CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH AS A MANAGEMENT TOOL FOR IMPROVING SERVICE DELIVERY IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

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by

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1. INTRODUCTION

The majority of South Africans have experienced the public sector as being oppressive, unjust, imposing, a disservice, non-existent in numerous instances and simply unhelpful.

The paradox is that even those that have benefited and experienced public sector delivery, are of the opinion that the public sector is inherently inefficient and ineffective. With the first democratic elections and the establishment of the Government of National Unity, there is high expectation from the majority of South Africans, especially the poorest of the poor, that the Government must deliver.

The truth is that, the inherited public sector is characterised by a work ethos that is not geared towards professional service delivery and a customer-focused approach. From an organisational culture and political perspective, there are various allegiances, cultures, behaviours and attitudes prevailing, the government has changed but the service standards generally remain as bad as ever.

This dark picture on the public sector cannot remain unattended and unchallenged, something must be done, namely that public officials should start treating citizens like customers.

In the second rubric the definition of a customer is fully canvassed and explained. An approach to be reckoned with is that, a customer does not only pertain to organisations or relationships where there are money transactions but also to incidents where people have dealings with one another. The explanation and

meaning of customer-focus approach form the pivotal point of this topic, this is fully outlined in the third rubric.

Customer-focus approach makes it everyone's 'business' to know the customer, this helps in managing the dynamic needs of the society. Customer-focus approach helps people to manage resources, sets quality as the standard and establishes a winning and lasting relationships with the customers.

The impact that customer-focus approach has is that, it promotes constant consultation with clients, it helps the institutions to set service standards, promote citizenry access to services and urges the public officials to treat citizens with courtesy. In order for public officials to be transparent and open, to remedy the mistakes of the past, to offer the best possible value for money, to be more accountable, to be more innovative and encouraging a partnership with the wide community, customer-focus approach is the integral part.

Customer-focus approach can be used for setting goals. Individual performance goals can be used to link what individuals do everyday to larger goals and values of the organisation, helps connect individuals, teams, and organisations with their customers, can be used as communication tool and above all, goals can assist individuals in self-management process. All these are fully articulated in the fourth rubric.

Customer-focus approach is a process to improve service delivery, as such it entails steps that must be followed. As standards are raised, higher targets must be set. The fifth rubric introduces the seven steps that should be followed if customer-focus approach is really expected to deliver the goods. These steps are: identifying the customer, establishing the customer's needs and priorities, establishing the current service baseline, identifying the 'improvement gap', setting service standards, gearing up for delivery and announcing service standards. Customer-focus approach

should be managed. Management is the process of achieving organisational objectives within a changing environment. Some management functions are policy-making, planning, decision-making, organising, leading and controlling. All these above articulated management functions cannot be of any force if not coupled with customer-focus approach. These will be fully canvassed in rubrics six to eleven.

In interacting with citizens as customers, the public officials are placed in a better position to know what their customers are, what their needs are, and how they can adequately respond to them. This interaction helps in the formulation of public policies. Public policies that do not respond to the needs of the citizens, do not really serve the purpose for which they were meant to, namely how particular objectives will be pursued. This aspect will be dealt with in the sixth rubric.

The introduction of customer-focus approach should be planned and not introduced in an haphazard manner. For example, selective radicalism rather than total change is recommended. Planning determines the objectives, allocates resources and helps in compiling programs for the realisation of such objectives. This will be covered in the seventh rubric. People feel happy to be part of decision-making in aspects that are going to affect them directly. Frontline or interface managers should be involved in the decision-making that affects them directly, because they have the first hand information from the customers. As a process, decision-making will be clearly outlined and its importance to promote customer-focus approach will be explained. This will be made clearer in the eighth rubric.

If people are to work together effectively in managing a program, they need to know the part they are to play in the total endeavour and how their roles relate to each other. All these can be made possible by the managerial function of organizing. The most appropriate organisational structure, will be the one, that adequately responds to the needs of the customer. Information should be freely disseminated through the organization if its main purpose is to promote customer-focus approach. The

rigid bureaucratic approach that inhibits customer-focus approach should be dealt with accordingly. This will be dealt with in the nineth rubric.

Managers are meant to lead the institutions in a particular direction. However, not all managers are leaders, leaders have the ability to influence the behaviour of others to go in a certain direction. In order for the public sector to be more responsive to the needs of its customers, leaders are needed. These leaders can drive the process of change without much friction than people who lack the leadership qualities. The introduction of customer-focus approach needs true leaders. This will be handled in the tenth rubric.

The last function in the management process is controlling. This is the process of monitoring activities in order to determine whether individual units and the institution itself are obtaining and utilising their resources efficiently to accomplish their objectives, and, where this is not being achieved, implementing corrective action.

Customer-focus approach should be controlled in order to make sure that what was planed, really is achieved. It should not be forgotten that, the main purpose for responding to customers' needs, is to improve service delivery. If this is not the case, monitoring and controlling should be intensified. This will be fully canvassed in the eleventh rubric.

2. CONCEPTUAL DEFINITIONS

2.1 Customer

Oxford Dictionary (1986:206) defines a customer as a person who buys goods or services from a shop or business. It goes further to state that a customer also means a person one has to deal with.

The conclusion that one is forced to come to is that, this definition suggests that customer relationship does not only confine itself to business transactions but also to situations where there are dealings with people. It is therefore argued that the public sector as a provider of voluminous goods and services to the public has in actual fact created a situation which can be termed customer relationship with the public.

A customer is an individual or group of individuals to whom one provides one or more products or services. One may receive goods or services in return or be paid through a third party who may also be one's customer. These exchanges form a series of links in a chain which joins with other chains and drives not only organizations but industries and economies (Smith 1995:5). Public institutions by their nature are not an exception to the rule, they also have customers who pay for goods and services rendered.

Customers include both end users who pay for the organization's products and internal customers - groups and individuals - to whom services are rendered (Spangenberg 1994:91).

The term customer is relative. Customers can be external to an organization, the usual perception, or internal within an organization, the new perception. The traditional departmentalization of companies makes any department both a supplier to the next department and a customer of a previous department. The dual responsibilities associated with the dual roles need to be recognized in order for the relationship to be clear and dynamic (Pitt 1994:358).

Like companies, public institutions also have traditional departmentalizations which make any department both a supplier to the next department and a customer of a previous one. In a public institution, this dual responsibility can be illustrated by way of an example: the finance department supplies money to the provisioning department for its (provisioning dept) operations, this means that the finance department can be regarded as a supplier to the provisioning department. By the same token the same finance department can be regarded as a customer of the human resources department because the finance department depends on the human resources department for its (finance department) staffing.

Pitt (1994:358) maintains that schools are beginning to structure themselves according to the need of the true customer, the student. Hospitals are managing their skills and services in an organized way around the patient's needs and care, some providing, for example, a home-like atmosphere in a recovery room after a baby is born and held by the new mother. Some medical laboratories are using control charts to maintain control over reference samples.

Customer-focused approach is therefore the corner stone of every satisfactory service delivery even though it might not serve as a panacea. Just as a person cannot initiate a business undertaking without money, a public institution also cannot initiate any work to deliver goods or services without money. However, all public institutions are dependent upon the citizens for their income (Cloete 1994:145). It is therefore appropriate at this stage, to mention that, citizens by

virtue of their being taxpayers, are in fact the customers of a government. Without further grappling with the idea whether citizens can be equated to customers or not, what is material is that, in order for any public institution to deliver goods and services to the citizens in an excellent manner, a customer-focused approach is highly recommended.

2.2   Focused

According to Oxford Dictionary (1986:311) focused means to concentrate or be concentrated on.   The delivery of goods and services should be focused on the needs of the people.   Managing the delivery of goods and services requires a different approach from managing manufacturing of goods, mainly because the service organisation continuously has to create the relationship between itself and its users.   The relationship has to be defined within the user's perception of the service (Flynn 1993:162).

Focusing on customers, means knowing and responding to the customer's expectations and needs.   It also requires that everyone knows the value that he or she adds, not only for the end customer, but for internal customers as well (McLagan 1991:7).

2.3   Approach

Approach means a way of dealing with a person or thing (Oxford 1986:35).   In order to deliver goods and services to the people in an excellent manner, the appropriate approach to be used, is the one that addresses the needs of all the citizens.   This approach implies listening to their views, treating them with respect, meeting their legitimate expectations and responding swiftly when standards of service deviate from the promised standard (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:13).

2.4   Management

Management is the process of achieving organisational objectives within a changing environment by:

- balancing efficiency, effectiveness and equity;
- obtaining the most out of limited resources; and
- working with and through people (Naylor 1996:3).

Starling (1998:23-24) lists five traditional management functions as planning, decision-making, organizing, leading and controlling.

Planning defines where the organization wants to be in the future and how it is going to get there. Lack of planning - or poor planning - can hurt an agency's performance (Starling 1998:23).

Decision-making is a process of identifying problems and opportunities, generating alternatives, and selecting an alternative (Starling 1998:23).

Organizing typically follows planning and decision-making. It reflects how an agency tries to attain the objectives of its programs; it involves the assignment of tasks and the grouping of these tasks into various organizational units (e.g. departments, divisions, bureaus, branches, offices, etc.) (Starling 1998:23).

Leading is the use of influence to motivate civil servants to achieve program objectives. It involves communicating these objectives to employees throughout the agency and developing in them a commitment to perform at a high level (Starling 1998:23).

Controlling, or implementing and evaluation is the last basic management function. Absolutely critical to the success of a program is the monitoring and adjusting of the agency employees' activities to ensure that the program remains on track toward its objectives. Administrators want to know, in particular, about two things: program effectiveness (the degree to which the program is achieving its objectives) and program efficiency (the amount of resources used to obtain a given volume of output) (Starling 1998:23-24).

However, Fox et al. (1991:5) list public management functions as comprising of: policy-making, planning, organising, leadership and motivation and control and evaluation. For the purposes of this dissertation, management will therefore include; policy-making, planning, decision-making, organising, leading and controlling.

2.5   Tool

A tool means a thing used in an occupation or pursuit (Oxford 1986:867). In the public sector tools are used as aids in ensuring effective and efficient delivery of goods and services. Van Straaten (1984:9-212) mentions most of these administrative tools, such as, information system, computerising, cost-benefit analysis, network analysis, work study, systems analysis and management by objectives (MBO). Customer-focused approach is one of those management tools that promotes excellent service delivery in the public sector.

2.6   Improving service delivery

Improving the delivery of public services means redressing the imbalances of the past and, while maintaining continuity of service to all levels of society, focusing on meeting the needs of the 40% of South Africans who are living below the poverty line and those, such as the disabled, and black women living in rural areas, who have previously been disadvantaged in terms of service delivery. Improving service

delivery also calls for a shift away from inward-looking, bureaucratic systems, processes and attitudes, and a search for new ways of working which put the needs of the public first, are better, faster and more responsive to the citizens' needs. It also means a complete change in the way that services are delivered. The objective of service delivery therefore includes welfare, equity and efficiency (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:11).

2.7   Public sector

Public sector is that portion of economy whose activities (economic and non-economic) are under the control and direction of the state. The state owns all resources in this sector and uses them to achieve whatever goals it may have to promote, the economic welfare of the ruling elite or to maximise the well being of society as a whole (Fox & Meyer 1995:107).

3. EXPLANATION AND MEANING OF CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH

It is very important to give a detailed explanation of the concept, customer-focus approach, and its meaning in the public sector.

3.1   Explanation of customer-focus approach

According to Myers & Lacey (1996:331) in an increasing number of countries, attention is being focused on the quality of public services as measured by customer satisfaction. This is something of a new departure for the public sector, although

it has long been an established part of private sector business practice. It hinges upon regarding the users of pubic services as consumers rather than as citizens.

A customer-focused approach is an approach which puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes and behaviour within the public service and reorients them in the customer's favour, it is an approach which puts the people first. This does not mean introducing more rules and centralised processes or micro-managing service delivery activities. Rather, it involves creating a framework for the delivery of services which treats citizens more like customers and enables the citizens to hold public servants to account for the service they receive (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:12).

The concept of the citizen as a 'customer' may therefore seem inappropriate at first sight. 'Customer' is nevertheless a useful term in the context of improving service delivery because it embraces certain principles which are as fundamental to public service delivery as they are to the provision of services for commercial gain.

To treat citizens as 'customer' implies:
- listening to their views and taking account of them in making decisions about what services should be provided;
- treating them with consideration and respect;
- making sure that the promised level and quality of service is always of the highest standard; and
- responding swiftly and sympathetically when standards of service fall below the promised standard (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:13).

It should be noted that not only citizens can be regarded as customers. National and provincial departments have many internal customers such as components and staff within their own organisations, as well as other departments and institutions for whom they provide a service (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:13).

Treating citizens as customers and training public managers to be customer-focused in their approaches will increase and improve service delivery in the public sector. The challenge of developing a culture of quality customer service in the public sector is undoubtedly a challenge which can no longer afford to be ignored (Week & De Beer 1994:4).

Culture may be defined as the values, beliefs, norms and practices of a particular group that are learned and shared and that guide thinking, decisions and actions in a patterned way (Giger & Davidhizar 1991:3). A culture of quality customer service is therefore premised on shared values, beliefs, norms and practices that promote good customer service.

Myers & Lacey (1996:334) maintain that there should be efforts to make the public sector more responsive to the customer as the direct consumer of its products. These efforts have relied on two main instruments. The first, and most important, is increasing market contestability for public-service products. The second is providing consumers of public goods and services with a stronger voice in the absence of opportunities for exit. Responsiveness is a core value of the transformed public service. Its application in practice will have a profound effect on the way national departments and provincial administration operate. The key to implementing the responsiveness principle lies in being able to identify quickly and accurately when services are falling below the promised standard and having procedures in place to remedy the situation (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service 1996:8). Customer-focused approach encourages dissemination of useful information so that customers can be able to complete transactions at ease. Public sector forms should be very easy to fill, they should be user-friendly.

According to Manning (1997:16) "... becoming customer-driven is a complex matter, that takes hard work and smart management. It demands that you not only

get to know the customer intimately, but also that you rethink everything you do, and the way you do it."

Customer-focused approach is very important because it focuses on customers who are the providers of the needed revenue and more importantly so, the information so much needed to help public managers to provide excellent service.

Employees are a critical force when evolving to a customer-focused culture: not everyone can adjust to a new way of working. Hiring and retaining employees who will fit in a customer-focused organization and who can work in teams means selecting a new breed of worker (Murphy, in Theresa Brothers & Carson 1993:13).

In forming a customer-focused public sector, all employees should be involved. All are encouraged to make their business to learn about customers and their needs (Blem 1995:20). Customer-focused approach is sometimes termed customer-handling approach. The customer-handling approach defines a service problem in terms of inadequacies in the interpersonal and communication skills of the frontline service deliverers. It focuses on the individual; it attempts to redress poor service quality by modifying the behaviour of frontline staff through training in new skills and attitudes. Frontline people cannot deliver service if they are not adequately trained (Maguire 1991:24). The approach assumes that as staff members become more skilled in handling customers, service quality will improve automatically (Foster et al. 1989:55).

According to Maguire (1991:23) top management must identify its commitment to service excellence. It is a full-time obsession with getting things right first time. They must spell out how service excellence will benefit the customer, and that benefit must be deliverable. The institution must find out from the customer what he or she expects and once known, should to be translated into specific criteria

against which service can be measured. The public institution should scrutinize its contact with its customers, this is called "moments of truth."

According to Weeks & De Beer (1994:5) the "moment of truth" in instilling quality customer service in the public sector, arises when the public comes into contact with any aspect of the service and consequently has an opportunity to form an impression of service provided. These impressions accumulate to shape public opinion in regard to the standard of customer service.

From what has been outlined above, it is true to allude that empowering employees and seeking customer feedback play an important role in achieving customer satisfaction. Public sector customers should be encouraged to provide feedback on service delivery. In analysing the feedback, Smith (1994:157) states that statistical methods can be used to collate responses and indicate the general levels of customer satisfaction.

According to Zeithaml, et al. (1990:51) knowing what customers expect is the first and most critical step in delivering quality service. Raising awareness of customer-focused approach is very cardinal in promoting excellent customer service. The most commonly used approach is to form customer-focused teams.

Spangenberg (1994:90) maintains that in implementing customer-focus approach, the focus is on evaluating whether the organization is meeting customer needs and requirements by:

1.   The decision-maker in the organization meeting with the staff (as a team) to determine who the customer is.
2.   The team meeting with the customer to determine customer needs and requirements.

3. The team developing a strategy to meet customer requirements by:

    (a) meeting with employees to discuss customer requirements;

    (b) outlining the processes in place and eliminating any unnecessary steps;

    (c) learning how to utilize statistical calculation and statistical thinking to strive for ongoing improvement of the system; and

    (d) establishing ongoing information exchange between the management/ employee team and customer.

4. The manager and employees maintaining an open and ongoing information exchange with each other, with the focus on improving processes.

3.2 Meaning of customer-focus approach

The art and practice of public administration came under fierce international criticism in the 1980's. The discipline was increasingly regarded as unproductive and inefficient. A number of governments, mostly but not exclusively right-wing, attempted to introduce private sector practices into the public sector in order to improve efficiency and productivity. Britain, United States, Australia and New Zealand, are foremost examples of such countries (Cameron & Stone 1995:114). In New Zealand, for instance, the reforms were guided by two objectives, namely not only the need for more efficient public sector but also the one that responds better to the policy aims of elected governments (Myers & Lacey 1996:332).

Customer-focused approach is one of those practices that attempts to improve efficiency and productivity in the private sector but it can also be implemented with success in the public sector. The primacy of the customer dictates that the public sector provides services that are responsive to the needs of its primary customer, the public. Worldwide and particularly in South Africa, customers were accustomed to mediocrity. Not any longer, for the person most affected by the rising awareness of the importance of customer service, is the customer (Dyamond 1990:33).

In the following paragraphs a full attempt will be made to describe meaning of customer-focus approach in the public sector. This refers to the impact the customer-focus approach has in the public sector. Meaning of customer-focus approach refers to the following:

3.2.1 Consulting users of services

All national and provincial departments must, regularly and systematically, consult not only about services currently provided but also about the provision of new basic services to those who lack them. Consultation will give citizens the opportunity of influencing decisions about public services, by providing objective evidence which will determine service delivery priorities. Consultation can also help to foster a more participative and co-operative relationship between the providers and users of public service (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:16).

Provincial governments should encourage the establishment of subregional and/or local forums which consist of representatives of all the stakeholders in the areas. In consultation with these forums, local authorities will promote the development of their local areas. At provincial level, consultative councils, which consist of representatives of both stakeholders and subregional forums, should be established (Cameron & Stone 1995:95).

According to Myers & Lacey (1990:336) the public sector should provide choice wherever practicable. There should be regular consultation with those who use services. The consultation process should be undertaken sensitively; for example, people should not be asked to reveal unnecessary personal information, and they should be able to give their views anonymously if they wish. Often, more than one method of consultation will be needed to ensure comprehensiveness and representativeness (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:16).

3.2.2 Setting service standard(s)

In the United Kingdom, The Citizen's Charter was launched in 1991 and became operative in 1992. It is, initially, a ten year program and is designed to improve the delivery of public services (Myers & Lacey 1996:334).

One of the key principles of this Charter is service standards. Explicit standards are set, monitored and published for the services that individual user can reasonably expect (Myers & Lacey 1996:336). Spangenberg (1994:73) refers to these standards as performance measures. This author maintains that performance measures are needed to determine how well one must perform and how one will know if one has succeeded (Spangenberg 1994:73).

Service standards must be relevant and meaningful to the individual user. This means that they must cover the aspects of service which matter most to users, as revealed by the consultation process, and they must be expressed in terms which are relevant and easily understood. Standards must also be precise and measurable, so that users can judge for themselves whether or not they are receiving what was promised (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:5).

However, measurement problems in the public sector contribute to differences in decision-making behaviour. The lack of a clearly defined bottom line in the public sector leads to a focus on inputs and budgets, not outputs and productivity measures. Thus, meeting the budget becomes an important measure, not just an input tool as in the private sector (Watson et al. 1997:392).

Customer-focused approach is the driving force behind good standard setting. Once approved, service standards must be published and displayed at the point of delivery and communicated as widely as possible to all potential users so that they

know what level of service they are entitled to expect, and can complain if they do not receive it (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:17).

In line with the United Kingdom's Citizen's Charter, the South African department of Home Affairs has formulated what is called the improved standards plan in order to improve productivity, courteousness, efficiency and eliminate corruption (The Star. Thursday April 2 1998).

According to the Minister of Home Affairs (The Star, Thursday April 2 1998) "We realise that the same requirements of good customer service apply to us as to any other public or private provider of services ... our operating circumstances, however, crucially differ in one important instance. We serve a captive clientele, they cannot shop around the corner for better product. This places an even greater responsibility on us."

The plan is outlined in a services pamphlet which will be distributed to Home Affairs personnel and the public. It includes a list of the customer's rights, guidelines on the services offered by the department concerning how its staff will deal with inquiries.

Provided the application is straightforward and has been correctly completed, the Department of Home Affairs aims to process the documents within the following time frames:

O   identity documents (two months);
O   registration of births (one day);
O   marriage certificates (same day);
O   registration of deaths (same day);
O   temporary identity documents (on the spot);
O   passports/travel documents (six weeks);

O   emergency passports (one week);

O   visas (10 days);

O   permanent residence - foreign applications (18 months);

O   citizenship (eight weeks);

O   refugee affairs (three months);

O   repatriation (one month); and

O   permanent residence - local applications (eight weeks) (The Star, Thursday
        April 2 1998).

It is obvious that this publication of service standards is mainly for users' benefits.
It is therefore appropriate to state that customer-focus approach plays a prominent
role in setting service standards.

3.2.3 Increasing access

While some South Africans enjoy public services of first world quality, many others
live in third world conditions. One of the prime aims of customer-focus approach
is to provide a framework of making decisions about delivering public services to the
many South Africans who were and still are denied access to them within the
parameters of the Government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy.

Customer-focus approach also aims to rectify the inequalities of distribution in
existing services. All national and provincial departments are required to specify and
set targets for progressively increasing access to their services for those who have
not previously received them. In setting these targets, institutions which promote
the interests of previously disadvantaged groups, such as the Gender Commission,
and groups representing the disabled should be consulted (Batho Pele White Paper
1997:18).

Accessibility means that all citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled. Customer focus approach amongst others, entails the vigorous promotion of accessibility.

The **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**, 108/1996 makes provision for the citizens to have access to information, just administrative action and to courts of law. This concept is called the concept of customer-driven government: meeting the needs of the customer, not the bureaucracy (Osborne & Gaebler 1992:166-194).

Customer-focus approach is an appropriate management tool to barriers to access because it address meeting the needs of customers.

