

Msunduzi Municipality Customer Care:

**An investigation into customer care offered to Industrial and Commercial
Customers by**

Pietermaritzburg Electricity within the context of Batho

Pele Principles.

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ABSTRACT

Pietermaritzburg Electricity provides electricity to all residents living within its area of license which is mainly within the Msunduzi Municipality boundary. PE has in excess of 66 000 customers, 600 of which are industrial and commercial. PE customers service is regulated by the Batho Pele – ‘People First’ White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery published on 18 September 1997. This White Paper dictates how the service will be provided by public service institutions to public members.

This research will endeavour to investigate customer care offered to industrial and commercial customers by Pietermaritzburg Electricity within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

A sample size of 242 was chosen and 238 of the sample responded 10 of which were spoilt. 228 responses were analysed and an attempt to understand the performance of PE as far as customer service is concerned was made. A meeting was held with PE’s senior management to understand their commitment as far as customer service offered to industrial and commercial customers is concerned within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

The survey responses as well as the management responses were analysed and conclusions and recommendations were drawn.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CCF	Customer Communication Forum
CBO	Community Based Organisation
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
EDL	Electricity Distribution Licence
DoH	Department of Health
DPSA	Department of Public Service Administration
ISF	Infrastructure, Services and Facilities
MM	Msunduzi Municipality
MMC	Msunduzi Municipal Council
NER	National Electricity Regulator
NERSA	National Energy Regulator of South Africa
NRS	National Rationalised Standards
NGO	Non Governmental Organisation
PE	Pietermaritzburg Electricity
WTPSD	White Paper on Transforming of Public Service Delivery
SPSS	Statistical Package for the Social Sciences
Eskom	Electricity Supply Commission of South Africa

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Pietermaritzburg Electricity [PE] is an electricity distribution utility wholly owned by Msunduzi Municipality [MM], operating under the direction of The Msunduzi Municipal Council [MMC]. The MM is part of the Local Government sphere. PE was established in 1896 and at that time, electricity generation was also part of their business. With the establishment of the Electricity Supply Commission of South Africa [Eskom], which took over the national electricity generation responsibility, PE dropped the electricity generation business altogether and confined themselves to electricity distribution.

Electricity uses have progressed from simple heating and lighting to sophisticated uses ranging from surgical, music creation, control, communications and many more. Without electricity supply today, life would stand still, no plane would take off or land safely, network communication would cease, no electronic transaction would be made and all surgery would be halted. This shows how dependent human life today is on electricity. The Pietermaritzburg City's economic activity is as dependent on electricity. This opens up new opportunities for the electricity distribution industry with which also come enormous challenges, such as electricity supply requirements to suit customer needs that would require high capital outlay, or that may be impossible to provide using the existing electricity infrastructure. Customers will soon be requiring the electricity supply coupled with broadband communication networks, which is now possible.

PE has progressed from humble beginnings in 1896, where the major electricity consumer was the City Hall and a few domestic consumers surrounding the City Hall, to the current customer base of approximately 66 000 with the industrial and commercial customers as the major electricity consumers and the most profitable customer segment.

PE holds an Electricity Distribution License [EDL] issued by the National Electricity Regulator [NER], which is now known as National Energy Regulator of South Africa [NERSA]; it enables them to distribute electricity to residents within the specified area as stipulated in the EDL.

The EDL regime stipulates the area to which the licence holder is entitled exclusive right to distribute electricity. This entitles the licence holder exclusive access to all customers who reside within their licensed area. Therefore the electricity consumers cannot choose their electricity supplier. The EDL issued by the NER stipulates minimum requirements that the licence holder has to meet in terms of quality of supply and quality of service; that are now promulgated in section 15 of the Electricity Regulation Act, Act No 4 of 2006. The NER has developed mechanisms and systems to police and enforce compliance to these minimum statutory requirements. There are utilities like PE that have not yet fully embraced customer care principles. They are not as responsive to customer needs and demands as they should be; as a result the NER has introduced the customer communication forum to encourage the utilities to engage their customers; which is also incorporated in section 15 of the Electricity Regulation Act, Act No 4 of 2006.

1.1 BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES – PEOPLE FIRST

The Department of Public Services and Administration [DPSA] in 1997 instituted the Batho Pele initiative to build a public service capable of meeting the challenge of improving the delivery of public services to the citizens of South Africa, according to Dr Zweli Skweyiya, (White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery [WTPSD], DPSA, 1997, pg 2).

He states,

“Batho Pele, is a Sotho translation for ‘People First’. It is an initiative to get public servants to be service oriented, to strive for excellence in

service delivery and to commit to continuous service delivery improvement. It is a simple and transparent mechanism, which allows citizens to hold public servants accountable for the level of services they deliver. It is a way of delivering services by putting citizens at the centre of the public service planning and operations. It is a major departure from a dispensation which excluded the majority of South Africans from government machinery, to one that seeks to include all citizens for the achievement of a better life for all through services, products, and programs of a democratic dispensation”, (pg 2).

A declaration by Government was made that all public service institutions should offer a service to public which is in accordance with Batho Pele Principles (WTPPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 2).

This study reveals how compliant PE is with Batho Pele Principles. The investigation conducted on the filed PE documents (Fowles, 2004-2006 and Mchunu, 2004 - 2006) confirmed that they never trained or work-shopped staff on Batho Pele Principles, except that the employees were issued with golf shirts with Batho Pele Principles written on them. Further investigations into the matter may prove otherwise. The White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, published on 18 September 1997, outlines eight Batho Pele Principles, they are: Consultation; Service Standards; Access; Courtesy; Information; Redress; Openness and Transparency; Value for Money (WTPPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 3). Some government departments have added two additional principles, though they are not yet included in the white paper. These principles are: Customer Impact; and Encouraging Innovation and Rewarding Excellence (Department of Health, DoH, 2002).

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

PE has to meet legislated obligations in terms of section 52 of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996); the compliance with the Batho Pele Principles; Electricity Distribution Licence as issued by the NER

specifically section 15 of National Electricity Regulation Act, (Act No. 4 of 2006). In addition, the PE's 2004/05 strategic workshop revealed that PE is lacking the following: competitiveness; readiness to react to the future dynamics and good relationships with its customers (PE's Strategic Planning Workshop, 2004).

PE has to comply with the legislated requirements and has to offer a service which is in line with the industry norms and best practices in customer care; furthermore as part of the sphere of government, it is a requirement that they fully comply with the stipulations of Batho Pele. To try and address the above, PE decided to conduct an investigation into its customer service offering - whether it is within Batho Pele Principles and customer care principles. The intention was to ensure that PE is aligned with all the statutory requirements as dictated by the Constitution and the electricity distribution licence, as sanctioned by NER and promulgated in the National Electricity Regulation Act (Act No. 4 of 2006).

Compliance with Batho Pele Principles will enhance the customer services offered by PE to its customers.

1.3 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

In an endeavour to address the above-stated shortfalls, and to improve customer service to all its customers, PE decided to conduct an investigation to establish whether customers are offered a service within the Batho Pele Principles and if they are satisfied or not. The investigation would be conducted in phases; phase one deal with PE major customer segment, the industrial and commercial customers, phase two deals with small power users and the last phase, the domestic customers. This study is limited to the first phase of the investigation, i.e. industrial and commercial customers.

The investigation provides valuable information that is used to bring back the customer to the centre stage of business by ensuring that the service offering is within the Batho Pele Principles, and further ensure compliance with Chapter 7

of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No 108 of 1996); EDL requirements enforced by NERSA especially Section 15 of the National Electricity Regulation Act (Act No. 4 of 2006) .

From PE's customer categorisation, that has not changed for many years, and the service offering that is identical to all its customers regardless of differing customer needs, it can be seen that PE has been using a shotgun approach to their electricity customers. They are in a pure monopoly industry structure type and as a result, they do little or no advertising, and offer minimal service (Kotler 2000:220).

In addition, Chapter 7 of The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa establishes the local government, and section 152(1) (a) to (e) stipulates the responsibilities of the local government, but to mention a few, b) to ensure the provision services to communities in a sustainable manner, c) to promote social and economic development, e) to encourage the involvement of communities and community organisations in matters of local government (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No 108 of 1996). A preliminary investigation into PE's records revealed that they have never consulted with their customers before, as far as service offering is concerned and have never conducted any investigation to establish whether the service offered is satisfactory or not (Fowles, 2004-2006 and Mchunu, 2004 - 2006).

Casual talks with frontline staff and a visit to the customer service centre at 111 Havelock Road revealed no evidence that PE subscribes to key customer care principles. The customer centre is situated on 1st floor, with no easy access for the disabled and aged customers and the customer area is so small such that customers are squashed into a very small front counter. Blume in Dorrian (1996:43) asserts that, to provide the very best in customer care, there are five factors that every business needs to master. These are: reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness, and tangibles.

The legislation has empowered NERSA by promulgating section 15 (1) that

stipulated specific requirements to ensure that the electricity distribution utilities do respond to customer needs and have systems in place to ensure that customer complaints are heard and attended to (National Electricity Regulation Act, Act No. 4 of 2006, Section 15). One of the tools the NERSA used is the introduction of the Customer Communication Forums [CCF], to encourage electricity utilities to engage their customers (NER Guidelines to Customer Communication Forums, 2004).

During the PE's annual strategic planning exercise for 2004/05, the following facts were revealed (PE's Strategic Planning Workshop, 2004):

- Customer service should take a centre stage in PE's business,
- PE needs to strengthen the relationships with its customers,
- PE is not in total compliance with the dictates of the law and the service delivery mechanisms for the public sector, e.g. Batho Pele Principles,
- The objectives of the local government as stipulated in Chapter 7, Section 152 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No 108 of 1996) emphasises that Local Government must lift the service provision standards to communities,
- The current market conditions within which the electricity distribution sector operates is not going to last forever; competition is going to be introduced very soon as has been witnessed in the telecommunication sector,
- Should the industry sector be liberalised, PE will be driven out of business due to the fact that they did not embrace customer care principles,
- Customers will switch service providers in search for better value for money and good customer service,
- The new players (from other countries whose electricity industry was liberalised many decades ago) will come with a wealth of experience coupled with cutting edge technology to serve customers well. This is due to their experience in customer care and their understanding that it is profitable to maintain and uphold

customer service principles.

The above clearly indicated to PE management that there is a need to do something to improve the service offered to its customers.

1.4 OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The main objectives of this study are extracted from the Batho Pele Principles. They are fundamental to the service providers who are delivering a service to consumers and they also relate to the work of Dorrian (1996:100), which highlights similar factors that every business needs to master for its success.

1. To investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE.
2. To investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.
3. To investigate whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

1.5 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 2 provides a literature review on general concepts of customer care such as knowing customer needs, effective interaction with customers and how to ensure good customer service. The Chapter ends with a brief look at customer service in the public sector.

Chapter 3 provides a brief background to public service institutions and in particular local government. The applicable legislation as far as customer care/service is

adequately reviewed, mainly to establish the norms and practices. Batho Pele Principles are discussed extensively, taking cognisance of the fact that the research objectives are established from them. Its relevance to the local sphere of government is established and parallels with the customer care literature are also drawn, to ensure that the questions are investigating issues of relevance.

Chapter 4 presents the research methodology and Chapter 5 deals with data analysis and the results of the research. Tables, graphs, pie charts, and statistical analysis are used to present and explain the results of the research in a cogent way.

Chapter 6 deals with correlation of research data and PE management's interview responses. Chapter 7 presents conclusion, and Chapter 8 presents recommendations, the research limitations and further recommendations.

References are provided by way of the Harvard Referencing method.

The Appendices present the questions that were used and any other documentation of interest to this study.

CHAPTER 2

CUSTOMER CARE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

Customer care is a well-researched topic. It may be dynamic and diverse but there are well established principles in customer care literature. Canning (1999:4) defines customer care as creating a satisfied customer every time. She further states,

“Today, customers expect to be satisfied in every transaction with a company”.

In addition Peter Drucker in Cook (2002:1) provides another dimension when he states,

“There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer”.

The above implies that the business should establish good customer care practices that will ensure a satisfied customer every time.

Dee, (1994:20) states that there are three kinds of customers: 1) those who constantly nag and complain; 2) those who complain infrequently; and 3) those who never complain. He goes on to say that in case of type three customers, organisations never hear from them except when they place an order or obtain routine information, they are the ones that should concern the organisation the most. It stands to reason from the statement made by Dee, (1994) that type three customers do not give an opportunity to improve the service but switch to the next

service provider as soon as the opportunity to do so arises. However according to Dee, (1994:20), type one and two customers do give an opportunity to improve from their feedback (complaint and nagging).

This chapter broadly discusses customer care theory from different perspectives. Customer care as applicable to public service institutions is reviewed and the chapter concludes by introducing the Batho Pele Principles as applicable to all public service institutions.

2.2 CUSTOMER CARE – THE CUSTOMER PERSPECTIVE

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000:4) states that effective customer service begins with knowing customer needs; he posits that it is not what the organisation thinks that is important but what the customer thinks that is important.

Dorian (1996:51) cautions when he states,

“Make no mistake; embracing the philosophy of customer care will demand perseverance, tenacity, resilience, a great deal of motivation, and the ability on your part to encourage and motivate staff to espouse that philosophy”.

According to Becker (1998:170), good customer service cannot be derived from boardrooms, but by getting closer to customers and to ferret out what they consider to be good customer service. Cheales (1994:13) concurs with Becker and Zeithaml and Bitner (2000:4) as he states that good knowledge of customer needs is very important to the supplier. He further states that in order for the service to be offered, the customer needs to be asked the following questions:

- *What service/product do you want?*
- *How do you want it?*

He concludes by stating that the service offering should be according to the customer. Cheales (1994:13) expands by saying that to provide poor service is equally as bad as providing the best quality service that the customer does not want, but fail on what the customer wants. What the customer values in any encounter is very important. He emphasises the fact, that

“Quality is what the customer says he needs, not what you think he needs”
(1994:13).

Dorrian (1996:15) cautions management, especially South African managers from being swamped by the plethora of business management techniques, such as continuous improvements and quality control procedures, to name but a few, while failing dismally on the ‘in thing’ their customer needs. The customer is the reason of the organisations existence.

Lazarus in Cheales (1994:13) asserts,

“You listen to the customers, then act on what they tell you”.

He goes on to state,

“Don’t, for a moment assume that what a customer wants today will be the same tomorrow. The customer is fickle, always wants the latest, the best and the easiest to use at an affordable price, accompanied by superb service”.

In agreeing with this, Raymond Ackerman in Cheales (1994:13) said,

“Customer expectations are not static, they change all the time. So it’s vital to move with the changes”.

Understanding the above, it gives the impression that the customer behaviour is progressive as stated by Lazarus in Cheales (1994:13) that they fickle and want the best. Organisations must continuously give customers opportunities to state what they want. The usual management strategic planning exercises would not help if the customer perspective is not taking the centre stage in their planning.

From the above, it stands to reason that senior management of the organisation need to commit to providing a quality service to their customers and make the customer experience a memorable one. This is important as Cheales (1994: xi) states that good customer service is a means to ensure survival in the market place; and he concludes by saying that companies that fail to meet customer service expectations will be driven to the wall. Many, including old established corporations, have already succumbed.

Shonhiwa (2001:100) asserts that when the customer engages the staff member, staff member represents the organisation at that moment. The outcome of that engagement will determine the fate of the organisation (the customer when purchasing the product or service that ensures that the organisation succeeds). He elaborates further as he states that the customer's feelings on the organisation are formed from those few minutes called 'moments of truth'. This clearly indicates that the market place requires business people who know their customers as well as their needs (2001:100).

Becker (1998:243) agrees that good customer service doesn't have to be difficult to achieve. He states,

"It's merely a never-ending struggle to improve and stay focussed on the two most important areas: your people and your customers".

