EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER CARE AS A STRATEGY OF ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE OF THULAMELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO, SOUTH AFRICA

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DECLARATION

I Thinavhuyo Esther Munyai, declare that: EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER CARE AS A STRATEGY OF ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE OF THULAMELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA is my original work. All sources that I have used or quoted have been acknowledged through references. I further declare that this work has not been submitted for any other degree at any institution of higher learning.

Signature---

Date   ---

DEDICATION

I am dedicating this research project to my late mother Tshinakaho Maloka whose humility, integrity and compassion for people left an everlasting mark on my life. Your enthusiastic spirit and attitude made whom I am to date. I love you. May your soul rest in peace.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

ABSTRACT

The purpose of the research was to examine if the implementation of customer care has any effect on service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

Specifically the study focused on four main aspects, namely:to determine the effects of implementing customer care to enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality; to analyse the effects of enhancing customer care through quality service delivery; to investigate mechanisms of improving customer care through public relations; to explore the effect of implementing Batho-Pele principles in promoting customer care. The study used qualitative interviews to collect data from respondents.

The study revealed that there was a relationship between customer care and service delivery and where customer care prevailed service delivery improved. The findings also strongly indicated that through public relations and the implementation of Batho-Pele principles, customer care can be enhanced and consequently quality service delivery.

The study recommended that tools and systems should be developed that would motivate municipal employees to implement customer care. Training of municipal employees with regard to customer care was also emphasized. It was further recommended that the leadership at Thulamela Local Municipality should be morally sound for subordinates to follow.

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CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The introduction of democracy in South Africa brought hope to millions who were previously marginalised. The new government transformed the public service by developing policies that would ensure fairness and equity in the provision of services. Recent service delivery protests have indicated that the government had failed in meeting the expectations of the people. The empirical evidence has revealed that communities are unhappy because of, among other things, the absence of proper systems of collecting revenue by municipalities (Mpehle, 2012:1). In order to promote the culture of customer care and subsequently quality service delivery, municipalities must ensure that their billing, receipting, metering, debtor administration and credit control sections are appropriately staffed. Without proper institutional arrangement to ensure effective and efficient functioning of these services, efficient revenue collection becomes difficult, and service delivery inevitably suffers (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:238). Customer care does not come naturally. Each municipality has to develop a strategy to address unique challenges (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237). A customer care strategy describes the way in which a municipality serves its customers. According to Fourie and Opperman (2011:238), such a strategy must be to the benefit of the customer. The government, in its attempt to promote customer care, has introduced Batho-Pele principles which is a Sotho for "People First". Batho-Pele principle provides that people should be treated as customers and the public sector must strive on customer satisfaction and improve service delivery (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997). Customer care relates to how a municipality deals with both internal and external clients in its operations. It is an attitude that has to be developed and practiced before it is successfully implemented (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237). Effective implementation of customer care can enhance quality service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

1.2 Problem statement

Local government has been an area where customer care has been an important variable for promoting quality service delivery (Silcox, 1997:2). Many councillors believe that a minimum level of customer care is acceptable as its services are a monopoly in most areas and rate payers prefer reduced costs and better service standards. However, customer care is appropriate in the context of improving service deliver (Fox, Bayat, Ferreira, 2006:22).

Consistent with Section 195 (1) of the Constitution, Mafunisa (2008:79-80) argues that it is required of the public officials to act in an acceptable, effective and accountable manner in the performance of their duties Fourie and Opperman (2011:236) are of the view that municipalities need to cultivate sound relationships with their citizens and communities.

The importance of building relationships with local citizens is based on the fact that citizens, as customers and as users of municipal services, need to be treated with respect and care. Section 152 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) also requires from the Council, to ensure that all residents have access to the basic services. Therefore Thulamela Local Municipality must be responsive to the needs of customers by improving customer relations and providing good customer care.

Despite all attempts by government agencies to promote good customer care, the national purse is still vulnerable to individuals who are morally bankrupt. Municipal officials have been arrested for issues related to poor customer care such as financial mismanagement. The 48 year old Chief Traffic and Licencing Officer of the Thulamela Local Municipality appeared in the Louis Trichardt Regional Court with 1640 charges of fraud and contravention of the National Traffic Act. The charges were brought against him after he allegedly issued fraudulent driver's licences over a one year period (Traffic boss faces 1640 charges www.sowetanlive.co.za). These allegations related to poor customer care are some of the causes of service delivery protests. The information from the Municipal IQ's Hotspots Monitor, which monitors the occurrence of service delivery protests across South Africa, reveals that there have been more service delivery protests in 2010 than the previous years (Allen & Heese, 2014:2). According to Jain (2010:31), in 2007, the country saw an average of 8, 73 protests occur in a given month. In 2008, the figure rose modestly, as an average of 9, 83 protests occurred. In 2009, the average number of protests that occurred ballooned to 19, 18 a month, nearly doubling the figure from the previous year. Community protests remained a frequent event throughout 2010 as an average of 16, 33 protests per month took place (Jain, 2010:3-4). According to Jain (2010:31), 36, 33% of protests complained that they did not have access to affordable or adequate housing. About 18, 36% protests complained about being unable to access clean water. Electricity was another concern of residents arising to 18, 16% of protests. Protests with regard to insufficient refuse collection and unsanitary toilet system amounted to 15, 43% (Jain, 2010:32).

In terms of section 24 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996), waste management service delivery is a municipality function. However, Thulamela Local Municipality is struggling to meet its legal mandate of providing at least a weekly waste collection service to all households which amounts to poor customer care. The waste management service is also not available in rural areas (Thulamela Municipality Turnaround Strategy, 2010). Where there is electricity supply, challenges such as lack of maintenance,

especially street lighting and regular unplanned interruption of power supply, are prevalent (Thulamela Municipality IDP Review, 2011/2012:65-66).

Many in rural areas within Thulamela Local Municipality also complain about travelling long distances to access health care. With regard to sanitation, there are no sewer systems in rural areas.

Households are using pit toilets without ventilation and these result in health hazards through lack of proper toilets (Thulamela Turnaround Strategy, 2010).

The growing number of grievances from citizens suggests that local municipalities seem to be out of touch with its citizenry.

According to Yorke (2003:119) and Nomvalo (2011:1), local municipalities are experiencing the worsening billing, metering and revenue administration processes.

There is therefore, general concern that unless customer care is implemented, inefficiency and ineffectiveness will continue to waste scarce resources of the municipality and at the expense of quality service delivery. It is against this background that examining the implementation of customer care as a strategy of enhancing service delivery becomes the focus of this study.

1.3 Motivation/rationale for the study

Customer care is crucial in municipalities precisely because customers make evaluative judgement of the quality of service delivered by municipal officials (Dzansi & Dzansi, 2010:995). Therefore, taking care of the needs of customers in service delivery is critical for the municipality, since it improves the quality of service (Masango & Mkutukana, 2013:594). Municipalities, as role players in service delivery, are required by law to find innovative ways to involve communities in all their activities (Boshoff & Mazibuko, 2008). Customers want to feel that those attending to them understand how the problem affects them and to have confidence in the ability of the municipal officials concerned to rectify the challenge (Masango & Mkutukana, 2013:598). It is for this reason that implementing customer care in Thulamela Local Municipality would ensure that service delivery is enhanced for the betterment of the lives of local residents.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of the study may be indicated in a number of different ways. Local residents in Thulamela Local Municipality would benefit from the research as it is envisaged that recommendations are made in the study for improvement of customer care.

The researcher is of the opinion that this study would also stimulate robust debates among academics, politicians and officials in municipalities.

The study also has an academic significance as it should be of interest to scholars and researchers who focus on poor customer care at local government level.

1.5 Aim of the study

The aim of the study is to examine the implementation of customer care as a strategy of customer care for enhancing service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality. Upon investigating this problem, the study sought to contribute in the improvement of municipal understanding of customer care.

1.6 Objectives

In order to accomplish the aim of this study, specific objectives in relation to the study are as follows:

- To determine the effects of implementing customer care to enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality;
- To analyse the effects of enhancing customer care through quality service delivery;
- To investigate mechanisms of improving customer care through public relations; and
- To explore the effects of implementing Batho-Pele principles in promoting customer care.

1.7 Research Questions

Research questions in relation to the study are as follows:

- How can implementation of customer care enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality?
- What could be done to enhance customer care through quality service delivery?
- Are there mechanisms of improving customer care through public relations at Thulamela Local Municipality?
- Can implementing Batho-Pele principles improve the promotion of customer care?

1.8 Definition of concepts

For the purpose of this study, concepts have meanings affixed thereto. They include customer care and service

delivery in the context of municipal governance.

1.8.1 Customer care

Customer care is how well municipalities render quality services to the local residents. This involves how a municipality deals with its customers during its operations, including building a sound relationship with its local communities (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237).

1.8.2 Service delivery

In the context of this study, service delivery refers to the distribution of basic resources that local residents depend on such as, clean water, sewage collection and disposal, refuse removal, electricity, municipal health services, municipal roads, street lighting, municipal parks and recreation (Chen, Dean, Frant & Kumar, 2014:1).

1.9 Organisation of the study

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The chapter focuses on the problem statement, rationale of the study, significance of the study, aim of the study, specific objectives, research questions, definition of concepts and organisation of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter searches and evaluates the existing literature with regard to the effects of the implementation of customer care in service delivery.

CHAPTER 3

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK PERTAINING TO CUSTOMER CARE

This chapter outlines different legislations in municipalities which contribute to sound customer care.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

The chapter discusses the research design, study population, sampling, sample size, sampling method, instruments for data collection and data analysis.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

The chapter is aimed at transforming data into the answers to the original research questions.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

The chapter focuses on the results of scientific findings regarding theoretical framework as articulated in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter 7 presents the main findings and recommendations drawn from the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Literature review indicates insights into what other research has been conducted with regard to the implementation of customer care in service delivery in other municipalities. Customer care has become an important focus to enhance service delivery in municipalities, and Thulamela Local Municipality is no exception. Fourie and Opperman (2011:236) are of the view that municipalities need to cultivate sound relationships with their citizens and communities. The importance of building relationships with local citizens is based on the fact that citizens as customers and end users of municipal services need to be treated with respect and care. Customers always expect value for money and services which are affordable.

Customer care as a new concept in the public sector is borrowed from the private sector which provides services with the profit motive. It is based on the belief that people who use municipal services have the right to be treated with respect and dignity in a two-way relationship that recognises the principles of public service. No organisation can expect to succeed without building customer satisfaction and loyalty (Kumasey, 2014:174). It is accepted that to survive and prosper in the medium and long-term, public sector institutions must become market-oriented (Somerville & Elliot, 2011).

2.2 The implication of customer care in service delivery

According to Fourie and Opperman (2011:237), customer care refers to how a municipality deals with its customers during its operations. This involves building sound relationships with citizens and communities. Even though the concept of customer care has its origin from the private sector, it is definitely as important to the public sector as to the private sector. Malan and L'estrange (1989:2) emphasise the importance of establishing and maintaining good relations with the public by arguing that all public institutions are there to serve people, and therefore, public acceptance and consent is needed. Customer care is about expectations (Fourie & Opperman 2011:237). It is important for municipalities to involve their communities and find out what their expectations are. Customers expect a product or service to address their demands. Customers expect to be treated with respect. They expect that if the promised standard of service is not delivered, the problem will be resolved as a matter of urgency in an open, friendly and

courteous manner.

Customer care is about how well municipalities render quality service to the people. Public sector institutions, including municipalities, are responsible and accountable to citizens and communities as well as its customers (Ramseook, Murhurrun & Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2010: 40). Customer care is important to municipalities because they rely on public funds to render service to the people. Therefore, municipalities would want to encourage people to pay for services rendered to them to prevent non-payment and avoid the fiscal crises that may be caused by non-payment for services. It is therefore, of importance to ensure that people, as customers of municipal services, be treated properly with care and respect. According to Pauw ,Woods, van der Linden, Fourie &Visser (2011:309-310), treating people as customers implies that municipalities should be willing to:

- Listen to the views of the residents and take them into account when decisions are taken pertaining to service delivery.
- Treat people with consideration and respect.
- Ensure that the promised level and quality of service is of the highest standard possible.
- Respond quickly and effectively when service standards are not maintained.

Section 95 of the Municipal Systems Act 32 of 2000 (MSA) provides municipalities with legislative responsibilities in relation to the levying of rates and other taxes and charging of fees for municipal services. The municipality must effectively give attention to the following issues pertaining to customer care. The municipality must:

- Establish a sound customer management system that aims to create a positive and reciprocal relationship between persons liable for these payments and the municipality.
- Establish mechanisms for users of service and ratepayers to give feedback to the municipality or other service providers regarding the quality of the service and the performance of the service provider.
- Take reasonable steps to ensure that users are informed of the costs involved in service provision, the reasons for the payment of the service fees and the manner in which monies raised from the services are utilised.
- Where consumption of services has been measured, reasonable steps should be taken to ensure that the consumption by individual users of services is measured through accurate and verifiable metering systems.
- Ensure that persons liable for payments receive regular and accurate accounts and metered consumption, and to provide appeal procedures which allow such persons to receive prompt redress

for inaccurate accounts.