3.2.4 Ensuring courtesy

The concept of courtesy goes much wider than asking public servants to give a polite smile and to say please and thank you, though these are certainly required. The Code of Conduct for Public Servants issued by the Public Service Commission, makes it clear that courtesy and regard for the public servants is one of the fundamental duties of public servants, by specifying that public servants treat members of the public as customers who are entitled to receive the highest standards of service (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:17).

However, Mokgoro (1997:243) reports that even though there are some glimpses of refreshing change, public servants in many parts of the country continue to behave as though they exist to serve their own interests and not those of the public. Telephones and written enquiries continue to be ignored; applicants are not informed if they are unsuccessful - often receipt is not even acknowledged of their applications; bribes are still demanded in exchange of service delivery; response time continues to be unbearably long (i.e. if it happens at all); police do not respond to

reported crime, if they do arrive, it is only when the perpetrators have carried out their heinous deeds; and nepotism has been exposed but this is being addressed in the new Public Service Regulations now being drafted (Mokgoro 1997:243).

The gloomy picture outlined by the above-mentioned author cannot remain unchallenged. National and provincial departments must specify the standards for they way in which customers should be treated. These can be included in their departmental codes of conduct. These standards should cover, among others:

❑ greeting and addressing customers;
❑ the identification of staff by name when dealing with customers, whether in person, on the telephone or in writing;
❑ the style and tone of written communications;
❑ simplification and 'customer-friendliness' of forms;
❑ the maximum length of time which responses must be made to enquiries;
❑ the conduct of interviews;
❑ how complains should be dealt with;
❑ dealing with people who have special needs, such as the elderly or infirm;
❑ gender; and
❑ language (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:19).

The performance of staff who deal with customers must be regularly monitored, and performance which falls below the specified standards should not be tolerated.

An important aspect of encouraging customer-focused behaviour is to provide staff with opportunities to suggest ways of improving service and for senior managers to take these suggestions seriously. This implies particularly to staff who come into regular contact with the public because they usually have an accurate appreciation of their needs and concerns. Senior managers should regularly meet with staff to

get feedback about service (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:6-7).

Customer-focus approach is the key to the promotion of courtesy for public servants.

3.2.5 Providing more useful information

No public organisation can be expected to optimize service provision processes without access to timely and accurate information. The power of the modern computer to store and process data causes this technology to appear extremely attractive as the most effective way to create decision support systems. A frequently articulated complaint of managers in the public sector is that their data-processing staff lack the abilities to provide these systems (Chaston 1993:174). Although this criticism may be valid in some situations, the more usual cause of the problem is that information users lack even a basic understanding of information technology and are therefore unable to describe their real needs adequately to the system designer (Chaston 1993:174).

It is a requirement that public administration should be rational and objective as far as possible. In practice this means that public administration should be based on factual information, e.g. estimates of income and expenditure should be based on factual information. To ensure that this is done, it is necessary to provide for the creation and maintenance of information system (Cloete 1994:245).

Information is one of the most powerful tools at the customer's disposal in exercising his or her right to good service. National and provincial departments must provide full, accurate and up-to-date information about the services they provide, and who is entitled to them. This must be done actively, in order to ensure that information is received by all those who need it, especially those who have

previously been excluded from the provision of public services. The consultation process should also be used to find out what customers and potential customers need to know, and then to work out how, where and when the information can best be provided (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:19).

According to Ross (1970:106) information system is a network of component parts developed to provide a flow of information to decision-makers. It is composed of procedures, equipment, information, methods to compile and evaluate information, the people who use the information, and the information management.

Samuelson **et al.** (1977:3) maintain that information system is that combination of human and computer-based resources which results in collection, storage, retrieval, communication and use of data for the purpose of efficient management (planning, decision-making, reporting and control) of operations in organisations.

In the public sector information system serves a variety of functions such as policy-making, planning, organising, and control in various internal and external functions such as personnel, financing and engineering, health, security and public works. Every system consists of a set of elements or sub-functions which are referred to as sub-systems (Fox **et al.** 1991:261).

Written information should be plain and free of jargon, and supported by graphical material where this will make it easier to understand. There should always be a name and contact number for obtaining further information and advice. All written information should be tested on the target audience for readability and comprehensiveness. However, it should not be assumed that written information alone will suffice: many people prefer to receive information verbally, so that they can ask questions and check their understanding (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:7).

Walsh (1989:83) identifies a number of promotional mechanisms best suited for a local government environment:

▪ Complaint forms.

▪ A special telephone service for consumers (the community).

▪ An organised letter and mail correspondence network.

▪ Effective complaint procedures.

▪ The existence of an effective system for the provision of information.

▪ Organised campaigns to involve the community in decision-making.

▪ Measures to ensure accessibility to local government structures and administrative activities.

As a minimum, information about services should be available at the point of delivery, but for users who are far from the point of delivery, other arrangements will be needed. Schools, libraries, clinics, shops, and local non-government organisations and community-based organisations are all potential distribution points; information notices on trees in rural areas, and toll-free telephone help lines, in a variety of languages, where needed, can be extremely effective. Service providers should also make regular visits to remote communities to disseminate information (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:20).

It is appropriate at this juncture to point out that the department of Home Affairs has introduced a toll free complaint hotline (0800601190) which became operative from 2 April 1998 (The Star, Thursday April 2 1998).

3.2.5.1   Types of information systems

The nature of information is determined by its value to the user. The information must be responsive to the user in four main areas: it must be timely, integrated with other data and information, consistent and accurate and relevant. Information that

lacks any of these basic features will result in incorrect decisions, misallocation of resources, and overlooked windows of opportunity (Bidgoli 1997:8).

The underlying objective of information systems on functional levels is to provide managers with the information they need to monitor and control individual functions, so that the ultimate objectives are achieved through effective decisions. The activities of the institution on the different functional levels are strategic, tactical and operational (Kroon 1996:474).

Different types of information systems can be identified such as:

3.2.5.1.1   Transaction Processing Systems (TPS)

A Transaction Processing System (TPS) collects and stores data about transactions and sometimes controls decisions that are made as part of a transaction. TPS were the first computerised information system. TPS are highly structured and are based on detailed models of how the transaction should be processed. TPS enforce the collection of specific data in specific format and in accordance with rules, policies, and goals of the organization (Alter 1992:127).

The speed and accuracy in which transactions are processed has improved service delivery to the public.

3.2.5.1.2   Management Information Systems (MIS)

MIS can be defined narrowly as the automation of routine and structured tasks to support decision-making (Murdick et al. 1984:7).

The concept of MIS emerged partly as a response to the shortcomings of first computerized TPS, which often succeeded in improving transaction processing but

provided little information for management (Alter 1992:133).

MIS is a means of providing information necessary for decision-making to the various levels of management within an organisation, usually through computer-based files (Kindred 1982:570). It is a specifically planned computer-based organisational tool that enables managers to gather, store, process and retrieve relevant organisational data that can be used to make informed organisational decisions (Kreps 1990:217).

Smit & Cronje (1992:16) indicate that MIS is an integrated approach that provides relevant information used to help managers make decisions. With MIS data can be interpreted, organised and filtered to reach managers efficiently and timeously. This information is designed to support the effective planning and control of management activities.

The extent of computerised MIS varies from institution to institution, but the most effective types are those that are integrated. An integrated MIS incorporates all five managerial functions: planning, organising, staffing, directing and controlling throughout the institution. An integrated management computerised system uses the computer to solve problems for the entire institution, instead of attacking them in a piecemeal fashion (Capron 1990:490).

Customer-focus managers need more refined information in order to make informed decisions for improved service delivery.

3.2.5.1.3   Decision Support System (DSS)

Another positive contribution of information technology has, in fact, been developed as a result of one of its limitations. Indeed, the 60's saw attempts to apply computers across the board, leading to experiments on the possibility of automating

all information handling processes. After countless failed attempts, the conclusion was finally reached that computer could not substitute people in significant decision-making process (Andreu **et al.** 1992:27).

As a result, a new more modest and realistic point of view, was developed in order to take advantage of technology. It simply consisted of trying to help people in charge of making decisions instead of trying to automate the whole process. The idea lead to the Decision Support System (DSS) concept (Andreu **et al.** 1992:27).

A Decision Support System (DSS) is an interactive system that helps people make decisions, use judgment, and work in areas where no one knows exactly how the task should be done in all cases. DSS support decision-making in semi-structured and unstructured situations, and they provide information, models, or tools for manipulating data (Alter 1992:133).

Unstructured decisions are those in which the decision-maker must provide judgment, evaluation, and insights into the problem definition. Each of these decisions are novel, important, and non-routine, and there is no well-understood or agreed-upon procedure for making them. Structured decisions, by contrast, are repetitive and routine and involve a definite procedure for handling them so that they do not have to be treated each time as if they are new. Some decisions are semi-structured; in such cases, only part of the problem has a clear-cut answer provided by an accepted procedure (Laudon & Laudon 1997:82).

The decision support information system (DSS) is the information system that was developed within management information system. A Decision Support System can be defined as an interactive computer system that is easily accessible and usable by the manager without the continual support of computer specialist (Rue & Byars 1992:542). It is a specialised information system designed to support management skills in all stages of decision-making (Donnelley **et al.** 1990:568).

A Decision Support Information System also makes it possible for public officials to seek alternative solutions in the process of decision-making. This is made possible after computerised information has been assessed and the necessary updating has been made. It gives public officials and political office bearers instant signals of problems and more time to devote to planning, and the ability to evaluate more alternatives (Sanders 1985:384).

A Decision Support System does not replace a management information system. Instead a DSS supplements MIS. Distinct differences exist between them. A Management Information System emphasises planned reports on a variety of subjects where as Decision Support System focuses on decision-making. MIS is standard, scheduled, structured and a routine system whilst DSS is quite unstructured and available on request. MIS is constrained by the organisational system while DSS is immediate and friendly (Capron 1990:507).

The collection of useable information helps managers to make decisions that are relevant to meeting customers needs. Ross (1970:199) maintains that decision-making is the process of selecting from alternatives a course of action to achieve an objective.

3.2.5.1.4   Executive Information Systems (EIS)

An EIS is a computerized system that provides executives with easy access to internal and external information that is relevant to their critical success factors (Watson et al. 1997:3).

Like TPS, MIS, and DSS, EIS grew out of unmet needs. MIS provided standard reports in a standard format on a scheduled basis, which was acceptable for monitoring the same indicators over time but not very useful for analysing problems and new situations. DSS initially attempts to help here but provided tools that

required too much expertise to use. Only analysts could use these tools effectively and few managers were truly analysts.

In contrast, EIS are designed to help executives find the information they need whenever they need it and in whatever form is most useful (Alter 1992:136).

3.2.5.1.5   Expert Systems (ES)

The progress from MIS to DSS and EIS provided models and analytical tools for professionals and usable information for executives. An Expert System addresses a different type of problem: It supports the intellectual work of professionals engaged in design, diagnosis, or evaluation of complex situations that require expert knowledge in a well-defined area. Expert Systems have been used to diagnose diseases, configure computers, analyse chemicals, interpret geological data, and support many other problem solving processes (Alter 1992:136). Like all the other systems, ES can only be useful when it responds to the need of the 'customers.'

3.2.5.1.6   Office Automation Systems (OAS)

These systems include a wide range of tools such as word processors, spreadsheets, and telephone systems, with a few exceptions, that are used in unstructured situations and are oriented primarily toward data rather than models. They usually provide little or no structure concerning the substance of the information being stored or transmitted. Secretaries, typists, and receptionists use OAS a lot since their jobs involve general office tasks such as leaving messages, drafting memos, and creating presentations (Alter 1992:138).

OVERVIEW OF SIX TYPES OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS

TYPE OF INFORMA-TION SYSTEM	WHAT THE SYSTEM DOES	DEGREE OF STRUC-TURE IMPOSED	HOW THE SYSTEM HELPS CO-ORDI-NATE WORK	TYPICAL USERS
Transaction processing system	Collects and stores information about transactions	Enforces procedures and standards to ensure consistent record keeping and decision-making	Assures that transaction data are consistent and available to whomever needs it	People who process transactions
Management information system	Converts data from transaction processing systems into information for managing an organisation and monitoring performance	Reinforces the organization's goals by measuring performance and comparing it to expectations	Emphasizes measures of performance	Managers and people who receive feedback about their own work
Decision-support system	Helps people make decisions by providing information, models, or tools for analyzing information	Gives users direction in using the system and making decisions; may provide methods and formats for portions of a decision process	May provide a common framework for analyzing and explaining a decision	Analysts, managers, and other professionals
Executive information system	Provides information in a readily accessible, interactive format without forcing executivs to become data analysis exports	Sometimes used to structure parts of organizational planning and control processes	Sometimes used to emphasize measures of performance	Executives and high-level managers
Expert system	Makes the knowledge of experts available to others; assists problem solving in areas where expert knowledge is needed	May guide the decision process and assure that key factors are considered	May help an organization make consistent decisions	People who solve problems in an area where expert knowledge exists
Office automation system	Helps people process documents and messages; provides tools that make general office work mor efficient and effective	May define or restrict the format or method for performing everyday tasks; rarely affects the content of the information	Provides tools and methods that can be used consistently throughout an organization	Office workers and others who occasionally do office work

(Alter 1992:128)

3.2.5.2   The attributes for useful information

These attributes are, amongst others, accuracy, timeliness, comprehensiveness, multi-faceted and confidentiality.

3.2.5.2.1   Accuracy

Accuracy refers to the extent to which information is exact (Fox **et al.** 1991:261). Decision-making is always influenced by the type of information at hand.   For example, if the information is inaccurate, the decision taken will also be inaccurate. Oxenfeldt (1979:7) confirms that "(t)he information relevant to a decision should describe the existing situation accurately so that the executive at least knows what problem he is trying to solve."

3.2.5.2.2   Timeliness

To make a quick and accurate decision, the information needed should be on time so that it can be carefully analysed by the designer of an information system for short, medium or long term planning. Van Straaten (1984:48) further maintains that "... daar derhalwe by die verwerking van inligting so te werk gegaan moet word dat die inligting tydig en betroubaar is, maar aandag moet terselfdertyd aan metodes gegee word sodat die bewaring van inligting op die effektiefste en goedkoopste wyse kan geskied en inligting weer herwin kan word wanneer optrede noodsaaklik is."

3.2.5.2.3   Comprehensiveness

An incomplete information does not serve any good purpose. For information to be of value and effective, there should be comprehensiveness. Managers are always faced with decisions to be made. In the process of decision-making, they are faced

with information that is accurate, timely but unfortunately incomplete. This causes frustrations. Complete information can, however, often be provided through the design so that systems do a better job of integrating and consolidating available facts. It is thus important to have complete information (Van Straaten 1984:48).

3.2.5.2.4   Confidentiality

Confidentiality should also be built-in in the information system. It is essential that adequate precautions are taken to ensure that unauthorised people do not gain access to the confidential information. In other words, the information system should be so designed that specific confidential information can only be accessible to authorised people, particularly people who have the responsibility to make final decisions (Van Straaten 1984:49).

4.2.5.2.5   Multi-faceted

To ensure that the decision-makers have a complete, timely and accurate as well as relevant information in order to make rational decisions, the information system needs to be multi-faceted. This is necessary so that the decision-makers can approach the information system from all angles (Van Straaten 1984:49).

The impact of customer-focus approach in the public sector is that users and consumers of public services can expect full, accurate information about the services they are entitled to receive.

3.2.6 Increasing openness and transparency

Public managers should be transparent in their deliberations and accountable to their political superiors (Harris 1990:6). While open administration was not a feature of

the old South Africa, the new **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,** 108/1996 makes provision for access to all information held by the State.

Section 32(1) states that:

> "everyone has the right to access to-
>
> (a)   any information held by the state; and
>
> (b)   any information that is held by another person and that is required for the exercise or protection of any rights."

Thus, openness and transparency promote customer-focus approach by placing citizens in a position where they can contribute to improving service delivery by getting the right information to judge the government.

Chapter 10 of the **Constitution of the Republic of South Africa,** 108/1996 which deals with basic values and principles governing public administration states clearly under section 195(1) (g) that:

> "Transparency must be fostered by providing the public with timely, accessible and accurate information."

Openness and transparency are the hallmark of a democratic government and are fundamental to the public service transformation process. In terms of public service delivery, their importance lies in the need to build confidence and trust between the public sector and the public they serve. A key aspect of this is that the public should know more about the way national and provincial departments are run, how well they perform, the resources they consume, and who is in charge (Batho Pele 1997:20).

According to Cameron & Stone (1995:117) public sector operations are monitored closely and sometimes anticipated by the press. The extensive negative reporting of the salaries of new public-sector contract appointments ('gravy train') by the

press is an example of this close scrutiny. The advantage of this publicity is that it allows public managers to use a public microphone to get the message across to outside people. The disadvantage is that what public managers say is often distorted, misquoted and misunderstood (Kurkjian & Chase 1984:5-6).

For the public to know more about how national and provincial departments are run, how well they perform, the resources they consume, and who is in charge, reporting mechanisms to the citizens should be exploited. The mechanism for achieving this will be an annual report to citizens, published by each national and provincial department setting out, in plain language the following:

◇ staff numbers employed, and the names and responsibilities of senior officials;

◆ performance against targets for: improved service delivery, financial savings, and increased efficiency;

◆ resources consumed, including salaries and other staff costs, and other operating expenses;

◆ any income, such as fees for services;

◇ targets for the following year; and

◇ a name and contact number for further information (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:20).

According to Hunt (1995:12) openness is concerned with public knowledge of the way in which decisions are made, the principles which guide that process of decision-making and the degree of information that is available to the public to enable them to participate fully in the decision-making process.

The Bill of Rights open to citizens, presupposes the availability of such information - that is to say, the opportunity for citizens to find out the true facts at first hand,

without the information being filtered or presented through a distorting mirror (Gentot 1995:5-6).

Kerauden (1995:41) states that, the policy of openness, that is to say openness of an administrative decision, is in any case clearly an attempt to influence external management by making an internal change within contemporary reform. One would agree that the active involvement of citizens in decision-making and public affairs requires that information, decision-making channels and files should be made open but again one wonders as to what extent, taking ethics into consideration, should openness take precedent on ethics and **vice versa**.

Hunt (1995:11) states that, there is a clear overlap between openness and ethics, the debate about openness in administrative organizations raises a number of ethical issues such as the rights and powers of the state in relation to its citizens in terms of dissemination and the right to access to information as spelt out in Act 108 of 1996 and about the protection of information given in confidence to the state. Equally, ethical questions such as maintenance of neutrality by serving the Government of the day in a dedicated and loyal manner, the implementation of the policies and programmes of the Government, irrespective of personal preferences and judgements, the maintenance and upholding of intellectual honesty in the exercising of responsibilities and the all times maintenance of honesty in providing advice and opinions to the Government on matters of policy, programmes and projects in an objective manner in administrative organizations are rarely subjects of public scrutiny and debate. They are usually determined by the bureaucracy to which they relate, reflecting principles presumed to be of benefit to the government of the country and thus in the interest of its people (Hunt 1995:11).

However, where the relationship between openness, ethics and administrative reform is concerned, it is customary to stress that most efforts at modern reform are designed to improve the internal management of public services rather than the

external management of the interface between the public service and its users or customers (Kerauden 1995:41). Be that as it may, openness promotes a culture of participation by the citizens at large.

The difficulties encountered when exercising openness are as follows:

❖ divulging information which the administration would prefer to keep confidential exposes it to criticism and opposition;

❖ the reluctance of the administration to play the openness game often stems from fear that this will completely alter the nature of the decision-making or control process; and

❖ finally, it is the fear of improper use being made of the information contained in the documents requested for consultation by the public which most often explains the reservations of the administration which tends to stress the complexity of administrative affairs, the difficulty of arbitration between opposing interests, or possible misunderstandings which may arise from revealing files to ill-informed citizens whose unhealthy curiosity should not be protected (Gentot 1995:8-9).

3.2.7 Remedying mistakes and failures

It is mandatory that management of change programmes should be accompanied by regular surveys of employee attitudes and opinions. Hopefully, the results of such tracking studies will begin to indicate that:

(a) employees are regaining a sense of personal satisfaction about their contributions to value added process; and

(b) the organizational culture is moving from confrontation towards inter-departmental co-operation. It is only at this point that public sector marketers should start to emphasize the importance of establishing mechanisms to

enhance customer perceptions over the quality of service provision (Chaston 1993:176-177).

Regular surveys of employee attitudes and opinions have positive staff development in so far as customer satisfaction is concerned. However, surveys should not only be conducted amongst employees but also amongst external customers. These surveys should focus on obtaining information on how customers feel about specific issues. From these surveys a process called customer action planning should evolve. Farley, in Theresa Brothers & Carson (1993:18) maintains that, customer action planning is a continuous loop of getting information, identifying gaps, fixing problems and measuring results. This continuous feedback system has evolved into a management process that is nothing more than listening to customers and responding to their needs.

Customer-focus means enhancing of customer perceptions over quality of service by remedying mistakes and failures whenever they occur.

The capacity and willingness to take action when things go wrong, is the necessary counterpart of the standard setting process. It is also an important constitutional principle. For example Section 195(1) (i) of Act 108 of 1996 states that:

> "Public administration must be broadly representative of the South African people, with employment and personnel management practices based on ability, objectivity, fairness and the need to redress the imbalances of the past to achieve broad representation."

The customer-focus principle of redress requires a completely new approach to handling complaints. Complaints such as dissatisfaction with Government administration in cases considered as unfair, inappropriate and not in accordance with the stipulated laws and regulations or indicative of abuse of power or

mismanagement are seen by many public servants as a time-consuming irritation. Where complaints procedures exist, they are often lengthy and bureaucratic, aimed at defending the department's actions rather than solving the user's problem. Often, 'complaints' are counted as such only when they are submitted in writing through the formal channels (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:21). Yet many members of the public do not bother using these channels because they have no confidence in their effectiveness, and because they find the process time-consuming and sometimes daunting. As a result, public sector organisations frequently underestimate the level of dissatisfaction which exists (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:21).

Superior customer service involves more than handling complaints. It means striving to provide customers with no reason to complain in the first place. This means that customer contact staff are provided with the skills such as to handle complaints without losing temper to deliver consistently reliable, everyday service excellence such as adhering to time frames and making sure that every complaint is attended to. This is not to suggest that handling complaints is unimportant. It is an extremely difficult and challenging aspect of the customer contact person's job. But complaint handling needs to be an integral part of an overall service strategy (Dyamond 1990:34). Complaints handling should not be left to individuals, there must be avenues for the resolution of public complaints. The availability of these avenues is vital as they offer an outlet for disgruntled individuals to voice their complaints, act as a proper channel for submission of complaints, enable corrective actions to be taken systematically and future plans to be mapped out. They are also a testimony of a caring government that is committed to provide quality services to the society at large. Such avenues also foster closer relationship between the public and the government in power.