He goes on to affirm that unfortunately it is not something that can be achieved overnight but a concerted effort and investment needs to be made. To augment this, Raymond Ackerman argues in Cheales (1994:25) that customer service or

service excellence is not a quick-fix solution. He substantiates by saying that Pick 'n Pay has a long-term approach to customer service, over 26 years working on it. Shonhiwa (2001:100) provides a wider perspective in saying that in the past, customer service or customer care was non-existent to many, if not all organisations. The traditional business approach was dominated by the pursuit of profit. He alludes to the fact that the business philosophy was in this order:

- Profit,
- Product and,
- People

The product came as a natural second, profit being the chief source. People came at the bottom of the scale because their only relevance and value was in terms of the first two elements.

Shonhiwa (2001:100) contends,

“In organisations oriented towards service, the order has been turned:

- *People*
- *Product*
- *Profit*

He concludes,

“The people part of the equation does not only deal with customers, but the customer service equation to be completed begins with people and ends with people”.

He further asserts that the people who manage the customer's experience are key assets. They should be developed, encouraged, inspired, supported and empowered to deliver service excellence, and the quality products which will make

the organisation profitable. He concludes by saying that it is therefore inevitable to affirm that investment in people is a central quality service requirement; it is not optional.

From the literature reviewed, it could be firmly argued that the role played by people in service offering is of utmost importance, and Shonhiwa (2001:100) confirms this when he states that the customer service is an engagement of people, where a service is offered by frontline employees to customers to enhance their lives.

Buchanan (2002:9) defines a customer as someone with a problem who is willing to pay someone else to solve the problem. He further adds that people do not buy products; they solve problems by buying the product, they do not buy services; they solve problems by buying services. The above, in a nutshell, means that whether the organisation sells a product or a service, the customer sees a basket of solutions to his/her problems. In order to make a deal, the solution should match/fit the problem.

Customer care/service authors such as, Becker, Dorrian, Cook, and Cheales, call the encounter between the frontline employee and the customer the 'moment of truth'. It is imperative therefore to focus on organisation/customer engagement and try to unravel the determinants of successful or unsuccessful encounters, and also to understand whose perspective determines the success or failure of the engagement. An attempt is made to understand this concept the 'moment of truth'. The following questions assist in the endeavour to understand the concept 'moment of truth':

- Who determines the outcome of the engagement?
- Who are the customers and what is it that they want? And how do they want it?
- What is it that needs to be done to ensure that the encounter is a memorable one?

- During the encounter between the organisation and the customer, which part of the engagement is within the organisation's control and which is not?
- What is it that needs to be done to ensure that the customer comes back for more?
- What needs to be done to ensure that the customer experience is continuously improved?

2.3 THE 'MOMENT OF TRUTH'

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000:86) illustrate that when the customer procures a service, he/she gets in to a cascading series of many encounters, 'moments of truth', that the customer receives a snapshot of the organisation's service quality, and each encounter contributes to the customer's overall satisfaction and willingness to do business with the organisation again. He further states that each encounter presents an opportunity to prove the organisation's potential as a quality service provider and to increase customer loyalty.

Dorrian (1996:26) however states that customers are not interested in the problems that companies face. They are only concerned with what can be obtained from the interaction between the two parties, and he further adds that there is a strong correlation between the provision of superior service and the profitability of a company, (32). He then concludes by saying

"Essentially, customers buy two things: solutions to their problems and good feelings. This includes good service, reliability, as well as a quality product and or service. If you continually give people good feelings by solving their problems, you are well on your way to creating longer-lasting customer relationships" (1996: 45).

The outcome of the service/product offering has to meet the customer needs. The service gap therefore denotes the discord that prevails when the expectations or perceptions of delivery action fall short of what the recipient actually experiences in the relative context. The latter qualifying phrase emphasises the reasonableness and relevance of the expectations (Shonhiwa, 2001:94).

Cheales (1994:71) advises that in order to save time and money, the frontline staff should do the job right first time and listen to customers. He reaffirms the point as he says, "really listen"; he further suggests that the art of active listening can be cultivated by following his five points:

1. Getting out from behind the desk to where the customer is,
2. Becoming accessible to customers,
3. Providing quick feedback to customers,
4. Acting on what the customer says,
5. Speaking the customer's language.

The above clearly indicates that the frontline staff should be trained to be active listeners and to understand that the success of their daily activities is dependent on satisfying the customer.

On the other hand, Becker (1998:169) suggests the following steps to great customer service:

1. Answer phones promptly – It angers customers to hang on the phone endlessly whilst no one takes the call,
2. Return all phone calls – Failing to call back is considered rude by customers,
3. Learn to apologise – When a mistake has happened, saying sorry makes the customer to feel better,
4. Try to correct problems promptly – Problems do not go away by themselves, they need to be taken care of and resolved promptly.

5. Get to know your customers

Becker (1998:169) concludes by quoting the statement made by Harvey Mckay:

"The better you know the customer the better the relationship will be with the customer".

In Cheales (1994:79), the former United States Secretary of State Dean Rusk said:

'One of the best ways of persuading others is with your ears - by listening to them.'

He further suggests that the heart of a customer can be won by becoming an avid listener. The Freelander Group, (1998:13) also states that the results of surveys indicate that about 70% of all customers who switch do so because they simply feel the vendor didn't care about them or their company's needs.

In ensuring that the customer gets the best service and the 'moment of truth' is a memorable one, Cheales (1994:89) affirms that institutions should not protect themselves but they should enhance service. He then suggests that organisations do the following:

1. Add, don't subtract.
2. Build sales to build profitability.
3. Focus on enhancing revenue, not containing costs.
4. Use their initiative.
5. Create an idea bank.

To Cheales (1994:60), providing consistent service does enhance the customer experience. He also suggests a five-point guide to providing consistent service; he calls it 'service of unwavering high quality'.

1. Give the customer control,
2. Dress the same, behave the same, and offer the same,
3. Own and duplicate the experience,
4. Deliver the same result every time,
5. Define the organisation's role in giving the customer control. Then work out how others are going to assist in offering control.

The above Cheales's five points suggest that customers want control and consistency. They have expectations from past experiences and they expect at least the same or better experience during their next encounter. Therefore the organisation should put systems in place to ensure that the customer expectations are met at all the times.

2.4 KNOWING WHAT THE CUSTOMER WANTS

Cheales (1994:xi) states,

“Change seems to be very slow, but the time will come when the organisations that were complacent with the present, relaxed in their laurels, will be overwhelmed by the its tide and their doom will be inevitable”.

He goes on to say that customers are now kicking back; they want more than the product; they want more than quality; they want more than product performance; they insist on added value; they demand service. He concludes by saying that the desire to give better than - average service, according customer's perspective, it is a great deal and value adding (Cheales, 1994:2).

Becker (1998:xxi) summarises this nicely as he says,

“If the organisation really blows away their customers with incredible service, they will want to stay with them. They know that they will always

take care of them, and they will tell other people about that organisation's great service".

Shonhiwa (2001:99) alludes to the fact that at every moment of truth there are three possible customer behaviours:

- ❖ Customers will get less than what they expect and be disappointed or angry (i.e. the service is not memorable because it is horrible),
- ❖ Customers will get exactly what they expect and therefore it is 'no big deal' (i.e. forgettable because it is natural!),
- ❖ Customers get service of a higher quality than what they expect and are delighted (i.e. it is memorable because it's magic!),

He goes on to state that the last encounter is 'the external aim of service excellence'.

Cheales (1994:4) concurs with Shonhiwa by asserting that the customer does not repeat the ordinary experience, but repeats an extra-ordinary good experience. He further states that excellent service is a judicious blend of factors, the main one being added value. This means that somehow you have to reward a customer if you want him/her to come back for more. He concludes by saying that consumers want something that makes them smile and feel a little better about buying a product/service.

Chapman and Cowdell (1998:84) give an understanding of organisational needs in saying that organisational demand; therefore, is related to a series of factors which relate to its survival, operations, security, profitability, obligations and reputation. It is impossible for the utility to provide shoddy customer service and not affect any two of the customer demands, if not all.

A question is asked, what is it that the customer wants? Cheales (1994:14) recommends a five-point plan on how to satisfy customer perception of quality.

1. Exceed customer expectation,
2. Don't settle for second best,
3. Always take decisive action,
4. Let the customer define what is important, and lastly
5. Add a little detail that enhances the customer's pleasure.

Shonhiwa (2001:95) outline what he calls 'ten non- negotiable commandments for service excellence'. They are as follows:

1. All professionals and their lieutenants should be adequately service-oriented to realise that a customer is the most important visitor they receive at any time in their work period.
2. The customer comes first at all times... To render professional service in any discipline, one must have the following basic people skills: these refer to communicating clear messages; demonstrating a positive attitude at all times, making everyone feel special, showing high energy and giving consistent service under pressure. Remember that customers are not idiots, they always know when they are not welcome, no matter how well disguised the behaviour is.
3. The customer is not dependant on you. You are dependant on the customer, whether he or she is a patient, a legal client, a prisoner, a school pupil or a passenger in transit... On occasion, public service offices close down because of lack of patronage by people who require the services rendered there. In the private sector the equation is extremely straightforward - no customers, no business.
4. A customer is not an interruption to your work; he or she is the cause of it. Customers are evaluating your performance in handling them. From

this evaluation, strong opinions arise that can be positive or negative towards the professional person. When you are serving a customer, whether as a teacher, doctor, nurse, policeman, lawyer, business manager, banker or any profession, you are on stage. The questions you should answer upfront are: Are you dressed for the part? Do you know your lines? Do you understand the play?

5. The customer is not an outsider in your organisation but an important partner. Those organisations that have constant open communication with their customers are the market leaders because they know what their customers want, and when and how they want it before producing it. During hard times customers stick to those businesses that gave them respect by asking their opinion and shared consumer plans with them.
6. Remember when a customer calls on your services you are not doing the customer a favour, the opposite is true. By seeking your services the customer is giving you a vote of confidence that you should seize eagerly to prove your ounce of gold.
7. The corollary to this principle is that customers do not owe you anything by seeking your services. They can go elsewhere if they are not satisfied with you. When resources are scarce, short-sighted service providers foolishly believe that they are the only ones capable of meeting the customers' needs and they have no alternative. This is tantamount to shooting oneself in the foot because once another option presents itself, even second rate in service, customers will change allegiance overnight, if only out of spite. Many enterprises have gone bust unexpectedly through this invincible power of consumers.
8. Every person who renders a service to others, at whatever level this may be, must remember that the first four minutes of the encounter are critical and the last two minutes are crucial for a sustainable service

relationship. In the first four minutes you are the organisation you work for. When customers interact with you they are doing so with the full conviction that you are the organisation. If you captivate customers by radiating an understanding of other's needs, willingness to satisfy them and taking appropriate timely action, you have created a memorable customer experience. That will become your individual credit, which will ensure they do not go to the competition. The last two minutes are crucial because the first impression lingers longest after the event. Your concluding behaviour sets the tone for the 'moment of truth' that you have just had with the customer. Create a professional, but warm and personal image, capped by a definite indication of action.

9. In whatever capacity you may be operating, always remember the customer's bill of rights. Rule 1 is that the customer is always right, regardless of the circumstances. The onus is on professionals to navigate around potential conflict with the customer because they cannot win the argument. Rule 2 is that if you should find the customer wrong, return immediately to Rule 1. Ultimately the customer is king. He or she is the reason for your being in the profession that you have chosen.
10. Foster a relationship of mutual benefit that enables you to profit through service. The 80/20 rule dictates that under normal circumstances in a market situation, professions included, 80% of business comes from 20% of the client base. This means people relationships are fundamental to success factors. The traditional business approach was dominated by the pursuit of profit. The people who manage the customer's experience are key assets. They should be developed, encouraged, inspired and supported to empower them to deliver the service excellence, the quality product, which will make you profitable. All professional service providers should be convinced that investment in people is a central quality service requirement; it is not optional (100).

Becker (1998:170) provides two phrases that are important in customer service, he says

“Customer service is doing more than the customer expects and customer service isn’t what you think it is - it’s what the customer thinks it is. Customer service is centred on the customer”.

And he goes on to say (241) that if the customer is really happy with a company, if that company really goes out of its way to show the customer that it cares, if that company proves that it puts the customer first, and if that company makes the customer feel that he was taken care of in the right way - then the customer will stay with that company and continue to buy its products.

Cheales (1994:94) concurred in saying that several companies have introduced sophisticated customer-care programmes in a bid to improve service levels; few manage to deliver better service consistently. It isn’t difficult to find the reason for this lapse. Even superficial research shows that most companies, which invest - sometimes heavily - in customer care programmes seldom, know how to measure the results. ‘If you can’t measure them, you can’t manage them’. Of the companies that do measure results, the majority either don’t do so often or measure the wrong variables. He further poses a challenge in saying

“Management’s challenge is to create a measurement and feedback system that is interesting and relevant for the individual or the team”.

Cheales sums it up by saying measuring customer service levels at regular intervals and measuring the right variables is important.

The service rendered must therefore meet the customer expectation. In elaborating about this Cheales (1994:14) stated that in the back of every customer’s mind is a scale that automatically compares what he expects with what he gets. When the scale rises on the plus side, his perception of the service you provide will rise in sympathy.

Most organisations would do everything possible to cut costs, sometimes even compromise the very quality the customer is seeking in the product or service, but Cheales (1994:16) advises otherwise when he states that on average, quality supercedes the cost factor. He further substantiates this fact in saying that this is borne out of the results of a survey by call for the American Society for Quality Control.

“It would appear that most consumers are willing to pay for quality in the products they desire (16)”.

After all effective processes and procedures are established, frontline customer care training conducted, implementation of the best IT systems to harness the benefits of effective customer care, implementation of complaints handling processes and procedures, it should not be hoped that the result would be happy customers. Cheales (1994:33) advises,

“Measurement must be at the heart of any effective customer care programme. I suggest that you speed up your response times, quantify them, and measure them. And when you achieve 100%, add a further dash of speed”.

The management has to integrate all resources to ensure that they work to provide a memorable customer experience. This has been found to be a never ending process as the customer needs and perceptions are ever changing. The senior management commitment to customer care has been found to be very important in making the customer experience a delight. All organisations activities should dovetail to ensuring that the customers get what they want, the way they want it and in time. It was revealed that the customers do not care what systems and processes are used to deliver the service, therefore, they need not to be bogged down to internal systems and processes but the internal systems should be designed with the customer needs in mind. It has been clearly stated that customer experience must be according to the customer. It is imperative therefore to investigate ways of ensuring good customer service provision.

2.5 ENSURING GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE PROVISION

Dick Barnes in Cheales (1994:133) wrote:

“A decade ago we would have puzzled over the idea that someone would care who they were dealing with as long as the price was right and the order arrives intact. Now we don’t question this anymore. People are simply expecting more today from business dealings. They have become more self-aware, some might even say self-absorbed, and expect to be treated with real respect. A distributor who fails to recognise that his customer service department is not living up to the expected new standards is going to pay a price for his ignorance.”

Becker (1998:163) concurs by stating that all the best companies have done an incredible job of pleasing their customers. This satisfaction is accomplished in only one-way: with ongoing training. The winning companies have an ongoing training programme that involves everyone, it has to start at the top, with senior management, and continue through all levels of the company. Training also has to continue from day to day, and it has to happen in countless ways.

In addition, Becker (1998:172) states that the best companies in the world have the best customer service programmes and spend the most money on training.

Shonhiwa (2001: 44) customer service excellence is not achieved by accident; it is the result of systematic planning, dedication and hard work supported by intensive training. Katzenbach and Santamaria (2001:106) observed that frontline employees are unskilled and are paid little. Their work can be stubbornly unexciting. Because their work is monotonous and their chances of advancement are limited, most frontline employees work for a regular pay-cheque and nothing more; they never emotionally connect with their employers, let alone care about the company’s long-term performance. Yet their impact on the customer’s experience – not to mention the company’s profits, can be enormous.

