THE V-MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

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An Exploration of African Customer Service Delivery Metrics

BY

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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

To Chen,
Leon Jonathan, Jerran David, Marcel Joseph, Nathan Richard and their families,
a very special clan who have with me, shared this long journey.

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Business Intelligence Africa (BIA) worked closely with us to collect 7,258 responses on customer service in Namibia reaching 1,500 homes and covering 12 essential services from home affairs to supermarkets. The results of this data collection effort are one of the studies reported here.

A special thanks to our guests and keynote speakers in particular Professor Moira Clark and Howard Kendall. Clark is Professor of Strategic Marketing at Henley Business School, Head of Marketing and Reputation as well as Director of The Henley Centre for Customer Management (a consortium of organisations who are interested in leading-edge best practice in customer management). Kendall, who

founded the Service Desk Institute (SDI) in 1988, is recognised as a leading authority in Europe on Help Desks and IT Support. Kendall wrote a definitive book on customer service for the British Standards Institute (BSI).

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This book has been in the making since 1995 when I completed my PhD and my wife, Chen, and sons have supported and encouraged me all the way, to them is the biggest thank you of all.

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PREFACE

A mild wet afternoon in November 2013 saw Professor Frank Witt and I playing host to Professors John Board and Jon Foster-Pedley of Henley Business School. The setting was Okapuka Game Ranch and the discussion was making business schools relevant to the communities and countries in which they operate. It was during this free-flowing discussion that the idea of studying and suggesting ways of improving customer service in Namibia was first conceived. A year later in November 2014, the first Namibia Customer Service Awards, Conference and Master Class was born. This fledgling movement hopes to make a contribution in changing attitudes towards customer service and basic service delivery (i.e. housing, water and sewerage), first in Namibia and eventually throughout Africa. We therefore hope this book will be the first of many from the Customer Service Management Africa (CSMA) organisation and be the first step in a long journey of service change in Africa.

We hope it will inspire you to be a part of this change!

Professor Grafton Whyte
Director, Namibia Business School (NBS)
in the University of Namibia (UNAM)
May, 2018

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1. THE PROBLEM OF CUSTOMER SERVICE DELIVERY (CSD) IN AFRICA

‘African solutions to African problems’ is a maxim popularised by Thabo Mbeki, the second President of the democratic Republic of South Africa. Africa in general is suffering from a crisis in the delivery of basic services such as housing, healthcare, education and essential utilities. The causes of this lack of delivery are many and complex, but significant areas impacting on this problem are poor perceptions and understanding of service.

African businesses, both large and small, are often adversely affected by a lack of customer service. While politeness, respect and hospitality to strangers are a cornerstone of most African cultures, the concept of organised customer service as a competitive advantage is poorly developed across the continent.

Not least because, while in the ‘West’ customer service is equated with speed and efficiency from the paradigm that ‘time is money’, time in many African contexts is still a much more fluid and relative concept. However, this is changing rapidly as business communities are increasingly embedded in the global village and catering for a growing middle class of professionals that demand punctuality and accountability. Progressive businesses in developed economies establish long-term relationships with their customers, embracing concepts such as customer retention, customer satisfaction and customer experience. They seek not only to maximise repeat business from their customers but also to turn them into advocates for the products and services on offer.

In many Africa countries by contrast, the relationship with the customer is mainly transactional, and in many cases almost adversarial, so that customers are treated with suspicion and as objects of exploitation. Many service providers see their role as 'doing the customer a favour', by granting them access to products and services as a privilege, especially where a near-monopoly exists. A transition is needed, to a context where customers are valued and suppliers seek to establish and preserve long-term relationships with them. Also, because in Africa 'service' is often mistaken for 'servitude', a concept that understandably does not sit well in our post-colonial experience.

Poor service delivery would be bad enough if it just concerned service in supermarkets, banks or taxis, but poor customer service is also pervasive in public sector entities dealing with basic services to the poor such as housing, water, education and health. If these good outcomes are to be achieved, and if the changes are to be visible, then there needs to be a careful discussion about *how to measure change in customer service*.