Customer-focus approach encourages that people should be given a fair hearing and their complaints should be listened to. Staff should be encouraged to welcome

complaints as an opportunity to improve service, and to report complaints so that weaknesses can be identified and remedied. The head of each department should regularly and personally review complaints, and check how they have been dealt with (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:21).

Frontline staff should be trained to handle customer complaints in a sensitive manner because people are different and they react differently to same issues. Some people do not want to talk about personal matters in front of other people, frontline staff should be trained to handle such issues.

Peters (1992:6) states that "(t)o compete in time, frontline people must be empowered, given autonomy and high spending authority, trusted, encouraged to break the rules, etc. It's as clear as that. You can't have real time decision-making at the frontline unless the people in the frontline have been trained and have the means, the authority and the managerial backing to get on with the job of working painlessly with each other and with outsiders."

3.2.8 Getting the best possible value for money

Improving service delivery, and extending access to public services to all South Africans must be achieved alongside the Government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution Strategy for reducing public expenditure and creating a cost-effective public service (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:22).

Cost-effectiveness goes hand in hand with excellent customer handling. According to Foster et al. (1989:55) the customer-handling approach defines a service problem in terms of inadequacies in the interpersonal and communication skills of frontline service deliverers. It focuses on the individual and it attempts to redress poor service quality by modifying the behaviour of frontline staff through training in new skills and attitudes.

Many improvements that the public would like to see often, require no additional resources and can sometimes even reduce costs, for example a courteous and respectful greeting requires no financial investment. Failure to give a member of the public a simple satisfactory explanation to an enquiry, may result in an incorrectly completed application form which will cost time and money to put right. A few hours each month of senior manger's time spent, talking to their customers - and the staff who serve them - may be worth hundred of rands in research fees (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:22).

One of the most efficient ways of improving service delivery, is by using activity sampling. According to Murray (1989:16) activity sampling is based on the principle that information can be obtained on how people and machines spend their time by looking at sample of their activities. Information gathered by looking at people or machines at random intervals and recording the activity and pace of work taking place at the moment of observation can, if done properly, be nearly as accurate as if they had been under continuous observation over a long period of time. Corrective measures will then have to be taken in order to eliminate any unnecessary slack times.

3.2.9 Enhanced accountability

Traditionally the definition of accountability focuses on the obligation to publish some form of account or report (Normanton 1966:2). One would, however, in view of the influence of constantly changing determinants favour explanations that acknowledge characteristics of change and evolution, such as the one provided by McCandles (1994:39) who argues that accountability has to do with the obligation of an organisation to allow public challenge of its fairness.

The public declaration of an organisation's mission and how it will go about achieving this, are central to determining accountability. Equally accommodating is

the definition of accountability as "... an obligation to answer for a responsibility conferred" (Loots 1991:201). Accordingly, public accountability is the obligation to answer publicly for the responsibility conferred (McCandles 1993:14).

It is generally accepted that politicians and public officials should display a sense of responsibility and accountability when performing their duties. According to Fox **et al.** (1991:124) accountability is mainly a statutory obligation resting upon the executive to provide the legislature and the public at large with all necessary information to determine how legislative directives have been or have not been executed, and how executive actions have been executed. Accountability is therefore, the obligation to give answers and explanations concerning one's actions and performance to those with a right to require such answers and explanations. Accountability, thus, means that public servants must remain continually accountable in an honest and accurate manner for their actions, act in a competent and effective manner to achieve set purposes and produce desired results and use public funds entrusted to them for authorised public purposes and not for their own private gain (Fox et al. 1991:124).

Hanekom & Thornhill (1993:150) state that accountability is a relatively new dimension in governmental affairs, brought about by the separation of power by which the supreme authority of the legislature was established. In order to remain supreme, the legislature requires the executive to account for the manner in which its directives have been carried out. This requires the legislature to have the ability to make a tangible contribution to the executive in order that an efficient public service may be provided. (Fox et al. 1991:124).

The recognition and acceptance of public accountability is a guideline to which employees are bound. Because all public employees are bound to a specific ethical code of behaviour, it is necessary that at all times they can explain in public that they have in all respect carried out their duties in the correct manner (Andrews

1988:28). Accountability in the public sector means that, public officials should be apolitical in their dealing with the public. Managerial work in public services involves an important and complicated interface with the political process. The previously accepted ethic, that managers do not work to further the interests of a particular party, has been eroded. Managers need to be very clear about their degree of independence and the boundary between politics and management. If their work is too closely identified with a particular party, they may have to accept that change of political power may bring change of job (Flynn 1993:197-198).

The complexity in the public service has resulted in the inclusion of control measures such as the introduction of Public Protector to make public accountability possible. However Fox **et al.** (1991:124) maintain that, although excessive emphasis on control measures may hamper administrative action, accountability remains an aid in exercising control over executive actions and compels public officials to act with caution and constraint.

According to Cloete (1994:210) the matter of accountability in public administration can be viewed from a number of angles. It can explain how and why the executive institutions have to yield before the legislatures. The legislatures are responsible for ensuring that, account is given for any act prejudicial to the interest of the community. In exercising this responsibility, the legislatures must put a stop to high-handed bureaucratic action.

Accountability should be viewed from two angles - internal where subordinates are answerable to a superior and external where each public functionary is accountable to the electorate. Once these two control mechanisms are formally established, high ethical standards of behaviour can be demanded from all public functionaries even if it is not always attained (Hilliard 1996:26).

Customer-focus approach has a very positive impact on public officials because it makes them accountable. Many people wait for the manager or others to notice when changes require an adjustment or they ignore the signs of a changing environment. Accountable people take charge and they are alert for changes (McLagan 1991:64).

Accountability means taking charge of the changing environment and being answerable to the electorate. It is manifest, not only in the South African context but indeed throughout the world, that governments or leadership elites are no longer able to go their way in blithe disregard of the interests and aspirations of the ordinary people whose servants they are supposed to be (Keys 1993:8). Making public servants more directly responsive, in a formal way, to users of the service, raises important issues of accountability. The situation varies from country to country, but in most democracies governmental accountability to the public is through the electoral system. In the United Kingdom, for example, ministers have, until recently, been accountable to the British Parliament for the actions of their civil servants (Myers & Lacey 1996:344).

Interestingly in New Zealand, the 'purchasers' of department outputs are ministers who are directly accountable to voters through the parliamentary system. No attempt has been made to establish direct links between departments and the immediate consumers of the services. If customers are dissatisfied then they have recourse through the 'traditional' system of complaints to their members of parliament, and, ultimately, through the ballot box. This approach may work well, in part, given New Zealand's small size, very strong participatory customs, relatively homogeneous population, and frequent elections (Myers & Lacey 1996:345).

Public managers, thus, have an obligation to carry out their assigned duties in a responsible and responsive manner and will be held answerable to any success or failure. Customer-focus approach should be in a position to foster public

accountability on the side of public officials. In encouraging public accountability, public officials should eventually be innovative.

3.2.10 Encouraging innovation and rewarding excellence

The success of the improvement programmes in the public sector is also attributed to the system of recognition and rewards. The use of rewards will inculcate a culture of achievement whereby organisation members can exploit their talents and creativity to the fullest in their job and thus contribute to quality and productivity improvement in the public sector.

According to Batho Pele White Paper (1997:23) it is not only the public who would like to see public services improve. Many dedicated public servants, particularly those who serve the public directly, are frustrated by systems and procedures such as being unable to take decisions without consulting their superiors first, which are often a barrier to good service rather than support for it. It is essential to the success of customer-focus approach that the commitment, energy and skills of public servants are harnessed to tackle inefficient, outdated and bureaucratic practices, to simplify complex procedures, and to identify new and better ways of delivering services. It is also important that the efforts of staff - both individual and groups - who perform well in providing customer service, should be recognised and appropriately rewarded. Innovation helps to create more effective rules and procedures. This will eventually lead to a more satisfied workforce.

According to Foster et al. (1989:55) frontline workers, no matter how skilled, cannot instigate the effects of a poorly designed service system. Their role is one of damage limitation; they become buffers, absorbing the impact of dissatisfied customers through friendly and sympathetic behaviour, while the organization's culture, systems, and performance standards continue unscathed and unchanged.

The rigid bureaucratic systems and performance cannot change if there is no innovation. Innovation can only be created if customer-focus approach is really taken seriously. Too often the link between the newly designed performance review system and the pay system is established too quickly. The performance review process needs time to bed down, for employees and managers to develop the trust needed to conduct participative performance discussions. It is not advisable to link pay to performance review results unless a strong supportive culture, good job designs and adequate manager-employee relationships exist in the organization. In the absence of these conditions the pay system will be ineffective and the performance review process will collapse under the stress of supporting the pay system (Mohrnman et al. 1989:178-179).

Performance management procedures must include an assessment of the performance of individual staff in contributing to improving service to the public. This will be essential for staff who serve the public directly, but it is also important for staff who provide services directly to their fellow public servants whether in their own or other departments. A key indicator will be how they rate in their dealings with their customers in accordance with the behaviour code of the department (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:23).

Innovation which is coupled with good performance salary is one of the outputs of customer-focus approach. Because innovation brings change, it will eventually lead to greater citizenry participation.

Administrative performance is largely determined by the balance amongst incentives and controls under which public servants work. Responsiveness standards must be built into the incentive system of the administration and links established between internal performance standards and client appreciation of performance (OECD 1987:118).

3.2.11   Partnership with the wider community

Improving public service delivery, matters not only to the individual users of services, but also to the whole community. Improved delivery of service from national and provincial departments, as well as from institutions such as hospitals and tax offices, is essential for the future economic prosperity and social development of the country as set out in the Government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy. However, the public service cannot develop a truly service-oriented culture without the active participation of the wider community, including the private sector and citizens themselves (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:23).

Citizen participation aims to educate the individual citizen in civic awareness, to instill pride in his town and community, and to promote participation in public policy-making by providing inputs (values and needs) to the policy-makers and the policy-making process - inputs that might otherwise have been considered irrelevant (Hanekom & Thornhill 1993:192-193).

Whilst acknowledging the legitimacy of parliamentary prerogative to scrutinise the affairs of a public institution as an element of citizen participation in the operations of public institutions, it should, however, be noted that the need for direct public involvement in governing boards of public institutions is undisputable, and absolutely essential. Generally speaking, public institutions are more often than not unable to service their debts due to managerial problems and limited capacity for innovations (Odipo 1994:54). Their vulnerability to inefficiency and ineffectiveness is therefore inherent in their structures and mode of operations. In the context of this reality it is in the best interest of such institutions to draw their expertise for policy-making and planning from a broad spectrum of societal pool of skilled personnel and experts. Hence the legitimacy of citizen participation in policy making bodies through direct representation (Korten 1983:209).

Alienation of the individual from government activities can be overcome by the promotion of citizen participation (Hanekom & Thornhill 1993:193). However, according to Cameron & Stone (1995:100) it needs to be noted that the concept of 'community participation' is very vague. The question to be asked is who exactly is the Community? There are often competing civics in the same area, all claiming to represent the community. Be that as it may, community participation helps the public managers to respond to public needs. Hence improved public service delivery.

A final point is that the process of consulting communities will generally be lengthy, time-consuming and probably frustrating to bureaucrats who wish to provide projects in a speedy fashion. However, if properly carried out, a consultative process can in the long term ensure far greater success of projects than a non-negotiated process, which could well be rejected by the community (Cameron & Stone 1995:101).

4. CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH TO GOALS SETTING

Many South African institutions are becoming extremely service conscious. Recently the Department of Home Affairs has outlined a plan in a service pamphlet which includes a list of the customer's rights, guidelines on the service offered by the department and pledges by the department concerning how its staff will deal with enquiries (The Star April 2 1998). However service standards become very difficult to be accomplished without setting customer-focused goals.

Some organisations in striving to maintain efficiency, effectiveness and equity become so bound up with rules that their members forget why they were set up in the first place. Bureaucratic paperwork becomes more important than human needs (Naylor 1996:107). Let it be no question that goals are very critical in establishing

a customer-focused institution. Goal displacement is therefore the phenomenon of the means becoming the ends (Naylor 1996:107).

When referring to the concepts 'goals' and 'objectives,' Spangenberg (1994:85) states that, goals comprise broad statements of desired conditions or outcomes. Objectives are statements of specific results to be achieved to accomplish a goal and are measured quantitatively or qualitatively. However while the term 'goals' is often used to signify broad organizational goals, the two terms are very often used interchangeably.

Institutions that have been successful in delivering consistently high service quality are noted for establishing goals or standards to guide their employees in providing service quality. Of critical importance is the fact that the goals set by these institutions are based on customers' requirements and expectations rather than internal institutional standards (Zeithaml **et al.** 1990:83).

Goal-setting interventions involve managers and subordinates jointly, setting employee goals. The manager monitors performance and provides counselling and support where necessary. The major premise underlying this intervention is that individual employees and group members will be motivated to work harder to improve their performance when they are actively involved in setting their own goals (Spangenberg 1994:86).

4.1   Customer-Focused Goals (CFG) vs Management By Objectives (MBO)

MacLagan (1991::89) outlines the comparison between customer-focused goals (CFG) and management by objectives (MBO) as follows:
❑   CFG creates goals from both the customers' and the organisation's strategic perspective. The customer is not an explicit factor in MBO.

❑ CFG incorporates subjective as well as objective requirements. Subjective qualitative requirements are not allowed in MBO unless they can be reduced to 'the clearly measurable.' In MBO, measurability is the critical factor. In CFG, the customers' expectation (whether measurable or not) are the critical factors.

❑ CFG includes all of an individual's key goals even if they are ongoing parts of the job. MBO tends to focus on only special programmes and projects that reflect unique requirements this year.

❑ In MBO, measurable indicators must be specified for each goal. In CFG, it is not necessary to specify indicators during goal setting unless you anticipate that various stakeholders will use different kinds of evidence in judging success or when tangible measures will or should be used.

❑ MBO goals often are activity statements. CFG goals are output statements with outputs being the product, services, information, or processes you provide to your internal or external customers.

4.2 Performance Appraisal vs the Customer-focus Approach

An issue that is currently featuring strongly in Performance Appraisal is customer-focus. Instead of measuring the employee's knowledge and skill levels and contribution to the organization, the evaluation should be whether or not customer needs and requirements are being satisfied (Spangenberg 1994:89).

It is suggested that the current performance process be eliminated and alternative approaches be established to measure the objective of meeting customer needs. In order to contrast current practices with the focus on customer needs, Spangenberg

(1994:89-90) lists key steps of both customer-focus approach and performance appraisal as outlined by (Mullen, 1990) as follows:

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL CURRENT PRACTICE	CUSTOMER-FOCUS ALTERNATIVE APPROACH
The focus is on the evaluating the individual's contribution to the organization by:	The focus is on evaluating whether the organization is meeting customer needs and requirements by:
1. the manager establishing objectives/ expectations with the employee (who may or may not have input in shaping the objectives)	1. the decision-maker in the organization meeting with the staff (as a team) to determine who the customer is
2. the manager observing/evaluating the employee's performance	2. the team meeting with the customer to determine customer needs and requirements
3. the manager providing feedback on an ongoing basis	3. the team developing a strategy to meet customer requirements by:
4. the manager evaluating/rating the employee and communicating the rating to the employee	(a) meeting with employees to discuss customer requirements (b) outlining the processes in place and eliminating any unnecessary steps
5. the manager recommending adminis- trative actions (promotions, salary actions)	(c) learning how to utilize statistical calculation and statistical thinking to strive for ongoing improvement of the system
6. the manager and employee outlining a development plan to increase the employee's knowledge and skill level	(d) establishing ongoing information exchange between the management/ employee team and the customer
7. the manager establishing a new set of objectives/expectations with the employee for the next performance cycle	4. the manager and employees maintaining an open and ongoing information exchange with each other with the focus on improving processes

The above clearly demonstrates the evolvement of a team and process approach towards customer needs and requirements.

4.3   The role of goals

Goals can perform many functions for individuals, teams, customers and the organization itself. A meaningful description of the role and contribution of goals was given by McLagan (1991:12-15). She considers five functions particularly important **viz**:

4.3.1 Individual performance goals link what individuals do every day to larger goals and values of the organization

Individual performance goals are very essential in managing institutions, but unfortunately employees are not always informed about what is important or where they fit in. Very often executives do not communicate institutional plans down to employees and mobilize them in support of these strategic priorities.

4.3.2 Goals to connect individuals, teams, and organization with their customers

Most of the studies of customer-oriented organizations conclude that one of the primary reasons for these organizations' success is that every employee focuses on and values the customer. People in customer-focused organizations think about their work in terms of what quality means to the end user. Furthermore, they treat people they serve directly (often fellow employees) as customers. Goals can also provide a focal point for relationship-building discussions with customers.

4.3.3 Goals as a communication tool

By focusing their discussions on goals, team members can clarify their relationships and roles, and managers and employees can develop a common vision about expectations.

4.3.4 Goals to assist individuals in the self-management process

Goals establish priorities, focus attention, and brings order to turbulent world.

4.3.5 Goals to create future

People set goals because they know that they, as individuals, can create the future. This view is in line with the concept that people can control events in their environment. The concept of creating the future becomes more important as organizations establish even more challenging strategic goals.

Living in the Information Age and realizing that the organization's leaders want to pursue larger changes and initiatives, individuals must develop a new vision and commitment to manage by goals (McLagan 1991:15).

Management by goals generally supports flexibility of means as well as clarity of ends. The goal-focused manager spends a large amount of time helping other employees understand critical issues, strategies, values and customers' needs. Goal-focused manager assumes that the larger organizational structure and processes make high performance both possible and likely. The goal-focused manager ensures that individuals know their roles and expected contributions. He or she fosters an environment for innovation. The primary focus is on the future (McLagan 1991:11).

4.4   Building a customer-focused goal-oriented organization

In a rapidly changing environment, strategies for administrative reform and modernisation need to be focused to provide the framework for the management of the reform effort. A continuing concern is the ability to sustain the movement to effect the desired goal of institutionalizing a culture of excellence in the public

sector. Private companies cannot afford to ignore the needs and wishes of their customers if they want to stay in business, because dissatisfied customers can choose to take their business elsewhere (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:3). The public sector is no island unto itself and the same demand that are presently being placed on the private sector for improved standards of customer service are just as applicable to the public sector. The ability to think strategically about service and to build a strong quality customer service orientation into the vision of public service organization has become imperative (Weeks & De Beer 1994:4).

There are certain things that do not demand resources to be implemented and these are small but important improvements in the service delivery process which can be immediately attended to and implemented. These include the speeding up of response times for answering letters and telephone calls or the introduction of departmental courtesy campaigns (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:5).

A fresh approach is needed: an approach which puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes and behaviour within the public sector and orients them in the customer's favour. This does not mean introducing more rules and centralised processes or micro-managing service delivery activities, rather it involves creating a framework for the delivery of public services which puts citizens or customers first and enables them to hold public servants to account for the service they receive - a framework which frees up the energy and commitment of public servants to introduce more customer-focused ways of working (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:4).

Chaston (1993:168) states that, in the case of the public sector, it is suggested that three major areas will need to be addressed in the implementation process: managerial attitudes, individual staff competence, and overall organizational competence, viz:

4.4.1 Managerial attitudes

The Eastern Cape Administration was essentially paralysed because there was no effective political and administrative leadership, the provincial audit found. Financial controls were inadequate owing to lack of understanding of the budgetary system. "Budgets tend to be 'wish lists' rather than detailed assessments of the costs of implementing planned programmes," it was reported (Business Day Thursday August 21 1997).

The above mentioned audit reports clearly show that in order for staff to deliver excellent service delivery, good leadership is very important. Whether establishing a new system or adapting an existing one to a new environment, managers are faced with change, with developing something new.

Public sector services are typically organized along functional lines and staffed by 'professionals.' Chaston (1993:168) states that, the term 'professionals' is ambiguous but in the main refers to individuals such as doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers and scientists, who are members of a professional body which sets minimum educational standards to be achieved by an individual in order to qualify for membership. The professional tends to exhibit the following characteristics:

(a)   They participate in protracted specialized training to acquire and prove their expertise.

(b)   Their membership of a professional body confers a right to decide on the means and ends in their work to a degree which even an employer would have difficulty in challenging.

(c)   They are devoted to the technical aspect of their work to the point of placing this ahead of any organizational objective such as revising work practices to increase productivity.

(d)   They identify with other members of their profession ahead of any loyalty to their work colleagues or employer.

(e)   Challenges to their conduct can often only be made indirectly through a formal complaints procedure involving their professional body.

(f)   Work standards and further knowledge acquisition activities are considered the responsibility of their professional body.

The resultant attitude of many professionals is an unwillingness to place the performance objectives of either superiors who are not of the same profession, or of their employer organization, before the standards and tasks roles defined by their own professional body. Under these circumstances, it is very understandable why attempts to introduce a more integrated, cross-functional, participative, market-oriented approach to service provision in the public sector are often frustrated (Chaston 1993:168).

Overcoming attitude barriers between professionals and non-professionals must be the first step in implementing a strategy based on customer satisfaction within the organization.

It is unlikely that the current fashion of bringing in new senior managers from the commercial sector, who attempts to mandate revised working practices, will prove successful in every situation. Instead it may be necessary to instigate internal marketing programmes which promote a change process based upon employees gaining a deeper understanding of each other's needs, perceptions and opinions in

relation to their task role of supporting the service provision process (Chaston 1993:169).

The rapidly changing, uncertain and turbulent environment now facing public sector organizations, however, demands a more flexible and innovative operating philosophy if effective solutions are to be found to the problem of sustaining service delivery in a period of declining resources. Hence the organization should develop internal marketing campaigns which can lead to a change in management style - style that permits junior staff being granted greater self-decision powers and the discretion to allocate resources without first seeking the approval of a superior (Chaston 1993:169).

People who lead others play a key role in the success of customer-focused goals; they must make an active choice to manage by goals rather than by controls and consequences. Control measures such as for e.g. procedures, quality checks and feedback and consequences like bonuses, rewards and performance ratings should continue to be part of the management process, but in times that are changing faster than procedures and controls can keep up with, the emphasis must shift to goals as a guide to performance (McLagan 1991:71).

Managers must also understand their employees and nurture them to higher levels of maturity and responsibility for their work. People need varying degrees of guidance and support. Some may be new in a job and thus need more support in finding information and deciding where the leverage in their jobs is. Others will be experienced, have a large, active network of co-workers and customers, and just need help to fine-tune goals and agreements. Some may have a history of dependency; they don't want to make decisions or take charge. These individuals may find it difficult to own their goals and to be proactive in dealing with problems and opportunities. Others are self-starters and immediately take action when problems or new possibilities occur. Obviously, managers aren't therapists, but they

do have responsibility to help their employees grow in competence and accountability (McLagan 1991:71-72).

4.4.2 Staff competence

Not only the managers' attitudes should be transformed but also those of employees. It is difficult to conceive of any organisation whose performance does not depend on the quality of the staff that make it work. Customer-focused public servants are expected to treat all citizens with courtesy, respect and dignity (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:5).