Further, Katzenbach and Santamaria (2001:119) states that business executives would first need to shake off their old attitudes. They would need to embrace the notion that a great many frontline workers can lead, and thus should be trained to do so. Executives would need to support the idea that every frontline supervisor deserves extensive leadership training with the approach that makes the most of the supervisor's individual leadership style. They conclude by saying that these are major attitude adjustments.

Becker (1998:243) takes this issue further and identifies three things that would ensure the creation of irresistible customer service, which is good customer experience. He states them as right company policies, the right people, and the right attitude. The attitude should be noted.

Buchanan (2002:15) contends that the only way to really fix a customer service problem is to change the culture in which it happens so completely that it cannot happen again – because the culture doesn't want it to.

Shonhiwa (2001: 81) alludes to the fact that customer service works wonders in the private sector. It should be implemented with the same vigour in the public sector. He also confirms that tremendous training occurs in this sector, but contends that it is designed mainly to upgrade technical and administrative skills. He further suggests that training in behavioural competencies, which improve understanding of people, managing personal behaviour and inculcating passion for giving service in the line of duty should be provided.

Poisant (2002:36) contends that employees are to be the centre of management's concern and attention. Sustained profit and growth is primarily stimulated by customer loyalty. He further states that loyalty is a direct result of customer satisfaction, and the level of service provided to customers largely influences their satisfaction. He concludes,

"In turn, motivated and productive employees create a high degree of quality service that drives customer loyalty".

The literature reviewed highlighted points worth noting. The organisation is responsible for the frontline employee's activities. They can also ensure that the customer encounter is a pleasant one by providing training. They can do this by establishing a training programme which will provide continuous training instead of once off training. The training should establish the customer needs and requirements as superior. Also, the frontline staff needs to be made to understand that the determinant of the outcome of the encounter, whether it was a success or a failure, all depends on the customer, what he/she says it was and nobody else. The literature also revealed that frontline employee's work is superior as it determines the profitability of the organisations, it should therefore not be looked at as inferior. Management should provide the necessary training, motivation, support and most of all the leadership. The organisational support should be in terms of policies, systems, attitude that will form a culture that empowers the frontline employees to fulfil their role in ensuring a satisfied customer.

Fred Smith in Basch (2002:17) states,

"Give employees a sense of control over their own destiny, and they will do anything you ask - and more".

He further states that systems must be designed to give employees and customers total control of the relationship.

For the organisation to succeed in performing and ensuring that the employees play their vital role in providing good customer service, they should be properly motivated, (Poisant, 2002:10). He further advises that for management to be able to motivate their frontline employees, they will need to understand Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs theory and also be able to apply it to their employees. The manager needs to know at what level (Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs) the frontline staff is. From that understanding the manager will be able know what needs to be done to fill the employee needs gap, and what will motivate them. The Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, that underpins the human motivation, is as follows:

1. Physiological Needs: Most basic is the need for relief from thirst, hunger and physical drives,
2. Safety Needs: Need to be free from harm or danger, to have a secure and predictable life,
3. Love and Belonging: Beyond existence needs, lies the desire for nurturing, acceptance, respect, and caring relationships,
4. Esteem Needs: Psychological well being, built on the perception of oneself as worthy and recognised by others.
5. Self-Actualisation Needs: The peak of human existence; the ability to develop latent capabilities and realise one's fullest potential.

The real goal is to have passionate employees who deliver extraordinary services to their customers, either internal or external, and who are constantly finding better ways to deliver more value at less cost to those customers (Basch, 2002:67). Most people are smart and, left to their own devices, will find better and better ways to serve their customers, peers, and owners successfully (Basch, 2002:78).

Another reason to have your frontline employees improve their services is that they typically know far more than anyone else, including the customer, about what the customer's needs are. Service experts generally say "ask your customers", but the reality is that customers in most situations really don't know what they want - at least not on an emotional level (Basch, 2002:116).

It has been revealed that the people's side of the organisation is important. Without effective and motivated frontline team, every endeavour to provide good customer service will be futile. Every effort should be made to train motivate and provide the policies, procedures and systems that will ensure that frontline staff provide the service the customers expect to receive. The organisation should move to developing good and profitable customer relationships which enhances customer engagement.

2.6 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

According to Anderson and Kerr, (2002:2) Customer relationship management is a comprehensive approach for creating, maintaining and expanding customer relations.

Cheales (1994:33) advises;

“Take a hard, critical look at how your products or services move through the system to your customer. Pay particular attention to areas that could impede the smooth flow. Then get together with those responsible for maintaining the flow and sort out the problems. Open an ongoing dialogue between all interested parties. Start with the customer. Involve the customer, whenever possible, in product or service development. Ask the customer what she/he wants? And when and how he wants it? Then look at your own facilities. Are they adequate? Can they handle the required throughput? If they can’t, look into possibility of sub-contracting as a means of improving your service to the customer.”

Becker (1998:172) posits 10 points; he calls them 10 rules for customer service:

1. The commitment and priority should come from top management to do whatever it takes to satisfy the customer,
2. It should be the responsibility of everyone - total teamwork,
3. Focus should be on what the client wants, not what the company wants,
4. Seek to develop long-term relationships,
5. Be proactive, seeking customer input and involvement at every phase of the relationship,
6. Create means to be flexible, not just going by the rules or the computer.
7. Ensure that there are quality standards, measurements and performance against them,
8. Focus on the positive and on what can be done,
9. Communication with external and internal customers should be honest and sincere (employees are internal customers),

10. The investment of time and resources should result in lower costs and improved services.

The concept of partnerships, writes Lynda King Taylor, is at the heart of every customer service organisation and must extend to the supplier if any real success is to be achieved (Cheales, 1994:34).

Many companies falter because they spend a disproportionate amount of their resources chasing new customers, when they should be focussing their attentions on developing and cementing relationships with existing customers. The more care afforded to customers the more business they will do with your company. And the more business the company generates, the more profit it stands to make. Therefore, it makes good business sense to look after customers (The Freeland Group, 1998:11).

Every distributor that wants to remain in business simply has to become more focused on retaining its customer base. Statistics vary, depending on the industry and on how the figures are derived, but research shows a 5% increase in customer retention can boost bottom line profits anywhere from 25% to 125% Similar research indicates that many businesses find that it takes from one to two years to reach a break-even point on a new customer...and that they are losing from 10% to 60% of their customer base during that time period (The Freeland Group, 1998:17).

2.7 MANAGEMENT'S ROLE

Peter Ducker in Canning (1999:66) states:

"No business can do better than its top management will permit; the 'bottleneck' is, after all, 'at the head of the bottle'. Of all the jobs in the enterprise, the top-management job is the most difficult to organise. But it is also the most important one to organise".

Shonhiwa (2001:45) presents another perspective when he states:

“When management share their vision through effective communication and participation, they empower the employees to act independently but appropriately”.

Cheales (1994:xi) further affirms the point when he states that the new management philosophy, rapidly taking shape in more enlightened businesses, encourages employees at all levels to think more creatively about ways to deliver quality customer service. It emphasised the need for greater top management participation in the frontline - at the point of direct customer contact. It also stresses the importance of decentralising control of service standards, and a willingness to re-align organisational structures to meet customer needs more effectively.

The above discussion concurs with Cheales (1994:3) that the top management's involvement in the frontline customer care issues is important, but more so their willingness to empower their frontline staff to make important decisions because the business fraternity appreciates quick and hassle-free service.

Basch (2002:117) states that employee passion is aroused when they are given the opportunity to invent their own version of service. He adds that they are close to the customers and know their needs far better than the senior managers of any organisation.

The frontline staff members are the organisations intelligence; they can acquire a lot of customer information vital to the organisation's strategic planning exercises aimed at ensuring effective customer service. Cheales (1994:34) posits that a customer should be given a new dimension. He further states that organisations need to understand customer feelings. When doing the strategic plan, the customer needs to take part and have his voice heard. The customer should feel that the organisation cares for him.

Lynda King Taylor in Cheales (1994:34) writes,

“The concept of partnerships is at the heart of every customer service organisation...”

The above cannot be achieved without well trained frontline staffs who know what questions to ask the customers and what it is that makes the customer tick.

Poisant (2002:36), states that superior leaders truly care about their people. In turn, they provide a caring work environment for them; he further contends that organisations that focus on creating and sustaining a positive employee experience within a caring environment are solidly positioned to compete.

Paddy Lund in Basch (2002:67) says

“When you try to be all things to all customers, you are often perceived as nothing to no one. As a result many highly successful businesses are very specific about the types of customers they want to serve and the value they bring to those specific customers. Such companies focus on customers that they want to serve and deliver extra-ordinary service specifically targeted at those people. ...”

He continues to state that they set customer-oriented goals, group customers and focus on delivering great service to group A customers and literally getting rid of group C and D customers, (66).

Buchanan (2002:41) reveals some very fascinating points about employee behaviour. He states that employers believe that all employees are on their side. He presents facts that are not found in most literature. This statement is among the facts he presents:

“Not every employee cares about keeping their jobs, a minority of employees really care – but only because they value something their work provides, some employees not only don’t care, they actually want to destroy their employer and suicidal employees may be crazy, but they are not stupid”.

The organisations need to look out for things that do not add any value to the customer service offering but instead frustrate the process and may even result in customers switching service providers. Shonhiwa (2001:94) tries to address some of the variables that sometimes impact on service providers in the various professions analysed earlier, they are as follows:

- Level of sophistication: Some professionals tend to become too sophisticated to really understand their customers. Consequently they will not stop to understand their needs, but only see their own aspirations as the key drivers for action. You cannot effectively serve people to whom you have a condescending attitude. No service excellence can be given to the slave by the master, only benevolent dictatorship.
- Present and historical understanding: If someone does not have in-depth knowledge and understanding of service circumstances, he or she is likely to render tardy service. Most environmental and demographic trends change in quantum leaps in Africa because of the technological influence of the donor super powers. Some professionals fail to keep abreast of changes, which compounds lack of understanding.
- Learning capacity: It is forgivable to give poor service because of genuine ignorance but unforgivable to do so deliberately. This is often the cardinal error of the ostrich mentality, where one believes that by burying one's head in the sand, the challenges of the surroundings will disappear. Some professional people cease to learn from the day they finish training and cannot see the wood from trees throughout their working life thereafter.
- Stigma attached to the situation: Those who believe their professional status is high tend to become class conscious about those they deal with. Similarly those of lower achievement, but who mistakenly believe they have arrived, will tend to lack customer care and a professional approach.
- Clash of professional values and business expediency: In the early eighties I

had two acquaintances that qualified as medical doctors in a county with a dire shortage of such skills. They had hardly practiced in public hospitals when they opened several private practices, which they openly referred to as 'shops'. Clearly, professional care for patients was compromised for business expediency.

- Inherent mediocrity in society: The public, who are on the receiving end of service, should be the most potent watchdog against substandard treatment by the professions. Unfortunately, the African spirit of respect bequeathed us a legacy of docile acceptance of mediocre standards without rejection or complaint. As a result, poor service becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. By the way, this shortfall seems to affect everyone who lives in Africa, irrespective of colour.

Part of the success story, naturally, lies in empowering everyone in the firm with the mission, then in rewarding everyone when goals are met. When people feel they are a vital part of the marketing effort, with a measurable goal, they will perform differently than if they are simply carrying out a function. They will care more about their jobs, and more about what the customer thinks of the company, and as a result the customer actually will think better of the company (The Freeland Group, 1998:22).

According to Basch (2002:67), many business leaders do not see employee happiness as a goal of the enterprise. They do see employee satisfaction, reduced turnover, employee dedication, and productivity as worthwhile goals - all of which relate to employee happiness.

Fred Smith in Basch (2002:71) said

“you can tell if a company is people centred, its CEO spends at least 50% of his/her time on people issues. People generally make up their own minds about management actions, and if they perceive the action was arbitrary and not based on objective reality, they learn to take actions that are safe and non-creative”.

He continues to state that over time, the organisation becomes stagnant because hanging on to jobs becomes more relevant than finding better ways to serve customers and owners (79).

Extraordinary service has more to do with people's desires and powers to serve than it does with systems and processes for serving. When people truly care about serving others, it shows in the customer's experience. The process of letting them invent the system and processes generates both the passion and the process for serving customers efficiently and effectively (Basch, 2002:116).

2.7.1 Attitude Towards Customer Care

Cheales (1994:102) states that never be satisfied with the status quo, complacency breeds failure and self-classification is the key to improvement. He further advises to keep raising the expectations so you don't get complacent. It is easy to get sloppy once you've achieved your goal. To ensure that this doesn't happen, continually seek out a bigger mountain to climb. He concludes by stating that smart organisations, like smart people, are always tough on themselves. Everything being done today is going to be done better and differently in the future. If you don't improve, rest assured your competitors will, (103).

Senior management who are taking their employee happiness seriously should go an extra mile to ensure that. Basch (2002:18) states

"The sun will not set on an unresolved customer or employee problem, meaning that, if the problem cannot be resolved, at least it will be dealt with and the people involved will be aware that it is being dealt with",

2.7.2 Corporate Culture – Customer Focussed

Basch (2002:17) states:

“This same phenomenon happens in companies that don’t walk the talk when it comes to focussing on employee and customer well being. I have yet to talk with or even hear about CEO’s that haven’t said employees and customers were their primary focus. The problem is that 95% talk about it and 5% demonstrate it through their employees’ actions and behaviours. It is that behaviour that reflects the prevailing culture, not the platitudes of senior managers”.

It is no longer about customer service. It is about congruent and continuous customer experiences driven by culturalising nearly every interaction. This means having all employees vitally aware of the need for customer loyalty, whether they design computer screens, fly airplanes, manufacture things, or pay expense accounts (Basch, 2002:18).

According to Dorrian (1996:16),

“Business improvements must be customer care driven and should not be treated on an ad hoc basis. A company’s entire infrastructure, technology included, needs to be employed to look after customers”.

The bottom line is that extraordinary service is really passionate people serving people. People’s natural desire, for the most part, is to be liked and to solve other people’s problems where they can add value. Our corporate cultures often destroy this natural passion to serve (Basch, 2002:117).

From the above it can be clearly noted that fragmented organisations will find that their sales department focuses on market growth, often at the expense of profit. The finance department will also focus on profits, often at the expense of growth, the operations department being drawn in between the crossfire, but no one will be looking at the customer interest. The result is an internal power struggle and a customer receives mixed signals from the company (Basch, 2002:77)

Values, when practised by all employees, define a consistent customer experience in action. Values lay out the rules of the game that are being played by employees, and observed by customers (Basch, 2002:54).

- Customer always comes first.
- Fairness and honesty in all dealings.
- Respect for the individual.
- Excellence in products and services.
- Rewards tied to performance.
- Leadership by example.

If people are applauded for going out of their way to serve a customer, more and more people will go out of their way to serve customers in extraordinary ways. On the other hand, if people go out of their way to serve a customer and no benefits accrue for them and no recognition is given, fewer and fewer people will go out of their way to serve. Eventually, the norm of poor service is established, and management may try as they might, cannot change that norm through conventional techniques (Basch, 2002:22).

Customer goals provide the anchor for goal establishment. Customer goals generally consist of two categories: promises vs actual (objective goals) and customer experience (subjective goals). The problem with sales as a bottom-line goal is that it can be driven by factors well outside customer value. Such as the economic situation, how well the sales force executes, and so on (Basch, 2002:65).