- Provide accessible mechanisms for dealing with complaints from customers together with prompt relies and corrective actions by the municipality.

- Provide mechanisms to monitor the response time and efficiency in complying with complaints from customers.

- Provide customers with accessible pay points and other mechanisms for settling their accounts or making prepayments for services.

Customer care strategy must be designed as part of the Integrated Development Plan (IDP). The customer care strategy should culminate in the formulation of the customer care policy. Each municipality must ensure that its customer care policy can be a separate policy document or it should form part of its revenue management policies. Important aspects that should be included in the revenue management policies are amongst others, policies on rates, tariffs, indigent management, credit control and debt collections. The importance of quality service delivery cannot be overemphasised. This is important because customers expect quality service to satisfy their expectations. It is for this reason that the concept of service quality will receive attention in the section that follows.

2.3 Service quality

Improving service quality can be described as an assessment of how well a delivered service meets the expectations of the customer (Brink & Berndt, 2004:46). Service quality is a significant basis customers use for differentiating between competing services. Quality can only be defined by customers (Okibo & Ogwe, 2013:104). Service quality is the critical component of customer perceptions because it is an antecedent to customer satisfaction. Organisations which strive for service quality focus on ascertaining customer perceptions of service quality and therefore devise strategies to deliver the same (Sureschchandar, Rajendran & Anantharaman, 2002:10). Service quality can assist Thulamela Local Municipality to differentiate itself from other municipalities and other public institutions, and through it, gain a competitive advantage. Perceptions are described as the end results of observations of customers. Customers perceive services in terms of quality of services provided and the satisfaction level attained (Kumasey, 2014:174). The quality of service delivered should be assessed in order to improve the service and to identify gaps and to better evaluate customer satisfaction. Service quality is a critical determinant for the success of an institution and any decline in customer satisfaction due to poor service quality should be a matter of concern (Moletsane, De Klerk & Bevan-Dye, 2014: 283). In Thulamela Local Municipality, service quality can be achieved by understanding and improving operational processes and establishing

valid and reliable service performance measures and measuring customer satisfaction. It is the responsibility of Thulamela Local Municipality to understand factors that affect customer perceptions and elements of service quality.

According to Brink and Berndt (2004:46), quality is described as the measurement of how well the product or service of an institution satisfies and meets the expectation of the customers. It involves creating a memorable experience for customers. Political office bearers and public officials who form part of Thulamela Local Municipality represent it, and it is important for each member to be aware of the responsibility if meeting the expectations of customers.

In order to better serve the community, municipalities must involve their customers and find out what their expectations are. This can be achieved by developing a framework using the information they received from their customers in relation to the service they provide. According to Brink *et al*. (2004:60), customers evaluate service quality according to the following factors:

- Reliability- the municipality must provide customers with what was promised, dependably and accurately. If it is achieved in the correct manner, the perceived service quality of the customer will be enhanced.

- Responsiveness- public officials and political office bearers must be willing to help customers promptly. They must respond promptly to requests and inform customers when the services will be delivered. They must also deliver the service on the promise within a specified time.

- Assurance- this refers to the knowledge and courteous public officials and political office bearers show to customers. The behaviour of public officials and political office bearers must convey trust, competence and confidence in the mind of the customers.

- Empathy- public officials and political office bearers must show care and individual attention to customers. This can be achieved if public officials and political office bearers understand the concerns of customers.

- Tangibles- the facilities, equipment, material used as well as the appearance of public officials will reflect positively on the organisation.

Everything public officials and political office bearers do to and for customers of the municipality fall into one of the above categories and will impact on customer satisfaction with regard to quality service delivery.

The municipality differs from commercial business in that it does not have core goal of making profit. Unlike the private sector, municipalities, like other public institutions, have unique challenges compared to the private sector. Service quality in the municipality is challenged by the interference of politics in the

administrative sphere. Thornhill (2008:727) argues that politics in the context of the local government and municipal administration is concerned with quantity of the service to be provided and quality of services to be delivered.

Public sector organisations are required to take into account the political, social and organisational environment which can negatively impact public sector's ability to remain focused on customer care (Somerville & Elliott, 2011:4). The aim of the municipality is to serve the public as it represents the common interest of the public. This becomes important because every government must focus on promoting the general welfare of its citizens (De Bruijn & Dicke, 2006:79). Thulamela Local Municipality is directly accountable to the public for the services it provides and it is therefore, morally and legally required to serve and satisfy the public.

Because Thulamela Local Municipality deals with citizens who are ratepayers, the issue of public relations is also important. Public relations is not only concerned with dealing with citizens who are ratepayers to the municipality. Public relations is also about the image of the Thulamela Local Municipality and therefore, it is part of the daily tasks of public officials and political office bearers.

Poor relations with the public lead to a negative image of the municipality which is also linked to how the public sees the employees of the municipality. It is required of Vhembe District Municipality of which Thulamela Local Municipality is part of, to make an effort to foster good human relations. The public will offer cooperation if they are convinced of employees' conduct. The section which follows deals with public relations paying particular attention on how officials can succeed in fostering sound relations with the public. The intention should be to establish and maintain mutual understanding between the municipality and the people they serve (Cloete, 2012:151).

2.4 Public relations

Wilcox, Ault and Agee (1989:7) and Fawkes in Theaker (2008:5) consider public relations as the planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain goodwill and understanding between an institution and its publics. Beard (2001:7) sees public relations as mainly concerned with the reputation of an institution with the aim of gaining understanding and support, influencing opinion and behaviour. Beard argues that if public relations is well managed, the institution will win respect internally and gain allies who will assist it to achieve its intended objective. According to Beard (2001:1), an organisation which is well received externally will be trusted and consulted as an important asset.

Seitel (1989:10) defines public relations as the management function for evaluating public attitudes,

identifying the policies and procedures of an individual or an organisation with the public interest, with an aim of executing a program of action in order to earn public understanding and acceptance.

Black (1993:11) sums public relations as about reputation, perception, credibility, confidence, harmony, and seeking mutual understanding based on truth, and full information. According to Black (1993), public relations should have the support of top management to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of an institution.

According to Smit, Cronje, Brevis and Verba (2007:16), public relations is mainly concerned with the creation of favourable, objective image of the institution, and to establish good relations with all stakeholders concerned with the institution and its products and services. Coetzee (1991:70) argues that public relations include measuring public opinion, maintaining or changing it in a way that will benefit the organisation, interpreting the institution to its public and those publics to the organisation. Instruments that can be employed to facilitate public relations function include the press, radio, television, speeches, photography, advertising, slides, charts and exhibitions.

It is of importance to note that public relations is about goodwill and mutual understanding between the institution and the publics it serves. It is about popularity or approval. Public relations is about ensuring that publics have an accurate image about the institution. In one way or another, public relations affect almost everyone who has contact with other human beings. For Thulamela Local Municipality, every letter, every phone call, every face-to-face encounter is a public relation activity.

2.4.1 Public relations within the municipality

According to Mafunisa (2008:87), public relations is aimed at promoting the image of and the services rendered by the public service to the people and not to advance the policy of a particular political party. Public relations must advance democracy through full and accurate information. It is therefore, considered unethical to impose a point of view which has no truth to the people. According to Cloete (1997:288), every public institution has the duty to evaluate its public image and the attitude of the people it serves in terms of activities it performs. Public institutions, including Thulamela Local Municipality, must also obtain acceptance and understanding by the people it serves of its activities. It is the responsibility of every official employed by the municipality to ensure that public relations activities are performed.

Public relations in Thulamela Local Municipality can play an important role in creating a conducive environment and acceptance by the people it serves. As the municipality is a democratic institution, popular involvement of the people is important for its success. Without the cooperation and involvement of

members of the community, programmes of the municipality cannot succeed. Cooperation of the people is important.

Communication with members of the community should be intensified by informing them about the activities, policies and programmes of the municipality. That can only be achieved by appealing to their hearts and minds. Public relations must provide information and inspiration to members of the community so that they may willingly participate in the activities of the municipality. It is towards achieving the willing cooperation that public relations become important.

Because the municipality provides essential services which directly affects the interests and lives of the people, it is understandable that people will be concerned and be sensitive about the performance of political office bearers and public officials at the municipality. Thus, it becomes important for the municipality to ensure that activities are performed economically, efficiently and effectively. The objective would be to establish and maintain a mutual relationship, goodwill and cooperation between the municipality and the people it serves, hence, the importance of public relations. Public relations help bring the municipality close to the people it serves. Due to their proximity, people will be more willingly to support the municipality whether or not their expectations are fulfilled (Montalvo, 2009:1).

Within the municipality, public relations cover two aspects. They are personal conduct of employees and the physical image of the municipality.

2.4.1.1 Personal conduct of political office bearers and public officials

According to Cloete (2012:153), public relations are affected positively or negatively by the actions of political office bearers and public officials. It is therefore, important for political office bearers and public officials to understand how their conduct in the public can contribute to the image of the organisation. Political office bearers and public officials have the obligation of ensuring that their actions contribute to constructive relations between the municipality and the public.

Political office bearers and public officials should regard themselves as liaison officers of the municipality and should always keep in mind that they are obliged to sustain the highest standard and always strive to put the interest of the public at the fore. This becomes important because their activities are watched closely by ratepayers, civic associations as well as by political parties (Cloete, 2012:154).

The success of public relations depends on the contributions of political office bearers and public officials. The conduct and performance of every functionary involved in public administration contributes to the success of public relations. The words used should be in such a way that they express courtesy, friendliness

and respect.

The conduct of top officials within the municipality who have contacts with influential leaders in the private sector will also affect the image of the municipality. Subordinate public officials who are visible to large numbers of members of the public must also be aware that their conduct and activities also affect the image of the municipality (Cloete, 2012:155). Public officials and political office bearers must be responsive to the queries of the members of the public. Prompt action and quick finalisation of queries will give the municipality a good name.

It is, therefore, important to finalise a task as quickly as possible even if it does not seem urgent or no precise target date has been set. The speedy completion of tasks is a key to officials to show members of the public that their concerns are taken seriously. People will be more sympathetic for the constraints under which the municipality is operating if political office bearers and public officials demonstrate empathy with their concerns. Showing members of the public that they are valued will positively facilitate public relations (Cohen & Eimicke, 2002:161). The conduct of political office bearers and public officials is important to the eye of the public. If members of the public are unhappy with the conduct of political office bearers and public officials within the municipality, they will eventually find a way to voice that view within the political process. It is, therefore, important that public officials and political office bearers be familiar with the respective concerns of the public in order to anticipate what the public wants from the municipality. When public officials deal with members of the public, they should expect that they may not be well informed about the responsibilities of the municipality. It is the responsibility of public officials to explain issues in order to keep the general public informed. The best approach is to keep the information as simple as possible. Public meetings are recommended to keep the public informed about the activities of the municipality and to make the institutions more accountable to the public. Public meetings can also generate support for the municipality and also create the perception of openness and competence. Although the activities of public relations should be performed by appropriately qualified public relations officers, every official employed in a public institution is expected to promote the image of the institution and therefore, should be well trained and educated to render service for the institution (Cloete, 1998:288).

Having discussed personal conduct of public officials and political office bearers in relation to public relations, another important aspect is the physical image of the municipality. The section which follows will deal with it in details.

2.4.1.2 The physical image of the municipality

According to Coetzee (1991:70), public relations functions in the public administration context involve measuring public opinion, and maintaining or changing it to ensure the promotion of the general welfare.

The appearance of the municipality building is important in creating a certain impression to the public. A clean building with flourishing gardens invites a positive attention from the public. This also applies to the interior of the building, the furniture, desks and set-up of waiting rooms. Every picture communicates a particular story and people as customers can believe that what is inside reflects who the officials are. The working environment can provide the information as to whether officials are effective or not. The way public officials dress and their appearance can indicate respect for their work and for the people they will be in contact with. The municipality must be proud by the way its officials dress. Public officials are encouraged to wear appropriate clothes in line with the particular situation. This is motivated by the fact that it is required of public officials and political office bearers to adhere to the maintenance of high ethical standards even when they are off duty. Public relations can be affected positively or negatively by the actions of political office bearers and public officials (Cloete, 2012:152-153).

Having discussed the conduct of public officials and political office bearers and also the physical image of the municipality in relation to public relations, the section which follows focuses on the purpose of public relations within the municipality.

2.4.2 The purpose of public relations within the municipality

According to Cloete (1998:288), a public institution needs to evaluate its public image and the attitudes of the public in terms of the activities it performs. Good public relations will, therefore, be relevant in ensuring that the municipality earns the public's goodwill. A municipality's goodwill towards the public is reflected by the extent to which it is in contact with the public. Public relations must promote cordial relations inside the municipality. Public relations can achieve its intended objective if employees are satisfied within the municipality. Political office bearers and public officials can be expected to create good relations with the public if they are satisfies and happy in the organisation. The satisfactory attitude of the public officials will be reflected by selfless approach to the rendering of services (Cloete, 2012:154).