The insistence of professionals that, only they have the necessary skills to make all but the most trivial of decisions means that staff costs in organizations dominated by such individuals can be extremely high. One way of reducing costs, and thereby enhancing value added service provision processes, is to delegate service provision tasks and decisions to individuals who, because they are not members of the appropriate professional body, can be paid a lower salary (e.g. architectural technicians preparing building plans; accounting technicians undertaking audits; nurses prescribing drug treatment) (Chaston 1993:169-170).

However, staff not belonging to any professional body should be adequately trained if they are to deliver good service to the public. Well trained service employees who are not empowered to constantly look for ways of improving service quality are a waste of precious resources (Dyamond 1990:35).

The selection of staff who are in direct contact with clients should take due account of qualifications, experience and personality, as well as of the specific characteristics of each interface situation and degree of discretion permitted (OECD 1987:122).

Frontline employees should be empowered to do their jobs. Empowered individuals know that their jobs belong to them. Given a say in how things are done, employees feel more responsible. When they feel responsible, they show more initiative in their work, get more done, and enjoy the work more (Wellins **et al.** 1991:22).

Frontline people cannot deliver service if they are not adequately trained. Unless people are willing to make the effort to satisfy customers, service delivery will fall flat on its face. Willingness is a state of mind created by the example set by top management. At every step employees will test management's sincerity. One of the ways they will test that sincerity is in the authority they are given to deliver service. Without authority they will not be capable of satisfying the customer and service delivery will fail (Maguire 1991:24).

Managing by goals is partly a self-management process through which individuals play a leading role in aligning and creating their goals. They take responsibility for negotiating agreements and making adjustments when the situation changes. This scenario is very different from one in which individuals are passive, just waiting to be told what to do and when to change. Managing by goals requires that individuals see themselves as powerful. They must know they can make a difference. It also requires individuals to see themselves as team members and as important performers in a larger system (McLagan 1991:70).

To succeed in this role, individuals need according to McLagan (1991:70) to:

O   Cultivate a self image as a powerful team player by contributing ideas to the group effort, cooperating with the other players, and showing an active interest in the organisation's success.

O   Develop knowledge of the organisation and its customers by asking questions, paying attention to any internal communications or publications, and reading relevant journals.

○ Refine communication skills by listening carefully, asking questions, and stating ideas and opinions clearly.

○ Make goals and goal management a high priority by setting aside time to talk to customers, managers, and colleagues.

4.4.3 Organizational competence

The process of enhancing value added processes in the private sector is greatly assisted by the fact that organizations usually have accounting systems which provide data on the various input costs associated with the production of goods or services. This information can be used to prioritize which activities offer significant opportunities for cost reduction. Unfortunately, the traditional accounting philosophy within the public sector has been an orientation towards determining that total expenditure is within the budget and employees are not misappropriating funds (Chaston 1993:171).

If the public organizations are suddenly required to be more responsive, to cope with resource availability problems and rapidly changing market conditions, then they need to change their rigid hierarchical systems. At best all one can suggest is that management should seek to develop the most appropriate structure through which to fulfil the assigned service provision responsibilities. In adopting this approach there is, however adequate evidence to suggest that fulfilling certain objectives will prove beneficial (Chaston 1993:175).

These, according to Chaston (1993:175-176) include:

❖ Creating flatter organizations by seeking to reduce the number of levels within the structure.

❖ Delegating decision-making as far down the organization as possible and concurrently permitting the most junior of staff the opportunity to gain a high degree of personal control over their assigned work tasks.

❖ Ensuring there are effective communication channels to permit the rapid, accurate flow of information down, up and across the organization.

❖ Where solutions require inter-departmental inputs, moving from a rigid functional system to one based upon multi-disciplinary teams of either a temporary or permanent nature, depending on the nature of the task being undertaken.

Every organization's most important operating challenge for future will be to create an atmosphere that fosters high level of personal commitment and performance. This challenge will require individuals, managers and the organisation's leaders to take aggressive actions to move toward the process of managing by goals (McLagan 1991:69). Thus customer-focused goals play an important part in building a customer-focused organisation.

Some of the disadvantages of goal setting even though they are by far out weighted by the advantages, are as listed below. The process can be time consuming and complex to administer, feedback on expectations from multiple customers can be confusing and conflicting, changing goals can be difficult because the process requires a flexible and streamline approach and lastly but not least, the process requires the participation of top management, extensive training and pilot testing (Milliman et al. 1995:142). However, goal setting has the potential of effecting improved service delivery.

5. STEPS TO IMPROVED SERVICE DELIVERY

Improving service delivery is a continuous progressive process, not a once-for-all task. As standards are raised, higher targets must be set. Implementing a service delivery improvement programme can best be illustrated as an eight-step cycle:

5.1 Identifying the customer

The starting point is to establish who the recipients of service are. This is not as straightforward as it may appear, since many public services have a variety of customers such as the aged, the disabled and women, whose requirements do not coincide (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:26). However the first question any manager in the public sector must answer is, "who is our customer?" That's the issue that underpins all strategy, and the one that trips up so many efforts to become world class (Manning 1991:225).

Every public institution has customers. For some people, customers are the end users who pay for or use the organisation's goods and services. For others, the relationship with the end users is indirect, such as patients being the 'customers' of the Department of Health via hospitals, clinics or doctors. A customer relationship often exists between divisions of an institution such as personnel, finance and provisioning or between job functions such as secretariat and management. It is simply a matter of who is supplying support for whom (McLagan 1991:21). After establishing who the customers are, their needs and priorities should also be established.

5.2 Establish the customer's needs and priorities

The customer's needs and priorities will be the starting point for the setting of standards. Since delivering on standards will involve decisions about resources, it

is essential to have accurate information about what customers really want. This will require systematic, regular consultation, using objective methods which ensure that the views of all customers, including potential customers, are represented. Particular care must be taken to seek out the views of those who have previously been denied access to services, and those who may find it difficult to speak up for themselves (Batho Pele .White Paper 1997:26). The most effective way of understanding and responding to customers' needs is to put oneself in their position and try to understand why they choose to be one's customers (Smith 1995:7).

As mentioned above, information on customers' needs is very vital in setting service standards, however, it is unfortunate that most senior managers still need to understand that the real purpose of collecting information is not to improve their control over employee performance, but to provide a support system to enhance the capabilities of the employee to make better decisions and to provide the customer with an accurate statement of the status of their request for service (Chaston 1993:179). Information seeking should therefore be about what customers really want.

Successful institutions spend lots of energy and money trying to find out what their customers want. Every member of staff gets involved and all are encouraged to make it their 'business' to learn about customers and their needs. Every department gets involved too (Blem 1995:20).

Flynn (1993:148) states that, the starting point for designing a service for the user rather than for the provider is to find out what the existing and potential users think about the service. Even if people have no choice at all it is worth finding out how they perceive the service and what preferences they have.

More than one method will almost certainly be needed, for example, written questionnaires are unlikely to elicit helpful responses from people whose standard

of literacy is not very high; and some members of the public may feel intimidated from expressing their true opinions if asked questions by government officials (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:26).

However Flynn (1993:148) states that, there are various techniques such as listening and focus groups for finding out what users think. The simplest is to listen to the employees who are in contact with them. While these contact, or 'frontline,' staff will not necessarily give an unbiased view, they certainly know more about the users than management do. However if it is not feasible or appropriate to engage people who are in contact with the customers, there are ways of listening to the users without needing to rely on those frontline people as intermediaries. Specially convened user groups, sometimes called 'focus' groups, can be useful ways of testing reactions to services or trying out new ideas for services (Flynn 1993:148).

Systematic analysis of complaints can also be a useful source of information. Only by following up individual complaints will the organisation know if there is something wrong. Complaints are an opportunity for improvements (Flynn 1993:149).

5.3   Establish the current service baseline

Accurate information about the current level and quality of service is essential in order to decide where and how to make improvements. Questions like the following can be raised. How long does the average customer in a public office have to wait before being attended to? How long does it take to reply to letters or telephone enquiries? How long does it take to process applications, licences, permits etc.? Is information to customers provided in a language which they can easily understand? What resources are consumed in delivering a particular service? A thorough scrutiny of organisational arrangements, work processes and practices involved in delivering the services provided as well as the motivation and skills of

staff will be required to establish the current baseline (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:27).

The baseline mentioned above is all about service, poor service quality is costly, waste, rework, duplication of effort, and the need for double checking and monitoring of work can add between 15 per cent and 50 per cent of the total cost of service. Much of that cost is avoidable and unnecessary (Foster **et al.** 1989:55). Thus, a thorough investigation into these costs will culminate in establishing the present baseline and the need for service improvements.

The Department of Home Affairs has recently established a baseline for the processing of documents within prescribed time frames in dealing with identity books, birth and death certificates, passports, visas, marriage certificates, citizenship, refugee affairs, repatriation and permanent residence (The Star Thursday April 2 1998). Establishing service baseline will more often than not identify the improvement gap between service demand and capability to provide service.

5.4   Identifying the 'improvement gap'

The 'improvement gap' is the gap between what customers want, and the level and quality of service currently provided. Closing this gap is the prime aim of a service delivery improvement programme. Accurate identification of customers' needs, and of the current service baseline will enable targets to be set for improvement in a systematic, prioritised way, taking into account the availability of resources (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:27).

One of the most appropriate methods of closing the gap between what customers want and the level and quality of service currently provided, is to frequently talk to customers or customers representatives (McLagan 1991:40). Thus, customers or

their representatives will be able to articulate their service delivery expectations which may lead to improved service provision.

If the performance of the institution is below the customers expectation, they (the customers) will be dissatisfied; if performance equals expectation, they will be satisfied; and if performance exceeds expectation, they will be very pleased and even excited (Blem 1995:24). So, the identification of 'improvement gap' is very vital in delivering good customer service.

5.5 Set service standards

Once the 'improvement gap' has been identified, standards can be set, and progressively raised for closing the gap. Service standards are commitments to provide a specified level and quality of service to individual customers at any given point in time. Standards are different from targets, which express long-term aims for the ultimate level and quality of service to be achieved. Service standards must cover customers' main requirements, e.g. accessibility of service, response times, turnaround times, accuracy, courtesy, the provision of information, and dealing with complaints (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:27). Thus, standardizing some aspects of the service process is often desirable in providing consistent service. quality (Zeithaml et al. 1990:82).

Standards are performance measures that are needed to determine how well one must perform and how one will know if one has succeeded (Spangenberg 1994:73). However measurement problems in the public sector contribute to differences in decision-making behaviour.

The lack of a clearly defined bottom line in the public sector leads to a focus on inputs and budgets, not outputs and productivity measures. Thus, meeting the

budget becomes an important measure, not just an input tool as in the private sector (Watson et al. 1997:392).

Service standards must be relevant and meaningful to the individual user. This means that they must cover the aspects of service which matter most to users, as revealed by the consultation process, and they must be expressed in terms which are relevant and easily understood. Standards must also be precise and measurable, so that users can judge for themselves whether they are receiving what was promised or not (Green Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery 1996:5).

The standards should be measures of acceptable performance results which could include a tolerance range within which deviations will be acceptable. Standards can be set for intermediate stages and the final output. Actual performance will be measured against the standards of performance. The measurements will usually be at predetermined times (Fox et al. 1991:228-229).

5.6   Gearing for delivery

Ensuring that service standards are met, is not solely the responsibility of those directly involved in delivering the service, but depends on the whole organisation being geared up to support the commitments that have been made. The service delivery improvement programme, approved by the minister/MEC/other executing authority should set out how standards of service will be improved, and how the organisation will be geared up to deliver them. For example, monitoring and reporting systems which will enable senior management to check on progress, and take remedial action where necessary will be needed (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:27).

The personnel involved should include the senior managers of functional areas and divisional directors who work with their subordinates to put together large-scale

implementation plans. These plans would include programmes, budgets and procedures. The implementation of strategy will involve management which will, according to Wheelen & Hunger (1987:229), include planning, organising, staffing and directing. David (1986:67) also states that strategies are not the end result of the strategic management process. Strategic thought has to be translated into strategic action. Strategy implementation is an operationally oriented process because implementation objectives must be established and resources allocated and utilised effectively and efficiently in pursuing strategic objectives.

Management information system will be required to provide data on the unit costs of key services. Human resource training, supervision and appraisal system will need to be refocused on service delivery; and senior management must ensure that human and financial resources are shifted from inefficient and unnecessary activities and used instead to ensure that delivery of service standards can be met (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:27).

5.7   Announcement of service standards

When the foregoing steps have been taken, the organisation will be ready to announce its service standards and launch its service programme. There is no single right method for publishing standards: the key is that all customers and potential customers must know and understand what level and quality of service they can expect to receive, and what recourse they have if standard is not met. The method or methods adopted - more than one will usually be needed - must be tailored to the needs of different customers (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:28).

In order to monitor service performance, the Department of Home Affairs has for example introduced a toll-free complaint hotline (0800601190) which became operational from 2nd April 1998 (The Star Thursday April 2 1998). Thus one can

telephone this department at any time and complain if the service offered is not meeting the expectation of its users.

5.8 Monitoring delivery against standards, and publishing results

The final step is to check whether services have met the standards that were set, to announce the results to customers, and to explain the reasons where the service has fallen short of what was promised. These results not only complete the accountability loop, but will provide valuable insights to guide further efforts to improve services in the future (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:28). In implementing the steps to improve service delivery, the difficult context under which public managers are operating should also be taken into consideration.

Public managers function in at least two different cultural contexts ("worlds") which have to be bridged. The political world has a particular moral character and sets distinctive norms for the strategic management process. Simultaneously large segments of the public demand efficiency where the tasks of government are executed without waste (Fox et al. 1991:233). Still others demand equity, fairness and reasonableness. The public manager has to cope with the particular relationships in the public policy process where there are frequently competing constituencies and legislative members. For this the skills of being able to integrate competing viewpoints in decisions are important. Low levels of dogmatism have to be maintained and open-mindedness is important (Fox et al. 1991:233).

6. USE OF CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH
TO RATIONALISE PUBLIC POLICY

It is of importance to explain some crucial terms in the following paragraphs.

6.1 Policy

Wessels (1995:9) describes policy as a complex and dynamic process that determines and details goals and lays down major guidelines for action. It is also a declaration of intent, a specification of objectives and a broad description of the different ways in which particular objectives will be pursued. Policy, therefore, implies conscious actions of an actor or actors in dealing with a situation in such a way as to achieve a particular goal or goals.

6.2 Public policy

The literature of political science contains many definitions of public policy. Sooner or later, it seems, almost everyone who writes about public policy yields to the urge to offer a definition, and does so with greater or less success in the eyes of critics (Anderson 1997:9). However, some definitions by different authors need to be mentioned.

Public policy is concerned with how issues and problems come to be defined and constructed and how they are placed on the political and policy agenda, but it is also the study of how, why and to what effect governments pursue particular courses of action and inaction (Heidenheimer **et al.** 1990:3) or, with what governments do, why they do it, and what difference it makes (Dye 1976:1).

Parsons (1995:3), in an attempt to define public policy, is of the opinion that the idea of public policy assumes that there is a sphere or domain of life which is not private or purely individual, but held in common. He went further to define "public" as comprising "... that dimension of human activity which is regarded as requiring governmental or social regulation or intervention, or at least common action" (Parsons 1995:3). Jenkins (1993:34) referring specifically to **public** policy, described it as "... a set of interrelated decisions taken by a political actor or group

of actors concerning the selection of goals and means of achieving them within a specified situation where these decisions should, in principle, be within the power of these actors to achieve." In other words, public policy refers to the actions of government and non-government institutions such as interest and pressure groups concerned with the making and execution of policy, although not necessarily involved with the policy process at the same time and in the same way.

6.3   Policy-making

The term policy-making usually refers to the actions and thought processes that produce a policy statement (Hanekom 1987:13). In the process of deciding on public policy, there are many moments during which a deliberate choice has to be made between alternatives, with a view to arriving at a final statement of the intention of the legislator, of the actions to be taken and of the objectives to be achieved (Hanekom 1987:13).

According to Ströh (1992:20) policy-making has to do with deciding on and spelling out goals in such a manner that actions can be devised to achieve them. Booyens (1993:197) states that policies are means of accomplishing organizational goals and objectives. Policies explain the steps to be followed in achieving goals; they serve as a basis for future decisions and actions; help co-ordinate plans; control performance; and increase consistency of action by increasing the probability that different managers will make similar decisions when faced with similar situations.

Anderson (1997:9) defines a useful concept of policy as a relatively stable, purposive course of action followed by an actor or set of actors in dealing with a problem or matter of concern. This statement focuses on what is actually done instead of what is only proposed or intended, and it differentiates a policy from a decision, which is essentially a choice among competing alternatives.

Anderson (1997:10-12) further states that, firstly, the definition links policy to purposive or goal-oriented action rather than to random behaviour or chance occurrences. Public policies in modern political systems do not, by and large, just happen. They are instead designed to accomplish specified goals or produce definite results, although these are not always achieved.

Secondly, policies consists of courses or patterns of action taken over time by government officials rather than their separate, discrete decisions. A policy includes not only the decision to adopt a law or make a rule on some topic but also the subsequent decisions that are intended to enforce or implement the law or rule (Anderson 1997:10).

Thirdly, public policies emerge in respond to policy demands, or those claims for action or inaction on some public issues made by other actors - private citizens, group representatives, or legislators and other public officials - upon government officials and agencies. Such demands may range from general insistence that a municipal government for example do something about traffic congestion to a specific call for the national government to prohibit theft of pet dogs and cats for sale to medical and scientific research organisations (Anderson 1997:10-11).

Fourthly, policy involves what governments actually do, not just what they intend to do or what they say they are going to do. If a legislature enacts a law requiring employers to pay no less than a stated minimum wage but nothing is done to enforce the law, and subsequently little change occurs in economic behaviour, it seems reasonable to content that public policy actually takes the form of non-regulation of wages (Anderson 1997:11).

Fifthly, a public policy may be either positive or negative. Some form of overt governmental action may deal with a problem on which action is demanded (positive), or governmental officials may decide to do nothing on some matter on

which government involvement was sought (negative). In other words, governments can follow a policy of **laissez-faire**, or hands off, either generally or on some aspects of economic activity (Anderson 1997:12).

Sixly, public policy, at least in its positive form, is based on law and is authoritative. Members of a society usually accept as legitimate the facts for example that taxes must be paid, import controls must be obeyed, and highway speed limits must be complied with, unless one wants to run the risk of fines, jail sentences, or other legally imposed sanctions or disabilities (Anderson 1997:12). Thus, public policy has an authoritative, legally coercive quality that the policies of private organizations do not have.

6.4 Policy process

According to Anderson (1997:39-41) the policy process comprises of: problem identification and agenda setting, formulation, adoption, implementation and evaluation.

6.4.1 Problem identification and agenda setting

In the public sector the legislature is responsible for setting guidelines for official action. These guidelines, or public policies, are future oriented and subject to continuous review by the legislature. It is the task of the legislature to determine what aught to be an ideal situation or an ideal course of action; in other words, the legislature should be creative when visualising courses of action for the attainment of societal goals or the resolving of societal problems (Hanekom 1987:5). However, no public policy can be formulated without first identifying a public problem and the setting of the agenda.

A policy problem can be defined as a condition or situation that produces needs or dissatisfaction among people and for which relief or redress through governmental action is sought. Such conditions for example, as dirty air, unwholesome food, the practice of abortion, urban congestion, crowded prisons, and global warming are conditions that may become problems if they produce sufficient anxiety or dissatisfaction to cause people to seek a remedy (Anderson 1997:94).

To be converted into a problem a condition must also be seen as an appropriate topic for governmental action and, further, as something for which there is a possible governmental remedy or solution. A problem is a problem only if something can be done about it (Wildavsky 1979:42). Quite a few conditions will not be transformed into problems because they do not qualify as matters that government can handle appropriately and effectively. Putting a man on the moon for example, became a problem for policy-makers only after it became technically possible to do so in the late 1950's (George et al. 1978:90).

Although many problems are persistent, how they are defined may change as values and conditions change. Conditions that at one time are accepted as the normal order of things may later because of social change, be treated as problems. For centuries, for example, wife-beating, child abuse, and other forms of family violence were private matters except, perhaps, when the regular criminal laws, as against homicide, were violated. They are no longer so treated. Changes in public attitudes, media attention and the women's movement, for example, changed the notions about acceptable conduct in family matters (Anderson 1997:95).

What characteristics or qualities make a problem public? Essentially, public problems are those which affect a substantial number of people and have broad effects, including consequences for persons not directly involved (Dewey 1927:15-16).

It should be stressed that whether a condition or situation is regarded as a problem depends not only on its objective dimensions, but also, quite importantly, upon how it is perceived by people or; put differently, how it is socially constructed (Anderson 1997:98).

One frequently reads about demands being made by this group or that individual or some public official for action by a governmental body on some problem, whether it be for example rough streets or crime therein, disintegration of the family, or waste and fraud in defence contracting. Of the thousands and thousands of demands made upon governments, only a small number will receive serious consideration by public policy-makers due to the scarcity of money to serve all the needs of the public. In other words, each problem must compete for official attention because legislators and executives have limited time and resources. Decisions to consider some problems mean that others will not be taken up, at least for the time being. The demand that policy-makers choose to or feel compelled to act on at a given time, or at least appear to be acting on, constitute the policy agenda (Anderson 1997:99).

To achieve agenda status, a public problem must be converted into an issue, or a matter requiring governmental attention. Eyestone (1978:3) states that an issue arises when a public with a problem seeks or demands governmental action, and there is public disagreement over the best solution to the problem. A rising crime rate may for example be defined as a public problem, but disagreement over what, if anything, government should do about it creates an issue.

At the national level one can identify legislative, executive, administrative and judicial agendas (Anderson 1997:100). The number of people affected and the intensity of their interest will vary across the issue on an agenda. Some matters will attract much interest from the broad range of citizens and officials; others will

attract the attention primarily of policy specialists and those who have a direct stake in them (Anderson 1997:101).

Sinclair (1989:51) suggests that an agenda is best conceptualized as roughly pyramidal in form. A limited number of highly salient issues will be at the top; as one moves towards the base there will be an increasing number of progressively less and less salient issues.

In his study of presidential agenda setting, Light (1991:69) found that in selecting major domestic issues on which to advocate action, American presidents are motivated by three primary considerations, amongst them is electoral benefits, which are especially important during a president's first term. Certain issues are seen as critical to electoral success, and as vital in building and maintaining electoral coalitions. Based on the above extract, it is befitting to say that, in their first term, American presidents are mostly customer-focused in their approaches. However, it should be noted that it is in the nature of many governmental services that not all consumers can be satisfied the whole time (Myers & Lacey 1996:342).