According to Dorrian (1996:16)

“The level of care an organisation provides its customers with is, after all, a reflection of that organisation’s culture which, in turn, reflects the society in which it exists. Traditionally, South Africa has been an authoritarian and, until recently, a repressive society. Unfortunately, this has been carried over to the manner in which business is conducted. The lack of caring in our business sector, particularly from customer satisfaction and employee relations

perspectives has resulted in many companies not reaching their true potential and sadly lacking in competitive spirit”.

Dorrian (1996:26) states

“It certainly appears that the South African customer is subjected to mediocre service at best, and poor service as a matter of routine”.

To change the tide for better Cheales (1994: 38) suggests that the organisation needs to speed up response times, establish a growing number of customer-focussed programmes, and scrap vertical organisational charts by flattening the command structures. The concept empowers frontline and administrative staff - those who have a direct bearing on customer service - to make immediate decisions without referring everything up the chain of command for executive ratification.

2.7.3 Complaints Handling and Attitudes towards Complainants

Striking a balance between accepting criticism as an opportunity to improve and defending ones self is always difficult. Canning (1999:35) states that organisations should treasure complaints and think of them as free market research. Value the people who complain. They are giving you valuable information and they care enough about you to bother to complain. She went on to state that over 96% of customers simply do not complain, they get angry, tell at least nine people about their bad experience and they do not give you an opportunity to explain. She adds that the 4% who complain, actually gives you an opportunity to explain and recover your position. She concludes by saying that the quicker you resolve the problem the greater are the chances of keeping them as a customer.

Shonhiwa (2001:47) states that it is more of an uphill battle to win a single new customer than to retain existing ones.

2.8 CUSTOMER CARE AND PUBLIC SECTOR INSTITUTIONS

Government institutions (local and national) have the most influence on the economic, social and political lives of people in South Africa since public service and parastatals are by far the biggest formal employers. This makes them the fulcrum around which societal values; work ethic and quality of life perception revolve.

Chapman and Cowdell (1998:39) state,

“It can’t be argued, therefore, that organisations in the public sector have been, and in many cases continue to be, less sensitive to market needs, and by very nature, less autonomous and flexible than those in the private sector. They are usually subject to a much higher level of statutory responsibility and regulatory control. For a long time they were actually protected from competition and market forces by the very constitutions”.

Chapman and Cowdell (1998:41) states that it is important to consider the extent to which the purchaser is free to make a decision to buy or not to buy in public sector markets. Many public sector exchanges are necessarily 'distress purchased'. Individuals may need a benefit or a service because they have no other alternative. As a result the government established the Batho Pele Initiative, to ensure that the balance, normally created by the market forces in the private sector, which non existent in the public sector, at least be controlled by some form of legal frame work.

It is encouraging to hear a promising view by Chapman and Cowdell (1998:47) in that the public sector is gradually coming to understand the necessity of making more efforts to learn from private sector marketing, understanding and satisfying the customers or clients needs, wants and preferences. If public sector operations are to serve their social functions successfully, they need to demonstrate their ability to satisfy what people need and want. Criticism of public services has long centred upon those services apparently insensitive to user needs.

Chapman and Cowdell (1998:59) state that in marketing-oriented companies, the consumer is not the energy, but the source of sustenance for the organisation, which depends upon the consumer for its survival. As a result, consumer behaviour patterns need to be understood properly before an organisation can make satisfactory transactions with its consumers.

Many transactions in the public sector take place as a consequence of legislation. They are therefore coercive, thus eliminating one of the elements of choice. In other institutions, monopoly conditions may prevail, again reducing choice. These factors will have an important impact on consumer behaviour (Chapman and Cowdell 1998:61).

2.9 CONCLUSION

The important aspects in customer care can be summarised as follows:

- Firstly, is knowing what the customer wants and values; and getting this information from no one else but the customer. This means that the organisation should establish a platform to effectively communicate with a customer.
- Secondly, the frontline customer service personnel should be trained to give the best; be empowered to make the right decisions and have the right attitude, and also understand that their customer encounter is the most important moment, which can eventually decide whether the organisation succeeds or fails.
- Thirdly, the organisational structure should focus on one thing, which is ensuring that customers get what they want when they want it. All systems the organisation employs should compliment the customer services personnel in delivering quality service. They should be customer focussed as far as possible. If the customer uses IT systems to engage the organisation, such an interface

should be user friendly to allow an average minded customer to navigate with ease.

- Fourthly, that the top management must not provide a lip service, but must walk the talk. Good customer service will require commitment in terms of effort, time and funding. Therefore the organisation should finance the initiative and empower the staff to make the necessary decisions. The whole organisation must be committed to customer service from the manager to the shop floor level employee. Employees may not engage the customer to realise a transaction but their commitment and input will be seen at the end. It was also established that from the literature reviewed that it is profitable to serve the customer well. The organisations that fail to serve their customers well might as well pack up and forget about doing business.

The above is true, but unfortunately, it is very difficult to implement in the public service. The customers cannot decide the service provider; instead they are forced to get their services from the government departments with all the inefficiencies associated with it. The Batho Pele Principles were introduced by government to try and lift the customer care to a point comparable with private sector.

CHAPTER 3

BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES

3.1 INTRODUCTION

As stated in chapter one, the government established the eight Batho Pele principles which are to govern the service delivery process in all public service institutions. PE, as wholly owned by Msunduzi Municipality is under the ambit of local government; therefore compliance with the dictates of Batho Pele Principles is inevitable.

This chapter introduces the Batho Pele Principles and they are extensively discussed. A correlation is drawn between customer care literature and the Batho Pele Principles, which are a guide to service delivery within the public sector. The relevance of Batho Pele Principles to PE is discussed and conclusions are drawn.

3.2 INTRODUCTION OF 'BATHO PELE' – PEOPLE FIRST

The then Minister for Public Service and Administration, the honourable Dr Zola Skweyiya when launching the BATHO PELE – 'PEOPLE FIRST' White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery [WTPSD], published on 18 September 1997, stated,

“The transformation of our Public Service is judged, rightly, by the practical difference people see in their everyday lives. That is why I am launching Batho Pele. I want to turn words into action. I want the needs of our people to come first and be satisfied. I want people to view and experience the Public Service in an entirely new way” (WTPSD, Department of Public Administration and Services [DPSA], 1997, par 2).

He went on to state that users of public services are to be consulted about their needs and priorities. More accessible and responsive arrangements are to be developed to enable members of the public to have something done if standards are not met. Public servants are expected to treat all citizens with courtesy, respect and dignity. He went on to state that codes of behaviour will be developed and training should follow to ensure that what is expected of them does happen (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 2).

He concluded by stating that Batho Pele presents public servants with a great challenge, but he acknowledged the fact that such a challenge will be welcomed by the dedicated public servants because they will see Batho Pele as an opportunity to provide their fellow citizens with public services that make them proud (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 2).

The Minister for Public Service and Administration stated that the WPTPSD is directly applicable to the parts of the public sector, both national and provincial, which are regulated by the Public Service Act, 1994. It is also relevant to all areas and employees of the public sector regulated by other legislation, such as local government and parastatals... (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4).

This therefore means that all public service institutions should offer a service to the public that is in accordance with Batho Pele Principles which propose to lift the service standards of all South African Citizens. The eight Batho Pele Principles extracted from the White Paper, are as follows (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 3):

1. Consultation

Citizens should be consulted about the level and quality of the public services they receive and, wherever possible, should be given a choice about the services that are offered.

2. Service Standards

Citizens should be told what level and quality of public services they will receive so that they are aware of what to expect.

3. Access

All citizens should have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.

4. Courtesy

Citizens should be treated with courtesy and consideration.

5. Information

Citizens should be given full and accurate information about the public services they are entitled to receive.

6. Openness and Transparency

Citizens should be told how national and provincial departments are run, how much they cost, and who is in charge.

7. Redress

If the promised standard of service is not delivered, citizens should be offered an apology, a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy, and when the complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.

8. Value for money

Public services should be provided economically and efficiently in order to give citizens the best possible value for money.

The following two principles have been included as part of Batho Pele Principles by some government departments but they are not yet incorporated into the White Paper. For the purpose of this study they will not be included, but they are worth mentioning (Department of Health [DoH], 2002).

9. Encouraging Innovation and Rewarding Excellence

Innovation can be new ways of providing a better service, cutting costs, improving conditions, streamlining and generally making changes that tie in with the spirit of Batho Pele. It is also about rewarding the staff who 'go the extra mile' in making it all happen.

10. Customer Impact

Impact means looking at the benefits we have provided for our customers, both internal and external

3.3 BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES AND CUSTOMER CARE

The WPTPSD, DPSA (1997), establishes the Batho Pele Principles. It spells out one criterion above all that it can be judged by,

“Its effectiveness in delivering services which meet the basic needs of all South African citizens”.

It is further pointed out that the primary purpose of the white paper is about *how* services are provided to the public. The issue of what services are to be provided has been left to each government department because they are diverse in nature. It is also stated that their decisions about *what* should be delivered to citizens will be improved as a result of the Batho Pele approach. Therefore, both the ‘*what*’ and the ‘*how*’ are well addressed by the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997).

WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.2.1) states that public services are not a privilege in a civilised and democratic society but they are a legitimate expectation... people’s needs should be responded to. Therefore the WPTPSD acknowledges that the service offering is about meeting an established expectation by the citizens.

The concept of consultation is well established in the WPTPSD. The statement that the public should be consulted about the service offerings resonates through out the WPTPSD. It is stated that the public should be encouraged to participate in policy-making WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.2.2). The White Paper adopted the ‘customer’ concept and it is well documented that the term ‘customer’ will therefore be used interchangeably with the term citizen throughout the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.3).

The customer is the reason of the organisations existence. On the contrary, the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.3) acknowledges that citizens, as the 'customers' of the public services, cannot choose to take their business elsewhere, because the government institution cannot be substituted for any other service provider. For example, any South African who wants a passport has no alternative but to apply to the Department of Home Affairs. The WPTPSD further captures the fact that many public servants are not paid directly by individual 'customers', as a result, the departments who fail to satisfy their customers do not go out of business, which therefore means that government institution's existence is outside the 'customer' satisfaction principle.

The outcome of that engagement will determine the fate of the organisation (the customer when purchasing the product or service that ensures that the organisation succeeds). This principle also is not fully applicable to public institutions because they cannot be driven out of business by the absence of customers resulting from their poor service offering. It is therefore imperative for the Government to ensure that all civil service institutions subscribe to Batho Pele and that they implement it. The broader community should be educated on Batho Pele Principles, this will ensure that they are empowered to know their rights and can hold civil servants accountable to provide good customer service. The government will not achieve much by instituting a Policing system, but if the community reports that certain sectors of civil servants do not adhere to the principles, proper action needs to be taken (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 1.3).

The WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.3) acknowledges the dynamics that private companies work under, and the lack of such dynamics in public service sector complicates the level at which the customer concept can be implemented. The WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.3) concurs with Dorrian and Cheales as it states,

"In a genuinely competitive market, 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. Knowing what the customer wants and providing it quicker, better and cheaper than your competitors, is essential to business success. As competitive companies

worldwide soon discover, 'the customer comes first' is not an empty slogan but a fundamental business principle".

By contrast citizens, as the customers of public services, cannot choose to take their business elsewhere... as a result, national and provincial departments (Municipalities and parastals included) which fail to satisfy their 'customer' do not go out of business (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997).

It is therefore concluded that the concept of the citizen as a customer may not seem appropriate at first sight. 'Customer' is nevertheless a useful term in the context of improving service delivery because it embraces certain principles which are fundamental to public service delivery as they are to the provision of services for commercial gain (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, Par 1.3).

The WPTPSD calls for a paradigm shift away from the current inward-looking bureaucratic systems, processes and attitudes, and a search for new ways of working which put the needs of the public first, is better, faster and more responsive to 'the citizens' needs. This acknowledges that the rules, policies, processes and procedures are not the outcome but rather the means to the outcome. When the citizen engages the public servant to receive a service, the end of such engagement is the actual outcome of all prior processes. The WPTPSD acknowledges that service delivery should be constantly improved and development-oriented (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, Par 1.2)

The public service is not immune to this, the WPTPSD quotes the following:

"The public service is currently perceived as being characterised by the following shortcomings" (DPSA, 1997, Par 1.2):

- *Lack of access to services,*
- *Lack of transparency and openness,*
- *Lack of consultation on the required service standards,*
- *Lacks responsiveness and insensitiveness towards citizen's complaints, and discourteous staff.*

The WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, Par 1.3) seeks to transform the public service by introducing a fresh approach to service delivery: an approach which puts pressure on systems, procedures, attitudes and behaviour within the Public Service, and reorients them in the customer's favour, an approach which puts the people first. This involves creating a framework for the delivery of public services which treats the citizens more like customers, and enables the citizens to hold public servants to account for the service they receive. The framework will free up energy to commit the public servants to introduce a more customer-focussed way of working.

In recognising the role played by the frontline public servants, the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, Par 1.3) records that many public servants, especially those who serve the public directly, are only too conscious of all this (bureaucratic, internally focussed systems full of red tape), because they have to face the public's frustrations every day in their work. They would often like to see improvements and often have good ideas for what could be done, but they are bound by systems and practices which they believe they are helpless to change. From the literature reviewed above, it could not be argued that the people part in the service offering is an important one. The above, in a nutshell, means that whether you sell a product or a service, in the eyes of a customer you sell a basket of solutions to his/her problems. In order to make a deal, the solution should match/fit the problem.

Whether it is customer care theory or the Batho Pele principles, they mean nothing if they are well articulated in books but they are not put into action. It will be very important to see the principles in practice.

3.4 PUTTING THE BATHO PELE PRINCIPLES INTO PRACTICE

The Ministry of Public Service and Administration established the Batho Pele Principles as a transformation tool, to transform the service delivery in all spheres of government. These principles would mean nothing if they are not implemented to ensure that public servants deliver on what the Batho Pele Principles state.

The WPTPSD captures clearly what the public service should do to address each and every principle. The following are extracted from the WPTPSD, (DPSA, 1997), it is the account of what should be done and it will be correlated to the customer care theory.

3.4.1 Consultation - Consulting Users of Services (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, Par 4.1)

- 3.4.1.1 All public service institutions must, regularly and systematically, consult not only about the 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 services.
- 3.4.1.2 There are many ways to consult users of services, including customer surveys, interviews with individual users, consultation groups, and meetings with consumer representative bodies, Non Governmental Organisations [NGOs] and Community Based Organisations [CBOs], including bodies representing previously disadvantaged groups. The method or methods adopted must be chosen to suit the characteristics of the users and consumers concerned. Whatever method is chosen, consultation must cover the entire range of existing and potential customers. It is essential that consultation should include the views of those who have previously been denied access to public services. Particular effort must be made to include the views of those who have been previously disadvantaged or who, due to geography, language barriers, fear of authority or any other reason, have previously found it hard to make their voices heard. 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.

- 3.4.1.3 The results of the consultation process must be reported to the relevant executing authority and the relevant Committee, and made public, for example through the media. The results should also be widely publicised within the organisation so that all staff are aware of how their services are perceived. The results must then be taken into account when decisions are made about what services are to be provided, and at what level. Consultation must be conducted intelligently. It should not result in a list of demands that raise unrealistic expectations; rather, it should reveal where resources and effort should be focused in future to meet the public's most pressing needs. The outcome should be a balance between what citizens want and what public service institutions can realistically afford - and have the resources and capacity to deliver.

3.4.2 Setting Service Standards (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.2)

- 3.4.2.1 Public service institutions must publish standards for the level and quality of services they will provide, including the introduction of new services to those who have previously been denied access to them. These standards 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.
- 3.4.2.2 Some standards will cover processes; whilst others will be about outcomes. Service Standards must be set at a level that is demanding but realistic. This means that they should reflect a level of service that is higher than that currently offered but which can be achieved with dedicated effort, and by adopting more efficient and customer-focused working practices. To achieve the goal of making South Africa globally

competitive, standards should be benchmarked against international standards taking into account South Africa's current level of development.