Because officials of the municipality have the obligation of maintaining public relations with the public, it is imperative to keep them informed about policies decided by the council.

The policy is a declaration of intent to do something in order to achieve a particular objective (Cloete, 1998:126). A policy gives direction and it will therefore, be virtually impossible for the municipality to deliver service effectively and efficiently without a clearly articulated policy.

Deliberate efforts must be made to inform public officials of any change of policy so that they can serve and supply the public with the relevant and up-to-date information. It is furthermore accepted that the municipality with good quality staff maintains relations with the public. It goes without saying that public officials with appropriate qualifications and experience should be appointed in the municipality. This is important because in the end, it is people with necessary skills who are needed to do the actual work (Coetzee, 1991:61). It is people who are required to give effect to the policy. Quality staff is the product of sound application of human values. It is therefore, incumbent to public officials and political office bearers to treat people with respect and dignity. Where there is human dignity, good public officials ensue.

2.4.3 The internal environment

The internal environment of the municipality involves everyone responsible for delivering quality services to the people. This includes political office bearers, public officials and organised labour (trade unions). Municipal employees are internal customers of the institution and represent an internal market within the organisation. Employees in the public sector are under increasing pressure to prove that their services are customer friendly (Zemke, 2002:75). Political office bearers are councillors who form a council and public officials are employees of the municipality. According to Cloete (2012:157), it is generally required that councillors will be at the forefront in creating cordial relations between the municipality and its people. Because the actions of the councillors are closely watched by public officials and residents, it is required of them to perform their duties in order to meet the general welfare of the people. It is councillors at council meetings who deliberate and take appropriate decisions to promote the general welfare of the people as effectively as possible with the efficient utilisation of scare resources.

Between councillors and the public officials of the municipality, a boundary of discipline must be maintained. Good relations across these boundaries are required to ensure that quality service is delivered to the people. Good understanding is also required between councillors and public officials as the two bodies represent separate fields of authority. Local management of trade unions in the municipality is also a public with whom public officials must deal. Good relations based on mutual understanding and respect must be maintained between the local management of the trade union and the officials to ensure cooperation. The municipality must also establish good relations with the outside world. It is therefore, important that councillors and public officials should know the external environment of the municipality in order to meet the expectations of their diverse clients. The section which follows will deliberate on the external environment of the municipality (Cloete, 2012:157).

2.4.4 The external environment

The external environment of the municipality consists of all the people who are not employed by the municipality and to whom the services are rendered. Of importance is to ensure that sound external relations must prevail at all times between the municipality and the public (Coetzee, 1991:72). Sound public relations depend on the effectiveness of the municipality and how informed its customers are. This is important because the municipality deals with diverse needs and expectations of the external public. The municipality deals with a large number of matters than any known formal administrative institution. It is for this reason that a municipality is considered a multi-purpose institution which differs fundamentally from other single-purpose institutions such as electricity corporations and water corporations (Cloete, 2012:98). The external environment of the municipality amongst others, includes state departments and residents.

2.4.4.1 State departments

According to Coetzee (1991:72), cordial and professional relations must prevail between state institutions like the municipality and state departments. This is consistent with Section 40(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, which makes provision for the government constituted as national, provincial and local spheres of government, which are distinctive, interdependent and interrelated. It is for this reason that the municipality is required to perform its functions in cooperation with state departments. This is important because the municipality renders services to state departments at all levels of the government, namely, the provincial and national government. It should be acknowledged that the primary purpose of the municipality is to deliver services to the people and this becomes an added reason as to why sound relations between the municipality and state departments should be at its best. The objectives of promoting external relations between the municipality and state departments are aimed at:

- Promoting sound relations and mutual confidence between public officials and legislators for purposes of policy making.
- Ensuring that there is useful information required for consultation with the policy-makers and high ranking functionaries for effective and efficient service delivery.
- Keeping the community informed of services and facilities to ensure that they make use of them.

The municipality must improve relations with different levels of government particularly through effective coordination (Coetzee, 1991:72). This becomes important because coordination is basically a function of

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external relations.

2.4.4.2 Residents

Residents are people who stay in residential areas of the municipalities and who depend on the municipalities for services. Municipalities provide essential services to residents without which life will be impossible (Cloete, 2012:99). Examples of essential services rendered by the municipality include water supply, refuse removals, electricity supply, cemeteries and crematoria, street, sidewalks and drainage, health services, housing and clearance of slums. According to Cloete (1998:107), residents should keep themselves informed about what the municipality is performing so that they could voice their concerns in case of ineffectiveness and inefficiency in municipal service delivery. In that way, residents can raise concerns to relevant stakeholders if the principle of customer care is violated during service delivery. This is reinforced by the fact that services are the legitimate rights of the residents which public officials should render without undue failure in Thulamela Local Municipality.

2.4.5 Public opinion

Public opinion is the aggregate of individual attitudes or beliefs. Public opinion is another important component of public relations, or the perception members of the community have about the level of service the municipal delivers to the people. Jefkins (1998:13) defines public opinion as information which is well known to the people. Public opinion may be uncontrollable and it may be either bad or good about a specific issue. It is a summation of the expression of people regarding a subject concerned.

All residents have a common interest in the municipality and it is not uncommon for them to have a certain opinion or view about how the municipality is performing in terms of quality service delivery. Residents are always in contact with one another and if these contacts sessions are negative, they will develop a negative perception of the municipality which will spread like wild fire.

Satisfied customers will repeat their transaction and will inform others about their experiences from the product or service (Azizzadeh, Khalili, Soltani, 2013:115). It is therefore, important to create a positive, acceptable public opinion and every contact session must be seen as part of this process. This will eventually contribute towards a sound customer care which is important to enhance quality service delivery.

2.4.6 Providing quality service delivery

According to Fox, Bayat and Ferreira (2006:22), the concept of customer care is appropriate in the context of improving service delivery because it includes certain principles that are important in public service delivery as they are for the provision of service for profit objective. Customer care implies treating citizens as customers and this involves:

- Listening to their views and taking them into consideration when decisions are made about the types of services to provide.
- Treating them with consideration and respect.
- Making sure that the promised level and quality of service is always of the highest standard possible.

Customer care also includes responding swiftly and sympathetically when standards of service fall below the promised level (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997). These are critical principles of customer care in municipalities. The principles of Batho-Pele, which are outlined in the White Paper on Transforming Service Delivery (1997) highlight the importance placed on citizens as customers. Batho-Pele principles put emphasis on the legitimate right of the people to expect quality service delivery from the public sector, including the municipality. People are empowered to demand quality service from public institutions and public officials (Du Toit *et al*., 2002:101).

It is hoped that compliance to Batho-Pele initiative will motivate public officials to promote customer care in order to improve service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality. Through compliance to Batho-Pele approach, it is believed that public officials and political bearers will refrain from poor customer care and strive to enhance quality service delivery. The section which follows will attempt to deliberate on the Batho-Pele principles in detail.

2.4.7 Batho-Pele as an instrument for customer care

Batho-Pele, a Sotho translation for "People First", is an initiative to get public servants to be service orientated, to strive for excellence in service delivery and to commit to continuous service delivery improvement. It is a simple and transparent mechanism which allows citizens to hold public servants accountable for the level of services they deliver. Citizens have a democratic right for appropriate services, effectively delivered.

Batho-Pele Strategy on service delivery is developed to achieve the following strategic objectives, namely:

- To introduce a new approach to service delivery which puts people at the centre of planning and delivering services
- To improve the face of service delivery by fostering new attitudes such as increased commitment, personal sacrifice and dedication
- To ensure that the image of the public service is improved

Batho-Pele principles were developed to serve as acceptable policy and legislative framework with regard to service delivery in the public sector. These principles are consistent with Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 which makes provisions for:

- Promoting and maintaining high standards of professional ethics.
- Ensuring that services are provided impartially, fairly, equitably and without bias.
- Utilising scarce resources efficiently, effectively and economically.
- Ensuring that the needs of the people are responded to as quickly as possible.
- Ensuring that public administration be accountable, transparent and development-oriented.

2.4.8 General overview of Batho-Pele principles

Fox, Bayat and Ferreira (2006:20) are of the view that Batho-Pele principles have not been published as a bill and therefore, remain a public policy document. Interestingly, the principles spelt out in the document have been incorporated in certain legislation.

Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, insists that public services should be improved and that public servants should commit themselves in rendering services of high standards that meet the needs of the people. People should be in a position to access decent public services from public institutions. It is not a privilege but a rightful expectation for people to access quality services. People are therefore, encouraged to take an active role in the planning process in order to improve service delivery. Batho-Pele principles are aimed at improving quality service delivery within a short term, and then setting high standards in order to reach internationally recognised standards (Fox *et al*., 2006:20). Batho-Pele principles are also aimed at enhancing accessibility of government services by improving efficiency and accountability to the recipient of public services.

Batho-Pele provides that people should be treated as customers and the public sector, including the municipality, must strive on customer satisfaction and improve service delivery. Batho-Pele principles require that the needs of the people must be responded to and good relations must always be cultivated

within the people. Batho-Pele principles are consistent with the African value of Ubuntu which requires public officials to treat people with care, respect and courtesy. In order to benefit from Batho-Pele initiative, active participation of the wider community must be encouraged. This is important because municipalities need feedback from the community if they are to improve their operations. It is important to acknowledge that Batho-Pele principles should not be seen in isolation. They are interlinked and interrelated. The section that follows will attempt to discuss principles of Batho-Pele in detail. Batho-Pele principle of consultation will be the first to be discussed.

2.4.8.1 Consultation

According to Du Toit *et al*. (2002:108), consultation implies that citizens should be consulted about the level of the public services they received and wherever possible, be given a choice about the services that are rendered. Consultation is one of the pillars of democracy and good governance because it invites active participation of service recipients in decision-making on service delivery.

Consultation is closely related to participation. The service cannot be provided without the participation of its consumer (Mortynova, 2014:224). According to Callahan (2007:163), public participation requires people to be included and treated as equals in decision making. Consultation is a multi-way interaction where stakeholders communicate and work in both formal and informal ways to influence action and to bring about positive results. Craythorne (1993:74) argues that public consultation requires interacting with, listening to and learning from the people who are provided with public service. Consultation provides the opportunity for cooperative problem-solving and improved public service delivery.

Municipal officials should be in touch with the people they serve, by finding out what services they need and how they would like services to be delivered.

 This will enable public officials to take appropriate steps needed to improve the services given to the people. If the system is defective, management can be afforded an opportunity to change it. Newman in Mclaughlin, Osborne and Ferlie (2006:86) asserts that consultation requires local authorities to reconnect with the community they serve by giving local people a bigger say in the way in which councils run services. This requires an agreement between public officials and the people in setting standards and in planning performance improvement. The goal must be to engage the people as users of service to be more active in decision-making processes.

Fox *et al*. (2006:23) assert that consultation must involve both the existing and potential customers. The view of those who have been previously denied access to public service should also be attended to in

different ways of consultation including interviewing users of services, arranging meetings with representatives of users of services, involving representatives of the previously disadvantaged communities, and promoting active participation of Non-Governmental Organisation (NGOs) and Community-Based Organisation (CBOs). It is important that the methods used during consultation must suit the characteristics of the users and customers involved (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997:16).

According to Thomas (1995:8-9), benefits which are associated with involving and consulting members of the community are as follows:

- Channels of communication are improved.
- Implementation of programmes and decision is also improved.
- Criticism by users of services is reduced to the minimal when people are involved in decision-making.
- Citizens are empowered to address their challenges better that public officials.

In the same vein, Cohen and Eimicke (2002:260) emphasise the importance of consultation by arguing that it provides valuable feedback to programmes, helps define and monitor quality and recommend improvements. Consultation can assist to foster a participative and cooperative relationship between public officials and users of public services. The importance of reporting the results of consultation process to the relevant body should not be ignored.

Results of consultation process should be published within the organisation to ensure that all public officials may be aware of how their services are perceived by users. Results must then be taken into consideration when decisions are made about what services are to be provided and at what level.

Consultation can also empower people by informing them about their rights and obligations, and also about the services that the municipality provides. Consultation promotes a democratic society and enhances transparency and accountability.

2.4.8.2 Setting service standards

Service standards are a commitment by the municipality to ensure that a certain level of service is provided to the people as customers. Service standards are important for managing expectations of customers based on available resources. They inform customers what the municipality can provide and what they can expect to receive. Service standards should be made known to all affected, namely, municipal officials and

customers. Service standards should be client driven and reflect what the customers want, but also what the municipality can afford. Du Toit *et al*. (2002:108) state that it is important to ensure that citizens are well informed about the level and quality of services that they will receive. When citizens are informed, they know what to expect. Public servants will therefore, be obliged to deliver services in terms of the level and quality of services they have promised to deliver. When public servants fail to delivery services in terms of the expected standards, citizens have the right to complain and to demand quality service.