6.4.2 Formulation of policy

Policy formulation involves developing pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action (often called alternatives, proposals, or options) for dealing with public problems. Policy-makers may be confronted with several competing proposals for dealing with a problem; or they may have to struggle with devising their own alternative (Anderson 1997:113).

Policy formulation does not always culminate in law, executive order, or administrative rule. Policy-makers may decide not to take action on a problem, but instead leave it alone, to let matters work themselves out (Anderson 1997:113-114). Although the main movers and shakers in formulating public policies in the

executive branch are the political appointees in departments and bureaus, career civil servants themselves provide a productive source of new ideas (Starling 1998:60). Customer-focus civil servants are able to provide new ideas because they consult with the citizens. Consultation will give citizens the opportunity of influencing decisions about public services, by providing objective evidence which will determine service delivery priorities (Batho Pele White Pater 1997:16). The effective service employee needs to know how to interact well with customers. These skills are built over days of training and practice, not in few hours (Dyamond 1990:34).

Policies to increase responsiveness must discriminate according to the types of client, policy and interests found in each interface situation. Such policies must be taken in a decentralised manner and engage the enthusiasm and expertise of public servants, especially those working at the interface (OECD 1987:118).

Traditionally public officials and thus by implication public institutions are accused of narrow-mindedness, rigidity, lack of initiative, self-interest, disregard for societal values, secrecy, facelessness and failure to communicate with the public at large (Hanekom 1987:30). Whether these accusations be true or false, Hanekom (1987:30) states that it is true that the shaping of public policies - and thus the performance of public institutions and individual public functionaries - is to a greater or lesser extent influenced by public opinion and participation by the public in matters they believe affect them directly, together with what is perceived to be in the public interest. Voice may be generated directly by those who use, or are affected by, government services. Alternatively, or in addition, the providers of those services may seek the views of their customers through service delivery surveys (SDS) or similar mechanisms (Myers & Lacey 1996:336). The Nicaraguan public sector has embarked for example on customer surveys aimed at affected institutions, and also aimed at households as a means to help inculcate a new culture of customer orientation (Myers & Lacey 1996:339).

Anderson (1997:117) states further that, interest groups have a major role in policy formation, often going to the legislature with specific proposals for legislation. A customer-focused government will always solicit citizenry participation in formulating policies. In South Africa after many submissions where received from the public, the White Paper in higher education lead to the Higher Education Act, 101/1997.

6.4.3 Policy adoption

A policy is adopted with legislative majority (Dunn 1994:16). What is typically involved at the policy adoption stage is not selection from among a number of full-blown policy alternatives but rather action on preferred policy alternative for which the proponents of action think they can win approval, even though it does not provide all they might like (Anderson 1997:134).

The most salient point to mention is that according to Anderson (1997:134) in democracies, the task of making policy decisions is most closely identified with the legislature, which is designed to represent the interest of the populace. This is akeen to customer-focus government. Lastly it must be remembered that although private individuals and organizations also participate in making policy decisions, the formal authority to decide rests with public officials: legislators, executives, administrators and judges. However, this authority by public officials to decide, should be done in a responsible manner for openness and transparency are the hallmarks of a democratic government (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:20).

6.4.4 Policy implementation

Although policy-making and policy implementation are two distinct and distinguished functions, they are so closely interrelated that separating them is difficult, if not

impossible or impracticable; for example, the way policies are interpreted and translated into action could have important policy implications (Hanekom 1987:55).

In actuality it is frequently difficult, sometimes impossible, to neatly separate a policy's adoption from its implementation. Statutes sometimes do not do much beyond setting some policy goals and creating a framework of guidelines and restrictions for their realization (Anderson 1997:214). Much that occurs during policy implementation may appear to be routine, tedious, or mundane, and may be performed with limited awareness of it by the public (Anderson 1997:214).

However, according to Ripley & Franklin (1986:4-5) implementation consists of those players, organizations, procedures, techniques, and target groups (for example, beneficiaries or regulated firms) that are involved in carrying policies, into effect in an endeavour to accomplish their goals.

Most of the implementation studies take either top-down or bottom-up approach. Top-down focus on the actions of top level officials, the factors affecting their behaviour, whether policy goals are attained, and whether policy was reformulated on the basis of experience. Bottom-up contend that this approach gives too much attention to top-level officials and either ignores or underestimates the efforts of lower-level (or street-level) officials to either avoid policy or divert it to their own purpose (Anderson 1997:216). Implementing policy should focus on lower-level officials and how they interact with their clients. This again promotes customer-focused government. Managers and supervisors must be trained to model, coach and reinforce the skills they expect of their service employees. Other employees, not in direct contact with the customer, also need to be made aware of the importance of their jobs in relating to the customer and have the skills to identify and meet the expectations of their internal customers (Dyamond 1990:34).

6.4.5 Policy evaluation

Public policy evaluation has often been referred to as the last stage of the policy process, where those who determined and implemented the policy and those who were affected by the policy attempt to find out if it has really worked. However, policy evaluation does not necessarily take place only after implementation of policy, but could occur as a continuous process throughout the policy process (Hanekom 1987:89).

Dunn (1994:16) states that, auditing and accounting units in government, determine whether executive agencies, legislatures, and courts are in compliance with statutory requirements of a policy and achieving its objectives. However, much policy evaluation is performed by non-governmental actors such as pressure and interest groups. They also provide the general public with information, publicize policy success and failure, sometimes act as advocates for unpopular causes, and occasionally provide representation for those unrepresented in the policy process, for example such as the aged confined to negligently run nursing homes or exploited farm workers (Anderson 1997:280-281). Providing information is one of the most powerful tools at the customer's disposal in exercising his or her right to good service (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:19). Administrations may be made more responsive by the careful design of policies and programmes, and the means by which they will be implemented. The selection of policy instruments, specification of administrative tasks and performance measures, and comprehensive reviews of policy coherence, as seen at the point of implementation, are particularly important (OECD 1987:118). Customer-focus approach to rationalise public policy should not be done in isolation but in a planned and systematic manner.

7. CUSTOMER FOCUS APPROACH FOR
· RATIONALISING PLANNING

The customers of the public service are made up of the public.

The public has three faces:

O   everybody as beneficiary is a member of the public who receives a service
       from the public service;

O   the public as paymaster whose direct or indirect taxes finance the working
       of Government; and

O   the public as a voter who votes governments in or out of office (Tampoe, in
       Lovell 1994:140).

The above sketched scenario therefore presupposes that customers, namely the
public, are the pivotal point of every public institution and that any rational planning
should take that into cognisance.

7.1   Planning

According to Andrews (1982:138) planning refers to the functions that are
undertaken to -

❑   determine objectives;

❑   allocate resources; and

❑   compile plan(s) or programme(s) for the realisation of such objectives.

Similarly, McRae & Page (1967:41) argue that planning involves decisions on
priorities of financial, material and manpower resources. However, these authors
argue that prioritising is not easy in the public service as it involves making

preference of one service over another where both services are an integral part of a whole.

In the public sector context it can be argued as is explained by Cloete (1978:27-29) that planning has to follow after policy-making where policy constitutes a statement of an intention to satisfy a societal need. As such planning is a set of processes which must be carried out to find the best course of action which has been identified and described with the policy statement (Fox et al. 1991:47). This view of planning in the public sector context is also shared by Starling (1982:189) when he states that policy is a statement of goals and of the relative importance attached to each goal. These policies are translated into a plan by means of the planning process where policy goals are specified as specific objectives to be attained. A programme is a proposed set of specific actions intended to implement the plan (Starling 1982:189).

According to Starling (1998:208) planning is reasoning about how an organization will get where it wants to go. It's essence is to see opportunities and threats in the future and to exploit or combat them by decisions made in the present.

Nowadays the public sectors of some countries have drastically transformed from what they have been. Indeed, it is true to say that the most successful and far-reaching ones are those which started from a lucid and coherent conceptual basis, such is the case in New Zealand, for instance, where the reform is guided by two objectives not only the need for more efficient public sector, but also one which responds better to the policy aims of elected governments (Myers & Lacey 1996:332). Thus, these kinds of reform help the public officials to plan the execution of their programmes in a proper manner. In the United Kingdom, the original aims behind the reform were to create a more professional civil service which would carry out its tasks in a more professional manner. Over time, however, a new objective was added, customer satisfaction (Myers & Lacey 1996:332). It

was The Citizen's Charter which articulated the need for the public service to become more customer focused by raising the expectations of the public by publishing the standards for service provision (Tampoe, in Lovell 1994:141). Thus, setting standards is an aid for improving service delivery.

7.1.1 Kinds of planning

Planning has a variety of meanings. Starling (1982:186-189) and Gortner (1981:229-231) distinguish the following meanings in which planning is used in a public management context:

* National planning is constituted by a situation where a government attempts to influence the national production process in terms of the amounts and types of goods and services that will be produced.

* Development planning is used by developing nations to set out the main measures that are needed to improve the national output and the standard of living of their citizens.

* City planning, urban planning or regional planning. These plans are concerned primarily with the physical location and design of development project such as housing projects, roads and other physical infrastructure.

* Management planning can be seen as reasoning about how a public organisation will reach its objectives in the future by a proper assessment of opportunities and threats and the taking of correct decisions at present.

* Budgeting planning could be viewed as part of managerial planning. A budgetary plan shows how the expected revenues in a particular period will be raised and spent.

Central to the management of government's financial resources is the budget. Administrators devote much time and energy in preparing it. Its adoption represents a critical juncture in the policy-planning process, for few major programs are conceivable without the expenditure of money (Starling 1998:13). Budgeting, however, is important for other reasons as well. Because it is the means by which public officials allocate and raise resources to achieve social objectives, budgeting answers the bedrock question of politics: who gets how much for what purpose, and who pays for it? In this sense, the budget provides an X-ray of the values and priorities of a free people (Starling 1998:13).

After the budget has been approved by the legislature, then activities can be started. The amounts agreed upon in the budget are actually estimates which are limited. One of the requirements that the budget should achieve, is namely, the meaningful arrangement of goals, priorities and alternatives solving methods, that are important for effective decision-making (Van Straaten 1985:412).

According to Kotzé et al. (1984:135) priority determination must as a result of scarce funds in the draft budget, be rationalised by preference of goods and/or services. The budget as an embracing policy document includes the regulation of information which aims at quantitative and qualitative provision of goods and/or services. Thereafter it will reflect the nature and extent of the meaningful satisfaction of goods and/or services with limited resources at the end (Van Straaten 1984a:11).

Plans, as the result of the planning process, are also often classified by their time-frame. Short-term plans usually cover a period of less than one year. Intermediate-term plans range from one to five years and plans that exceed five years are considered to be long-term plans (Robbins 1980:132-133).

In public sector planning, long-term plans as a fundamental redirection of the ends and means of the organisation, will probably be a part of the policy-making process which will generally be decided upon by the political office-bearers after consultation with public managers (Fox **et al.** 1991:48). Intermediate-term plans would normally be part of the executive functions of government for which public managers are primarily responsible although still under the supervision of political office-bearers. Short-term plans would normally be classified as programmes giving effect to policy statements and planning actions. These programmes are normally the responsibility of the public managers (Fox **et al.** 1991:48).

7.1.2 The rational planning model

According to Starling (1998:209), planners are acting rationally if they undertake the following five interrelated steps:

(i)   Identify the problem or problems to be solved and the opportunities to be seized.

(ii)   Design alternative solutions or courses of action (i.e., policies, plans, and programs) to solve the problems, or seize the opportunities and forecast the consequences and effectiveness of each alternative.

(iii) Compare and evaluate the alternatives with each other and with the forecasted consequences of unplanned development, and choose the alternative whose probable consequences would be preferable.

(iv)   Develop a plan of action for implementing the alternative selected, including budgets, project schedules, regulatory measures, and the like.

(v)   Maintain the plan on a current basis through feedback and review of information.

According to Starling (1998:209), although these steps are treated separately and in linear sequence, in actual practice, they represent a cyclic process. Evaluation

procedures, for example, enter into the process at the outset in the identification of problems and opportunities; they also influence the design stages as constraints that must be taken into account, for this reason, it is probably preferable to present the model not as a list of steps but as a dynamic and interactive process.

7.2 Aids for planning

There are many possible aids that can be employed, such as, democratic participation, programming techniques and the use of computers, to enhance public management planning. For the purposes of this topic, only democratic participation will be dealt with as it is mostly informed by customer-focus approach.

7.2.1 Democratic participation

Public management planning is not a strictly rational process but is influenced by politics, complexity and unpredictable human behaviour. The public manager must realise that planning efforts will have to take cognisance of this views of the people that are being served (Fox et al. 1991:55). In this sense public planning even at the managerial level should generally provide for democratic participation.

The question remains whether it is possible for planning to be truly a community-based process, rather than simply a project-driven effort that legitimizes and assist the reorganization of the environment for the benefit of developers. According to Tauxe (1995:479) to be so, it must not only democratize formal institutions and procedures, but also make room for non-bureaucratic discourse and organizational forms.

The democratic participation could include participation by employees and the public being served. The eventual acceptability of the results of public management planning will be enhanced greatly if it makes provision for involvement of relevant

constituencies through democratic participation (Fox **et al.** 1991:55). Management planning is essential for improving public service delivery. However, the public service cannot develop a truly service-oriented culture without the active participation of the wider community, including the private sector and citizens themselves (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:23).

In the United Kingdom 'The Citizen's Charter' was the first noble idea of John Mayor's premiership, and was first expounded formally in a Government White Paper in 1991 (Schofield & Ford 1995:88). The Central theme of the White Paper is the argument that the relationship between the public services and the citizen should be redefined, with the citizen being increasingly characterised as a consumer of public services empowered to influence service provision by the introduction of greater choice and competition in the public services area, and by ensuring that the 'consumer' receives more information about the quality and efficiency of service provision (Schofield & Ford 1995:88). Although the ideal is that democratic participation should approach the level of real citizen power in the case of public management planning this is not always the case in practical reality (Fox **et al.** 1991:55). It has been found that even where explicit opportunities are provided for citizen participation in public planning the thrust has been to manipulate citizen groups, provide therapeutic activities for citizens or at the most offer degrees of token participation (Fox **et al.** 1991:55).

Improving public service delivery, matters not only to the individual users of services, but also to the whole community. As part of the consultation exercise, national and provincial departments must involve representatives of the wider community in discussions about the future development of public services (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:24). Participation by wider community can result in influencing decision-making in a positive direction.

8. CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH FOR
RATIONALISING DECISION-MAKING

Decision-making means selecting from various alternatives one course of action (Starling 1998:249). As such, it cannot be divorced from the planning process.

In any public institution, officials make decisions within their institutions. As an example, high-level public managers determine their institutions' objectives and administrative policies, middle-level public managers decide on merit ratings of employees, and junior-level public managers decide on supervisory procedures (Fox et al. 1991:134).

Decision-making is not the exclusive domain of public managers, employees in non-managerial jobs also have to make decisions that are bound to effect their own jobs and those of their co-workers, and the institutions within which they are employed (Fox et al. 1991:134). Robbins (1984:57) defined decision-making as, making a choice from two or more alternatives.

According to Simon (1957a:1) the task of deciding pervades the entire organization quite as much as does the task of doing. Starling (1998:249) states that there are at least four steps in decision-making:

❏ identifying the problem (or opportunity);

❏ gathering information;

❏ making a decision(s); and

❏ implementing and evaluating the decision(s).

8.1   Identifying the problem

First, decision-makers should establish what kind of problem exists. More specifically, are they facing a generic or unique problem? According to Starling (1998:250) most of the problems that an administrator faces are generic, that is, they are part of a pattern of problems stemming from underlying cause. Since this underlying cause is seldom obvious, the tendency of the administrator is to view the problem as a unique, isolated event and to treat it as such. Thus, administrators often find themselves treating symptoms rather than establishing rules or principles that remove the root cause (Starling 1998:250). For example, unproductiveness of staff may be as a result of lack of training or skills. Thus, administrators might call for quick fixes instead of getting to the root of the problem. Drucker (1966:166) argues that a major failure of the Kennedy administration in the United States of America was its tendency to treat generic problems as unique. In the name of pragmatism, its members refused to develop rules and principles and insisted on treating everything on its own merit.

8.2   Gathering information

With the problem accurately defined, the administrator then turns to framing the response. Here, careful attention should be given to what is called the upper and lower limits of the decision.

Sorenson (1963:22-42) argues that upper limits of a decision refers to the ever-present limitations that determine how far the administrator can go. He lists the following as upper limits of decision:
1. The limit of permissibility (Is it legal? Will others accept it?).
2. The limits of available resources.
3. The limits of available time.

4.   The limits of previous commitments.

5.   The limits of available information.

According to Starling (1998:251) the above list is self-explanatory, but the limits of available information, merits emphasis simply because administrators rely so much on the past experiences in making decisions.

Meaningful and rational decision-making cannot take place unless the decision-makers have relevant information available at their disposal. In the field of public administration, information can be programmed with the help of information system, this can be done with the help of the computers. The primary function of a management information system is to transmit data quickly to the managers, so that the information can be used for control and decision-making purposes (Laufer 1975:389).

In order to gather more and relevant information, the citizenry participation should be highly encouraged. The public service cannot develop a truly service-oriented culture without the active participation of the wider community including the private sector and citizens themselves (Batho Pele White Paper 1997:23). Statistics should also be used to gather more information. Modern statistics is based on the concept of probability; it deals with making judgement regarding the probability of a characteristic occurring in a population (e.g. a certain level of income) on the basis of information derived from a small sample of that population (Starling 1998:252).

Lower limits of a decision refers to what, at least, must occur for the problem to be solved. For example, Germany knew, at the outbreak of World War I, that it could win if, and only if, two minimum conditions were met. Germany would (condition I) put up weak resistance against Russia, thus allowing Russia to (condition II) concentrate forces for a knockout blow to France. But as Russia began to penetrate deeper and deeper into East Prussia, the German general staff decided to pull forces

from the Western front. Condition II therefore, was not met and the chance for victory was lost (Drucker 1966:132).

Barnard (1938:202-205) introduced the idea quite similar to that of lower limits. He calls it the limiting (strategic) factor in decision-making. It is the factor whose control, in the right form, at the right place and time, will establish a new system of condition which meets the purpose. Thus, if one wishes to increase the yield of grain in a certain field, one has to analyse the soil, it may appear that the soil lacks potash; potash may be said to be the strategic (or limiting) factor.

Starling (1998:253) argues that, it is also generally a good idea to consult those who will be most affected by the decision, checking one's facts with theirs and above all, listening to what they have to say. Consultation will give citizens the opportunity of influencing decisions about public services, by providing objective evidence which will determine service delivery priorities. Consultation can also help to foster a more participative and co-operative relationship between providers and users of public services (Batho Pele White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery 1997:16).

The gathering and supply of information to decision-maker in a decision-making process is influenced by **inter alia** the correctness of the calculations and the speed at which the information is compiled and made available. As an aid, the computer can effectively be used by systems analysts to retrieve the collected data for useful information for decision-makers (Van Straaten 1984:56).

8.3   Making a decision(s)

After gathering facts and suggestions, the decision-maker should be ready to begin assessing the various alternatives. According to Starling (1998:254) there are six analytical techniques that can help the administrator in this critical task:

1.   Cost-benefit analysis

2.   Multi-objective models

3.   Decision analysis

4.   System analysis

5.   Operations research

6.   Nominal group technique

8.3.1 Cost-benefit analysis

Cost-benefit analysis is a technique which allows public managers to compare the various decision-alternatives on the basis of the cost/benefit ratio, which is assessed in monetary value. In other words, if R80 is used on a programme which produces R100 in outcome-value, the effort can be said to have a cost/benefit ration of .80 as opposed to a programme which produces R120 in outcome for the same input as has a 0.66 cost/benefit ratio. It can be said that the lowest ratio alternative should be recommended as the most optimal economic solution (Fox **et al.** 1991:288).

Planners use techniques such as cost-benefit analysis in order to establish the cost and benefits of each option in decision-making. This involves costing up the advantages and disadvantages of each of the proposed courses of action and selecting the preferred option on the basis of the balance of each calculation (Lawton & Rose 1994:127).

Cloete & Mokgoro (1995:176) postulate cost-benefit analysis as a systematic evaluation of all benefits and costs, tangible and intangible, whether readily quantifiable or difficult to quantify, that will accrue to all members of society if a particular project is needed.

Problems arise firstly in trying to forecast events and make realistic costings of programmes, and secondly, in making costings of intangibles such as the costing of noise pollution in the case of a new airpost (Lawton & Rose 1994:127). According to Anderson & Settle (1978:1) "... benefit-cost analysis is a tool for systematically developing useful information about desirable and undesirable effects of public sector programs or projects."

Cost-benefit analysis purports to be a way of deciding what society prefers. Where only one option can be chosen from series of options, cost-benefit analysis should supply the decision-maker with information to decide which option is socially most preferred. Governments can take rational decisions if they can follow cost-benefit analysis (Ströh 1992:210). The objective of cost-benefit analysis is to guide the decision-making in the choice of capital projects and expenditures which will maximise the gains to social welfare (Ströh 1992:211). Today the government must do more than assess the benefit of goals, such as cleaner environment, safer products, healthier working conditions, and better mass transit, it must also weigh the cost and other side effects of such action (Starling 1998:257). Improving service delivery, and extended access to public services to all South Africans must be achieved alongside the Government's Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy for reducing public expenditure and creating a more cost-effective public service (Batho Pele White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery 1997:22).

8.3.2 Multi-objective models

Starling (1998:262) states that one limitation of cost-benefit analysis is that it accounts for only one objective, usually an aggregate of all accrued benefit in money terms. For that reason, the decision-maker might want to either replace or supplement it with a newer technique that emphasizes multiple objectives as in multi-objective model. A project can be ranked on an ordinal scale by more than one

criterion, for example, four sites of Waste-treatment plant can be ranked on an ordinal scale by five criteria, as follows:

Ranks of Four Proposed Waste-Treatment Plant sites.

Project	Local Transporta-tion	Land use Planning	Neighbour-hood	Community Economy	Task base
A	4	4	3	2	3
B	2	1	1	4	1
C	3	3	4	3	4
D	1	2	2	1	2

Ranks: most-positive = 1, least positive = 4. Example based on Starling 1998:263.

8.3.3 Decision analysis

Decision analysis can best be understood by referring to the following analogy by Starling (1998:264):

Suppose a general faces the following situation. According to the general's aides, unless he leads his soldiers to safety, all six hundred will die. There are two escape routes. If he takes the first, two hundred soldiers will be saved, if he takes the second, there is a one-third chance that six hundred soldiers will be saved and two-thirds chance that none will be saved. Which route should he take?

Starling (1998:264) states that, in this situation, most people will urge the general to take the second route reasoning that the first involves certain death of four hundred soldiers but that the second offers at least a one-third chance that no one will die. What makes this recommendation surprising is that, though both situations are identical, it does not make sense in light of the first recommendation. The only

difference between the two situations is that, in the first, the general's aides state the problem in terms of live saved; in the second, they state it in terms of live lost.