3.4.2.3 The overall responsibility for decisions about what services are to be provided and at what level rests with elected representatives - authorities - who are accountable for implementing Government policies and for the proper use of public money. Service Standards must therefore have the approval of the relevant executing authority before they are adopted.

3.4.2.4 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. Publishing standards is not enough however. Performance against standards must be regularly measured and the results published at least once a year and more frequently where appropriate. These steps form an essential mechanism to enable the public to hold public service institutions to account for their performance. They are also essential tools to track improvements in services from year to year, and to inform subsequent decisions about the levels to which standards should be raised in future.

3.4.2.5 Performance against standards must be reviewed annually and, as standards are met, so they should be progressively raised, year on year. Once standards are set and published, they may not be reduced. If a standard is not met, the reasons must be explained publicly and a new target date set for when it will be achieved.

3.4.3 Increasing Access (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.3)

3.4.3.1 While some South Africans enjoy public services of first world quality; many others live in third world conditions. One of the prime aims of Batho Pele is to provide a framework for making decisions about delivering public services to the many South Africans who were and are still denied

access to them. Batho Pele also aims to rectify the inequalities of distribution in existing services. All public service institutions are required to specify and set targets for progressively increasing access to their services for those who have not previously received them.

3.4.3.2 One significant factor affecting access is geography. Many people who live in remote areas have to travel long distances to avail themselves of public services. Public service institutions must develop strategies to eliminate the disadvantages of distance, for example. Another significant factor is the lack of infrastructure, which exacerbates the difficulties of communication with, and travel to, remote areas. There are other barriers to access which need to be taken into account e.g. - social, cultural, physical, communication and attitudinal. Service delivery programmes should therefore specifically address the need to progressively redress the disadvantages of all barriers to access.

3.4.4 Ensuring Courtesy (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.4)

3.4.4.1 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. Courtesy and regard for the public is one of the fundamental duties of public servants, public servants must treat members of the public "as customers who are entitled to receive the highest standards of service". Many public servants do this instinctively; they joined the public service precisely because they have a genuine desire to serve the public. The Principles of Batho Pele require that the behaviour of all public servants be raised to the highest possible level.

3.4.4.2 The public service institutions must specify the standards for the way in which customers should be treated. These are to be included in their Codes of Conduct. These standards should cover, among other things:

- 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 within which responses must be made to enquiries;
- The conduct of interviews;
- How complaints should be dealt with;
- Dealing with people who have special needs, such as the elderly or infirm;
- Gender; and
- Language.

3.4.4.3 The performance of staff who deal with customers must be regularly monitored, and performance which falls below the specified standards should not be tolerated. Service delivery and customer care must be included in all future training programmes, and additional training should be given to all those who deal directly with the public, whether face-to-face, in writing or on the telephone. This should not require the injection of large amounts of additional resources: it is more a case of reorienting existing training courses to focus on service delivery. Of equal importance to formal training is the example set by senior managers, and the day-to-day guidance of immediate supervisors. Junior staff members quickly pick up the unspoken messages about an organisation's values from the way their seniors behave. All managers have a duty to ensure that the values and behavioural norms of their organisations are in line with the Principles of Batho Pele.

3.4.4.4 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 applies particularly to staff that come into regular contact with the public because they usually have an accurate appreciation of their needs and concerns. All managers should ensure they receive first-hand feedback from front-

line staff, and should personally visit front-line staff at regular intervals to see for themselves what is happening.

The WPTPSD, when dealing with courtesy, highlighted what the customer care literature calls the 'moment of truth' as stated by Shonhiwa (2001:100) that the organisations need to ensure that the 'moment of truth' is a successful one at all times and that customer expectations are continuously met. This calls for management to put systems in place to ensure that it does happen.

Zeithaml and Bitner (2000:87) concur as they state that not all encounters are equally important in building relationships. For every organisation certain encounters are pivotal to customer satisfaction. They further state that the first customer interaction with the organisation creates a first impression about the organisation, if that encounter was not a good one, the customer will never come back again, and the organisation will never have the opportunity to demonstrate good quality service again. It is just a lost opportunity that might have been caused by a rude employee or a long waiting period on the phone. The organisation needs to understand what is important to a customer in its customer care offering.

When the customer engages the organisation, at the first instance, he/she engages the employee of the organisation. Most authors of customer service related books such as Shonhiwa, 2001:99; Zeithaml and Bitner (2000:86) to name just a few describe the "moment of truth" as critical in customer service.

Becker (1998: 20) argues that there is not much difference out there between the products or services that different companies offer. He continues to state,

"Whatever your company has or does a competitor probably has or does the exact same thing. He further concludes that what differentiates the best companies in the world today is service".

He then summarises it neatly in saying that they don't give lip service - they give true customer service. Customer service is about the encounter with the customer (Shonhiwa, 2001:99), and the outcome of the encounter is dependant on the customer

(Cheales, 1994:13). For customer care to be effective, more work needs to be done in recognising customer needs, and the way in which they want those needs to be fulfilled. Cheales further states that customer service cannot be achieved in boardrooms, but by going to the market arena and finding out what those needs are.

Shonhiwa (2001:99) argues that the purpose of good customer service is to ensure that the existing customers are retained whilst ensuring that the new customer has a pleasant encounter with the organisation that makes it worthwhile to repeat the experience.

From the above authors, Shonhiwa, Becker, Zeithaml and Bitner, they make it clear that the frontline customer personnel need to understand that customers have expectations during the encounter, and failing to meet their expectations may result in the organisation closing down. The customer expects: to be treated with dignity and respect; to have a pleasant experience which is memorable, if offered bad service they will never offer a second chance to correct your mistakes; true customer service and not lip service; and the service offered to be according to his/her requirements.

3.4.5 Providing More and Better Information (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.5)

3.4.5.1 Information is one of the most powerful tools at the customer's disposal in exercising his or her right to good service. Public service institutions must provide full, accurate and up-to-date information about the services they provide, and who is entitled to them. 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.

3.4.5.2 Implementing Batho Pele will require a complete transformation of communication with the members of the public. Information must be provided in a variety of media and languages to meet the differing needs of a variety of customers. 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 ensure their understanding.

3.4.5.3 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. Service providers should also make regular visits to remote communities to disseminate information.

3.4.6 Increasing Openness and Transparency (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.6)

3.4.6.1 Openness and transparency are the hallmarks 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 how the public service institutions are run, how well they perform, the resources they consume, and who is in charge.

3.4.6.2 The mechanism for achieving this will be an Annual Report to Citizens published by each public service institution setting out, in plain language:

- 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.

3.4.6.3 These Reports to Citizens are not a substitute for formal annual reports. Their aim is, in one or two pages of straightforward language, to provide the public with key information to which they are entitled. Reports to Citizens should be publicised as widely as possible.

3.4.6.4 Additionally, public service institutions may utilise events such as open days, preferably not during normal working hours, to invite citizens to visit the institution to meet with all levels of officials to discuss service delivery issues, standards, problems, etc. These events can also provide the institution with an opportunity to advertise their services to citizens.

3.4.7 Remediating Mistakes and Failures (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.2)

Mistakes or problems that occur in the early level of the service cascade are particularly critical, because a failure at one point results in greater risk for dissatisfaction at each ensuing level (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000:86).

3.4.7.1 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. There are a number of institutions, such as the Public Protector, the Human Rights Commission and the Auditor-General, which serve to protect the public from maladministration and impropriety by public service institutions. However, such institutions should be seen as a last resort by citizens after exhausting departmental remedies, and are not a substitute for swift, effective action by service deliverers when services are falling below the promised standard.

3.4.7.2 The Batho Pele Principle of Redress requires a completely new approach to handling complaints. Many public servants see complaints as a time-

consuming irritation. Where complaints procedures exist, they are often lengthy and bureaucratic, aimed at defending the public service institution's actions rather than solving the user's problem. Many institutions have no procedures for regularly reviewing complaints in order to identify systemic problems. Indeed many organisations do not collect any statistics about the number and type of complaints they receive. Often, 'complaints' are counted as such only when they are submitted in writing through the formal channels. 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 that exists.

3.4.7.3 The first steps, therefore, are to acknowledge that all dissatisfaction, expressed in writing or verbally, is an indication that the citizen does not consider that the promised standard of service is being delivered; and then to establish ways of measuring all expressions of dissatisfaction. 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 how they have been dealt with.

3.4.7.4 Public service institutions are required to review and improve their complaints systems, in line with the following principles:

a) **Accessibility**

Complaints systems should be well publicised and easy to use. Excessive formality should be avoided. Systems, which require complaints to be made only in writing, may be convenient for the organisation but can be off-putting to many customers. Complaints made in other ways, such as face-to-face, or by telephone, should therefore also be welcomed.

- b) **Speed**

The longer it takes to respond to a complaint, the more dissatisfied customers will become. An immediate and genuine apology together with a full explanation will often be all that they want. Where delay is unavoidable, the complainant should be kept informed of progress and told when an outcome can be expected.
- c) **Fairness**

Complaints should be fully and impartially investigated. Many people will be nervous of complaining to a senior official about a member of his/her staff, or about some aspect of the system for which the official is responsible. Wherever possible, therefore, an independent avenue should be offered if the complainant is dissatisfied with the response they receive the first time round.
- d) **Confidentiality**

The complainant's confidentiality should be protected, so that they are not deterred from making complaints by feeling that they will be treated less sympathetically in future.
- e) **Responsiveness**

The response to a complaint, however trivial, should take full account of the individual's concerns and feelings. Where a mistake has been made, or the service has fallen below the promised standard, the response should be immediate, starting with an apology and a full explanation; an assurance that the occurrence will not be repeated; and then whatever remedial action is necessary. Wherever possible, staff who deal with the public directly should be empowered to take action themselves to put things right.
- f) **Review**

Complaints systems should incorporate mechanisms for review and for feeding back suggestions for change to those who are

responsible for providing the service, so that mistakes and failures do not recur.

g) Training

Complaints handling procedures should be publicised throughout the organisation and training given to all staff so that they know what action to take when a complaint is received.

3.4.8 Getting the Best Possible Value for Money (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997, par 4.8)

3.4.8.1 Improving service delivery and extending access to public services to all South Africans must be achieved. The Batho Pele initiative must be delivered within the public service institution's resource allocations, and the rate at which services are improved will therefore be significantly affected by the speed with which institutions achieve efficiency savings which can be ploughed back into improved services. Many improvements that the public would like to see often require no additional resources and can sometimes even reduce costs.

3.4.8.2 One of the key aims of Batho Pele will therefore be to search for ways to simplify procedures and eliminate waste and inefficiency. All public service institutions will be required, as part of their service delivery improvement programmes, to identify areas where efficiency savings will be sought, and the service delivery improvements which will result from achieving the savings.

3.5 SUMMARY

Batho Pele is government's initiative to get the public to the centre stage, and get public servants to be service oriented, to strive for excellence in service delivery and to commit

to continuous service delivery improvement in a simple and transparent manner. It allows citizens to hold public servants accountable for the level of services they deliver". The eight principles namely consultation, service standards, access, courtesy, information, openness and transparency, redress, and value for money has sought to put customer perspective in the public service sector. The review has revealed that the Batho Pele principles were framed from good customer care principles and the similarities can be seen from each principle. The parallels were also drawn from the customer care literature and Batho Pele Principles. The WPTPSD also spelt out clearly the implementation plan. If all civil service institutions can implement the Batho Pele Principles, the provision of mediocre service by civil servants will be over and the public's dignity when engaging the public service institutions could be restored once again.

From the above well-entrenched Batho Pele Principles, it could be clearly realised that though they are not fully mirroring the customer care principles, they are complementing customer care principles. They present a perspective that is transforming the public service institutions by driving the customer care philosophy to the forefront of all public service institutions. Also, it forces the heads of public service institutions to be accountable to their customers in that they publish their performance results annually. It is also well documented in the WPTPSD that the purpose of Batho Pele principles is to lift the service standards within the public sector from its present level which is partial, discriminating against people due to race, geographical location, language, level of education, etc, to a level where all citizens are ensured of the level of service which is the same, regardless of their circumstances. The customer care literature reviewed filled the gaps identified in the WPTPSD. This will provide the best objective view of the customer care principles within the public service institution.

The Batho Pele Principles also emphasised a very critical point of constantly and periodically consulting with customers. This consultation should not be to comply with legislation but to inform even the decisions that will be finally made by the Management of the public service institutions. The WPTPSD put more emphasis on the communication with the members of the public. It emphasises the importance of reaching the communities who are entitled to the service. It states serious consideration

should be made in selection of communication channel; the simplicity of the language, which is free from jargon whilst ensuring that it is understood by the target audience. It advocates that public service institutions should visit communities who can not access public service institutions, mobile information centres should be established where the previously disadvantaged and illiterate could be reached.

The last is that customer surveys need to be strategically conducted. It may be bi-annually or otherwise. This is where customer satisfaction is measured. Such input is valuable because it determines whether the effort is channelled in the right direction in that what the organisation is following and what the customer values.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the statement of the problem, the research objectives and it thereafter presents the research design which is discussed, incorporating the sampling methods, the questionnaire design, data collection, and data analysis methods. The validity issues are also discussed and finally the chapter ends with a summary.

4.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

PE has to meet legislated obligations in terms of Chapter 7 of The Constitution that establishes the local government, especially section 152(1) (a) to (e) (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No 108 of 1996); compliance with the Batho Pele Principles (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997); EDL as issued by the NER specifically Section 15 of National Electricity Regulation Act (Act No. 4 of 2006,). In addition, the PE's strategic planning workshop revealed quite a number of shortcomings which are critical in the daily running of the organisation (PE's Strategic Planning Workshop, 2004).

In an endeavor to comply with the legislated requirements and to offer a service which is in line with the industry norms and best practices in customer care, PE decided to conduct an investigation into its customer service offering -whether it is within Batho Pele Principles and customer care principles. PE wants to align its investigation with all the statutory requirements as dictated by The Constitution (The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, Act No 108 of 1996), WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997) and the EDL, as sanctioned by NER (National Electricity Regulation Act, Act No. 4 of 2006).

4.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

It is imperative to recall the objectives of this study to ensure that the research's focus is not lost. They are as follows:

1. To investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE.
2. To investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.
3. To investigate whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

For objectives one and two, the investigation is a descriptive study using structured questionnaires. Data is collected using the structured instrument that contained questions based on the customer care issues and Batho Pele Principles as they relate to the topic.

In addressing objective three, qualitative, in-depth interviews were conducted with Msunduzi Municipality (Pietermaritzburg Electricity) senior management in order to establish their commitment to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

All the above objectives achieved the aim of this study through a questionnaire for data collection, which led to data presentation and interpretation of the results.

4.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

A descriptive study was undertaken to measure customer service quality within the context of Batho Pele in the PE, in order to provide management with possible solutions. A descriptive study permits the research to be flexible and adaptable to change. Descriptive research is where a specific situation is studied either to see if it gives rise to any general theories, or to see if existing general theories are borne out by the specific solution (Melville and Goddard, 1996: 46).

This section provides information on the research procedure which was followed for this study:

4.4.1 Sample

Essentially the study focuses on the industrial and commercial customers who comprise approximately 600 organisations. According to Sekaran (1992:31) an appropriate sample size for the population of 600 is 242. According to Welman and Kruger (2001:53)

“...without a doubt... conceptually, random sampling is the most attractive type of sampling”.

For this study simple random sampling was used which according to Higson–Smith (1995:89) provides equal opportunity for selection for each element of population. These 242 organisations were chosen using simple random sampling. The random number generator in the Microsoft Excel programme was used to generate a random sample of 242.