Fox *et al*. (2006:23) argue that it is the responsibility of departments to communicate and to publish standards for the level and quality of services that they prepare to provide. This can also involve introducing new services to people who were previously denied access to them. The principle of setting service standards reinforces the need for benchmarks to measure the extent to which citizens are satisfied with the services or products they received. This will eventually promote the development of service delivery improvement plans to ensure a better life of the people. Of importance is to enhance that people or users of services are actively involved in the development of service standards.

Callahan (2007:187) emphasises ownership of citizens to ensure quality service delivery. Ownership by citizens encourages them to be in control and public servants are bound to comply and abide by people's decisions. It can be argued that when citizens assume an active role, service delivery will improve. Whenever problems arise, both the service users and the public servants get together to solve problems and get things done.

Service standards must be meaningful and relevant to the users of services. They must be expressed in such a way that they are easily understood by users of services. Service standards must be measured so that individual users can assess for themselves whether the promised standards were indeed delivered (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997:17).

Consistent with the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997, Cohen and Eimicke (2002:259) emphasise the right of people to know what the government is doing and the right of the people to be heard in decision-making process.

The government has the responsibility of keeping the people informed about service delivery. When people are informed about any service delivery, they will hold public servants accountable if the promised service is not delivered. This becomes important because public officials are in a true sense, public servants who must be accountable to the public for the services they produce. If members of the public are not satisfied with service delivery, they can find a way of voicing their views within the political process.

2.4.8.3 Increasing access

One of the primary objectives of Batho-Pele is to provide a framework for making decisions about rendering public services to many South Africans who do not have access to them. Citizens have the right to equal access to service and it is the duty of public servants to ensure that they do not withhold that right from them (Du Toit, 2002:108). The principle of access is also applicable to illiterate and rural people who may have difficulty in accessing municipal services. Services should also be accessible to disabled people.

Special facilities should be provided to people on wheelchairs and walking aids so that they are able to get into municipal buildings. Special arrangements must also be made to help people with visual and hearing disabilities.

Batho-Pele principle of increasing access is also aimed at rectifying inequality in the distribution of existing services. People who were previously disadvantaged should be given preferential treatment in terms of service delivery. It is the responsibility of the municipality to set targets for increasing access to the services for those who were previously disadvantaged and marginalised (Fox *et al*., 2006:24). In setting targets, institutions which promote the interests of previously disadvantaged groups such as the Gender Commission and the groups representing the disabled, should be consulted (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery 1997:18). In order to improve access to service, especially in rural areas, service facilities such as Multi-Purpose Community Centres and Call centres should be used.

Access to information and services empowers citizens and creates value for money and quality services. It reduces unnecessary expenditures for the citizens. One of the factors which hinder access to service is the distance between the service provider and the service user. Thulamela Local Municipality must develop strategies to eliminate the barriers of distance by setting up mobile units and redeploying facilities and resources close to those who are in dire need. Infrastructure should also be improved to ensure that rural areas are more accessible. The principle of access promotes that everyone should have equal access to whatever they are entitled.

2.4.8.4 Ensuring courtesy

Members of the community expect courteous treatment from municipal officials and political office-bearers. In most municipalities which are considered successful, courtesy is regularly practiced by employees. Courtesy among municipal officials is as important as courtesy to customers. Municipalities which embrace and practice courtesy extend the concept not only to customers and municipal officials, but

also to all stakeholders in the municipality, including the community at large. Courtesy should also be an important part of the strategic plan of the municipality.

Du Toit *et al*. (2002:108) argue that in terms of the principles of courtesy, public servants must treat all citizens with courtesy and consideration irrespective of their external social status. Courtesy does not only involve being polite to customers, it also requires service provides to be friendly, helpful and treating everyone with dignity and respect. This principle must be applied throughout in a municipal consultative process. Public officials are required to empathise with service users and treat them with respect and dignity.

Fox *et al*. (2006:24) emphasise the importance of different departments in specifying the standards for the way in which customers as users of services should be treated. Public officials must be committed to continuous honest and transparent communication with the people. This involves communicating services, products, information and   challenges which, if ignored, may have a detrimental effect on efficient delivery of services. If this principle is applied well, negative perceptions that citizens may have about the attitude of the public servants will be addressed.

Public officials should be trained in terms of service delivery and customer care, especially those that deal directly with the public, whether face-to-face or on telephone. Training of public officials and political office bearers is important as it could promote ethical and responsible conduct. Through training, these functionaries are informed on how to behave to ensure that their conduct and actions are ethical (Mafunisa in Kuye *et al.*, 2002:196). In this regard, Thakhathi in Mafunisa (2008:69) argues that public officials should have skills and competencies in terms of treating people with dignity and respect when performing their duties and functions. The performance of public officials who are in close contact with customers should be regularly monitored and any performances that do not meet the required standards should not be tolerated (Fox *et al*., 2006:24).

In order to encourage a customer-focused behaviour, public officials should be offered opportunities of suggesting ways of improving service. This is especially important to officials who are in close contact with the public. Senior managers must also lead by example.

They must provide guidance on a regular basis in terms of customer care. Junior staff will emulate the organisation's value by imitating the way in which their seniors behave. Senior managers have the responsibility of ensuring that the values and behavioural norms of subordinates are consistent with the Batho-Pele principle of courtesy (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997).

Public officials have to understand that they are employed to render services to the people and to ensure

that those services are accessible to the masses. It is incumbent on public officials to be courteous and helpful during their contact with the people.

2.4.8.5 Providing more and better information

Thulamela Local Municipality has the democratic duty to provide people with information that allows them to know how the municipality is operating. According to Du Toit *et al*. (2002:108), people have the right to accurate information about the services they are entitled to. The right of people to have information must be respected by public institutions (Schwella, Burger, Fox, Muller, 1996:263).

It is therefore, the duty of public servants or public officials to provide them with full and accurate information. The rationale of this principle is that should the promised standard of service drop for whatever reason, people should be informed why this happened, and when the situation will be addressed (Du Toit *et al*., 2002:108).

As is required, information about service should be at the point of delivery, but for service users who are far from the point of delivery, alternative arrangements will have to be devised. Local NGOs, CBOs, schools, clinics, shops can serve as potential distribution points. If the public officials do not have information, they should try to find out and help the people. This is consistent with Cohen and Eimicke (2002:237) who emphasise that the duty of public officials is to keep the public informed. When people are well informed, they participate actively in public policy making. Information should be provided in a variety of media and languages to address the differing needs of different customers (Fox *et al*., 2006:24).

Understanding exactly what people expect is the most important step in defining and delivering quality service. Gaining feedback from local residents provides valuable insight into how well the municipalities meet their customer's need.

The information can be used in quality improvement programs to assist municipal councillors recognise opportunities to improve services and creation of a positive perception among citizens (Mokhlis, Aleesa, Mamat, 2011:123). Public officials should be encouraged to spend extra time with people who need better information or special assistance to ensure that they access the services themselves.

Public officials should also make regular visits to remote communities to disseminate information. When people are better informed, it will be easier for them to access public services and fewer people will be in the queues.

Information is a powerful tool a customer can use in order to exercise his/her right to good service. It is the

way of reaching customers to make sure they are well informed about the services the municipality provides. Accurate and up-to-date information must be provided to the people about the services they are entitled to. This must be done actively to ensure that information is accessed by all those who need it, especially those who have been previously excluded from accessing public services (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997).

2.4.8.6 Increasing openness and transparency

Openness and transparency are important elements in cultivating the culture of accountability and trust which are necessary for the fight against poor customer care in Thulamela Local Municipality.

Sustained efforts should be supported to enhance openness and transparency through the free flow of information and the sharing of knowledge. According to Fox *et al*. (2006:24), the principle of openness and transparency promotes that the public should know about the way the national, provincial and local government institutions operate, how well they utilise the resources they consume, and who is in charge. Municipalities are encouraged to be open and honest about all aspects of their work. Municipalities should in terms of the principle of openness and transparency publish an annual report to inform the people how resources were utilised and the costs involved in equipment delivery, service and remuneration of staff.

Transparency concerns itself with the way in which the functioning of public officials is open to public scrutiny. Transparency requires public officials to be open, honest and visible to the public.

The actions of public officials should also be open and transparent to the public (Mafunisa in Kuye *et al*., 2002:210). In this regard, Section 32 (2) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that everyone has the right to access:

- Any information held by the state
- Any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights.

Transparency is also one of the basic principle governing public administration provided for by Section 195 (1) (g) of the Republic of South Africa (1996) which states that transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information. Any form of secrecy is not acceptable where transparency is required (Schwella *et al*., 1996:16).

Openness is a critical value for good governance and where the system is open, there are limited obstacles to the expression dissent (Parnell, Pieterse, Swilling, Woolridge, 2002:33). It is hoped that the public will

take advantage of this principle and make suggestions for improvement of service delivery mechanisms, and to even make government employees accountable by raising queries with them. Callahan (2007:203) argues that transparency enhances confidence and trust by people in government operation. Through openness and transparency, the willingness of people to support the programmes of the government is increased.

Thulamela Local Municipality must use events such as open days, preferably not during normal working hours, to invite people to visit the institution to meet with all levels of officials to discuss service delivery programmes, standards and challenges (Fox *et al*., 2006:24). These events can also provide the institution with an opportunity to advertise the services they offer to citizens (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997).

This reinforces the fact that the municipality must be run as an open book. It is unfortunately true that many people, especially the marginalised poor, are failing to access free basic services such as social grants simply because they do not have information to access it.

2.4.8.7 Remedying mistakes and failures

Du Toit *et al*. (2002:108) argue that when people do not get what they are entitled to from the public service, they have the right to redress. According to Du Toit *et al*. (2002) and Van der Waldt (2007:85), public servants should apologise to people and also explain the possible solution they are offering to the problem. When complaints are made, people should receive a sympathetic, quick and a positive response. Customer complaints indicate customer dissatisfaction and service deficiencies and this require great attention and care (Nathuwera in Kangoro, Musiega, Manyisa, 2013:89). Public officials must welcome complaints as an opportunity to improve service and to deal with them so that any discrepancy can be remedied for the good of the people. Thulamela Local Municipality must train their staff to deal with complaints in a friendly and helpful manner. This is important because the image of the municipality is built on its ability to deliver what people expect from them.

The significance of this principle is based on the need to identify quickly and accurately when services are falling below the promised standard and to have mechanisms in place to remedy the situation. Consistent with Fox *et al*. (2006:24), the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997) states that various departments are required to review and improve their complaint system in line with the following principles:

- Accessibility: complaint system should be easy to be used. Strict and confusing formalities should

be avoided. Complaints can be made in writing, face-to-face or by telephone. It is important to ensure that any method used should be within the understanding of the local community.

- Speed: dissatisfaction of the people should be addressed as a matter of urgency. Public officials are encouraged to apologise to service users if the required standard was not met. Any delay which is unavoidable in terms of rendering services to the people should be communicated, keeping them informed at all times.

- Fairness: complaints by the local residents in terms of service delivery should be investigated fully and impartially. The principle of fairness encourages people to raise concerns without any fear of victimisation by public officials.

- Confidentiality: complaints by the people should be treated with utmost confidentiality. This will encourage them to voice their concerns openly without any fear of being victimised by public officials and political office-bearers.

- Responsiveness: where poor service delivery by public officials is identified, responses to remedy the situation should be immediate. Any apology and a full explanation of what happened, accompanied by remedial action should be communicated to the service users. Redress asserts that public officials should explain to the people why a particular service was not delivered in accordance with the required standard.

- Training: public officials should be trained in terms of how complaints from the people should be addressed. To promote customer care in order to enhance quality service delivery, public officials should know what action to take when a complaint is identified.

2.4.8.8 Getting the best possible value for money

The principle of value for money requires public servants to deliver public services efficiently, effectively and economically. This principle also requires local residents to demand that services they receive are real value for money paid to them (Du Toit *et al*., 2002:109).

According to Jones (1996:89-91), value for money includes the combination of efficiency, effectiveness so that cash resources are economically turned into maximum non-cash resources which in turn, are converted efficiently into maximum service outputs. If service outputs are effective, then the value for money would have been achieved.

According to the Public Service Commission (August 2007:5), the Batho-Pele principle of value for money requires departments to use creative ways to eliminate wasteful expenditure and inefficiency. Public officials should be encouraged to prioritise the use of scarce resources of the state. Value for money

encourages careful spending by public officials to ensure efficiency and effectiveness during service delivery. It involves an assessment of service performance with an aim of ensuring rendering quality service to the people (Bovaid & Loffler, 2003:151).

In order to achieve the best value for money, public officials should not waste scarce resources and should deliver services that are cost-effective and efficient. It is the responsibility of any public official to inform the immediate supervisor of any undue wastage of resources and to look for ways of saving money and time without compromising the quality of the service delivered to the people.

2.5. Conclusion

For local residents, their main contact with their municipality is often as consumers of services. It is therefore, important for municipalities to build a good relationship with local residents. This is where the concept of customer care becomes important. Customer care requires Thulamela Local Municipality to be responsive to the needs of customers by improving customer relations to enhance service delivery. Public relations between the municipality and local residents are influenced by the conduct of political office-bearers and public officials. It is therefore, required from political office-bearers and public officials to establish mutual understanding, goodwill and cooperation with the people they serve.