The point of this exercise is to show that human reasoning is not always as reliable as one might wish. Even when one tries to be coldly logical, one gives quite different answers to the same problem if it is posed in a slightly different way. According to Starling (1998:265) decision analysis is a technique that can help avoid such mental pitfalls by better structuring complex problems. In this approach, the decision is not viewed as isolated because today's decision depend upon the ones one shall make tomorrow. Another technique that helps to improve decision-making is systems analysis.

8.3.4 Systems analysis

Schoderbeck (1971:276) maintains that, "systems analysis is an orderly study of the detailed procedure for collecting, organizing and evaluating information within an organization with the objective of improving control of operations of organizations." Thus, the aim of systems analysis is primarily to help grasp, present and assess the general connections of all components.

When analysing a system, the environmental influences and constraints are identified an measured in terms of their impact at the decision point. In addition, the internal systemic relationships within an organization are identified. At the decision point, all of the significant relationships converge and the relative impacts, both external and internal are weighed. Instead of adopting the first workable solution, in systems analysis where simulation is used, a number of decision rules are tested and the results measured before the best decision is selected and implemented (Hopeman 1969:30).

The systems concept takes as given that the values associated with particular variables are constantly changing. The systems concept further implies an understanding of the relationships of the variables and constants involved and how these relationships will change in the future, hence rational decision-making (Hopeman 1969:31). According to Cleland & King (1972:171) systems analysis is "... an analytic process designed to help a decision-maker select a preferred choice among possible alternatives."

The influence of systems analysis on public administration is made more clearer by the meaning of the word 'system.' A system is a set of objects together with the relationships between the objects and between their attributes (McMillan & Gonzales 1965:1). Nigro & Nigro (1989:259) explain that systems analysis "... means presenting decision-makers with a systematic and comprehensive comparison of the costs and benefits of alternative approaches to a policy goal, taking advantage of techniques variously described as operations research or cost-effectiveness studies."

8.3.5 Operational research

Preceding the arrival of the systems approach in the decision-making centres of government was the use of operational research (OR) (Starling 1998:272). The formal inception of OR may, in fact, be traced to World War II. Faced with acute shortage of men and material and working against the clock, the military turned for assistance to the scientific and engineering community for help in resolving some knotty operation problem. These problems concerned, for example, the most effective setting of the time fuse of a bomb dropped from an aircraft onto submarine; the optional formation of bombers as a function of a target shape; the best bomber-fighter combination to achieve maximum security and still accomplish the mission; the measurement of the effectiveness of arrning merchant ships against enemy aircraft; and the optimal location of radar stations (Starling 1998:272).

Byrd (1975:5) maintains that, "(o)perations research is ... the application of analytical procedures in the analysis of decision-making problems." Most of the above-mentioned definitions alude that, "(o)perations research utilizes the planned approach (scientific method) and an interdisciplinary team in order to represent complex functional relationships for the purposes of providing a quantitative basis for decision-making and uncovering problems for quantitative analysis" (Thierauf & Grosse 1970:4). Quantitative analytic procedures were, for the first time in the public sector implemented by Patric Brown, the governor of California (Byrd 1975:7).

OR (or management science as it is increasingly referred to) and the systems approach share many characteristics, for example, use of interdisciplinary teams, modelling, and sophisticated mathematics, but they are not the same. The scope of the former is narrower: it tends to be concerned with problems that can be represented by mathematical models that can be optimized. For example, a typical OR problem would determine (subject to certain constraints) the optimal (i.e., the very best) location in terms of service for a new fire station or a new bus route in a city (Starling 1998:272). OR tends to be concerned with relatively small problems.

The systems approach, on the other hand, is concerned with problems of greater complexity and abstraction (hence: less emphasis on calculations). Actually, OR is one of the most important inputs of the systems approach. Thus, the relationship between the systems approach and OR is much like between strategy and tactics (Starling 1998:272).

Systems analysis is therefore aimed at the identification and implementing of new alternative solutions as opposed to operations research. "Many operations researchers have confined themselves to problems involving the comparison of a prescribed set of alternatives whereas systems analysis have set out to develop new

ones" (Quade 1969:191). Caiden (1971:196) goes further and state that "(o)perations research is similar to systems analysis, but is confined within boundaries of existing programs and objectives, and it analyses in details the implications of a single set of assumptions."

8.3.6 Nominal group technique

In the crush of daily events, managers forget that they need to interact and communicate with the people who work for them. Hiding behind their desks, they make decisions that frequently have undesired and unanticipated effects on their organizations (Cohen 1988:10). Rather than deal with staff members as living components of a living organism, managers deal with them as abstractions. If this continues long enough, productivity is impaired and the organization ultimately loses its ability to attract resources (Cohen 1988:10-11). Thus, public managers must consult staff and service recipients in order to make sound decisions.

Whatever the precise political framework, public service bodies should design and develop particular services which are their jobs to deliver. They can draw their own expertise, and that of other professionals, undertake research, and consult the service recipients. Once the service is in operation they will receive feedback from service users, from the general public, and from politicians. This can then generate modifications, refinements and developments in the service as a continuing process (Starks 1991:28-29). Because group decision-making is so common in public administration, effective managers must be highly skilled in influencing the group process.

Often, the most critical decisions in organizations are made by committees, teams, task forces, or other groups. A great deal of research shows that consensus decisions arising from groups with five or more participants are better than individual, majority vote, and leader decisions (Carnevale 1995:83). Despite these

beneficial effects, however, Carnevale (1995:83) states that, there are problems with group decision-making, arising from underlying problems of fear and trust.

Groups can sometimes make poor decisions because of intra group dynamics where members lose their ability to think critically or refuse to express disagreement with dominant group perspectives (Carnevale 1995:83). In the first case, excessive cohesiveness or group conformity drives out individual capacity for discriminating thinking. People's eagerness to trust in the group overrides their own analytical abilities. In the second case, people worry that others in the group will interpret their questioning as disloyal or threatening an ultimately they will be expelled from the group.

However Starling (1998:274) maintains that, groups have an advantage over individuals because they bring together a broader perspective for defining the problem and diagnosing the underlying causes and effects. Starling (1998:274) goes further to state that "(m)ost of us tend to develop relatively fixed patterns of thinking, but when people with different styles interact in a group, they can stimulate each other to try new ways of approaching the problem and compensate for the weaknesses in one another's thinking style." Further, groups offer more knowledge and information than individuals can.

Balan (1992:117) states that, there is a need to minimise the number of trade Unions in the public sector and give participation to employees' representatives in the day to day working of the industry. However, Starling (1998:274) also is of the opinion that, among the most important disadvantages of group problem solving is that it is time-consuming or programmed decisions. Be that as it may, group decision-making provide synergy which can ultimately lead to improvement in service delivery in the public sector.

A number of techniques have been developed to help individual managers and groups arrive at better decisions. For example, the nominal group technique (NGT) was developed to ensure that every group member has equal input in the process (Guzzo 1982:95-126). The nominal group is structured in a series of steps to equalize participation:

1.   Working alone, each participant writes ideas on the problem to be discussed.
2.   A round-robin in which each group member presents ideas to the group is set up.
3.   After all ideas have been presented, there is an open discussion of the ideas for the purpose of clarification only; evaluative comments are not allowed.
4.   After the discussion, a secret ballot is taken in which each group member votes for preferred solutions.
5.   Steps 3 and 4 are repeated as desired to add further clarification to the process.

8.4   Implementing and evaluating decision(s)

Decision-making is a very human affair involving far more than objective analysis. Most important decisions in government are not rendered by solitary individuals but by group of people. It is fairly obvious that decision-making is not an entirely rational process. Biases, intuition, rules of thumb, sentiment, experience, and other factors play an important role in determining the outcome of the process (Starling 1998:276). Similarly, administrators may not have the open-mindedness, breath of imagination, intellectual or organisational resources, or the time to generate the full range of alternative courses of action and assess their implications (Lawton & Rose 1994:127). A public official may be reluctant to present an option to a political office-bearer in the knowledge that it would be politically unacceptable.

There are two important concepts that help people appreciate how people really make decisions: bounded rationality and satisficing. The former, namely bounded rationality, simply means that people have limits, or boundaries, on how rational they can be. The latter means that decision-makers choose the first solution alternative that satisfies minimal decision criteria (Starling 1998:277). Studies of employment interviews indicate several patterns that are consistent with the satisficing model (Robbins 1984:67). Among the final applicants (those selected to attend interviews) a person is more likely to be evaluated more favourably if directly following weak candidates, and if the interviewer perceives an absence of negative qualities during the early minutes of the interview (Fox et al. 1991:141). Thus, some administrators do not act rationally but do satisfice. However, the organisational structure helps individuals to contribute to the organisational decision-making.

9. CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH FOR RATIONALIZING ORGANIZING

If people are to work together effectively in managing a program, they need to know the part they are to play in the total endeavour and how their roles relate to each other. To design and maintain these systems of roles is basically the managerial function of organizing (Starling 1998:299). Fox et al. (1991:66) maintain that organising for public service, creates a structure for exercising administrative power. This structure and the exercising of administrative power, are generally subject to the determination, in the first place, by the political organs for decision-making in government, and is then subject to periodic revision by the legislative, executive, and judicial branches of government.

Organising may be thought of as social systems of co-operation designed to enhance individual effort aimed at objective accomplishment (Hodge & Anthony 1984:50). It has often been said that good people can make any organisational pattern work. Ambiguity in organisations may be a good thing as it forces teamwork, since people know instinctively that they must co-operate in order to get things done (Fox **et al.** 1991:69-70).

However, good people and those who want to co-operate, will work together most effectively if they know the roles they are to play in any collaborative venture, and how their roles relate to one another. This is as true in government as it is in business and sport (Fox **et al.** 1991:70). To design and maintain these systems of roles is basically the managerial function of organising (Koontz **et al.** 1980:330).

Fox **et al.** (1991:70) state that in order that an organisational role may exist and be meaningful to a person, it must incorporate the following:

✧   Verifiable objectives, which are the task of planning.

✧   A clear concept of the major duties or activities involved.

✧   An understood area of discretion, or authority, in order that the person filling it may know what he or she can do to accomplish results.

Further, to make a role operational, provision should be made for needed information and other tools and resources necessary for performance in a role. Public managers organise when they are in the process of establishing a formalised, intentional structure. Organisation can either be informal or formal.

9.1   Informal organisations

Informal organisations are alliances that are neither structured nor organisationally determined (Fox **et al.** 1991:71). They are natural formations in the work

environment, which appear in response to the need for social contact (Robbins 1984:71). An informal organisation may be regarded as any joint personal activity without conscious joint purpose, even though possibly contributing to joint results (Barnard, in Koontz et al. 1980:333).

A public manager should know that these interpersonal relationships are important in managing. They are extremely vibrant in terms of the nature of the group, the numbers within the groups, the actual personnel involved, what the group is concerned with, its changing leadership, and the continuing process of formation and dissolution (Fox et al. 1991:71).

9.2 Formal organisations

Formal in this sense means that which is defined by an organisation's structure, with designated work assignments establishing tasks and work groups (Fox et al. 1991:70). In formal organisations, the behaviours in which people should be engaged are stipulated by and directed toward organisational objectives (Robbins 1984:70-71). People, their behaviour, and their association belong to a large system of social relationships of which a single formally organised enterprise is only a sub-system (Fox et al. 1991:70). Barnard (in Koontz et al. 1980:331) referred to an organisation as 'formal' when the activities of two or more persons were consciously co-ordinated toward a given objective. To him, the essence of formal organisation was conscious common purpose. Formal organisation is created when persons:

* are able to communicate with one another;

* are willing to act; and

* share a purpose (Fox et al. 1991:70).

In order to forge ahead in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, there is a need for the public sector to realign itself. A public sector capable of producing

products and services of quality that meets the demands and requirements of today's discerning customers and stakeholders must be accompanied by a public sector with the right structure. Formal organisation is important for reponsiveness because it determines how programme tasks are allocated and how lines of accountability are structured (OECD 1987:55).

9.3 Types of formal organisations

According to Starling (1998:300-320) there are four types of organisations, namely: leader/follower, consortium, pyramid and adhocracy.

9.3.1 Leader/Follower organisation

This section begins with the most natural of human relationships, that between leader and followers. The relationship, however, is not as simple as it might appear at first blush. The leader's authority, for instance, can seldom be satisfied with obedience based merely upon the grounds of common sense or respect. Rather, as Max Weber was to note, authority seeks to arouse something else (love, fear, even awe) in the followers (Starling 1998:301). This line of inquiry led Weber to the conclusion that there are three types of legitimate authority: legal, traditional, and charismatic.

Legal authority is associated with constitutional governments; traditional authority, with kings and parents. But it is charismatic authority that is most relevant to the leader/follower cluster: it is based on the members' abandonment of themselves to an individual distinguished by holiness, heroism, or exemplariness (Starling 1998:301-302). A manager should not only follow what other managers are doing without being innovative. The manager who bases his decisions on a follow-the-leader pattern will never be a leader or innovator and therefore will forfeit the opportunities available to those who took the bold steps involved in innovative

decision making (Sunday Times 23 February 1997). The public sector needs a new style executive and manager. The new style executive and manager understands that people, their environments and the systems and processes that they work with are just as much part of the product as the design, materials and service which the customer sees. New style managers focus on quality improvement; long term effects, systems thinking, team work, empowerment and participative management (Weeks & De Beer 1994:5).

9.3.2 Consortium organisation

The consortium organisation is actually an association, partnership, or union of two or more institutions brought together for a few particular purposes (Starling 1998:303). Consortia vary greatly with respect to size, longevity, and amount of integration.

Starling (1998:303) refers to one early type of consortium called the Delian League as an example. In the winter of 478-477 B.C., the Greek City-states in and around the Aegean Sea met on the island of Delos and formed an alliance. The purpose of this early consortium was to free those Greeks who were under Persian rule, to protect all against a Persian return, and to obtain compensation from Persians by attacking their lands and taking booty. League policy was determined by a vote of the assembly, in which early states, including Athens, each had one vote. The Delian League was a forerunner of such modern organisations as NATO and the European Community (EC) (Starling 1998:303). However, the literature of public administration tends to neglect these multi organisational, decentralized entities. The assumption seems to be that the political provision of public goods requires one centre of authority and responsibility, that the way to guarantee effective coordination, control, and efficient performance is through hierarchy and monopoly (Starling 1998:303).

9.3.3 Pyramidal organisation

In the modern world bureaucracy brings to mind many attributes, usually implying inefficiency, such as red tape, rigid application of rules, passing the buck, an impersonal and a lethargic attitude towards change, redundancy of effort, empire building, and such (Fox et al. 1991:79). However, bureaucracy does not mean inefficiency, but relates to a type of structure which is the dominant form in organisations, whether public or private, in the word today (Fox et al. 1991:79).

A classical example and once again, the surest guide is Max Weber (Gerth & Mills, 1946:196-198), who, in the early part of this century, spelled out in considerable detail the features of the bureaucratic structure. In simplified terms, those features are:

(1)   division of labour based on functional specialization;

(2)   well-defined hierarchy of authority;

(3)   system of rules covering the rights and duties of employment;

(4)   system of procedures for dealing with work situations;

(5)   impersonality of interpersonal relations; and

(6)   promotion and selection based on technical competence.

9.3.3.1   Division of labour

The administrator begins by determining the necessary activities for the accomplishment of overall organizational objectives. Then devides these activities on a logical basis into departments that perform the specialized functions. In this way, the organizational structure itself becomes the primary means for achieving the technical and economic advantages of specialization and division of labour (Starling 1998:308). Specialization of task, because of the division of labour in

organisations, segregates individuals according to the tasks they perform (Bozeman & Straussman 1990:138).

9.3.3.2   Hierarchy

The second principle of administrative management is hierarchy. It is based on the scalar principle, which states that authority and responsibility should flow in a direct line vertically from the highest level of the organization to the lowest level. This flow is commonly referred to as the chain of command (Starling 1998:309). In such an arrangement, a cardinal mistake would be to fail to go through channels in trying to get a message to the top.

Hierarchy helps define work routines and ensures equal treatment of client cases. It sets up internal systems of review and control to prevent arbitrariness and corruption; it allows for authoritative and non-partisan decision-making; and it helps to ensure, according to set criteria, that decisions are dealt with or reviewed by persons having appropriate responsibility and knowledge (OECD 1987:76).

9.3.3.3   Span of control

Closely related to the principle of division of labour and hierarchy is the span of control. According to Smit & Cronje (1992:202) span of control refers to the number of subordinates working under a particular manager. Kroon (1996:232) explains that the number of subordinates that can be controlled effectively by a supervisor is limited.

9.3.3.4   Line and staff function

Line agencies in an organisation have the primary responsibility for carrying out its mission; staff personnel, in general, provide assistance to the executive (Bozeman & Straussman 1990:138).

Downs (1967:154) points out that, a large staff can function as "... a control mechanism 'external' to a line hierarchy, promote changes in opposition to the line's inertia, and act as a scapegoat deflecting hostility from its boss." Top executives can use staff to help bring change to organizations. The innovative capacity of a staff appears to result from the technical orientation of its members, who are younger and better educated; and it results from the incentive structure of the staff, which helps the top administrator improve the line's performance (Starling 1998:310).

The importance of understanding the line-staff concept cannot be overemphasized. Superior and subordinate alike must know whether they are acting in a staff or line capacity. Lack of clarity on this point often causes friction. Here, the notion of functional authority can help. Functional authority is "the right that an individual or department has delegated to it over specified processes, practices, policies, or other matters relating to activities undertaken by personnel in departments other than its own" (Koontz & O'Donnel 1974:175). Thus, in Figure 9-1, the functional authority of the personnel director might cover and only cover giving competitive examinations and conducting in-service training programs.

Figure 9-1

CITY MANAGER

PERSONNEL   FINANCE   PLANNING   LEGAL

POLICE   FIRE   PUBLIC WORKS   PUBLIC HEALTH   LIBRARY   PARKS AND RE-CREATION

------- FUNCTIONAL AUTHORITY   _____ LINE AUTHORITY
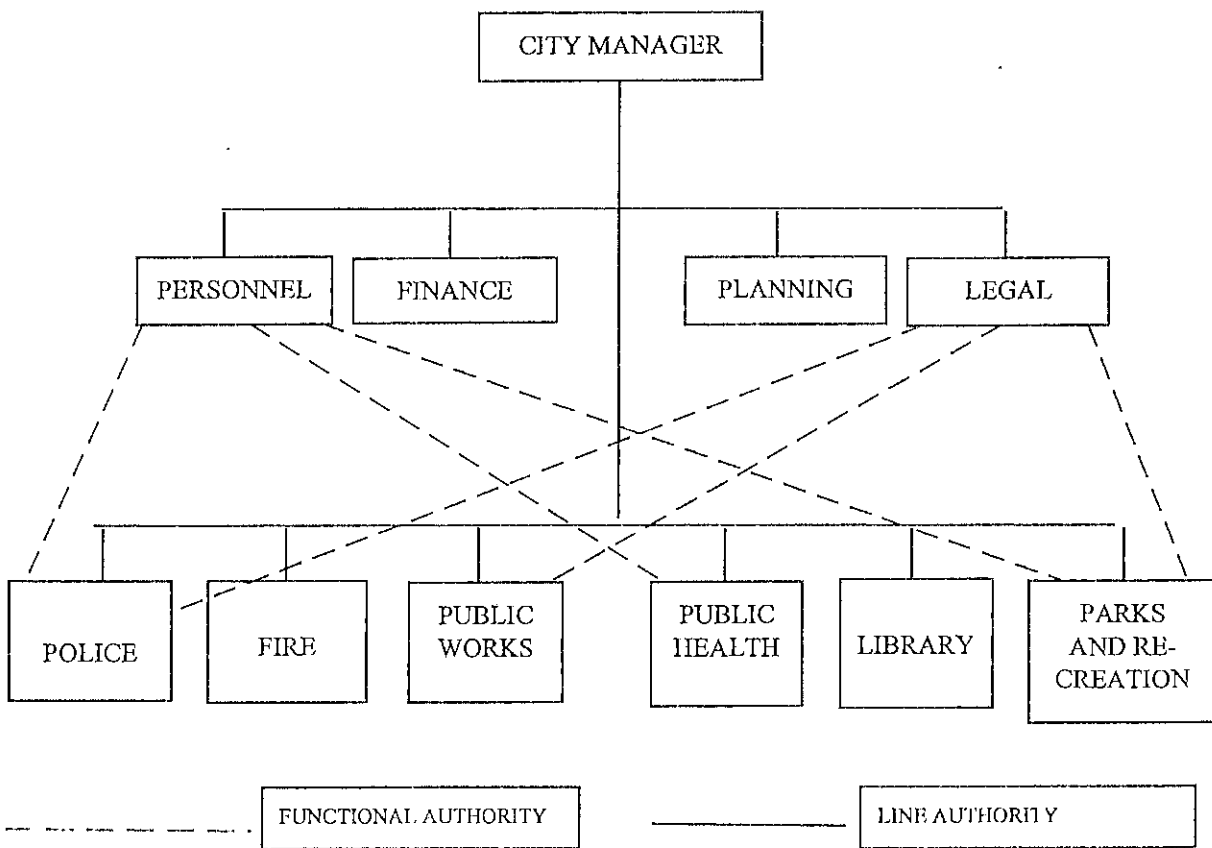
In a bureaucratic structure, processes are effectively discharged through the mechanisms of clear specification of tasks, formalized procedures, hierarchies that carefully define the degree for decision-making authority at each level, and career progress based on formal qualifications linked to specified year of service.

Unfortunately, if the organization is suddenly required to be more responsive, to cope with resource availability problems and rapidly changing market conditions, then bureaucracy will probably fail to fulfil its responsibilities to act as an effective provider of services (Chaston 1993:175). At best all one can suggest is that management should seek to develop the most appropriate structure through which to fulfil the assigned service provision responsibilities.

Chaston (1993:175-176) states that, in adopting this approach there is, however, adequate evidence to suggest that fulfilling certain objectives will prove beneficial. These include:

❑ Creating flatter organizations by seeking to reduce the number of levels within the structure.

❑ Delegating decision-making as far down the organization as possible and concurrently permitting the most junior of staff the opportunity to gain a high degree of personal control over their assigned work tasks.

❑ Ensuring there are effective communication channels to permit the rapid, accurate flow of information down, up and across the organization.

❑ Where solutions require inter-departmental inputs, moving from a rigid functional system to one based upon multi-disciplinary teams of either a temporary or permanent nature, depending on the nature of the task being undertaken.