All four Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management were interviewed on the 17 August 2006, using in-depth semi-structured questionnaire. The interview was a focus group type. The four Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management appointments are included as appendix E. Information required no formal sampling procedure to be undertaken.

4.4.2 The Questionnaire

The data collection instrument used for the survey is a semi-structured questionnaire that was completed by identified respondents. This questionnaire was designed in accordance with effective questionnaire design principles as highlighted by Martins et al, (1996:15). Self-administered questionnaires were utilised in collecting data needed from the study from 242 organisations identified in the sample. Lancaster (1977:44) pointed out that most researchers have used questionnaires as a major source of data collection, although statistics, correspondence and interviews have been used in various combinations. For this study it was decided to follow the procedures of using self-administered questionnaires, which Wood (1971:7) indicated are used most frequently for the study of information transfer. Gay (1992:25) stated that self-administered questionnaires eliminate or avoid biases in cases where the researcher is not present.

There was a structured questionnaire directed to industrial and commercial customers within the Msunduzi Electricity licensed area of supply (refer to Appendix A).

The researcher needed to access information from PE's Senior Management. A focus group type in-depth interview was used to access the information. The interview was held their premises at 111 Havelock Road, Pietermaritzburg. Therefore the questions which were answered by PE management are as follows:

- What strategies are in place to ensure that Pietermaritzburg Electricity delivers a customer service that is in line with Batho Pele Principles?
- Does the strategy comply with the White paper?
- What implementation plan has been put in place to ensure that the strategy is not a shelf document?
- How does the organisation measure its performance in meeting the Batho Pele principles?
- What is the monitoring system put in place to ensure that the objectives

are achieved and improvements made to ensure the set objectives are achieved?

- How often does the organisation conduct surveys to understand whether the implementation thereof does achieve the desired outcome?

Due to face to face interviews, the questions for PE management were structured differently from the appendix A, to allow active participation among all the managers.

4.4.3 Data collection

According to Fraenkel and Wallen (1993:13) survey methods are often opted for when researchers are interested in the behavior and/or opinions of a large group of people about a particular service, topic or issue. Furthermore, the major purpose of a survey is to describe the characteristics of a population in terms of its distribution for example, age, race, religious preference and attitudes and to determine the relationships among the variables. The questionnaire was considered as the most appropriate method for collecting data because of the advantages it provides when compared to other types of instruments (Busha and Harter, 1980: 66). The data was collected in the Pietermaritzburg area within 15 June to 14 July 2006.

Questionnaires were either hand delivered, posted, emailed or faxed to the respective respondents. They were either physically collected or faxed in. Some respondents preferred that they fill them over the telephone. The PE executive secretary was responsible for the administration of the process of collecting the data.

4.4.3.1 Research approach

The study is more quantitative and allowed the researcher to collect a large quantity of data from a sizeable population. The use of a questionnaire permits the data to be standardised and easily analysed (Lancaster, 1977:44).

4.4.3.2 Pre-testing

Pre-testing of the questionnaires was conducted using five industrial customer representatives. This was conducted to test for any ambiguity, misunderstanding and inclusion of any questions that may be perceived to be inappropriate or irrelevant. One of the disadvantages of using questionnaires as instruments of data collection method is the low response rate they have (Leedy, 1993:187).

Fraenkel and Wallen (1993: 61) see pre-testing as an important process in data collection, because it gives a clear understanding of possible problems with the questionnaire and gives the researcher a chance to refine the questions so that the respondents have no problems in answering them. A pre-test of the questionnaire can reveal ambiguities, poorly worded questions and unclear choices. It also indicates whether the instructions to the respondents are clear. Gay (1992:23) warns against complex questions to avoid ambiguity, vagueness and misinterpretation in general.

The representatives went through all the questions without finding a problem with any question. They felt that all the questions were relevant to them and easy to understand and no question should be changed or restructured.

4.4.4 Data Analysis

The data for the survey was analysed using the software package SPSS Version 11.5. The results took the form of, inter-alia, frequency distributions in tabular and graphical format. The PE management in-depth interviews were qualitative in nature, and the data was analysed mainly by reporting the answers of management verbatim. Some of the responses were summarised but the content was not changed.

4.5 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE STUDY

Reliability is the assessment of the degree to which the measures are free from random or unstable error, and therefore providing consistent data at different times under different conditions (Cooper and Schindler, 2001:215); McDaniel and Gates (1998:231). Leedy (1993:105) says that “reliability refers to the accuracy of the instrument”, which requires elimination of biasness from the researcher aspect; this was done through the pre-testing of the questionnaire.

Validity is the extent, to which the differences found with the measuring tool reflect the true reflection among the respondents tested (Cooper and Schindler, 2001:211). According to Newell (1993: 99) validity in the study refers to its ability to measure what it sets out to measure and the accuracy of the information. Leedy (1993: 160) stipulates the different forms of validity such as face validity, criteria and construction validity. According to Bell (1999:104) validity is a complex concept with many variations and subdivisions and measuring its extent can be very involved. In essence validity “tells us whether an item measures or describes what it is supposed to measure or describe” (Bell, 1999:104). There are many ways to ensuring validity according to Cohen and Manion et al, (2000: 105-6). They went on to state that one of which is to devise and use an appropriate instrument (Cohen, Manion, et al, 2000:116).

The ethical clearance was given by the University of Kwazulu Natal, and the letter is attached as appendix B. The letter (attached as appendix C) was also sent to each respondent clearly explaining the purpose of the study and the allowing the respondent to voluntarily participate in the survey. The delaration by the respondent is also attached as appendix D.

4.6 EVALUATION OF THE METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method used in this study was appropriate, because of its relatively low cost in terms of both time and money, when compared to other methods that could have been used in an investigation into customers by the Pietermaritzburg Electricity within the context of Batho Pele Principles. The method allowed simple random sampling, which helped to ensure that the sample representative was enough. The data collection took place over a period of five weeks.

The use of the self-administered questionnaire through open-ended questions allowed for freedom of expression on the part of respondents and was also beneficial in the study as they limited the length of responses and standardized responses. However, it should be noted that the use of the self-administered questionnaire did not permit any possible follow-up, in terms of, for example, clarifying ambiguous responses. When evaluating a particular research method, issues of validity and reliability become another part to cover.

4.7 SUMMARY

This chapter focused on the research methodology used in the study. The sampling method used was discussed. The procedures used to collect, analyse, and present the data were explained. The descriptive survey method was used to gather data, which was collected in a period of five weeks. The sample was selected at random from all Pietermaritzburg Electricity's industrial and commercial customers within its area of supply i.e. Pietermaritzburg. Before the study was carried out pre-testing was conducted to eliminate possible ambiguity, and poorly worded questions. The data collected was analyzed on SPSS. Finally the method was evaluated and the issues of validity and reliability of the data collection method was discussed.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF DATA

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the results of the data collected, the analysis and the interpretation thereof. The discussion of the findings is presented in the next chapter. The PE Management interview responses are also discussed.

For the population of 600 PE's industrial and commercial customers, the sample size of 242 was assigned for the study with a 5% tolerance level (Sekaran, 1992:31). A total of 238 respondents participated; this is a tolerable sample size from which to infer conclusion because it is within 5% tolerance level. However, 10 of the 238 questionnaires returned were spoilt and 4 of the 242 questionnaires sent out were never returned. The response rate is therefore 98%.

As indicated in the research methodology chapter that the sample was randomly selected amongst the data base of the 600 PE's industrial and commercial customers using the Microsoft Excel programme.

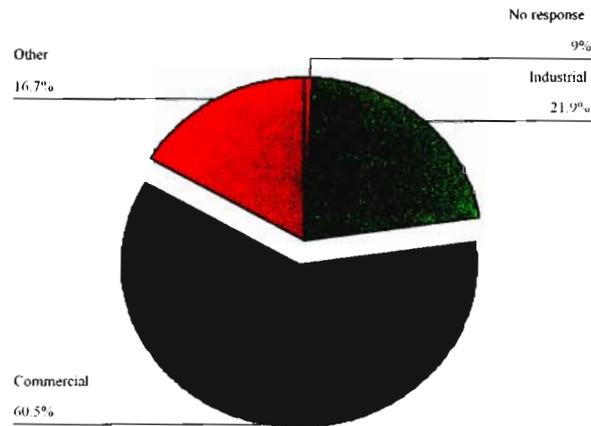
5.2 SECTION A: GENERAL SURVEY QUESTIONS

Prior to Section A are spaces that captures the customer details for follow up if necessary. Those spaces were provided for completeness and administrative purposes.

Section A captures the data which could be used for analysing the survey results. It may also be used for validity purposes as these questions are trying to understand whether the respondents are part of the customer segment that

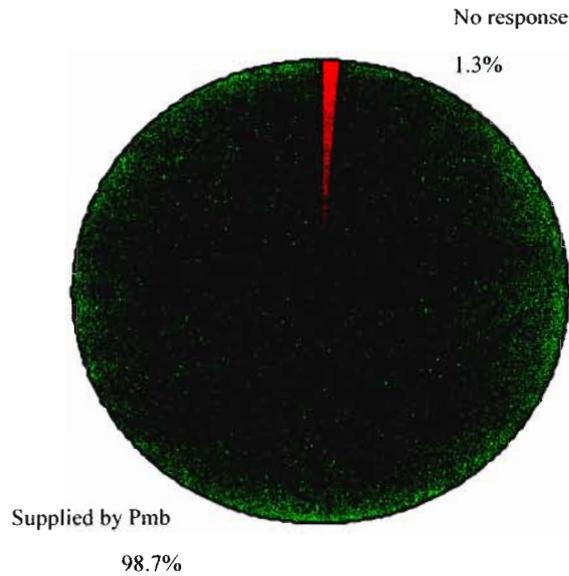
is being surveyed. It was felt that it is important to understand whether the respondent is representing his/her company when responding as it a known fact that the respondent may represent his/her interests, compromising the accuracy of the study. Finally, it was important to understand how long has the respondent been serviced by PE.

Figure 1: Types of Companies that responded to the Survey



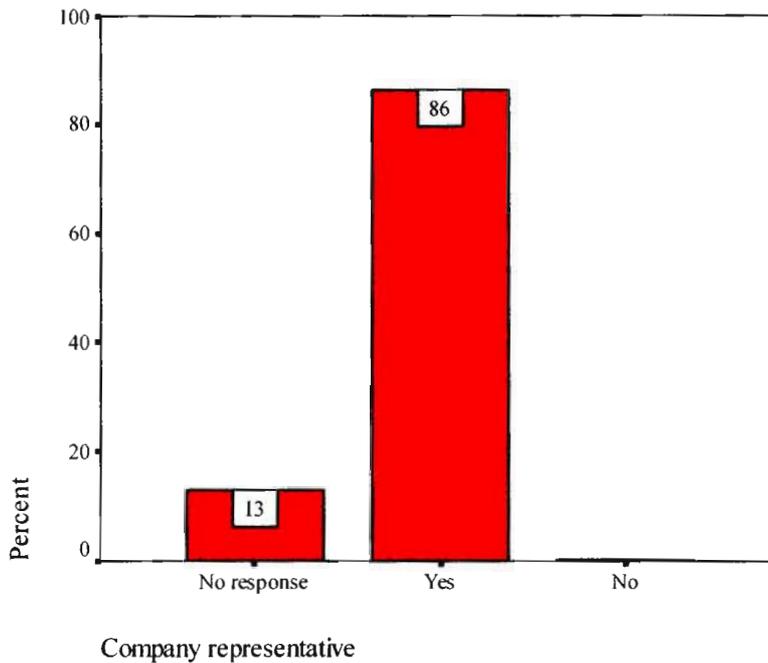
Most respondents (60.5%) were customers from the commercial sector; 21.9% of the respondents were customers from the industrial sector. 16.7% of the respondents were those customers which were neither industrial nor commercial, which includes institutions like universities, government departments, hospitals and schools. It was therefore confirmed that PE does not categorise their customers well. This could be seen from the response where 16.7% of customers could not classify themselves as either industrial or commercial. These customers should be classified differently as their service needs may be different from the Industrial and Commercial Customers.

Figure 2: Respondents Supplied Electricity by PE



A majority (98.7%) of the respondents agreed that PE is their electricity service provider and 1.3% of the respondents did not respond. The assumption can be made that those respondents did not understand the question or they decided to ignore answering the question, understanding that it is obvious because PE holds the electricity distribution license to supply electricity service to all customers within their licensed area. It is also understood that there are small power users who are using other sources of energy other than electricity. However the customers that were selected to participate in this survey were selected from the active customer data base where they are drawing high amounts of electrical energy.

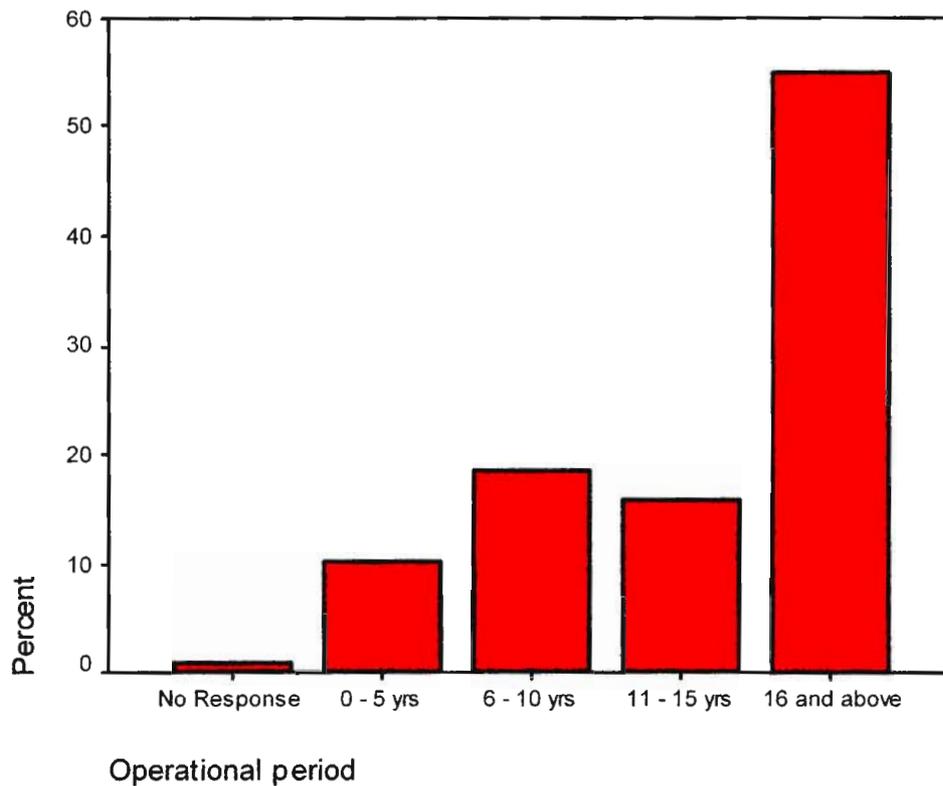
Figure 3: Respondents representing their Companies



The majority (86%) of the respondents agreed that they were representing their companies when participating in the survey, whilst thirteen percent (13%) did not respond to this question and one percent stated that they were not representing their companies.

It could be assumed that the 13% of the respondents who participated in the study but did not respond to this question will either use their personal experience with PE or they may have ignored the question but represent their organisations when responding. The 1% however would use their experience outside the realm of this study. Most probably their responses would reflect their personal experience with PE. The percentage of such respondents is insignificant and would not affect the accuracy of the study.

Figure 4: Operational Period



The majority of the respondents (55%) stated that they have been PE customers for 16 years and above, 16% of the respondents for 11 - 15 years, 18% of the respondents for 6 - 10 years, 9% of the respondents for 0 -5 years and the last 2% did not respond to the question.