Research into customer service delivery (CSD) by the author over the past three years has unravelled the failures in service delivery that is customer focused, thus addressing the twin evils of Africa; time and efficiency.

Generally, CSD is an undervalued concept in Africa yet it could become the catalyst for many changes:

- Social change – excellent customer service is at the heart of successful basic service delivery, for example, the provision of healthcare, water and housing to the poorest sections of society.
- Competitive advantage – enlightened companies (and countries) will begin to differentiate themselves based on CSD and thereby raise the standard across the board.
- Employment creation – every country that has seriously adopted customer service has created an industry and employment, for example, customer service managers, customer service departments with call centre agents and qualified customer service experts.
- International competitiveness – with a focus on excellent CSD, African countries could become destinations of choice for global companies looking to service African markets rather than do so remotely.
- Research and innovation – Africa cannot simply adopt solutions from the rest of the world; excellent CSD in Africa will have its own unique hue and flavour.

The customer service gap is exacerbated by the lack of research in CSD in Africa. Without research benchmarks, the stage cannot be set for monitoring and improvement of service standards. This realisation led in 2014 to the birth of Customer Service Management Africa (CSMA), the brainchild of the author and a team of researchers in the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

Together with commercial partners, the author organised the first two Pan-African academic conference on Customer Service Management (CSM), with the aim of establishing an

African research centre of excellence in Customer Service Delivery Management. Both academic conferences brought international experts in CSD to Windhoek, Namibia, to share cutting-edge research being conducted in CSM worldwide. The collection of papers submitted and presented at both conferences drew heavily on case studies from a range of African countries.

Academically, this initiative pioneered ground-breaking research into service quality, of which the V-model of service quality (VMSQ) is the result. Accepted for publication in the *European Journal of Marketing*, the VMSQ is an alternative service quality model to the internationally recognised and North American model, SERVQUAL.

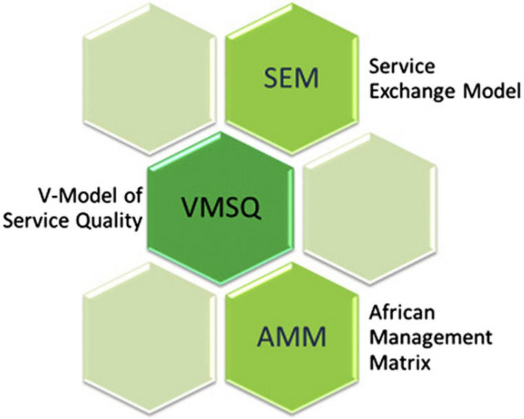
This book is therefore a how-to guide on using the VMSQ in business, government and research.

1.2. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

This book discusses three ideas: The The V Model of Service Quality (VMSQ), the Service Exchange Model (SEM) and the African Management Matrix (AMM). VMSQ is by far the most important idea and the main reason for the book. VMSQ is dealt with in detail in Chapters 2 through to 7. Starting with an overview of the VMSQ in Chapter 2 and a discussion of how to identify the attributes that feed into the VMSQ in Chapter 3. Chapters 4, 5 and 6 deal with the data collection, analysis and reporting from the VMSQ, respectively. Chapter 7 presents two case studies describing how the VMSQ has been used to measure CSD performance and diagnose issues.

The VMSQ is a tool for measuring service quality, but says nothing about how that service should look, neither the boundaries nor structure of service. The service exchange model (SEM) is a general framework for service describing its core components and provides a context within which the VMSQ operates. We also argue that applying the VMSQ does not lead to automatic solutions; in its diagnostic capacity the VMSQ provides indications where problems may lie in a service operation, but it will take intelligent management intervention to correct these problems. The African Management Matrix (AMM) identifies some of the historical and contextual barriers that need to be overcome if African managers are to achieve effective CSD. Both the SEM and AMM ideas are discussed in Chapter 8. Indeed, some readers my want to read that chapter first to get a sense of how the VMSQ will make a difference to service organisations.

Chapter 9 provides a road map for the busy manager who wants to know the practicalities of implementing the VMSQ and is the form of questions and answers. Figure 1, provides a diagrammatic overview of the book.

Figure 1. Overview of the Book.