9.3.4 Adhocracy

Adhocracy may be described as a rapidly changing, adaptive, temporary system that has been organised around problems to be solved by groups of relative strangers having diverse professional skills (Fox et al. 1991:82). In other words, professionals are organised into flexible groups by management in order to solve specific problems that cannot be solved by conventional means. Adhocracies have a high degree of horizontal differentiation based on formal training, because they are staffed largely by professionals with high degree of expertise. However, vertical differentiation is low (Fox et al. 1991:82).

In an adhocracy a novel solution is sought so that standardisation and formalisation are unsuitable. Finally, decision-making in adhocracies is decentralised because speed and flexibility are necessary and because senior management cannot be expected to possess the expertise necessary to make all decisions (Fox et al. 1991:82). Adhocracy can either be teams or matrix.

9.3.4.1   Team approach

This approach enables organizations to be more flexible and responsive in an environment characterized by rapid change in information flows and information technology (Starling 1998:320). It is important to distinguish a team from mere group of people with a common assignment. Katzenbach & Smith (1993:45) offer this definition:

A team is a small number of people with complementary skills (technical, problem-solving, and interpersonal) who are committed to a common-purpose performance goal and approach (that is, how they will work together) for which they hold themselves mutually accountable. Cross-functional teams consist of employees from various functional departments who are responsible to meet as a team and resolve

mutual problems. Team members typically still report to their functional departments, but they also report to the team, one member of whom may be a leader (Starling 1998:320).

The most important thing is that in order to deliver good service, team members must have a shared vision. Shared vision is certainly the most powerful force that drives organizations to achieve what they set out to achieve (Weeks & De Beer 1994:6). When people share a vision they are bonded together by a common purpose. It has the power of enhancing commitment of all the employees in an organization. It is no longer "their organization", it becomes "our organization" (Weeks & De Beer 1994:6).

9.3.4.2   Matrix organisation

The most widely found application of adhocracy is the matrix structure, which is a combination of departmentation by function and by project or product (Fox et al. 1991:82).

The matrix arrangement gets its name from the fact that a number of project (team) managers exert planning, scheduling, and cost of control over people who have been assigned to their projects, while other managers exert more traditional line control (e.g. technical direction, training, and compensation) over the same people (Starling 1998:317). Thus, two administrators share responsibility for the same subordinate. A simple matrix arrangement is shown in Figure 9-2. The five vertical arrows indicate the vertical chain of command for functions; the four horizontal arrows, the lateral chain of command for the project. The numbers in the boxes indicate the number of personnel assigned. Thus, there are twenty-two employees working on Project C, while the public works function has thirty-three employees assigned to it.

Figure 9-2
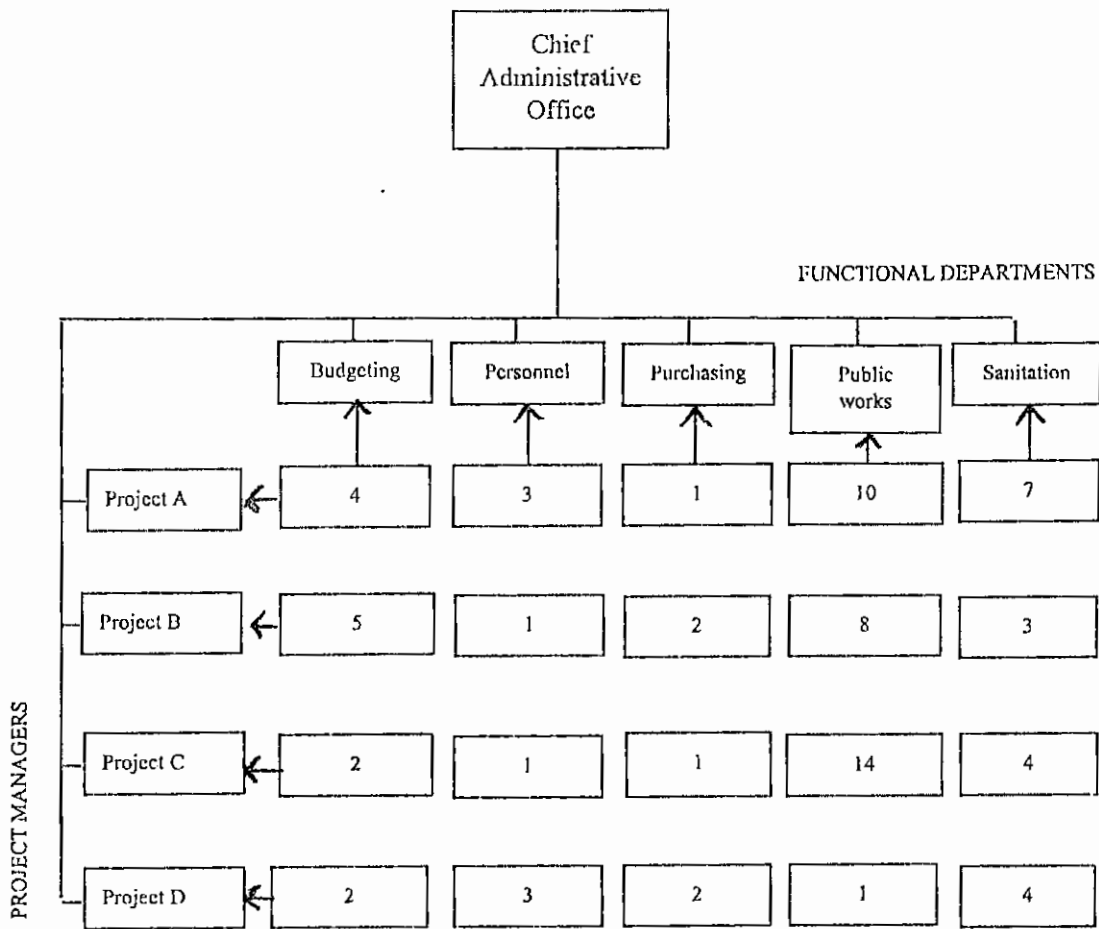
The advantage of the matrix lies in its ability to facilitate co-ordination when an institution has a multiplicity of complex and interdependent activities (Fox et al. 1991:83). However, the major disadvantages of the matrix lie in the confusion it creates, its tendency to foster power struggles, and the stress it places on individuals. When one dispenses with the unity of command concept, ambiguity is increased, confusion exists over who reports to whom, and all this creates the seeds for power struggles (Fox et al. 1991:84).

In order to forge ahead in an increasingly competitive global marketplace, there is a need for the public sector to realign itself. A public sector capable of producing products and services of a quality that meets the demands and requirements of today's discerning customers and stakeholders must be accompanied by a public sector with the right structure.

All organisations need to be designed with reference to their goals, the types of clients they face, the accountability and control systems, the priorities given to values such as efficiency and effectiveness, and the need or otherwise for very tight legal control (OECD 1987:119).

10. CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH TO RATIONALISE LEADING

In order for an organization to be successful in managing programs, administrators must lead and motivate their people. Individuals must relate and communicate effectively; sound decisions must be reached by individuals and groups; and

decisions must be implemented in a way that appropriately involves people and obtains their active commitment in a course of action (Starling 1998:357).

An operational definition of leadership will, to a large extent, depend on the purpose of the researcher (Fox et al. 1991:92). The purpose may be to identify leaders, to train them, to discover what they do, to determine how they are selected, or to compare effective and ineffective leaders (Yukl 1981:5). There are many definitions of leadership, but they do seem to have certain features in common. It is submitted that the general useful definition is the one given by Kossen (1983:201) namely, "(l)eadership is the ability to influence the behaviour of others to go in a certain direction." Management is about leading, however, Thornhill & Hanekom (1979:15) state that, leadership and management are not necessarily synonymous, although leading does normally occur within the higher hierarchies of an organisation. Managers have subordinates. Leaders have followers: people recognise and find attractive the leaders' sense of purpose (Steward 1989:4).

Definitions of leadership usually have in common the assumption that it is a group phenomenon involving the interaction between two or more persons, and that it involves an influencing process whereby intentional influence is exerted by one person (leader) over other persons (followers) (Fox et al. 1991:92). The author will not go into aspects such as, leadership traits and skills, leadership styles, motivation in organizations including Hawthorne studies, Maslow's hierarchy of needs and Douglas McGregor's theory X and theory Y or Herzberg's motivation-hygiene theory but on how customer focus approach can influence the improvement of service delivery.

Leadership in the public sector should work towards improving service delivery by increasing the efficiency of the public services, improving the structure and fostering behavioural change.

10.1 Increasing the'efficiency of the public services

The thrust of the drive for greater efficiency is through the creation of public sector that emphasises:

10.1.1 Quality and productivity

The public sector has embarked on its journey towards developing a quality culture. The key component in these efforts under this new paradigm is to focus on quality and productivity in order to improve service delivery. External and internal pressures require both public and private sector organisations to become more market-responsive and customer-oriented and to develop organisation-wide service-quality programs (Foster et al. 1989:55). In this regard, Total Quality Management (TQM) has been adopted as an approach to mobilise all available organisational resources to meet customer requirements.

In situations where customers are 'captive' to a single service source, poor service often breeds discontentment, resulting in customers adopting negative and hostile attitude to front-line service providers. The effect is devastating to staff morale (Foster et al. 1989:55). In order to correct the above situation, the leader should adopt the customer-handling approach. The customer-handling approach defines a service problem in terms of inadequacies in the interpersonal and communication skills of the front-line service deliverers. It focuses on the individuals; it attempts to redress poor service quality by modifying the behaviour of front-line staff through training in new skills and attitudes (Foster et al. 1989:55). This signals a major reorientation from one of merely generating output and service to that of meeting the expectation of the customer. The goal is to create an organisational culture where quality and productivity improvements are seen as a way of life and a mindset that permeates the whole organisation.

Organization development interventions need to be implemented to effect a culture change within the organization, so as to ensure that the organization's culture and climate support the introduction of TQM within the organization. Clearly, management leadership will play a substantial role in this regard (Weeks & De Beer 1994:7).

10.1.2   The Citizen's Charter

The implementation of the Citizen's Charter was launched in 1991 and became operational in 1992. It is, initially, a ten year program and is designed to improve the delivery of public services (Myers & Lacey 1996:336). According to Myers & Lacey (1996:336-337) the key Charter principles are:

◆   Standards - explicit standards are set, monitored and published for the services that individual users can reasonably expect.

◆   Publication - actual performance results, by agency, are published together with those standards. ˄

◆   Information and openness - full, accurate information is readily available in plain language about how public services are run, what they cost, how well they perform, and who is in charge.

◆   Choice and consultation - the public sector should provide choice wherever practicable. There should be regular consultation with those who use services. Users' views and priorities should be taken into account in deciding upon standards.

◆   Courtesy and helpfulness - these are expected for all members of the public at all times. Civil servants will be easily identifiable, normally through name badges.

◆   Putting things right - mistakes, errors, and failures to meet specified standards of service would be met by an apology, a full explanation and swift and

effective remedy, including compensation where appropriate. There is a well-publicized complaints procedure, monitored by independent task force.

◇ Value for money - efficient and economical delivery of public services within the country's fiscal resource constraints.

◈ Independent evaluation - against the agency's charter targets.

Thus the Citizen's Charter is a written commitment by government agencies providing assurance that their products and services will comply with the declared quality standards in conformance with the expectation of customers. Sound leadership is therefore very important in the implementation of the Citizen's Charter principles.

10.1.3   One stop payment centres

In its efforts to provide greater customer satisfaction in the delivery of services, leadership should opt for one stop payment centres to facilitate the payment of electricity, water, telephone and assessment bills at any of the one stop centres.

The leadership of Gauteng Province under their premier has opted for the establishment of these one stop centres. The concept, which is still in its initial stages of discussion with role players in government, business, churches and others, proposes the establishment of multi-purpose service delivery centres in the province to provide citizens with information about every aspect of government - locally, provincially and nationally - under one roof (City Press 28 June 1998).

The premier of Gauteng Province Dr Mathole Motshega told City Press, the service centres would be a facility through which co-ordination and intergration of information and services provided by different government departments could be easily accessed, Motshega said the service delivery centres would provide communities with a complete perspective of government services (City Press 28

June 1998). Thus leadership and innovation is very crucial to improved service delivery.

10.1.4   Improvement in systems and procedures

The primary elements in systems and procedures such as processes, regulations, standards and criteria provide the basis for implementing activities in an organisation.

Within the South African context political instability and the weak performance of the economy make the environment within which public organisations are operating more dynamic and complex. These changes have resulted in many traditional managerial principles and practices becoming obsolete (Weeks & De Beer 1994:5).

To survive this highly turbulant environment, public sector organizations are revisiting the traditional ways of managing their organizations. The ability to adapt to a rapidly changing environment has become an important consideration when devising new strategies to lead organizations into the future (Weeks & De Beer 1994:5). Thus, leadership is very important in implementing changes in the organization.

The vision of service excellence can only be realized if systems, procedures and processes are introduced that facilitate the rendering of an outstanding service to clients (Weeks & De Beer 1994:7).

10.2 Improving the structure of the public sector

Formal structure is an obvious and somewhat overrated feature of organizational life. In a formal hierarchy, everyone must report to someone, knowing whom you work for and knowing who works for you are fairly important aids to effective management (Cohen 1988:52). Weber observed that bureaucracy's great strength

is its ability to break up work into small, efficiently performed tasks. Each task is performed by distinct organizational unit.

Unfortunately, if the organization is suddenly required to be responsive, to cope with resources availability problems and rapidly changing market conditions, then the bureaucracy will probably fail to fulfil its responsibilities to act as an effective provider of services (Chaston 1993:175).

Obviously, an organization should be structured to emphasize the accomplishment of its principal policies and programs. If an organization must deliver services over a wide geographic area, we might expect it to develop a decentralized structure to accommodate local needs (Cohen 1988:54).

An organization's internal capabilities and attributes must be factored into decisions about structure. Sometimes a division of labour that seems totally illogical on paper works well in the real world because of a unique combination of talent that has developed within an organization. For example, organization A might perform a training function for organization B simply because the skill to perform the function has developed in organization A (Cohen 1988:54).

At other times, an organizational structure may develop around a manager's individual strengths and weakness. For example, some managers may not pay particular attention to detail and may require a strong staff office to follow up on initiatives and manage projects (Cohen 1988:54). Some organization structures emerge due to the preferences of an organization's staff or management. The key point is that organizational form should follow organizational function.

According to Cohen (1988:55) organizational structures can be viewed as a management tool designed to modify behaviour patterns. If the organization is performing poorly, structure is one of a variety of mechanisms that can be used to

stimulate improved effectiveness. Thus for a public sector organization to deliver improved goods and services to its customers, must be accompanied by the right structure. The role of senior management is not to lay down rigid guidelines, but instead to nurture an internal environment that can sustain the vision of effectively delivering customer satisfaction (Chaston 1993:179).

Any organization is confronted with both internal and external influences. By delegating more activities to lower-level staff, senior managers will then be able to give more attention to working with these influences, gaining their understanding of the dilemmas created by resource constraints, seeking guidance on appropriate future policies, reviewing the benefits of revising structures, systems or procedures and developing valid arguments for approaching national government with proposals for incremental funding to overcome critical imbalances in service provision (Chaston 1993:179).

Another aspect that managers need to take cognisance of, is right-sizing. Right-sizing of the public sector is intended to ensure that the size of the civil service is commensurated with its role and functions in national development. Right-sizing also ensures that the operating expenditure of the public sector is within the means of the government. This is done, among others, by eliminating unnecessary duplication and obsolescence in the roles of government bodies, consolidating and rationalising the structure of public organizations, with the objective of focussing on those critical areas of the civil service which will promote a faster pace of economic development and facilitate revenue collection.

According to Myers & Lacey (1996:338), in 1990 the Nicaraguan government, confronting a poor economy undermined by mismanagement, civil war and bloated public sector, has sought to fundamentally alter the size and role of the public sector through amongst others employment downsizing. A true leader should also see to it that in order for employees to improve service delivery, the remuneration system

should be appropriately structured. Again in Nicaragua in 1990, a new civil service system was in the final preparation for middle and upper level staff based on contracts, market-based remuneration and performance evaluation (Myers & Lacey 1996:338).

The underlying philosophy behind the effort to strengthen human resource management through this new remuneration system is to effect a paradigm shift in the public sector, to make it more responsive, innovative, creative, able to attract and retain quality personnel, with a strong value system and positive work culture and leadership capabilities.

10.3 Behavioural change-enculturation of excellent values

Nowadays many people are talking about change. One is tempted to ask questions as what constitute change? According to Nutley & Osborne (1994:178) change in itself is a difficult concept to get hold on. Nutley & Osborne (1994:180) refer to Kurt Lewin's (1951) model of change as the mostly quoted one. This model states that change occurs via the three phases of:

−   unfreezing;

−   changing; and

−   refreezing.

Unfreezing can be seen as the period during which existing ways of working and values are brought into question. Change refers to the period where new forms of working are introduced. Refreezing can be seen as referring to the consolidation of this new way of working with the establishment of a value system which supports the new state of affairs (Nutley & Osborne 1994:180).

It is contended that unless one changes the way people think and act, one has in fact changed nothing. All too often executives develop and introduce new systems,

strategies, structures, practices, procedures and technological innovations that look good, sound good and make management feel good, but in effect they are nothing more than a mere rain dance, in that they do little to change the weather within the organization (Weeks & De Beer 1994:7). Management in the public service takes place within a turbulant environment and managers have to respond to this environment (Lawton & Rose 1994:208).

In order to effect meaningful change, public service managers need to articulate their aims, strategy, and objectives (Starks 1991:39). To change the behaviour of employees from non-committal to that of commitment a lot of training is essential. Front-line people cannot deliver service if they are not adequatcly trained (Maguire 1991:24).

Unless people are willing to make the effort to satisfy customers, service delivery will fall flat on its face. Willingness is a state of mind created by the example set by top management. At every step employees will test management's sincerity. One of the ways they will test that sincerity is in the authority they are given to deliver service. Without authority (the right to use their initiative), they will not be capable of satisfying the customer and service delivery will fail (Maguire 1991:24).

It is therefore mandatory that management of change programmes should be accompanied by regular surveys of employee attitudes and opinions (Chaston 1993:176). If the employees surveys suggest a shortfall in service delivery, training should immediately be recommended and implemented. The effective service employee needs to know how to interact well with customers. These skills are built over days of training and practice, not in a few hours (Dyamond 1990:34). Managers and supervisors must also be trained to model, coach and reinforce the skills they expect of their service employees.

One of the most important parts of improving service delivery is to regard one's customer contact people as one's most important resource and to invest in them accordingly (Dyamond 1990:34).

Increasing administrative responsiveness has political consequences. Change strategies should, therefore, be driven by political leadership with appropriate organisational support. Care must be taken to ensure that programmes to increase responsiveness do not themselves become bureaucratised (OECD 1987:118).

11. CUSTOMER-FOCUS APPROACH TO RATIONALISE CONTROL

Control may be defined as the process of monitoring activities in order to determine whether individual units and the institution itself are obtaining and utilising their resources efficiently to accomplish their objectives, and, where this is not being achieved, implementing corrective action (Fox **et al.** 1991:118-119). To adjust to changing conditions, and to compensate for previous errors, public managers appraise previous and current organisational activities. They may then undertake actions, not only to correct actual deviations, but also to prevent deviations before they occur (Robbins 1980:376).

It is on the basis of the definition enunciated above that the author has opted to first deal with implementation and evaluation before touching on the last principle in the management functional chain, namely control.

11.1 Implementation

Implementation, according to Starling (1998:414) means just what the dictionary says it means: "to carry out, accomplish, fulfill, produce, complete." In this context, it means implementing a policy, and to be more exact, that part of policy which is called a program. A policy is a statement of goals and of the relative importance attached to each goal. It is translated into a plan by specifying the objectives to be attained. A proposed set of specific actions intended to implement a plan is called a program (Starling 1998:208).

In public administration, implementing a program should not be seen as a one-man job but complexity of joint action. However, this must be implemented with caution because governmental programs fail due to the fact that even when they are designed to be carried out in a direct and simple manner, eventually come to involve a large number of governmental and non-governmental organisations and individuals (Starling 1998:415).

Implementation can be exercised in the form of scheduling models. These models are useful for a wide range of activities, from a seemingly trivial task of scheduling a field-office tour for a high-ranking official to a very complex job of scheduling activities in the space program (Starling 1998:420). Even though these models will not be discussed in this text, some need to be mentioned, namely, Gantt chart, critical path method (CPM) and program evaluation review technique (PERT). Another technique which needs to be mentioned is, backward mapping. Working backward is useful in many practical situations (Starling 1998:423).

Implementation is not about the past but the present and the future. Consequently one is prompted to consider the action that should be taken now to cope with the future for improved service delivery. Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow (1992:88)

states that something is needed relating to practical issues, these can be called 'challenges'.

These challenges according to Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow (1992:88) are:

- Mission
- Public service delivery
- Efficiency and effectiveness
- Equal opportunities
- Managing for survival

11.1.1 Mission

Administrative and bureaucratic machinery thinks more typically in terms of what has to be done than why it has to be done. One of the key leadership tasks of a public services manager is to identify and promulgate the mission of the organization (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:89).

Mission relates to fundamental purpose, it is value-laden and is a symbol as much as a mechanistic, managerial tool. In order for any organisation to provide improved service delivery to the public, it must incorporate excellent service delivery in its mission statement. Mission-driven institutions empower their employees to pursue their mission through the most efficient methods available. This makes the institution more efficient, more flexible, innovative and responsive than rule-driven institutions (Fox & Maas 1997:103).

A clearly defined mission, and the relentless pursuance of that mission, does not imply that government should regulate its bureaucracy and society through rules and regulations (Basson in Vosloo 1994:205).

A strong pursuit of mission would assist government in budgeting for that mission. Each employee who agrees with the mission has an incentive to save money on expenditure not directly related to the realisation of the mission. This, in turn, gives managers the freedom to expand in terms of the mission (Fox & Maas 1994:103).

11.1.2   Public services delivery

Public services delivery relates to a number of issues, **inter alia**, services delivery to customer or public, customer service to generate income, quality and cost, and strategies.

11.1.2.1   Services delivery to customer or public

There is a growing realization in the public services that techniques that were originally developed for private sector market organizations are, with amendments, applicable to non-market organizations (Holtham, in Willcocks and Harrow 1992:90). The above statement is supported by literature such as Van Straaten (1984), Sapolsky (1972) and Starling (1998).

The purpose of applying these techniques in the public sector is informed by the desire to improve service delivery in the public sector.

In delivering particular and quasi collective goods and services, and with the motion of competition, public institutions should not only make such delivery in a profitable, responsive, innovative, equitable and efficient manner, but should also give the customer value for money (Fox & Maas 1997:104). If the government can not deliver certain services qualitatively, it must out source it to the private sector.

