Study

The study is based on the following assumptions:

(i) The current hotline service can be further improved to render it more effective.
(ii) Different complainants have different perceptions of good/excellent service and their needs and expectations may vary with time.
(iii) That the effectiveness of the hotline service may be influenced by the lack of service culture in the organisation.
(iv) This research study shows the detailed action research processes involved in reviewing the effectiveness of the hotline and developing ways to improve it. It was exploratory in nature. It assumed that the data collected and analysed were valid and reliable and that the action research members were honest and accurate in their observations, perceptions and evaluation.

1.7 Significance of the Study

This research is expected to contribute enormously towards the success of Kuching City South Council in its effort to provide excellent customer service.

First, the findings will provide useful information and enrich our knowledge of and insight into customer service and customer satisfaction. They will shed light on reasons for ineffective customer service in the hotline and to provide guidelines for improving it.

Second, the study and its findings should serve as a foundation for further similar research in the other departments. To date, there has been no serious attempt to conduct this type of research within the government departments.

Third, this study attempts to determine the applicability of using the action research methodology in bringing about learning in the action research team members. The relevance of this study will allow an assessment of the relative importance of this participation.

1.8 Definitions of Terms

The following terms are used in this study.

Action research - The action research methodology involving the cyclical processes of planning, acting, observing and reflecting was used in the study. Action research focused on real work-based problems/thematic concern.
Figure 1: The Conceptual Framework in this Study
Complaint - Complaint will be deemed as complaints, feedbacks, suggestions, opinions, views and proposals received from the customers/public/ratepayers. For the purpose of this study, complaints here would mean complaints on uncollected domestic wastes, building wastes, trade wastes and garden wastes.

Customer - According to Shaw (1996), the term customer refers to the "recipient of one or more of a process's specified outcomes". In this study, the customers are the public/ratepayers under the jurisdiction of Kuching City South Council.

Customer Satisfaction - Services provided and are perceived to have met the customers' needs and expectations.

Effective Hotline Service - In this study, an effective hotline service mainly involves the criteria of reliability, credibility, willingness and the speed the complaint is resolved and the ease of making complaint.

Hotline - The hotline is a telephone-added service launched and provided by the Council in April 1997 for the convenience of the public and the ratepayers within the Kuching City South jurisdiction.

Learning - Learning according to Sheal (1994) is an activity in which learners participate and are actively involved. The additional information, knowledge and skills acquired through training by the learner in this study had led to a relative change in his or her behaviour, attitude and interest.

Training - Training according to Buckley & Caple (1995) is a planned and systematic instruction to modify or develop knowledge/skills/attitude through learning experience. It is aimed to help employees do their present job correctly and effectively (Tan, 1995).

Quality Service - Quality according to Oakland (1993) is the ability of the service to continue to meet the customer needs and requirements. By consistently meeting customer requirements only then can we achieve a reputation for "excellence".

1.9 Scopes and Limitations of the Study

Scope

The scopes of the study are as follows:

(i) Identifying the problems of the hotline.

Issues affecting the effectiveness of the staff in handling the hotline complaints will be highlighted in this study. An attempt to find out the general attitude of the staff towards the hotline will be made. Feedback from the complainants will be obtained as an insight into the current performance of the Council in complaint handling.

(ii) Strategies to improve the system.

Strategies will be developed and implemented in order to improve the system and achieved service excellence.
Limitations

The limitations in this study are:

(i) **Research methodology**
There was lots of confusion as to the research methodology used for the study. Earlier on the researcher had been exposed to the conventional research methodology. She was only exposed to the action research methodology when she was in Gibaran Action Research Management Institute Adelaide, Australia in late November 1997. As a result of this, the researcher had to totally reframe her project ideas and commence afresh during the learning period at Gibaran in Adelaide. It entailed discarding the earlier preparation while being exposed to the new action research processes which was a difficult challenge.

(ii) **Focus**
The focus of this study is on hot-line complaint service in Kuching City South Council. The problems and related issues under study are peculiar to Kuching City South Council only and do not necessarily apply to other departments elsewhere.

(iii) **Literature Review**
Literature review on hot-line complaints was very limited because there are very few studies of this sort carried out or done. Nevertheless, literature associated with great customer service in the business arena had been used as references.

(iv) **Time Frame**
The action research study required that the researcher work on work-based problems so as to bring about real changes within the workplace. Within a limited time frame of six months (December 1997 to May 1998), the researcher and her action research members had to come up with their findings. This had created anxiety and worry in having to meet the expectations of both workplace outcomes and Unimas project outcomes.

(v) **Organisational Control**
Action research requires that the researcher have some control over the organisation and the action research group. This had been most difficult since the researcher was on study-leave and as such had no authority to secure the cooperation of the staff. The success of the study depended on the action research members. The members had to allocate their time between the research work and their own office commitments. As a result the research work came in second. Assigned tasks were delayed and meetings were, on several occasions, postponed which were beyond the control of the researcher.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This review of literature related to hotline complaint service focuses on the literature associated with customer service, quality service, complaint service, key attributes for customer satisfaction in a complaint service and service improvements.