Batho-Pele principles provide a useful approach to building a culture and practice of customer care and were developed, to serve as acceptable policy document regarding service delivery in the public service. It is an initiative to get public officials to strive for excellence in service delivery and to be committed to continuous service delivery improvement. Thulamela Local Municipality can, through sound public relations and customer care, encourage feedback from service users if they are to improve service delivery. The chapter which follows focuses on legislative framework in relation to customer care.

CHAPTER 3

LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK PERTAINING TO CUSTOMER CARE

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter focused on literature review in the context of customer care. This chapter considers a discourse on the legislative framework governing issues of customer care. Legislative framework refers to the process of regulating actions of different stakeholders. A comprehensive and effective legislative framework is important for ensuring that customer care prevails in the municipality for it to achieve its intended objective of providing quality service to the people. The legislative framework of municipalities with regard to customer care is imbedded in the Batho-Pele principles (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237). Batho-Pele principles acknowledge that the development of a service-orientated culture requires the support of the people. Municipalities need feedback from the people if they are to improve service delivery.

It is in municipalities where basic service takes place for local communities. It then becomes important for municipalities to establish good relationships with citizens and communities. Customers would always expect quality affordable services to be delivered. Municipalities are expected to be responsive to the needs of the people by improving customer care and providing good customer service (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237).

Legislative framework with regard to customer care include the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996); White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997); Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (2000); Local Government: Municipal Property Rates Act (2004); Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act (2003). These laws are discussed in detail below.

3.2 The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996

Section 2 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa(1996) makes provision for the Constitution as the supreme law of the Republic of South Africa and any law or conduct which is inconsistent with it is invalid (Cloete, 2012:9). Being the supreme law of the Republic, the Constitution binds all citizens, and directs the activities of every political office-bearer and every public official (Du Toit, Knipe, van Niekerk, van der Waldt & Doyle, 2002:102; Gildenhuys & Knipe, 2013:94).

Section 195 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa(1996) is significant in the sense that it is committed to customer care by prescribing that public administration must be governed by the

democratic values and principles which include some of the following:

- People's needs must be responded to

- Transparency must be promoted by providing people with timely, accessible and accurate information

- Efficient, economic and effective utilisation of scarce resources must be promoted

- A high standard of professional ethics must be promoted and maintained

- Public administration must be accountable to the people they serve.

The preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) pronounces amongst other things, that the purpose of this supreme law is to improve the quality of lives of all citizens and free the potential of each person (Cloete, 2012:9).

3.3 The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997

The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997), commonly known as Batho-Pele principles, provides a useful approach to building a culture and practice of customer care (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:236). Batho-Pele is a clear indication of the government's commitment to acknowledging the principles of good governance by requiring public officials to treat their clients with care (Cloete, 2012:111). The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery (1997) acknowledges that citizens have a legitimate right to be treated with dignity and courtesy (Du Toit *et al*., 2002:100). The intention of Batho-Pele is to make service delivery customer friendly and to meet the basic needs of all South Africans (Du Toit *et al*., 2002:107).

Batho-Pele creates a framework for the delivery of public services that treats citizens like customers and enables citizens to hold the responsible public officials accountable for the delivery and the quality of public services (Gildenhuys & Knipe, 2013:130). The frame consists of eight service delivery principles as discussed below:

- Consultation requires that citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and where possible, should be given a choice of the services that are offered.
- Service standards informs that citizens should be informed about the level and quality of services they will receive in order for them to know what to expect.
- With regard to access, all citizens should have a legitimate right to equal access to all the public

services to which they are entitled, and public servants must not withhold that right from them.

- Courtesy requires public officials to treat all citizens with courtesy and consideration irrespective of the external social status of the individual.

- Information emphasises that citizens have the right to accurate information regarding the public services they are entitled to and public servants must provide them with full and accurate information.

- Openness and transparency articulates that citizens should know how the municipality is run, how resources are spent and who is in charge of particular services.

- Redress requires that where the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation, and a speedy and effective remedy.

- Value for money emphasises that public service should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best value for money (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, 1997).

3.4 Local Government: Municipal Systems Act (Act No 32 of 2000)

The Municipal Systems Act focuses on the internal systems and administration of a municipality. The Municipal Systems Act makes provision for the core principles, mechanisms and processes necessary to enable municipalities to move towards the social and economic upliftment of local communities and ensure access to essential services that are affordable to all (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:6).

Section 95 of the Municipal Systems Act (Act No.32 of 2000) requires that in relation to the levying of rates and other taxes by a municipality and the charging of fees for municipal services, a municipality must, within the limits of its financial and administrative capacity, also give regard to the following issues pertaining to customer care. The municipality must:

- Establish a sound customer management system aimed at creating a positive and reciprocal relationship between persons liable for payments and the municipality or service provider.

- Take reasonable steps to ensure that service users are informed of the costs involved in service provision, the reasons for the payment of service fees and the way in which funds raised from the services are utilised.

- Establish mechanisms for users of services and ratepayers to provide feedback to the municipality regarding the quality of the services and the performance of the service provider.

- Ensure that persons liable for payments receive regular and accurate accounts that indicate the basis for calculating the amounts due.

- Provide accessible mechanisms for those persons to query or verify accounts and metered consumption, and provide appeal procedures which allow such persons to receive prompt redress for inaccurate accounts.

- Provide accessible mechanisms for dealing with complaints from such persons, together with prompt replies and corrective actions by the municipality.

- Provide mechanisms to monitor the response time and efficiency in complying with the predetermined standards to deal with complaints.

The municipality must also provide accessible pay points and other mechanisms for settling accounts and for making prepayments for services (Municipal Systems Act, 2000).

3.5 Local Government: Municipal Finance Management Act, 2003 (Act 56 of 2003)

One of the objectives of the Municipal Finance Management Act which is consistent with customer care is to develop sound financial governance within every municipality. This is achieved by separating the responsibilities of mayors, councillors and municipal officials. The separation of responsibilities is important for good governance, and is consistent with modern practices of effective public management (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:9).

The Municipal Finance Management Act promotes strategic approach to budgeting and enabling municipalities to plan for capital development and service delivery in their communities in an affordable and sustainable manner. This will ensure that an accountable and performance-driven service delivery culture in introduced and maintained (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:10). The purpose of the Municipal Finance Management Act is to establish the basis for financial management that is crucial to improve and sustain service delivery. Municipalities are, therefore, required to put in place internal control mechanisms in an effort to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their administrative processes.

Consistent with the principle of customer care, the Municipal Finance Management Act also requires regular and accurate financial reporting to the council, community and other spheres of government. In that way, real or potential financial challenges are identified allowing the council to seek appropriate solutions. Issues that are central to the Municipal Finance Management Act include amongst other things, accountability, transparency, empowerment and communication (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:11).

3.6 Local Government: Municipal Property Rates Act, 2004 (Act 6 of 2004)

Thulamela Local Municipality aims to provide services that are affordable to all its people and specifically to the poor and the disadvantaged, provided that service fees, rates, metered services, other municipal charges, levies, fines, interest, taxes or any other amount arising from any other liability are paid for. The Municipal Property Rates Act makes provision for the legislative framework within which a municipality has authority to impose property rates on the owners of property (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:199). The Municipal Property Rates Act allows municipalities to exercise their powers to impose rates within a statutory framework that takes into account historical imbalances and the rates burden of the poor. Income derived from property rates is an important source of revenue for municipalities (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:12).

The Municipal Property Rates Act observes customer care and consequently, service delivery by recognising differing local circumstances by providing exemptions, rebates and reductions subject to specific conditions on rating specific properties. Consistent with the principle of customer care, section 3 (3) of the Municipal Property Rates Act requires that a rates policy must take into consideration the effect of rates on the specific category of owners of properties, or the owners of a specific category of properties, from payment of rate levied on their property. The specific category of owners of property exempted in terms of the Municipal Property Rates Act include indigent owners, owners dependent on pensions or social grants for their livelihood, owners temporarily unemployed and without income, owners of property situated within an area affected by disaster or any other areas affected by serious adverse social or economic conditions. In terms of Section 2 of the Municipal Property Rates Act, rates policy must be adopted by municipalities to promote local, social, economic development while appropriate measures to alleviate the rates burden on the poor are taken into consideration. Section 3 (3) (f) of the Municipal Property Rates Act specifically states that municipalities should take into account the effect of rates on the poor and include appropriate measures to alleviate the rates burden on them. Municipalities are encouraged through rates policy to grant exemptions, rebates and reductions to indigent owners, and furthermore, implement measures to prevent the sale in execution of property owing to the owner's inability to settle rates liabilities.

3.7 Promotion of Access to Information Act, 2000 (Act 2 of 2000)

The Preamble of Promotion of Access to Information Act explains that the Act is important to give effect to Section 32 (1) of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, which makes provision for everyone the right to access any information held by the State, and when such information is required for the exercise or protection of any right.

The Promotion of Access to information Act fosters a culture of transparency and accountability in public institutions including municipalities (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:26).

With regard to municipalities, the Promotion of Access to Information Act requires the municipality to appoint an information officer to provide information at the request of any interested person (Cloete, 2012:104). The Act defines the information officer of a municipality as the municipal manager or anyone acting in that capacity. In relation to customer care in order to enhance service delivery, Section 14 of the Promotion of Access to Information Act provides that the information officer of a municipality compiles a manual in at least three official languages describing services provided by the municipality and an indication of how to gain access of such services. The manual must also provide a detailed description of all remedies available in respect of any act or failure to act by the municipality (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:26). This Act also requires those who withhold information to give reasons for their actions.

Section 18 provides that the request for access to records must be made in the way required by the municipality and must provide relevant information to allow the information officer to identify the records concerned and the identity of the requester, and also to determine the way in which information required will be conveyed to the requester (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:27). Records of the municipality refer to those records created or received in the course of official business and which are kept as evidence of the municipality's functions, activities and transactions. Different forms of records include registers, agendas and minutes, by-laws and tariffs, policy documents, correspondence files and can be available in different media formats including electronic.

Section 31 of the Act provides that if access is requested to a record in a particular language, such access must be provided if the record exists in that language, but if it does not, access must be given in any language in which the records exists. Chapter 4 of the Act deals specifically with the grounds for the refusal of access to records and allows the information officer to refuse access whenever such access will entail unreasonable disclosure of personal information about the third person. However, Section 74 of the Act also provides the requester to lodge an internal appeal with the municipality against any decision of the information officer if a request for access is refused. Of importance is to acknowledge the fact that any information held by the municipality that is clearly in public interest must be disclosed. This refers to any information about an imminent public safety or environmental risk or information about the breaking of

any law.

3.8 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on the impact of applicable legislation for municipalities with regard to customer care. Due attention was on how such legislation contributes towards sound customer care and consequently quality service delivery.

All legislations pertaining to customer care to enhance service delivery must be in line with the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. Section 2 of the Constitution declares that any law or conduct that is inconsistent with the Constitution is invalid. The next chapter focuses on the methods of research used for this study.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

4.1 Introduction

While the previous chapter paid attention to the legislative framework pertaining to customer care, this chapter focuses on research design and research methodologies. The chapter begins by clarifying the meaning and difference between qualitative and quantitative research methodology. It is then further indicated that the study is basically qualitative in nature. Methods employed in the collection of data are discussed together with the ways used to analyse data. Reasons for the selection of relevant samples and research areas are also provided in detail.

4.2 Research design and research methodology

Research design is a strategic framework for action serving as a bridge between research question and the implementation of research (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006:34). Research design provides the structure for the procedures the researcher follows, the data the researcher collects, as well as the data analysis the researchers conduct (Leedy & Ormrod, 2006:85). According to Babbie and Mouton (2003:647), research design is a structured framework of how the researcher intends conducting the research process in order to address the research question. A well-structured research design provides a plan that specifies how the research will be conducted in such a way that the research question is answered. The justification of a sound research design is to ensure that the research project is well planned in such a way that the validity of the research findings is maximised by either eliminating or minimising potential errors. It is important not to confuse research design and research methodology.

Research methodology focuses on the steps, procedures, techniques and specific tasks that should be followed by the researcher to implement the research design. The quality of research is determined by the validity and reliability of the results. Validity refers to the degree to which a study measures what it is intended to measure, while reliability involves the extent to which the instrument produces the same results on repeated trials (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006:563).

Validity and reliability are compromised when the researcher selects views that are personal, provide insufficient supporting evidence and reasons when making conclusion (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2006:156-157). To achieve validity and reliability, the researcher must ensure that the views and

arguments of the research participants are accurate. Validity and reliability should not work in insolation with each other. Both validity and reliability should complement each other since it is fruitless to use a reliable instrument which has no validity. In the same vein, validity of an instrument serves no purpose unless it can be proved to be reliable.

Two types of research methods, namely, quantitative and qualitative research methods have implications for the research design. The choice of a particular research method will influence the entire research process with regard to sampling, data collection and data analysis. Terre Blanche *et al*. (2006:47) argue that quantitative and qualitative research methods differ in terms of strengths and weaknesses, and constitute alternative not opposing research strategies. Most researchers agree that quantitative and qualitative research methods are not direct opposites, but are compatible and their application is influenced by the research question. An experienced researcher is able to choose a suitable research method in order to address a particular research question. Below, a detailed discussion of quantitative and qualitative research methods will be presented, and the preferred research method for the purpose of this research project will be indicated after such discussions.