11.1.2.2   Customer service to generate income

The most important aspect of good service delivery is to concentrate on the creation of a culture where service is seen not as a frill or a public relations exercise but as raison d'être of the organization (Holtham, in Wilcocks & Harrow 1992:91).   To change a culture towards a service-orientated approach is a long and difficult process, It requires constant self-questioning. It requires an orientation not only of policies but also of the day-to-day actions of the entire organization. It requires the commitment not only of politicians and senior managers, but of everyone directly providing services (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:92). In order to change towards the aforesaid culture, training is of the essence.

In conjunction with the idea of customer-driven government, those who are in receipt of public goods and services of a particular and quasi collective nature should pay for them to the extent that they do not have to be subsidised by public funds. On the other hand, user fees should not be exploited to generate higher revenues, unless taxpayers experience a simultaneous reduction in taxes (Fox & Maas 1997:104-105). Providing collective goods and services, such as health care, education and public highways, may be funded partially, in some cases, by user fees in the form of health clinic levies, school fees and toll roads. When this practice is generally adopted, it should be accompanied by a system of reduction in direct taxes (Fox & Maas 1997:105).

11.1.2.3   Quality and cost

Cost-quality relationship is very crucial in the provision of quality public services. Holtham, in Wilcocks & Harrow (1992:92-94) sketched the following scenarios: Firstly as costs increase, the quality of service rises. Secondly as costs increase the quality of service does not increase. In this situation spending more money does not lead to an increase in quality, probably because the nature of the service provided is

discontinuous. An example would be a situation in which there is a very large volume of work to be done, and only one member of staff do it. At least two members are required, but if a 5 per cent increase (i.e. 1.5 hours per week) in staffing is recommended, it is likely that the existing member of staff might have to spend as much time as that on additional management and supervisory duties, largely negating the benefits of the increased volume of hours (Holtham, in Wilcocks & Harrow 1992:93).

Thirdly, the quality increases as costs reduce. The type of situation in which this could occur is where the present level of service is extraordinarily low in quality; for example, a cashier's facility that was only open for two hours a day in each of six physically separate offices. This is such a completely inconvenient service that little may be lost by reducing it or even withdrawing it altogether (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:93-94).

Fourthly, where a very high quality of service is currently being provided, a point can be reached at which further increases in the cost and volume of that service actually reduce the overall quality of service delivery. For example, suppose there is a consumer requiring advice. If there are too many advicers, they may be literally falling over themselves to give that advice, and perhaps, confusing and probably irritating the consumer (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:94). Public officials should be trained to reach a point where an increase in quality should not lead to an increase in costs.

11.1.2.4 Catalytic government: Steering rather than rowing

Governments that focus on steering give direction. Their focus is on policy making, not to control society but to direct its activities (Fox & Maas 1997:102). Rather than employing public servants to deliver goods and services, it uses other institutions to perform the task.

Basson (in Vosloo 1994:204) hold that it is essential that governments focus on what they should do, which is to provide direction. If government starts to deliver a wide range of goods and services, it runs the risk of becoming so absorbed in administering activities that it stops giving direction (Fox & Maas 1997:102). On the basis of the above statement it should be noted that, if the government can not deliver qualitative service in a particular sector, it should go the route of privatisation.

11.1.2.5   Community-owned government: Empowering rather than serving

Osborne & Gaebler (1992:52) declare that public ownership should be relocated from the bureaucracy to the community. By helping communities to help themselves, their problems will be solved more satisfactorily. Generally, communities are more committed to their own members, have a better grasp of their problems, are more flexible than bureaucracies, and are able to deliver community services more efficiently because they have less bureaucratic overheads and utilise their own capacities to the full (Fox & Maas 1997:102-103). This concept of community-owned government is articulated clearly by the South African policy of Redistribution Development Programmes (RDP).

11.1.2.6   Competitive government: Injecting competition into service delivery

The ideal is that competition should be promoted between service providers and not between government institutions. When government institutions compete, a 'turf war' develops, restricting government steering role. The aim should be to allow the benefits of competition, for example, innovation and efficiency, to operate between government and the private sector, without reducing the ability of government to direct. Competition could take place between the private sector and government and among government institutions (Fox & Maas 1997:103).

11.1.2.7   Decentralised government: From hierarchy to participation and teamwork

Decentralisation goes hand in hand with the devolution of power, it is synonymous with the flat structure of organisation because communication and decision-making are taking place where the problems are.

According to Fox & Maas (1997:105-106) decentralised government has the following advantages:

❖   it operates close to the problem;

❖   it has intimate knowledge of the circumstances;

❖   it is able to act quickly; and

❖   it has a direct interest in solving the problem.

Decentralisation occurs most in federalisms, for example in the United State of America every state has its own laws and regulations as long as they are not in conflict with the overall federal laws. However decentralisation can also be found in unitary governments even though they are not as pronounced as in federal governments. For example South Africa has gone the route of decentralisation by having the three spheres of government, namely: national, provincial and local.

11.1.2.8   Market-oriented government: Leveraging change through the market

Government should use its power to structure the market so that essential goods and services are provided by the market and not by government itself. Rather than providing goods and services in a market that could differ from area to area, government should steer the markets by furnishing information, extending supply and demand, setting general rules of conduct and using its authority to make the right thing happen (Fox & Maas 1997:106).

11.1.2.9   Strategies

In the delivery of services, there are usually four strategy options available to public managers, namely:

*   low quality/low cost;

*   high quality/low cost;

*   high quality/high cost; and

*   low quality/high cost (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:94).

However, the conclusion that can be drawn is that it casts doubt on the ability to have a service delivery strategy that is both low cost and high quality. Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow (1992:95) maintains that efficiency can be used to move towards low cost/high quality strategy.

The recommendation is therefore, that public servants should try by all means to reduce cost without sacrificing quality.

11.1.3   Efficiency and effectiveness

Efficiency improvements can be used either to hold a given service quality level and reduce costs, or to hold costs level and increase the quality of service or a combination of the two (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:95).

Efficiency depends on the managerial resource available, the manager has to be very economic in running an organisation, he/she must plan, organise, lead and control in an appropriate manner and must concentrate on staff development through training. Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow (1992:96) holds that, even though the organisation could theoretically achieve a more efficient position, it may lack the managerial resource needed to do so. It is then easier, in a budget restrained environment, simply to reduce quality and cost than to invest the effort to become more efficient.

However, there is a problem with efficiency; it is usually reduced to the common language of money, or at least to measurable factors. Effectiveness in the public services is only rarely reducible to monetary terms, and is still difficult to measure in non-monetary terms. As a consequence, when organizational performance is under consideration, it is relatively easier to discuss public services efficiency in measurable terms, than public services effectiveness (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:96).

11.1.4 Equal opportunities

One of the foundations and strengths of the bureaucratic approach has been an emphasis on equity. Bureaucracy should be a mechanism for dealing impartially with the public. There is now, however, an increasing body of research and other data to show that public authorities, despite traditional approach to equity, have not actually delivered equal opportunities to the public they serve (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:97).

The remedy would, therefore be to legislate. This, in South Africa is evidenced by the promulgation of Employment Equity Bill. However this Bill is not welcomed in unism. The National Assembly's labour committee, on Tuesday 21 July 1998, held the first of two days of public hearings on the Employment Equity Bill, and heard widely divergent views on its merits (Citizen, Wednesday 22 July 1998). However, the government officials insisted the measures were necessary to reverse apartheid's legacy (Citizen, Wednesday 22 July 1998).

In reality, the vast majority of effort required to provide equal opportunities reflects and promotes good management practice. It is poor management practice not to be able to understand and respond to the needs of all consumers. It is bad management practice not to appoint and promote staff on objective as opposed to subjective criteria (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:97).

11.1.5   Managing for survival

There was a time when the public services unequivocally offered a job for life, and removal from that job could only be through extreme forms of misconduct. Such a system is still commonplace, for example in other European countries (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:99).

However, nowadays according to Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow (1992:99-100) in some parts of the public services the main issue is not managing for continuity, or even managing for change, but it is managing for survival due to the following significant changes:

O   Some changes in the legal status of public services whether overtly, as with university lecturers beginning to lose tenure, or covertly through organizational changes that begin to loosen the traditional constraints on public services employment practice, for example, the creation of central government agencies and local management of schools.

O   There has been the explicit adoption of contract-based employment typically tied to performance appraisal. This clearly is a complete break from the 'job for life' tradition of the public services and is found not only at the very senior levels of organizations but also lower down.

O   A climate has been created, or has simply developed, whereby the public services and their employees have come under a degree of public criticism not only from the media, perhaps as part of a historic tradition of campaigning against bureaucratic incompetence, but also even from their own political employers. This creates a degree of insecurity in public services employees, regardless of their legal position.

O   The progression of privatization and enforced competition for the physical provision of public services creates a climate whereby the security of the public services employees is subject to direct challenge, either as to whether a job will continue to exist or whether it will exist under public services terms and conditions of service.

In managing for survival, public managers should address issues like, to mention but a few, accountability, managing change, engaging political attention, drawing action plans, communicating responsiveness and implementing responsive programmes.

One of the major elements of customer-focus approach is to increase the public officials' responsiveness to the citizens' needs. Since increasing responsiveness is a political as well as a managerial matter, it requires the attention of elected officials in setting objectives and designing reform programmes. This is because of its different effects on clients and policies but also because of its effects on political accountability (OECD 1987:103).

In managing change, ultimately what is being sought is changed behaviour, both organisationally and individually. To do that, individuals in the organisation will almost certainty need changed skills. They may additionally need changed attitudes. It is also necessary to examine the organisation as a whole, and in particular its style and culture (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:101). In effecting change, the notion of selective radicalism is recommended. Selective radicalism suggests that only a very few key elements of the problem are radically changed. An example could be to change the attitudes of public servants as well as of the public.

In Norway, the public is asked on a regular basis to relate its experiences with the public service and its proposals for improvement as a contribution to the Norwegian action plan for increasing administrative responsiveness. Better complaint and address systems are also being developed; and public surveys are being conducted.

The full co-operation of the media is ensured. The Minister of Consumer Affairs has an open telephone line each Tuesday for two hours. Public servants, as well as the public, may call directly (OECD 1987:102).

Change is an unsettling process; it can undermine self-confidence; it can erode certainties of daily life; it can alter the pattern of relationships. Change requires face-to-face management of a high order (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:101).

Increasing responsiveness may require the public to be more aware of both its rights and its obligations. Some countries are experimenting with campaigns to increase the awareness of the public about administration and responsiveness. Such actions may have long term benefits, although they are hard to assess. Examples range from school programmes to broad-based information campaigns and the publication of 'guides' on rights and administrative procedures (OECD 1987:104).

Action plans must be clear and should concentrate on action, not vague objectives. They should, wherever possible, indicate those people whose input is required to secure success, and they should be set out in such a way that it is possible to monitor, either quantitatively or qualitatively, the achievement of the action (Holtham, in Willcocks & Harrow 1992:102).

Plans for change can be designed so that early implementation steps help to build up momentum and feed into longer term changes (OECD 1987:105). Implementation process should not be done in isolation but in conjunction with the evaluation process.

11.2 Evaluation

The idea of evaluation is to evaluate what results are produced by a specific policy, and what the costs and benefits are of alternative policies or of several ways in

which a policy or of several ways in which a policy may be implemented (Fox **et al.** 1991:126).

It has been stated earlier in this text that policy is usually implemented in the form of programs. This means that programs can be evaluated. Program evaluation is the systematic examination of .a program to provide information of the full range of its short- and long-term effects on citizens (Starling 1998:441).

According to Weiss (1972:16-17) to find out whether the program is delivering or not, provides a sound basis for deciding whether "... to continue or discontinue the program; ... improves its practices and procedures; ... add or drop specific program strategies and techniques; ... institute similar programs elsewhere; ... allocate resources among competing programs; and ... accept or reject a program approach." Program evaluation thus makes it incumbent on decision makers to look at their programs. It also uses performance measurement in the process.

11.2.1   Performance measurement

Performance measurement and evaluation are vital parts of the public sector reform process. The ultimate objective of such reform is to ensure that the public sector becomes more efficient and effective over time (Wanna **et al.** 1992:169). Performance measurement and evaluation are inherently and intensely political because they offer judgements regarding the appropriateness of using public resources in specific ways, of employing public servants in particular tasks, of allocating funds to programs, of providing clients and groups with specific benefits (Wanna **et al.** 1992:169). Based on the explanation of performance measurement and evaluation above, it therefore is, important that clear objectives must be set before performance measurement and evaluation could be conducted.

11.2.1.1   Identification of objectives

Wanna et al. (1992:170-171) admit that identification of goals is necessary for the evaluation of the program.   However the issue of goal identification causes considerable controversy for the following reasons:

- ✿   It may be difficult to establish what are the goals of an activity or program.

- ✿   Even where formal objectives are clearly and explicitly stated, they may not represent the actual goal of policy-makers or organisations and these actual goals may bear little or no relation to the content of the sub-program concerned.

- ✿   Even where policy-makers or program managers do have clear objectives and pursue them vigorously, the objectives may not be accepted as the basis for evaluation.

- ✿   Whether stated goals are realistic in the first place; if not, then using them as a basis for evaluation is hardly appropriate.

- ✿   The goals of a program may change over time in response, for example, to shift in the political and economic climate or in public perceptions of the nature of the problem concerned and of the feasibility or desirability of different approaches to its solution.

Ignoring or deprecating these problems will not make them go away, and may result in poor evaluation and waste and misallocation of resources.   It is preferable for evaluators to recognise them, and to indicate how they have been with, even if the solution is regarded as far from perfect (Wanna et al. 1992:174).

11.2.1.2   Performance measurement and evaluation perspectives

Methodologies can be applied in the evaluation process, to name but one, quasi-experimental approach, but evaluation simply reflect what is actually happening,

regardless of either the evaluator's or the sponsor's feeling on the matter. Critics argue that every methodology, whether in the natural or social sciences, contains its own biases and assumptions, and that the choice of methodology in fact represents a choice of values and is far from value free (Wanna et al. 1992:180). Thus, any evaluation, by choosing specific methodologies and applying them in particular ways, can have a major impact on the outcome of evaluations.

The question now arises; who should conduct program evaluations? The answer is that they should be conducted by program managers. This situation has been justified on the grounds that only managers are in a position to enforce those changes which evaluation indicates are desirable (Wells 1987:1).

However in the United States, extensive use is made of external evaluators from academic institutions and specialised, private sector evaluation agencies (Wanna et al. 1992:181). Performance measurement and evaluation should meet and promote the interest of the citizens, this is in line with customer-focus approach. Leung (1987:47) states that one major function of performance evaluation should be to appraise the extent to which a program is meeting the performance perceptions and expectations of responsible officials, interest groups and/or those on whom the program takes effect. Public sector programs including evaluation should be controlled.

11.3 Controlling

After planning has been done, and structure provided to facilitate achievement of the objectives formulated in planning, and the leading function performed, the organisational objectives have not necessarily been attained. Poor accomplishment of any of the managerial functions increases the importance of making some adjustments, either in the means used to attain the objectives or in the objectives themselves (Fox et al. 1991:118).

This control is designed to guarantee the protection of citizens, organisations and enterprises against encroachments from the State or its officials (OECD 1987:51). According to Dimock & Dimock (1969:570) "... control is a central function of management because it is the means of measuring results, not only in terms of finished products or services but also over periods of time."

Two other sources of control are important for reponsiveness. One is the control derived from public service ethics. This control is closely related to the regulations governing public servants and the ethical codes of their training and peers. The other source of control is from clients themselves. This power depends on their ability to obtain the facts about mal-administration and to pursue grievances (OECD 1987:51). Control can be visualised as a process. Much of this process involves informal communication and interaction, by means of **inter alia**, memoranda, meetings, conversation, and even by such signals as facial expressions (Fox **et al.** 1991:119). In addition to these informal activities, there are formal controls (Anthony & Dearden 1980:19).

11.3.1   Formal control

The formal elements of control differ greatly between countries, especially with respect to public or administrative law. Some elements of public sector controls differ from organisation to organisation. The status of public servants can greatly affect responsiveness. In some situations, public servants may be more responsive to political leaders than concerned for the law or individual clients; they may be more or less responsive to different clients, depending on the extent of clients' social, economic or political influence (OECD 1987:51).

Formal controls may operate on the policy process (e.g. ensuring the constitutionality of legislation) or at the level of implementation. Formal controls usually operates vertically to political levels through the administrative hierarchy (OECD 1987:51).

In addition to administrative and political controls, intermediaries also play a cardinal role in fostering customer-focus approach by making public officials to be more responsive to the citizens' needs.

11.3.2   Intermediaries

Equal access by all citizens to the public administration and to the established complaints system, is not always, nor necessarily, ensured by the structures of representative democracy (OECD 1987:52). Intermediary organisations such as ombudsmen and parliamentary commissioners may, therefore, be established, even in countries with well developed political and judicial control systems (OECD 1987:52). In South Africa the ombudsman is called the public protector.

Many countries have felt that additional channels for voicing grievances are needed. For example a channel to support clients through voluntary service offices (OECD 1987:52).

The Citizens Advice Bureaux in the United Kingdom are non-governmental institutions for neighbourhood assistance, staffed by volunteers, and financed primarily through grants from local and central government. A wide cross-section of the public looks to the Bureaux for advice. One reason for the success of the nearly 500 Citizens Advice Bureaux is their linkage into a national voluntary organisation which provides assistance and sets standards (OECD 1987:52).

In Greece, Italy, and Turkey, community leaders in remote areas and small villages play a "multiplier" role. These leaders (the elected village head men, the school teacher, the priest) are contacted by the administration to help disseminate information. They are also frequently approached by the citizen to interpret administrative decisions, to help fill in forms, to write complaint letters or to convey wishes and needs to the administration (OECD 1987:53).

In the United States, ombudsman-type institutions have been created in several states in the form of the non-governmental office of Citizens' Complaints. This office is usually attached to the state Governor's office and therefore functions independently of the state legislature. The Office of Citizens' Complaints tries to increase governmental responsiveness by contacting the administration and requesting a solution to the citizen's grievances (OECD 1987:53). Thus intermediaries play a very crucial role in making sure that the needs of the citizens are taken care of and satisfied. This is one of the key principles of customer-focus approach.

11.3.3   The formal position of the client

One approach to changing relations between citizens, organisations or enterprises and the administration is to increase clients' formal rights and powers directly. This may, for instance, include making the administration liable for damages caused by poor or malpractice (OECD 1987:53-54). This will make public administration to be more caring as it will be costly to commit malpractices.

11.3.4   Other formal control measures

Although the legislature is the final controlling body in a democracy, it does not itself make detailed investigations of all executive actions. It has, however developed measures to assist in performing its controlling action effectively (Fox **et al.** 1991:124-125). Some of these measures are as follows:

❖   The accounting officer. This is usually the chief administrative official of a government department, who is accountable for the administrative arrangements regarding the moneys entrusted to his/her department.

❖ A state treasury may be described as the institution, that, subject to the authority of the legislature, is responsible to the financial administration of the country.

❖ A government service commission serves as an important aid to the legislature in various administrative functions not necessarily confined to personnel matters.

❖ Ministers of state, as members of a cabinet, have individual and collective responsibility to supervise the affairs of state.

❖ The state budget, passed after lengthy debating of estimates by the legislature, delegates authority to government to spend monies on its behalf and to perform particular actions aimed at attaining the objectives agreed to by the legislature.

❖ Select committees are appointed by the legislature to obtain information on particular matters such as public accounts, and to discuss matters that the legislature itself has neither the desire nor the time to discuss.

❖ Annual reports, which are submitted by government departments to the legislature (not all executive institutions are required by law to submits reports) help the legislature assess the results achieved by departmental programmes.

11.3.5 Qualities of an effective control system

According to Fox et al. (1991:121-122) effective control systems have certain qualities in common. The following are six prescriptions for controls:

✳ Timeliness. Controls should call attention to deviations in time to prevent serious infringements on the organisational performance. Thus citizens problems should be attended promptly when they are still fresh.

✳ Flexibility. Effective controls must be flexible enough to changes in internal operations and the external environment.

* Economy. Even though a comprehensive control system is preferable, it should be cost effective.

* Understandability. It is sometimes necessary to substitute less complex controls for sophisticated device in order to achieve universal comprehension.

* Strategic placement. Efficient and effective controls imply that attention be given to the factors that are strategic to the institution's performance.

* Ability to stress the exception. As all activities cannot be controlled, strategic control devices should be placed where they can call attention to the exceptions rather than signalling when the system is within tolerance. Thus in making the public sector to be responsive to the needs of its clients, effective control system should be put into place.

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12. CONCLUSION

The idea of incorporating customer-focus approach as a public sector management tool is a new and relatively underdeveloped one which needs considerably more work, both in theoretical and in practical terms.

Customer-focus approach is a new concept that is constantly subjected to refinement both in theory and in practice, it centres around the word 'customer' which has been made clearer that, it does not only pertain to the private sector but can also be used effectively in the public sector.

The most important aspect of treating citizens like customers, is to improve public sector service delivery. By consulting service users, setting service standards, increasing access, ensuring courtesy, providing useful information, increasing openness and transparency, remedying mistakes and failures, getting the best

possible value for money, enhanced accountability, encouraging innovation and rewarding excellence, the concept of customer-focus approach hold considerable potential for improving the quality of public service delivery.

The effective system of response to citizen's complaints can actually increase rather than reduce government accountability. Customer-focus approach helps link the general public directly with the wider public-service reforms.

In forming customer-focused goals (CFG), the customer-focus approach helps individual to formulate goals that are meant to serve the public in an improved manner. The goals are not formulated in isolation, but help individuals to link what they do everyday to the larger goals and values of the institution and helps to connect individuals, teams and organisations with their customers.

In many institutions, the introduction of new concepts fail, not because of their inappropriateness, but because of lack of planning. Customer-focus approach to improve service delivery should be implemented in steps and not in an haphazard manner.

If supported by openness and transparency, consultation and participation by a wider community, customer-focus approach can be used to formulate policies that will be more responsive to the citizens' needs.

By probing and knowing more about the public sector customers, the public officials are in a more advantageous position to plan their work. One of the aid for good planning in the public sector, is democratic participation. Thus customer-focus approach is a pivotal point in effective planning.

In making a decision, one has to identify the problem or opportunity, gather information and make a decision. Decision-making entails the use of techniques such

as cost-benefit analysis, multi-objective models, decision analysis, system analysis, operational research and nominal group technique. Customer-focus approach can effectively and efficiently be used in decision-making.

Every institution has to have an organisational structure. There are many organisational structures, formal or informal organisations, but the most effective structure is the one that responds positively to the needs of the customers.

Leading is one of the most important functions of management, however, not all managers are leaders. Good leaders are those that respond favourably to the needs of public sector customers.

Lastly, in managing the public sector in a responsive manner, public sector management should constantly be controlling and implementing the programs that have been planned. Controlling and implementing should be in a manner that responds to the needs of public sector customers. Thus, customer-focus approach can be used positively in all management functions, it can be an effective management tool if appropriately used.

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