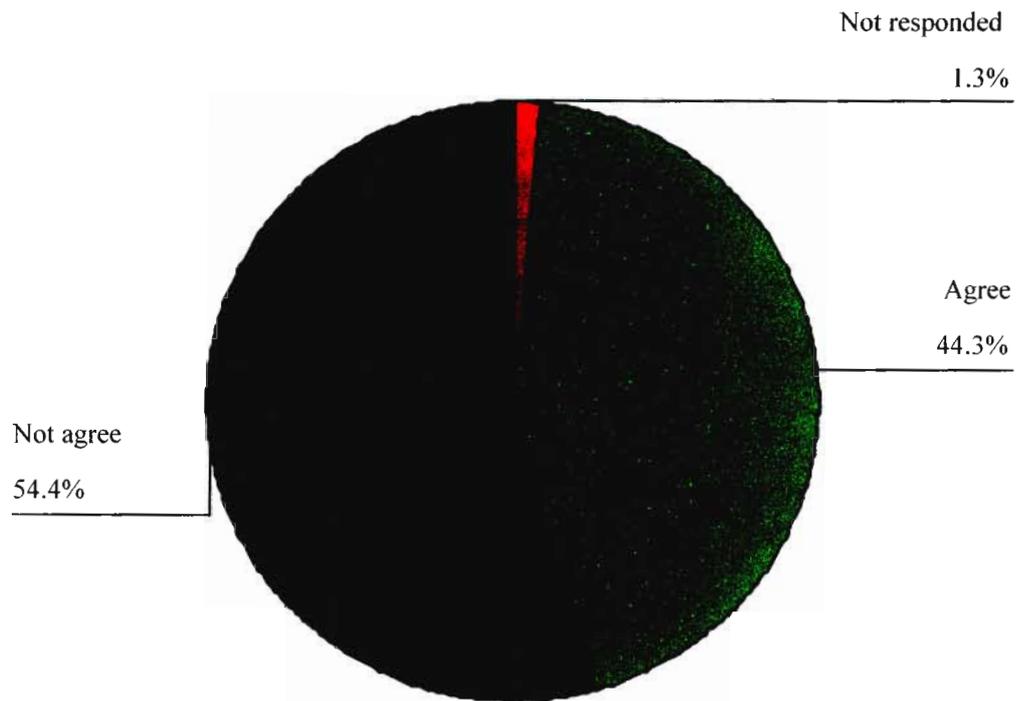
It is therefore interesting to note that the majority of respondents (71%) have been PE customers for more that 10 years.

5.3 SECTION B: SPECIFIC RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Section B of the research questionnaire attempts to test the first objective of the study i.e. to investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently adhered to in the service offering of PE. The responses from this section are to clearly determine whether or not PE adheres to Batho Pele Principles. Their efforts would be compared with the customer survey results.

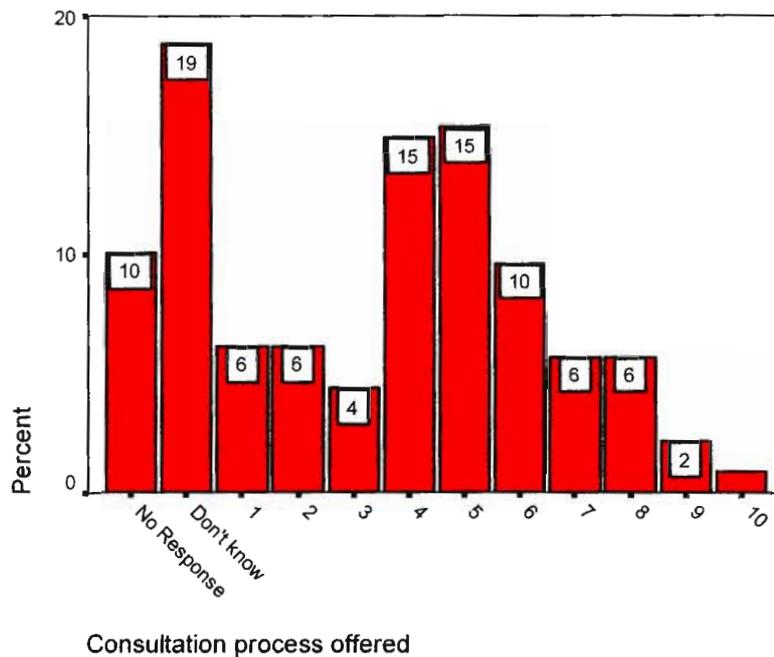
5.3.1 Batho Pele Principle 1: Consultation (Question 1.1)

Figure 5: PE's consultation process



The majority (54.4%) of the respondents did not agree with the fact that PE consults with them when deciding to introduce, alter or change the level and quality of service offered, whilst 44.3% of the respondents agreed with the fact. 1.3% of the respondents did not respond to the question.

Figure 6: Rating of PE's Consultation Process (Question 1.2)



56% of the respondents who either did not respond to question 1.1 or did not agree with the fact that PE consults with them when deciding to introduce, alter or change the level and quality of service offered, gave a rating for question 1.2 of below average i.e. between 1/10 and 4/10. The following analysis confirms the above:

- 10% did not respond
- 19 % indicated that they don't know
- 6% rated equally 1/10 and 2/10
- 4% rated 3/10
- Finally 15% gave a rating of 4/10

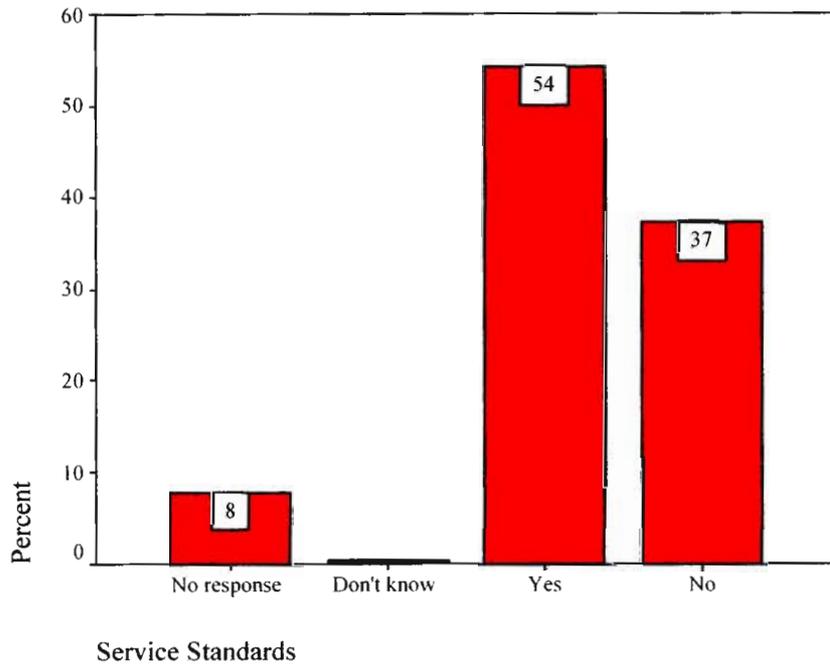
44% of the respondents, who agreed in question 1.1 that PE does consult them when deciding to introduce, alter or change the level and quality of service offered rated PE's performance at above average. The above statement can be confirmed by the following analysis of the research results:

- 15% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 10% rated 6/10
- 6% rated equally at 7/10 and 8/10
- Finally 2% and 1% rating at 9/10 and 10/10 respectively.

This rating indicates a very serious consultation problem that Msunduzi Municipality needs to deal with.

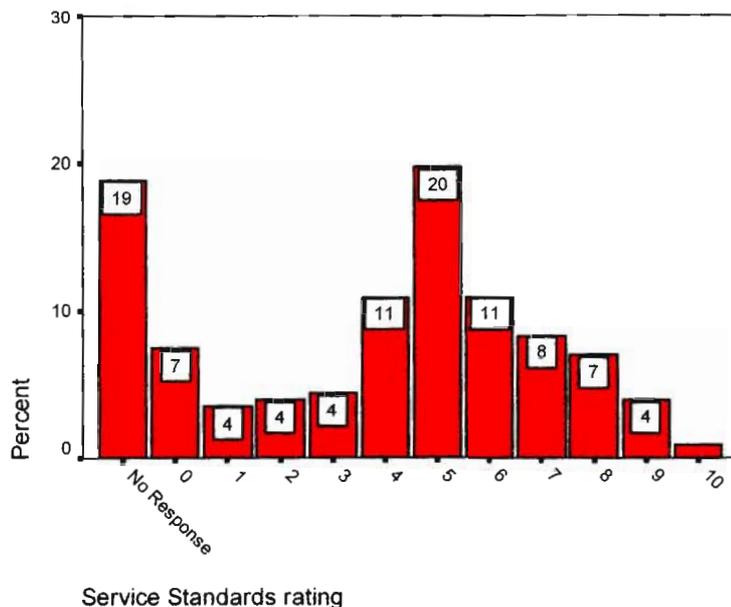
5.3.2 Batho Pele Principle 2: Service Standards (Question 2.1)

Figure 7: Service Standards



The majority (54%) of the respondents agreed that PE publish their service standards that customers expect to receive i.e. the quality and levels of service; 37% of the respondents disagreed whilst 8% did not respond to the question, only 1% stated that they do not know.

Figure 8: Rating of Service Standards (Question 2.2)



49% of the respondents either did not rate or gave a rating of below average as far as service standards offered by PE are concerned. It should also be noted that 44% of the respondents in question 2.2 did not agree with the fact that Pietermaritzburg Electricity publish the service standards that customers should expect to receive. It can be said that 5% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in 2.1 gave a rating of below average whilst the rest of the 44% who did not agree either did not rate or gave a rating of below average i.e. between 1/10 and 4/10. The following analysis confirms the above:

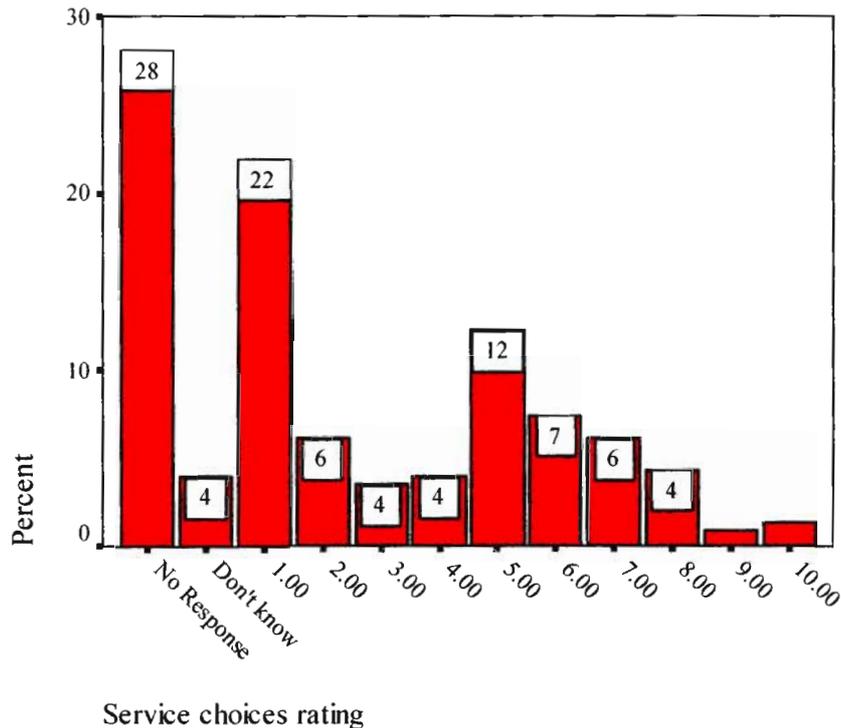
- 19% did not respond
- 7 % indicated that they don't know
- Approx. 4% rated equally 1/10, 2/10 and 3/10
- Finally 11% rated 4/10

51% of the respondents, who agreed in question 2.1 that PE does publish the standards of service that customers should expect, rated PE's performance at above average. The above statement can be confirmed by the following analysis of the research results:

- 20% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 11% rated 6/10

- 8% rated 7/10 and 7% rated 8/10
- Finally 4% and 1% rating at 9/10 and 10/10 respectively.

Figure 9: Rating of Service Choices Offered by PE (Question 2.3)



68% of the respondents either did not rate, did not know or gave a rating of below average as far as service choices offered by PE are concerned. This clearly indicates that PE's service offering is inflexible to customer needs. This also indicates that 24% of the respondents who agreed with the statement of question 2.1 gave a rating of below average whilst the rest of the 44% who did not agree either did not rate or gave a rating of below average i.e. between 1/10 and 4/10. The following analysis confirms the above:

- 28% did not respond,
- 4% indicated that they don't know,
- 22% rated 1/10,
- 6% rated 2/10,
- Finally 4% rated equally at 3/10 and 4/10

32% of the respondents, who agreed in question 2.1 that PE does publish the standards of service that customers should expect rated PE's performance at

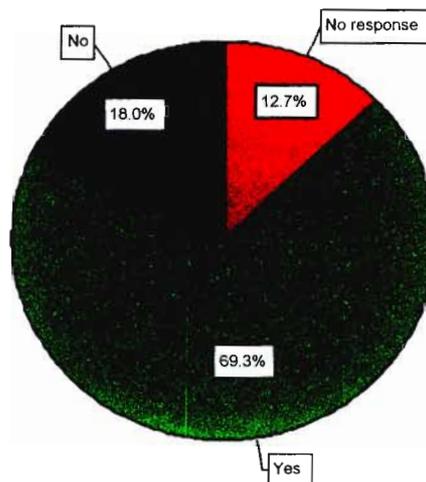
above average. The above statement can be confirmed by the following analysis of the research results:

- 12% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 7% rated 6/10
- 6% rated 7/10 and 4% rated 8/10
- Finally the remaining 4% rated at 9/10 and 10/10.

Considering the Msunduzi Municipality's logo and its motto "City of Choice", the performance of the PE in this area is not good at all. It may be that the customer segmentation is not appropriate thus offering a similar service to all customers with varying customer needs, resulting in quite a big number not getting the offering that meet their expectation. Also PE does not offer differing service products except on electricity pricing. The poor performance of PE on this question of the survey is not surprising but confirms the outcome of the first question, testing PE's consultation. This is indicative of a service provider who does not know what the customer wants and values. It will be recommended that PE look at this area very closely.

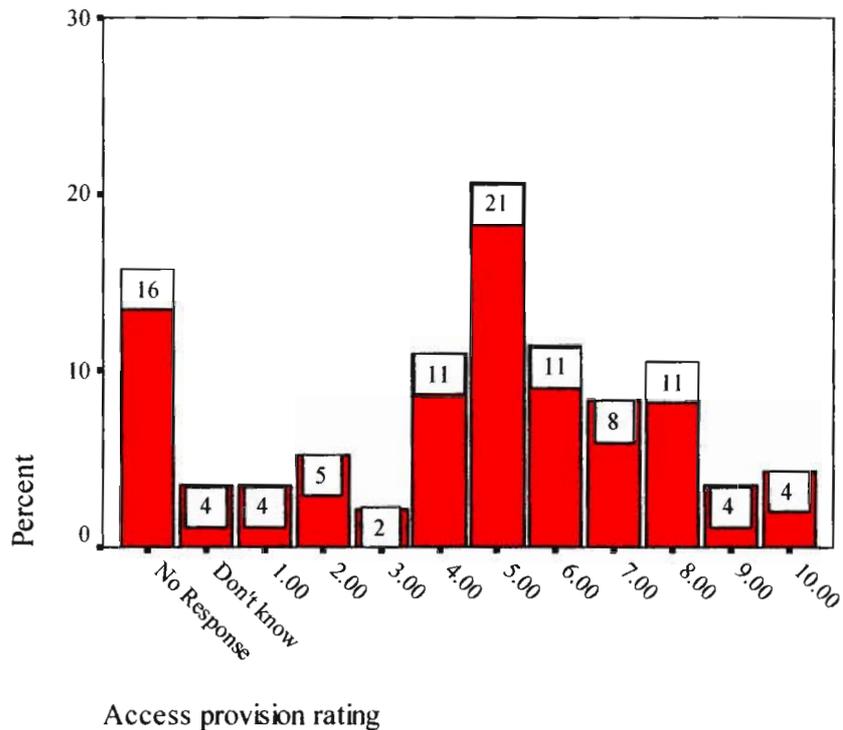
5.3.3 Batho Pele Principle 3: Access (Question 3.1)

Figure 10: Access to Services



A majority (69%) of the respondents felt that Pietermaritzburg Electricity provides equal access to services that customers are entitled to, whilst 18% respondents felt that Pietermaritzburg Electricity does not provide equal access to services that they are entitled to, and 12.7% respondents were uncertain, so did not respond.