4.3 Quantitative research method

Quantitative research involves the use of a large number of respondents, where listed questions are raised and response choices are predetermined. Quantitative research relies on numbers and statistical analyses are applied to determine the importance of the research findings (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006:563). The aim of quantitative research is to develop a theory or hypotheses pertaining to phenomena. Quantitative research involves asking respondents for their perceptions, feelings and opinions in a structured way in order to produce hard facts and statistics to guide the researcher. In order to obtain reliable statistical results, a large number of respondents that are representative of the population must be used. The goal of the researcher in conducting quantitative research is to ascertain the relationship between variables, namely, independent and dependent variables within a population. A variable is a concept that can take two or more values. Variables can be measured so that scores indicate the amount of an attribute. The independent variable is the variable that the researcher manipulates to determine its effects on the dependent variable (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006:42-43). Quantitative research focuses on unchanging data and usually the results can be replicated or repeated.

4.4 Qualitative research method

Qualitative research approach focuses on phenomena that occur in a natural environment and involves studying these phenomena in all their complexity (Leedy *et al*., 2005:133). Unlike quantitative research approach which involves identifying the characteristics of an observed phenomena or exploring possible correlations among two or more phenomena (Leedy *et al*., 2005:179), qualitative research encompasses an in-depth understanding of the behaviour of the research participants (Babooa, 2008:137) by talking directly to them in a face-to-face interaction (Creswell, 2013:45).

Qualitative researchers often rely on multiple forms of methods of collecting data, namely, observation, interviews and documents (Creswell, 2013:45). According to Mouton (2001:145-160) qualitative research approach can be divided into two approaches, namely, the study of people and their behaviour by means of field studies, case studies, interviews, direct observation and the study of products of human behaviour. Wessels, Pauw and Thani (2009:15) argue that the study of products of human behaviour involves the implementation and outcome evaluation research as well as programme evaluation and policy analysis. With regard to this research project, the focus is on products of human behaviour, which is inclusive of implementation and outcome evaluation research together with programme evaluation. Evaluation research refers to social research which investigates whether a particular project has been effective or has achieved its intended objectives (Bless *et al*., 2006:182). This research study is about evaluating whether implementation of customer care can contribute to the improvement of service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

4.5 Choice and rationale of research design

For the purpose of this study, a qualitative method of collecting data was used. Qualitative research is associated with interpretive perspective in which the logic of research is to develop an understanding of the underlying motivations that people have for doing what they do (Henn, Weinstein & Foard, 2006:149). In qualitative research, the focus is on the phenomena that occur in a natural setting (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:133). The researcher has chosen qualitative research design because the main objective of the study is to obtain detailed descriptions of the respondents' thoughts with regard to the importance of the implementation of customer care in order to enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

This is a phenomenological study as it aimed at generating knowledge about how respondents experience, perceive and understand things in a particular situation (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006:24;

Leedy & Ormrod 2005:139). Phenomenological research provides a very rich and detailed description of the human experience.

Phenomenology usually involves in-depth interviews with respondents in order to get a full picture of their views with the phenomenon. The strength of phenomenology is that results emerge from the data, instead of being imposed by structured statistical analysis.

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4.6 Data collection methods

Data collection is a series of interrelated activities aimed at gathering reliable information to answer research questions (Creswell, 2013:146). There are two types of data collected by researchers, namely, primary data and secondary data. Primary data refers to data collected by researchers which is obtained from the original source. Secondary data involves data that is collected by other researchers concerning other research problems (Brynard, Hanekom & Brynard, 2014:38). For the purpose of this research study, reliance on primary data was necessary because the researcher was of the opinion that sufficient secondary data was not available on the topic under investigation. It is important to take into consideration that the data collected should be of assistance in answering the research question, namely, whether implementing customer care can contribute to improved service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality.

An important step in this regard is to find suitable people and to gain access to and establish rapport with research participants so that they provide good data. This is not a probability sample that will enable the researcher to determine statistical inferences to a population, but rather it is a purposeful sample that intentionally sample people that can best inform the researcher about the research question (Creswell, 2013:147). It is important to ensure that data collected are accurate so that after analysis results remained reliable.

The method of data collection used for the purpose of this research project was semi-structured interviews. Interviews in a qualitative study are often semi-structured unlike interviews conducted in the quantitative study.

Interviews in qualitative approach could also be open-ended revolving around a few central questions (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:146). Qualitative interviews as a method of data collection is discussed below.

4.7 Qualitative interviews

Qualitative interview is an interaction between the interviewer and a study participant in which the interviewer gives direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent (Babbie, 2010:320). Interviewing the respondents is commonly used by researchers in Public Administration to collect data (Brynard *et al*., 2014:42). There are different kinds of interviews, namely, structured, semi-structured and unstructured interviews. For the purpose of this research project, a semi-structured interview was used. A semi-structured interview is a qualitative method of inquiry which combines a prearranged set of open-ended questions, allowing the interviewer to explore responses further. The use of prearranged questions provides uniformity. Semi-structured interviews understand how interventions work and how they can be improved. In the case of this study, semi-structured interviews were used to determine how the implementation of customer care could enhance service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality.

The advantage of using semi-structured interviews was that questions were prepared ahead of time, thereby allowing the interviewer to be more prepared and to appear professional during the data collection process. Semi-structured interviews also afford the respondents to express their views in their own terms, allowing the respondents to bring forward experiences and knowledge that the interviewer had not previously considered. Information is revealed from the respondents in a more natural environment with less attached bias from the interviewer. Since semi-structured interviews often include open-ended questions, discussions may diverge from the interview guide, hence, the importance to audio-record the discussion. The interviewer is allowed to build a better rapport with the respondent and this is useful when asking personal experiences as is the case with this research study. In order to allow the interview to proceed naturally and smoothly, the interviewer must be familiar with the questions to be asked (Babbie, 2010:319-320).

It was important from the researcher to prepare a few questions in advance and make sure that all were addressed during the course of the interview (Arthur, Waring, Coe, Hedges, 2012:172; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:147). It was also necessary that questions were related to the research questions and overall research

problem (Leedy *et al*., 2005:147).

Since this is a phenomenological study, attempts were made to understand the respondents' perceptions, perspectives and also the impact customer care has had in service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality. Since phenomenological researchers rely on lengthy interviews, the sample of participants was purposively selected.

A sample size of seven senior managers were selected as research participants since they have direct experience with the phenomenon, namely, whether implementing customer care can enhance quality service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality. All sampled research participants were from top management from different departments as indicated in Chapter 1, section 1.13.1 of this study. The reason for purposefully selecting respondents was based on the fact that they were able to speak and share ideas with regard to the phenomenon.

4.8 Study area

The research study was conducted at Thulamela Local Municipality. Thulamela Local Municipality is one of the four local municipalities comprising Vhembe District Municipality. It is a Category B municipality and is situated in the far north of the Limpopo province.

4.9 Population

Population is the total of all individuals who have certain features that are of interest to a researcher with relation to a topic (Thomas, 2013:135). A population is the total group from which sampling elements are drawn, and to which the researcher wants to generalise findings (Terre Blanche *et al.,* 2006:133). The population for this study comprised 589 municipal employees at Thulamela Local Municipality.

4.10 Sampling

The following issues of sampling, namely, sample size procedure and methods are discussed below:

4.10.1 Sample size

The need to identify an appropriate sample from which to acquire data is important. The particular entities the researcher selects comprise the sample, and the process of selecting them is called sampling (Leedy *et*

al., 2005:144). The sample size is an important feature of any scientific study in which the goal is to make inferences about a population from a sample. Phenomenological researchers depend on lengthy interviews and therefore the study comprised a typical small sample of senior managers at Thulamela Local Municipality who have all had direct experience with the phenomenon being studied.

Table 1. Purposive sampling procedure

Institution	Total Population	Target population	Sample sizes
Thulamela Local Municipality	589 Municipal employees	35 managers	7 Senior Managers

The sample for the purpose of this study consisted of only senior managers, namely:

1 Municipal manager

1 Senior manager: Corporate Services

1 Senior manager: Planning and Development

1 Senior manager: Roads and Water Services

1 Senior manager: Community Services

1 Senior manager: Financial Services

1 Senior Manager: Housing and Electricity

4.10.2 Sampling methods

Purposive sampling, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, another type of non-probability sampling was chosen. In purposive sampling, respondents are chosen for a particular purpose (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:206). Purposive sampling is based on careful selection of participants that are typical of the population being studied (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2005:563). The researcher opted for the research participants who were knowledgeable in terms of understanding how implementing customer care can enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality. Only research participants who were of interest to the researcher and who could best enable the researcher to answer research questions were selected.

4.11 Data analysis

Data analysis is aimed at transforming data into an answer to the original research question. In qualitative research, data analysis involves reading through the data repeatedly, and engaging in activities of breaking

the data down and building it up again in novel ways (Terre Blanche *et al*., 2006:322). The first step in the analysis of data is a critical examination of the collected data (Babooa, 2008:152). In this study, data collected through semi-structured interviews were analysed by means of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is the most common form of analysis in qualitative research.

It focuses on examining themes within data. Thematic analysis is also related to phenomenology in that it focuses on human experiences subjectively. This approach puts emphasis on the participants' perceptions, feelings and experiences as the paramount object of study. Participants are allowed to discuss the topic in their own words, free of constraints from mixed-response questions found in quantitative studies. The findings of the data analysis are presented in the chapter which follows.

4.12 Ethical considerations

According to Brynard, Hanekom and Brynard (2014:94), the main purpose of research ethics is to ensure that research activities are morally acceptable. Ethical issues that were considered in relation with this study include: protection from harm, informed consent, right to privacy, and permission to conduct the research.

4.12.1 Permission to conduct research

Permission to conduct research was requested from the mayor of Thulamela Local Municipality as she/he is the political head of the municipality. The purpose of obtaining permission to conduct research is to indicate to research participants the importance of participating in the research project

4.12.2 Protection from harm

The researcher should not expose research participants to undue stress, embarrassment, and or loss of self-esteem (Leedy & Ormrod, 2005:101). Research participants should not be harmed even if they have volunteered to participate in the research. Research participants were informed that they had the right to withdraw from participating if they felt they were no longer comfortable.

4.12.3 Informed consent

The aim and purpose of the research project were explained in detail to the participants. The research

participants were asked to sign the informed consent form. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2005:101), any participation in the research by research participants should be voluntary. The signed consent by research participants were obtained, in addition to the permission granted by the research ethics committee (Brynard *et al.,* 2014:96).

4.12.4 Right to privacy

Because customer care is a relatively sensitive issue, research participants were assured of confidentiality. This was achieved by storing recorded materials safely so that no one can have access to them except for the researcher. The research study should respect the right to privacy of the research participants. Privacy can be guaranteed when the researcher cannot identify a given response with a respondent. If a particular person's behaviour is described in detail in the research study, he/she should be given a pseudonym to assure anonymity (Leedy *et al.,* 2005:102).

4.13 Conclusion

This chapter paid attention to research design and methodology used in the study. Both quantitative and qualitative research approaches were discussed and the preferred research method applied in this study project was indicated. This chapter also indicated the data collection method used in this study, namely, the semi-structured interviews. Selecting sample method together with the research area was also indicated. The method used to analyse data was also highlighted. The research findings together with the interpretation are discussed in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, research methods were discussed in detail. This chapter focuses on data analysis. Thulamela Local Municipality is a category B municipality which was established in terms of the Local Government Structures Act 117 of 1998. It has the population size of about 618 462 (Statistics South Africa, 2011). More than 85% of the residents of Thulamela Local Municipality live in tribal areas.

The local government of which the municipality is part of, is the level of government which is very near to the people. Thulamela Local Municipality is therefore, required to render quality service to its local residents. The concept of customer care becomes relevant since people as customers always expect to be treated with respect and if the promised standard of service is not delivered, the problem should then be resolved as a matter of urgency in a friendly and courteous manner.

In order to find out whether implementing customer care can enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality, semi-structured interviews were conducted to seven senior managers from different departments. The researcher was of the opinion than seven senior managers would provide relevant responses in addressing research questions since they were knowledgeable in terms of understanding how implementing customer care can enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

The study revealed that senior management positions were male dominated. Of the seven respondents interviewed, only two were females. It was also encouraging to discover that all respondents were suitably qualified for their jobs. Of the seven respondents, five had relevant Bachelor's Degrees and two had relevant National Diplomas. The responses from interviews are explained in the section which follows.

5.2 Level of understanding of customer care on service delivery

All interviewees explained that they had a competent understanding of how the concept customer care can impact service delivery. The first respondent explained that because of poor customer care, there was often mistrust between the municipal officials and local residents.

The second respondent further explained that the concept only had relevancy in the corporate world, and

was alien in the public sector, and consequently to Thulamela Local Municipality.