2.1 Customer Service

To maintain the highest standards of service superiority, there must be continual striving for perfection in everything we do in and within the organisation. Top quality service needs to be sustained and reinforced time and again and this is a continuing, never-ending process.

Brown (1946) established that customers in his days were already selective and demanding, what more to say in this modern age and time where service means more than pleasing the customer. The rationale is that there must be an all-encompassing and genuine service culture in the organisation. In any organisation, one can have the best client’s charter or vision to provide the best services to the public but if the service culture is not right and the staff is not prepared not ready to ensure that this is implemented, the service will still fail. Customer service is about perceptions, a subjective and intangible personal experience (Cook, 1992). The perception of the service which customers receive is dependent on their expectations. If the treatment which the customers receive is better than their expectations this is good service. If the treatment which the customers receive is less than their expectations then it constitutes poor service. Poor service is and cannot be tolerated and being customers ourselves, we tend to feel and share the similar feelings.

The importance of customer service cannot be over-emphasised. According to Lytle (1997) customer service means more than a phone line to answer customer questions and complaints, it can be a tool to identify and to meet the superior needs of the customers. If the services offered is customer-friendly, customers do not feel threatened to call in to the organisation and put in their suggestions or opinions. The significance of this development is that their viewpoints would be taken seriously and actions taken which in the end is for the benefit of everyone. Willingham (1992) in concurring with Lytle expanded the belief that taking ownership or responsibility for the customer’s problems, when done with a sincere desire to understand and solve them, can “turn negative customer attitudes into positive ones”.

For the organisation that welcomes the customers’ suggestions and opinions, it is an avenue for them to improve and enhance their services. As this evolves, the relationship between the organisation and the customer grows closer. Edvardsson, Thomasson and Ovretveit (1994) advanced the existence of an organisation and business as a result of customers. Without customers, there is no business and their needs change faster than the weather. And one of the ways they communicate their needs is by complaining and/or making suggestions.
Much of the customer contact is by phone. The telephone has become a key component of customer service because:

(i) It provides faster contact with the customer;
(ii) It provides a more personal transaction than obtained by letter;
(iii) It is the least expensive means of contact for the consumer, and
(iv) It allows effective centralized service and facilitate wide-range information gathering.

Technical Assistant Research Programs (Garcia, 1992) shows that customers who asked questions or complained via an 800 number are significantly more satisfied and more likely to report repurchase intentions than those who used the mail. Among the number of complaints registered, around 64.0 to 78.0 percent were satisfied with the response given through 800 number contact as compared to 47.0 to 57.0 percent by mail. 70.0 to 89.0 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the response given to their enquires through 800 number contact as compared to 50.0 to 68.0 percent by mail.

While the telephone can be an effective tool in providing quality service, the phone service system can cause major damage on the market, depending on how it performs. Such is also the case in the public sector where the image and reputation of the public service is at stake. A research by Goodman, Marra and Brigham (1986) for Coca-Cola USA found that giving the customer the same answer by phone rather than by letter produced an 8.0 percent increase in satisfaction and repurchase rates. A similar study carried out by Williams (1996) concluded that people responded more positively to the chance to deal with things on the phone.

2.2 Quality Service

Quality is defined by the customers. Conformity to company specification is not quality, conformity to the customers' specification is quality. Spending wisely to improve service comes from continuous learning about the expectations and perceptions of customers and non-customers.

Edvardsson, Thomasson and Ovretveit (1994) defined customer-perceived quality as the relationship between the customers' expectations of the service and his or her perception of the service rendered. They believe that many customers are tired of broken promises about top quality. To them, promises are easy, especially for services, but customers increasingly want concrete evidence of 'Service Quality'. This is the most difficult part to commit because what the organisation or company perceives and provides may not be what the customers want.

Unless everyone in the organisation understands this concept and are committed towards achieving it, quality service will talk only but will not work. To add on, Groocock (1995) reflected in most cases, especially in the government service, which he termed as "archetypical monopoly suppliers", the synonym of customer is more appropriately termed as "patient". The reasons for him saying that were that “patients” usually have to wait, to queue up, before they receive their service. And when they are dissatisfied, they just have to be patient because it is beyond their means, and control to do anything, what more to say, change. Such a negative remark and mentality on the services of the “government service” should mark the starting point for one to seriously look and start reflecting on the weaknesses and causes of these general conclusions drawn on the public service. McClendon (1992) could not agree more when he commented that in many
communities, the public's attitude towards the government is becoming "ugly" and "mean spirited". "Frustration, alienation and skepticism" according to him, have evolved into "cynicism". In his book, he uses the term "parasitic incompetent" as the synonym used by the public for "public servant".