The third interviewee indicated that although customer care was imperative to ensure quality service delivery, the municipality seemed not to pay more attention to it. Local residents were not aware with regard to demanding quality service delivery from the municipality.

The fourth interviewee gave a clear explanation of how service delivery could be improved when local residents are treated with respect and consideration, but unfortunately, that was not the case at Thulamela Local Municipality. The fifth interviewee indicated that customers were not aware that they should be treated with dignity and respect.

The sixth interviewee indicated that municipal officials have the obligation of treating local residents with respect since they are in effect their employers. But unfortunately, municipal officials did not understand that they were employed only to render services to people as customers. The seventh respondent further indicated that if customer care was practiced, local residents would be encouraged to pay levies in order to keep the municipality financially functional.

5.3 Effects of customer care in enhancing service delivery

According to the first interviewee, customer care has effects in enhancing service delivery. The respondent stated that poor customer was negatively affecting service delivery and emphasised the importance of the relationship between customer care and service delivery.

The second interviewee also explained that good customer care is a determinant of quality service delivery. He explained that because the municipal services were a monopoly, local residents relied on the municipality for basic services. Because of poor customer service, local residents were not motivated to pay for the services they received. Where local residents do not pay for services they receive, the municipality becomes financially unstable and service delivery suffers.

The third interviewee gave a relatively different perspective by stating that it becomes difficult for the municipality to sustain its activities if customers are not happy with the services they receive, emphasising the effects of poor customer care in service delivery. The respondent is consistent with Kumasey (2014:174) who argues that the institution cannot expect to survive and sustain its activities without cultivating customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The fourth interviewee argued that since the municipal services such as running water and sanitation, electricity, refuse removals, cemetery services could not be provided by another provider, the municipality needed improvement because its services were somewhat a monopoly.

However, this respondent agrees that poor customer care has a negative effect on service delivery. According to the fifth interviewee, if the customer is experiencing poor customer care, service delivery will be negatively affected. The respondent explained that where customer service is ignored, local residents can destroy the infrastructure which is meant to improve quality of their lives.

The sixth interviewee explained that there was a relationship between customer care and service delivery. This relationship is seen where poor customer care has a negative effect in quality service delivery. He further stated that people as customers were not always getting quality services that would ultimately address their demands. According to the sixth interviewee it is required from municipal officials to render quality services because they are responsible and accountable to citizens.

The seventh interviewee stated that good customer care is positively related to quality service delivery. He explained that because recipients of services were not satisfied, mistrust with service providers grew. If the municipality does not fulfil its constitutional obligation of rendering quality services, customers will be disappointed and can decide not to pay for all services received.

5.4 Additional factors which negatively affect service delivery

The first interviewee and the fifth interviewee agreed that service delivery was negatively affected by financial constraints. They explained that the municipality finds it very difficult to provide basic services to the needy partly due to lack of financial resources.

The second interviewee mentioned unwillingness of local residents to pay for the services rendered to them. He said that this could be attributed to the lack of understanding by local residents that the functionality of the municipality was dependent on their willingness to pay for the services rendered to them. He explained that the municipality was predominately rural-based and therefore majority of local residents did not understand that basic services such as water should be paid for.

The third interviewee and the sixth interviewee gave a different perspective by stating that poor service delivery can be attributed to lack of skills resulting in poor spending capacity by municipal officials. Both respondents explained that due to cadre deployment, unqualified and incompetent senior municipal officials occupied higher positions with total disregard to the merit system. However, the third interviewee conceded that cadre deployment was not in itself a bad strategy if competency, required qualifications and experience were taken into account during recruitment practices.

The fourth and the seventh interviewees mentioned that the inability of the municipal officials to render quality services to the local communities could be linked to the high levels of corruption among municipal

officials. They explained that corruption made it difficult for the municipality to channel scarce resources of the government towards development programmes and projects.

5.5 Response from customers who are not satisfied with municipal services

Respondents were unanimous that if local residents were not satisfied with the services rendered, they would simply withhold their payments rendering the municipality in serious financial constraints. This was due to the fact that local residents could not obtain alternative municipal service from another service provider. There was no way the local residents could switch to another service provider if they were not satisfied with municipal services.

5.6 Supporting frontline staff in improving their interaction with municipal customers

The first interviewee mentioned that frontline municipal officials should have been provided with name tags so that they could be easily identified by customers. He explained that customers found it difficult and uncomfortable not to communicate with the municipal official by his/her name.

The second interviewee and the fifth interviewees said because some customers were difficult to deal with, the officials ought to be trained to deal with them in order to gain their cooperation. The respondents emphasised that when they are busy with other customers, there should be ways of indicating to other customers to enable them to feel that they are important and being noticed.

The third interviewee and the fourth interviewees mentioned that frontline staff lacked necessary training to fulfil their ultimate goal of satisfying customers and to give all their best to fulfil the commitment of rendering quality service to the people.

The sixth and seventh interviewees emphasised that the frontline staff should always be more motivated to cultivate a sound relationship with customers because the only thing the customers care about is their relationship with the municipality.

5.7 Public relations as another way of improving customer care at Thulamela Local Municipality

All respondents agreed that promoting public relations can enhance customer care at Thulamela Local Municipality.

Respondents were in agreement that both political office-bearers and public officials were not doing

enough with regard to conducting themselves in a way that is acceptable to the local residents. Interviewees emphasised that both elected and appointed officials have obligation of ensuring that their deeds contribute to positive relations between the municipality and the local residents.

The interviewees agreed that positive public relations could not be achieved if the interests of the public were relegated to the periphery. Interviewees emphasised that where public relations is promoted, the municipality earns the public's goodwill.

All respondents were in agreement with regard to the role of the physical image of the municipality in promoting public relations. Respondents agreed that the appearance of the building was crucial in creating a positive impression to the members of the community. The third interviewee went as far as mentioning that dilapidated buildings create uneasiness and thus, a negative image with regard to the municipality. The fifth interviewee mentioned that ill-maintained buildings reflected who the municipal officials were. The sixth interviewee said that flourishing gardens create an impression that indeed the municipality through its officials is a caring institution. According to the seventh interviewee, public officials who are not well-dressed send a message that they do not respect their work and their customers.

5.8 The effect of public opinion in service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality

The first and the third interviewees agreed that if the public opinion of the local residents was positive towards the municipality, trust would develop and people would become more willing to work with the municipality. The second and the fourth interviewees said that the wrongs of the municipality were always taken into consideration because there was a negative perception about the municipality. The fifth interviewee and the seventh interviewees were of the opinion that a public opinion which is negative always creates negative attitude towards the municipality, emphasising the fact that customers would be more dissatisfied and more unwilling to support the activities of the municipality.

5.9 Understanding the concept of Batho-Pele Principles

All interviewees indicated that they had knowledge about Batho-Pele principles. Although interviewees went to an extent of mentioning the basic eight principles of Batho-Pele, although it was difficult for each to explain how Batho-Pele principles operate. Interviewees agreed to know the concept Batho-Pele, but doubted its implementation part at Thulamela Local Municipality. The first respondent indicated that there were no regular workshops at the workplace for explaining to officials how Batho-Pele principles can assist in enhancing service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality so that government institutions could

be run as profit-making institutions where efficiency and customer care were emphasised. According to the first respondent, value for money was crucial in implementing customer care within the municipality because it was important that public services should be delivered efficiently, effectively and economically. According to the first respondent, value for money at the municipality was ignored as a way of eliminating any form of wasteful expenditure and inefficiency.

The second and the fifth interviewees regarded courtesy as important in enhancing quality service delivery. They both emphasised that local residents as customers of the municipality should be treated with respect and dignity.

The third interviewee regarded openness and transparency as important in creating accountability from public officials but to her, it was violated as members of the public did not know how the municipality was operating, and which services were being delivered by the municipality.

The fourth and the seventh respondents indicated that setting standards was more important because it emphasised that services delivered to the local residents should be of high quality. He indicated that the municipality was rendering services of poor quality which was rather, an insult to the recipients and it was as bad as providing no services at all.

The sixth respondent was more critical when he stated that all Batho-Pele principles were important in promoting service delivery and subsequently customer care. According to the sixth interviewee, violating one Batho-Pele principle renders all principles vulnerable as no principle can function in isolation as they are interdependent and interrelated.

5.10 Examples indicating how the municipality is implementing Batho-Pele principles

All respondents indicated that Batho-Pele principles were not always implemented at Thulamela Local Municipality to enhance customer care.

The first interviewee indicated that there was no culture of greeting customers with a smile by municipal officials at Thulamela Local Municipality, which indicates that courtesy was not complied with.

The second interviewee mentioned that public officials did not introduce themselves to customers to enable the customers to address them by names rather than positions during interactions. The interviewee also pointed out that the municipal officials did not have name tags so that they could be easily identified by customers. The third interviewee indicated that there were long queues during month-end due to few serving points set up to provide services at a snail's pace. Senior citizens and visibly pregnant women were not given preferential treatment because they were not provided with chairs to avoid standing for a long

period of time.

The fourth respondent indicated that there was a suggestion box where customers could voice their dissatisfaction and suggestions in order to enhance service delivery anonymously. However, the concerns of customers were not taken into consideration in order to improve service delivery.

The fifth respondent indicated that if the customer seemed not to be satisfied with whatever service, he/she was neither advised nor referred to another level

The sixth interviewee also indicated that facilities were not designed to cater for the disabled who were using wheel-chairs.

The seventh respondent stated that municipal officials were not well trained with regard to the correct way of answering phone calls promptly and to be kind to customers.

5.11 Conclusions

This chapter focused on how different respondents expressed themselves with regard to examining the implementation of customer care in service delivery. It should be emphasised that respondents were allowed to express their views freely without any form of intimidation. Interpretation of data is discussed in the chapter which follows.

CHAPTER 6

INTERPRETATION OF DATA

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed data analysis. This chapter focuses on results of the empirical findings with regard to the theoretical framework as articulated in Chapter 2 of this research study. Furthermore, it discusses the relationship between customer care and service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality.

6.2 Level of understanding of customer care in service delivery

The empirical findings of the research indicated that respondents had a clear understanding of customer care and that sound customer care has a positive influence in service delivery. Almost all the respondents agreed that where there is customer care, service delivery improves. Respondents agreed that customer care is about treating people with due respect and dignity. The findings also indicated that there was a prevailing poor customer care at Thulamela Local Municipality. The second respondent also indicated that the concept of customer care was relevant in the corporate world, and therefore, irrelevant in public institutions and indeed Thulamela Local Municipality. Customer care is about how well a municipality deals with its customers during its activities (Fourie & Opperman, 2011:237) and also involves cultivating a working relationship with the local community.

6.3 Effects of customer care in enhancing service delivery

Customer care is about how well municipalities render quality service delivery to its customers. Municipalities are responsible and accountable to its citizens (Ramseook, Murhurrun, Lukea-Bhiwajee, 2000:40).

The findings revealed that because of poor customer care, customers are often not motivated to pay for the municipal services such as water, refuse removals and cemetery services. Amongst others, the findings also revealed that there is mistrust between service providers and service users resulting in poor service delivery.

The municipality could find it difficult to sustain itself financially where customer care is violated since

people would not be motivated to pay for the services they received. The study further revealed that because of poor customer care service, delivery is negatively affected.

6.4 Other factors which negatively affect service delivery

Poor customer care is not only the determinant of poor service delivery. There are other factors as well that have a negative effect on service delivery. The findings revealed that the other factors include financial challenges that the municipality experiences during its operations. The study revealed that financial problems are compounded by unwillingness of residents to pay for the services they receive. The findings also revealed that right people with right expertise are not given the job and therefore, it becomes difficult to enhance service delivery. Municipalities must therefore, hire experienced professionals who would be in the position to enhance service delivery through implementing customer care. Municipalities should therefore, rely on merit system while hiring right people to perform the job. In the same vein, studies by Wanjan, Muiruri, Ayodo (2012:120) revealed that employee's incompetence affected service delivery. There should therefore, be a need for hiring qualified and experienced personnel who would be in a position to render quality service to the people.

The findings further highlighted that corruption by municipal officials negatively affects quality service delivery. Corruption swallows up huge amounts of municipal money and in 2011, the Council for the Advancement of the South African Constitution estimated that more than 20% of the country's GDP is lost through corruption, fraud and maladministration. According to Corruption Watch (2014), most of the reported corruption cases are linked to municipalities.

6.5 Response from customers not satisfied with municipal services

According to Ofori-Okyere and Kumadey (2015:32), where the customer and the producer of services fail to agree at some point, the organisation in question could fail despite all the effective strategies put in place by a service organisation. The study indicated that when customers are dissatisfied with municipal services, they simply decide not to pay for the services they receive. Non-payment of service accounts has a direct relationship with billing queries and many billing queries logged by customers had a direct effect on dissatisfaction. The ultimate impact is that the municipality fails to collect as effectively as it might and without diligent control of payments from citizens for services rendered, municipalities will ground to a halt as their sustainability will be compromised.