Edvardsson, Thomasson and Ovretveit (1994) believed that the right quality of service could only be achieved when the customers, staff and owners are satisfied. They believed that the customers' expectations are based on their needs. Their earlier experiences of the service in question and the reputation the government service has in the market. In support of this, Groocock (1993) argued that it is the delivery that is the key part of total quality in a service. His justification for this is that it is easier for the customer to identify poor delivery quality than poor quality in the service itself. A classic example of poor delivery quality is when a member of a public calls in with a drain blockage problem. Although, he or she was well received by the staff over the phone, who was friendly and warm, it took the department more than three months to rectify the simple problem. The public wants value and quality for its tax dollars and it is becoming increasingly difficult to satisfy.

Quality service is in the eyes of the beholder (Brown, 1946; Kearney & Bandy, 1990). The customer is the sole arbiter of service excellence. While receiving and welcoming complaints from the customers, the organisation must ensure that the customers' needs and wants are met accordingly. Quality reflects customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction involves not only assuring the quality of the production or service provided but also meeting the consumer needs as an individual (Kearney & Bandy, 1990). It is the customer's perception of the organisation that makes it first rate. All around the world, the message is loud and clear, 'Quality service is in'. Competition is shifting from price to quality and customers' expectations are increasing accordingly. This applies equally to manufacturing firms as well as service organisations.

Berry (1995) discovered that a common mistake that company make in service improvement is focusing on internal processes with no clear link to customer's service priorities. Quality inspection cannot be inspected into products or services; the customer satisfaction must be designed into the whole system (Oakland, 1993). Without the voices of customers guiding the service quality strategy, the best that can be hoped for is marginal improvement.

2.3 Complaint Service

This is the most popular type of customer service line, since satisfied complainants are some of the most loyal customers. LeBecuef (1987) and Walker (1990) highlighted three basic advantages of customer complaints which according to them pays handsomely for the organisation namely:

- complaints point out areas that need improvement. In doing this, LeBecuef also commented that the two places question of "How are we doing?" and "How can we get better?" are also answered. This is because the organisation and employees learn to gather and use the complaints or feedback they received to identify the weak spots and areas that needed corrective action.

In the ever-changing competitive environment and the increasingly demanding needs of the people, the companies and organisations need to continuously query their customers on the effectiveness of their services so that further self-improvements can be made. We are no longer living in the world of
'monopoly market' where customers would come to us for supply of goods and services. Instead, we have to continuously upgrade our services so as to meet their expectations.

(iii) complaints give one a second chance to provide better/improved service and satisfaction to dissatisfied customers. According to Leboeuf, a typical business hears from only 4.0 percent of its dissatisfied customers. That means the remaining 96.0 percent are "nice customers" who probably are not going to give one a second chance. They are just going to smile, take their business elsewhere and tell their friends about the lousy service one gives. A complaining customer is being honest by giving one another opportunity to make good. In other words, it is better to hear the painful truth for one to rectify and improve than to be "blacklisted" and "branded" forever from the 'silent ones'.

Customers whose requests for assistance have been satisfactorily handled become an important source of low cost corporate advertising. These customers generate positive "word of mouth" by telling others about their experience. The image of the organisation is boosted and for those in the sales line, their market share and corporate profits are further increased. Negative "word of mouth" generated by dissatisfied customers is likely to be twice the rate of positive "word of mouth" (Garcia, 1993). The TARP industry specific research findings on word-of-mouth behaviour showed that the median persons told of experience for both small and large problems among the dissatisfied doubled those of the satisfied.

Morgan (1989) in her studies found that on average, one dissatisfied customer told eleven other people, who each told five others. At the end of the day, according to her these sixty-seven people are spreading bad word of mouth about the organisation. Although these findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of bad word of mouth as a result of the customers' negative experiences, there are limitations because they do not focus on customer's perception of quality service. The customer's perception of quality service is judged based on superficial indicators and will change with time (Galloway, 1998).

(iii) complaints are a wonderful opportunity to strengthen customer loyalty. Whenever there is no problem, people are quite contented or do not think much about the kind of service being offered. But, whenever it is the reverse then there is the chance to really show them just what great service the organisation is giving and the willingness that one will do and the length one will go to see that they are satisfied. The principle behind this theory is nothing but solely to maintain the long-term relationship and friendship with the client which will ensure sustainability and survival of the organisation.

Customer complaints when handled properly reduced the "costs" incurred by the organisation. Complaints take time and effort even when it does not involve legal problems. Unresolved complaints create needless tension in the organisation and waste everybody's time. This is more so when complaints are not handled to the customer's satisfaction and even when they are, the disgruntled minority amongst those who complained, there is a tendency that they will make a serious nuisance of themselves (Williams, 1996).

In most cases, the customers rarely volunteer to tell a company whether the services offered works and what does not work and why unless they are being asked (Hunton & Schaeffer, 1994). There are also instances when people do not complain even after a bad experience with a product or service provided. These are the group of people who would bad-mouthed their bad experiences to their friends, relatives, peers and competitors especially in the business organisation. Knauer (1991),