6.6 Supporting frontline staff in their interaction with customers

According to Cambra-Fierro, Melero-Polo, Vazquezz-Carrasco (2014:68), the frontline staff employees, who in most cases are in majority, are regarded as spokespeople for the institution as well as being influential in the level of satisfaction and engagement.

Engagement can be seen as an indicator showing the level of customer involvement and connection with the services of the municipality, therefore, an engaged customer is the result of feeling satisfied with the services rendered (Cambra-Fierro *et al*., 2014:69). Municipalities should take great care in managing their performance and this can be achieved by promoting a positive attitude among frontline employees.

The studies revealed that frontline employees are not accessible to customers and that they are not well-trained to deal effectively with difficult customers. The focus should always be on cultivating a sound relationship with customers, but unfortunately, frontline employees are not motivated to deal with such challenges.

6.7 Public relations as a way of improving customer care

With regard to public relations, the results indicated that promoting public relations can have a positive influence in promoting sound customer care. However, the findings showed that political office-bearers and public officials were not conducting themselves in a way that is acceptable to the members of the public. Most public officials and elected officials were not well-dressed at work, indicating that they did not respect their work and their customers. Results of this study also showed that interests of the public should also be taken into consideration in order to promote positive public relations. The physical image of the buildings also had to be improved, and that could only be achieved by renovating buildings and maintaining a flourishing garden to indicate that the municipality is a caring institution. The findings also indicated that in order to promote sound public relations, the interests of the local residents should be taken into consideration. Aamer, Al Shamsi, Kendi, Al Darei, Al Shamsi, (2016:1) argue that public relations involves monitoring and evaluating public attitudes and maintaining mutual relations and understanding between the institution and its customers. Good public relations is important in municipalities and can have a direct impact on customer loyalty which can translate into more revenue. If a customer had to wait on hold for an hour, or is told different things by different public officials, or receives a defective support, or simply does not get the issues fairly resolved, not only is the interaction harmed, but the relationship with the particular customer is also compromised.

6.8 Effect of public opinion in service delivery

Public opinion is an expression of the general population's thoughts on a particular issue. According to Jefkins (1998:13), public opinion refers to the information which is well known to the people which may either be bad or good about specific issues.

The findings reveal that the public opinion of the local residents is negative and thus, destroying trust. People no longer pay much attention to the road-shows facilitated by the municipality.

One respondent indicated the importance of a positive opinion towards the municipality by stating that the shortcomings of the municipality may be understood even if it failed to meet its minimum expectations.

Public opinion is important in democracy because the people are the source of power. The study further revealed that municipal officials had no sound relations with the majority which makes them to be unhappy. The findings also revealed that most customers no longer support activities of the municipality such a service delivery *imbizo*.

6.9 Understanding the concept Batho-Pele principles

The findings showed that municipal officials had a sound understanding of Batho-Pele principles. It was further indicated that although the fundamentals of Batho-Pele were aimed at running public institutions like profit-making institutions where customer satisfaction was the main focus, there is still much to be desired in terms of internalising these important values.

Studies revealed that although Batho-Pele was not a new concept to municipal officials, they still struggled in the part of its implementation. However, the findings indicated that municipal officials understood that the implementation of Batho-Pele could improve service delivery. The findings also revealed that since the municipality was solely responsible in terms of service delivery, customers did not have much choice, but to accept the service of the municipality. The studies further revealed that these Batho-Pele principles cannot be implemented in isolation since they are interrelated and interdependent and therefore, municipal officials were urged to be innovative and results-driven.

6.10 Examples indicating implementation of Batho-Pele principles at Thulamela Local Municipality

The findings revealed that despite challenges, there were several positives in service delivery associated with the implementation of Batho-Pele principles.

The results indicated, among others, that customers were in a position to raise their dissatisfaction openly without fear of being victimised through suggestion boxes. Customers were also motivated to voice their

concerns if service standards were inconsistent with their reasonable expectations.

The findings also revealed that through the proper implementation of Batho-Pele principles, there was a shift towards customer-centred approach and therefore, services were no longer homogenously rendered, but were provided in order to address the needs of a particular community. This becomes important since communities within Thulamela Local Municipality usually have different priority needs. To one community, for an example, water might be a priority, while tarred road might be the primary concern in another community.

6.11 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was on the interpretation of collected data. This becomes important because data is useless before meaning is given to it. The next chapter focuses on the conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter, focus was on the interpretation of data obtained. This chapter focuses on the conclusions which are derived from the research study. The answers of the research questions are discussed. This chapter also articulates the contribution of the study followed by the reflection of the study and the suggested recommendations for future research in the same area of customer care and service delivery.

7.2 Addressing the Research Questions of the study

The first research question raised was: Can implementing customer care enhance service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality?

The study revealed that there is a relationship between good customer care and service delivery. It was indicated that where there is good customer care, service delivery often improves. The functionality of Thulamela Local Municipality depends on the financial stability and where customer care prevails, local residents are motivated to pay for the services they receive.

The second research question considered was: Can customer care be enhanced through quality service delivery?

The study revealed that quality service delivery has an important contribution towards customer care and ultimately customer satisfaction. The study also revealed that local residents are more likely to support the activities of a municipality where customer care prevails. Results also revealed that where customers are relatively satisfied with municipal services, trust develops and people become more supportive to all activities of the municipality. It can therefore, be concluded that customers would demand quality services from Thulamela Local Municipality to make them satisfied.

The third research question discussed was whether there are mechanisms of improving customer care through public relations.

Results revealed that improved public relations at Thulamela Local Municipality enhanced customer care and consequently quality service delivery.

The study indicated that public relations is closely related to customer care. The primary objective of

public relations is to promote communication and to establish new ways of setting up a two-way flow of information and understanding. The findings showed that elected municipal officials and appointed officials must enhance positive public relations between the municipality and the community it serves.

The fourth considered research question was whether implementing Batho-Pele principles had an impact on customer care.

The study indicated that implementation of Batho-Pele principles indeed promoted customer care. Results showed that implementing Batho-Pele initiatives assisted municipal officials to know the real challenges that customers experienced in their local communities. This was achievable since Batho-Pele encourages local residents to demand quality services and to hold municipal officials accountable if there was poor service delivery. The study also revealed that customers were motivated to air their concerns without fear from victimisation by municipal officials if their expectations were not addressed. Implementing Batho-Pele was about establishing a new service culture where the focus was on customer care and customer satisfaction.

7.3 Contribution of the study

This study identified and discussed the effects of the implementation of customer care as a strategy of enhancing service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality. It also described different ways to enhance customer care through public relations and Batho-pele principles. The relationship between both constructs is not widely discussed in academic circles as various authors did not relate to the impact of customer care on service delivery. The study has a unique contribution in this regard and future research can be conducted on the basis of this project to examine the impact of implementing customer care on service delivery. The results of this study are considered reliable and can therefore, be applicable to some rural-based municipalities.

7.4 Recommendations of the study

Based on the research findings the following reforms are proposed to improve the implementation of customer care in service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality. The proposed reforms can also be applicable and relevant to other governments departments and state-owned institutions in the Republic of South Africa.

- Thulamela Local Municipality should seriously develop tools and systems that provide incentives for municipal officials who implement customer care during service delivery.

- Municipal officials should be capacitated by training them with regard to customer care to enhance quality service delivery.

- Thulamela Local Municipality should also consider creating a post for dealing specifically with the challenge of enhancing service delivery through customer care. The leadership at Thulamela Local Municipality is encouraged to be morally upright to set the right tone for subordinates to follow with regard to enhancing service delivery to the people.

- Punitive measures such as fine, suspension and dismissal should be considered to deter other municipal officials from engaging in poor customer. Close monitoring of incidents related to poor customer care should also be prioritised to enforce compliance by municipal officials.

7.5 Recommendations for future study

It is further recommended that other studies be conducted to further improve the relationship of customer care in service delivery. Future research can also be conducted in other rural-based and urban-based municipalities in order to develop better strategies and techniques to satisfy people as customers by improving quality service delivery. This would be a great contribution for municipalities and their customers at large.

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APPENDIX A

INFORMED CONSENT

STUDY TOPIC: **EXAMINING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER CARE AS A STRATEGY OF ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE OF THULAMELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA**

1. Researcher:

I, Thinavhuyo Esther Munyai, am a Master's student at the University of Limpopo. I am engaged in a research project entitled: **THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CUSTOMER CARE AS A STRATEGY OF ENHANCING SERVICE DELIVERY: A CASE OF THULAMELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, LIMPOPO PROVINCE, SOUTH AFRICA.**

I am conducting this research project for my Master's studies at the Turfloop Graduate School of Leadership of the University of Limpopo. My supervisor for the study is Professor K. Phago.

The purpose of the study is to investigate the implementation of customer care as a strategy of enhancing service delivery in Thulamela Local Municipality. Upon investigating this problem, the study intends to contribute in the improvement of understanding customer care in Thulamela Local Municipality.

Your cooperation in conducting an interview with you will be highly valued. The interview will be conducted within 30-40 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded for verification of the findings by the supervisor. Your participation in this research will benefit Thulamela Local Municipality and South Africa as a whole and the findings could be used in improving customer relations between municipal officials and community members.

In view of the above, you are requested to participate in this research study.

2. Participant:

I---give my consent to be interviewed by Thinavhuyo Esther Munyai. It has been explained to me that my name and dignity as a respondent is preserved by me by observing ethical standards during the process. As a respondent in this research study, I am required to observe the following ethical standards:

- My name will not be mentioned during discussions;
- Participation is voluntary and there is freedom to withdraw without penalty;

- Raw materials will be kept under lock to ensure confidentiality;

- Information with regard to the interview will only be used for the purpose of this study;

- A summary of the research study will be available to me if requested.

Respondent's signature---Date---------------------

Researcher's signature---Date---------------------

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION

APPENDIX B

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Gender…………………………………………………………………………………

Designation……………………………………………………………………………

Qualification………………………………………………………………………..

Total year of service at Thulamela Local Municipality………………………………

Experience at the current position……………………………………………………

1. Do you believe that your customer care understanding on service delivery at Thulamela Local Municipality is adequate?

2. In your opinion, do you believe that customer care has some effects in enhancing service delivery?

    Explain further on your response.

3. Are you able to provide additional factors which often negatively affect service delivery?

4. What kind of a response do you expect from customers who are satisfied with your service?

5. What are the current measures in place supporting frontline staff in their interaction with the municipal customers?

6. Do you consider public relations as another way of improving customer care at Thulamela Local Municipality?

    a. If yes, how can the personal conduct of political office-bearers and public officials improve public relations in the municipality?

    b. How can the physical image of the municipality promote sound public relations to improve the quality service delivery?

7. Do you consider public opinion of local residents a way to improve customer care at Thulamela Local Municipality? If yes, how does public opinion affect service delivery at the Municipality?

8. How well do you understand the concept of Batho-Pele principles?

    a. Do you think municipal employees are generally familiar with the principles of Batho-Pele? Explain your response further.

    b. Which Batho-Principles do you consider crucial in implementing customer care within the Municipality and why?

    c. In your opinion do you think implementing Batho-Pele principles can contribute to sound customer care environment? Give reasons for your responses.

9. Can you provide examples indicating how the municipality is implementing Batho-Pele

principles in its attempt to improve customer care and subsequently quality Service delivery?

THANK YOU FOR YOUR EFFORT AND CONSIDERATION

P.O.Box 548
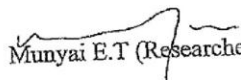
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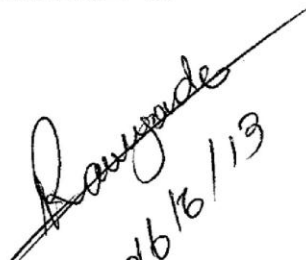
09 June 2016

Enq: Munyai E.T

0723556003

The Municipal Manager

Thulamela Local Municipality

Private Bag 5006

Thohoyandou

0950

APPLICATION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH

1. The above matter refers.

2. I, Munyai Thinavhuyo Esther, student at the University of Limpopo doing Master of Public Management in the Graduate School of Leadership hereby apply to conduct a research at Thulamela Local Municipality.

3. The project title is: **The implementation of customer care as a strategy of enhancing service delivery: A case of Thulamela Local Municipality, Limpopo Province, South Africa.**

4. Your co-operation in this matter is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

Munyai E.T (Researcher)

73

Department Of Corporate Services

Ref   : 4/3/4/1
Enquiries   : Mhinga T.C
Tel   : 015 962 7554
Fax   : 015 962 4020
Email   : mhingatc@thulamela.gov.za

To   :   MUNYAI E.T

From   : THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY

Date   : 14 JUNE 2016

Subject   : REQUEST TO CONDUCT RESEARCH IN THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY.

1. The above matter refers.
2. Kindly note that your permission to conduct research has been granted.
3. Contact Human Resource Section for more information

4. Hoping that this will reach your favourable consideration

pp.
MUNICIPAL MANAGER
MALULEKE H.E

THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY

Department Of Corporate Services

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MUNICIPAL MANAGER
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THULAMELA MUNICIPALITY