Figure 11: Rating of Access (Question 3.2)



42% rated (question 3.1) PE's performance to provide equal access to services that customers are entitled at below average. It could be assumed that the 30.7% of the respondents who either did not respond to question 3.1 or who disagreed with the statement that PE provides equal access to services that customers are entitled constituted the majority of the 42% of respondents that gave a below average rating. The other 11% came from the customers who had agreed in question 3.1 that PE provides equal access to services. The final outcome of question 3.2 can be summarised as follows:

- 16% did not respond
- 4 % indicated that they don't know
- 4% rated 1/10
- 5% rated 2/10

- 2% rated 3/10 and 11% rated 4/10

However, majority (58%) of the respondents who agreed with the statement in 3.1 gave a rating of average and above average. This can be confirmed by the following:

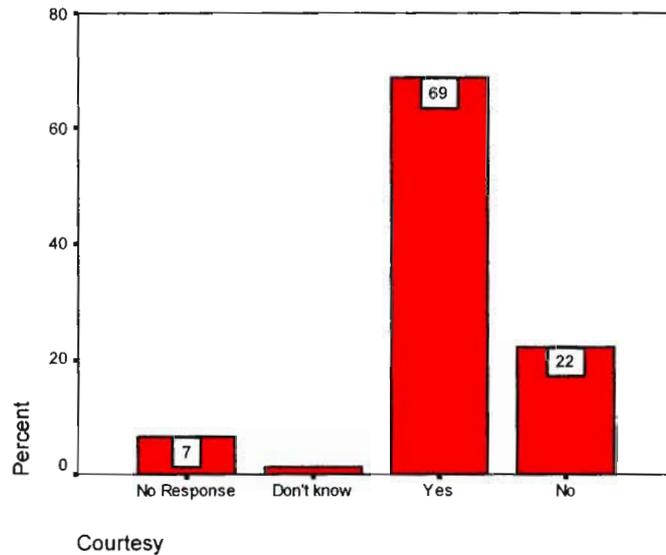
- 21% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 11% rated equally 6/10 and 8/10
- 8% rated 7/10
- Finally 4% rated equally 9/10 and 10/10.

Although most respondents gave an average rating, it is of great concern that a high number of the respondents (22%) scored PE's performance to below average i.e. 1/10 to 4/10. This needs further investigation. It may happen that the service offering may not be responsive to customer needs, and as a result, the customers may be communicating that they are not getting a fair deal.

For customers to agree that they were informed of PE's standards but do not accept them as appropriate, indicates that customers played no role in establishing these standards. If the customers were consulted when the standards were set, they would have given a different rating than this poor rating. Customers would not have only accepted the standards but defended them. They would have known the implication (financial) of raising or lowering the standards. The lack of consultation in the PE's side is understood to have resulted in such poor performance.

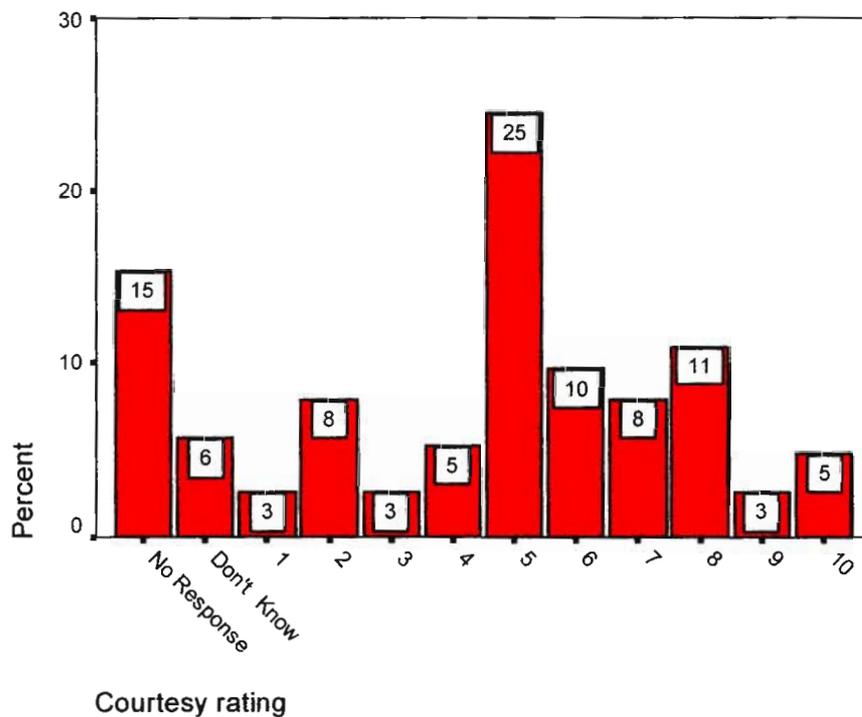
5.3.4 Batho Pele Principle 4: Courtesy (Question 4.1)

Figure 12: Courtesy



69% of the respondents agree that Pietermaritzburg Electricity is treating customers with courtesy and consideration whilst 22% felt that Pietermaritzburg Electricity was not treating customers with courtesy and consideration. 7% of the respondents did not respond to the question. The last 2% were uncertain about the statement and stated that they do not know.

Figure 13: Rating of Courtesy (Question 4.2)



40% rated PE's courtesy at below average. The 31% of the respondents who either did not respond or disagreed with the statement that PE treats its customers with courtesy and consideration in question 4.1 constituted the majority of the 40% respondents who rated for question 4.2 at below average.

The above can be summarised as follows:

- 15% did not respond
- 6% indicated that they don't know
- 3% rated 1/10
- 8% rated 2/10
- 3% rated 3/10 and 5% rated 4/10

9% of the respondents, who agreed in question 4.1 that PE treats their customers with courtesy and consideration, gave a rating of below average.

This can be confirmed by the summary below:

- 25% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 10% rated 6/10
- 8% rated 7/10
- 11% rated 8/10
- Finally 3% rated 9/10 and 5% rated 10/10.

From the above it could be said that the respondents feel that PE does offer a service offering which is in line with Batho Pele's fourth principle. On both the opportunities given the respondents gave a rating above average.

5.3.5 Batho Pele Principle 5: Information (Question 5.1)

Figure 14: Information Provision

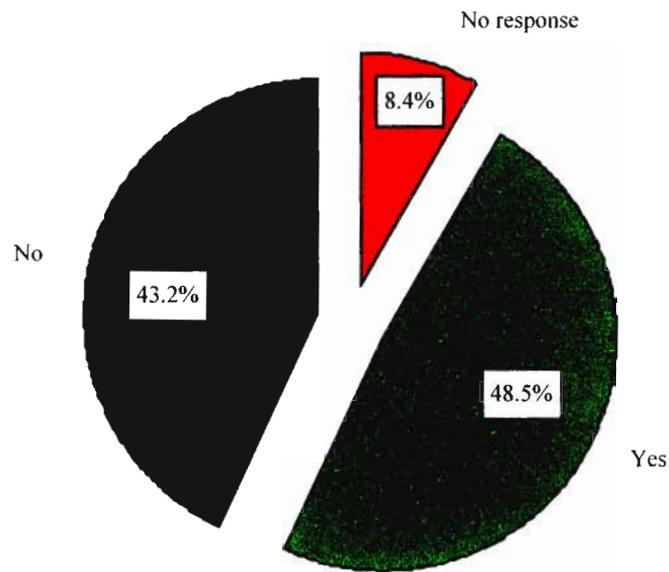
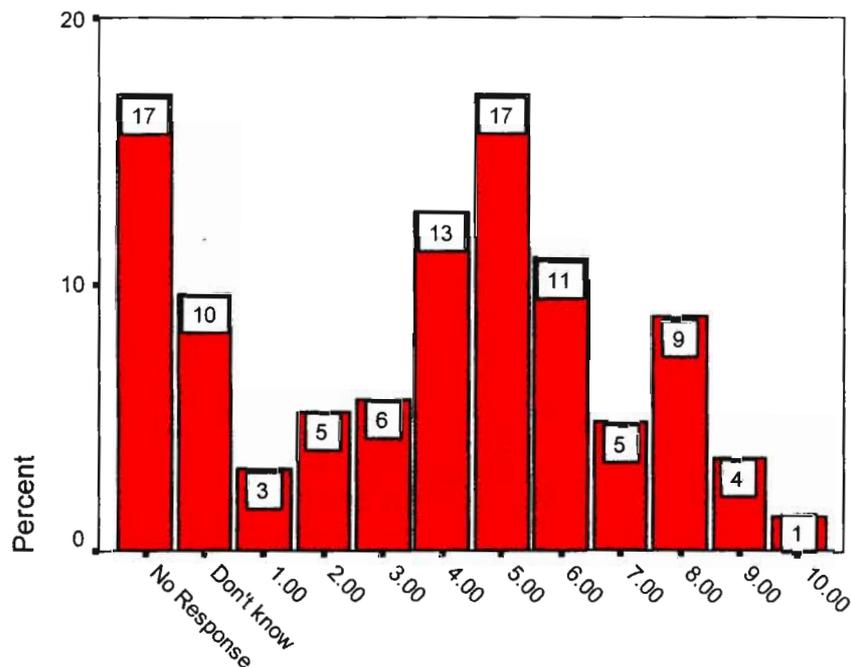


Figure 14 above shows that 48.5% of the respondents agreed that Pietermaritzburg Electricity is providing full, accurate and up to date information about the level and quality of service that their customers are entitled to, however, 43.2% of respondents disagreed and 8.4% did not respond.

It should be noted that the margin between the respondents who agreed and those who disagreed is very small, only 5%.

Figure 15: Rating of Information Provision (Question 5.2)



Quality and accuracy of Information

54% rated PE's provision of full, accurate and up to date information to customers at below average. Approximately 52% of the respondents who either did not respond or disagreed with the statement in question 5.1 constituted the majority of the 54% respondents who rated for question 5.2 at below average. The above can be summarised as follows:

- 17% did not respond
- 10% indicated that they don't know
- 3% rated 1/10
- 5% rated 2/10
- 6% rated 3/10 and 13% rated 4/10

Astonishingly it seems as if 2% of respondents who agreed with the statement on question 5.1 rated PE's performance on question 5.2 at below average.

However, the 46% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in 5.1 gave a rating of average and above average. This can be confirmed by the research summary below:

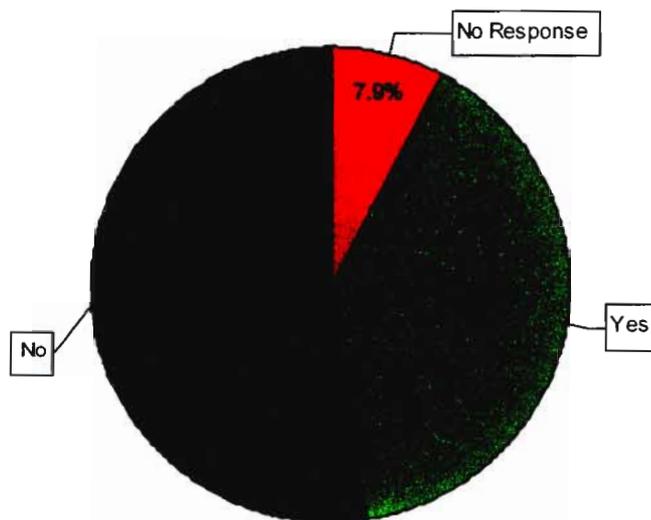
- 17% rated on average i.e. 5/10

- 11% rated 6/10
- 5% rated 7/10
- 9% rated 8/10
- Finally 4% rated 9/10 and 1% rated 10/10.

The small margin of 5% between the respondents who agreed against those who disagreed indicated that the performance of PE is not decisively good. As a result the second opportunity given to the respondents reveals that the PE's performance is poor as far as Batho Pele's fifth principle. This also indicates that PE needs to investigate the channels of communication it uses.

5.3.6 Batho Pele Principle 6: Openness and Transparency (Question 6.1)

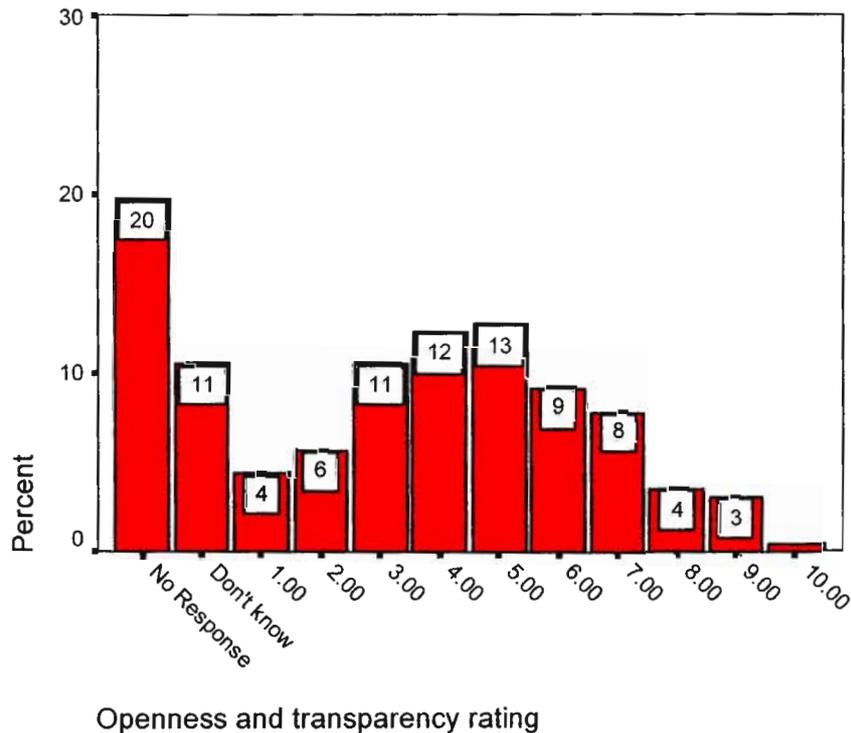
Figure 16: Openness and Transparency



A majority (52.6%) of the respondents felt that PE was not open and transparent on how it operates i.e. internal costs and who is in charge; whilst

39.5% felt that PE was open and transparent on how it operates. 7.9% of the respondents were uncertain as they did not respond at all.

Figure 17: Rating of Openness and Transparency (Question 6.2)



60.5% of the 64% who either disagreed or did not respond to question 6.1 rated PE's transparency on how it operates at below average. Approximately 4% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in question 6.1 also rated PE's transparency on how it operates at below average. The above can be summarised as follows:

- 20% did not respond
- 11% indicated that they don't know
- 4% rated 1/10
- 6% rated 2/10
- 11% rated 3/10 and 12% rated 4/10

However, the 36% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in 6.1 gave a rating of average and above average. This can be confirmed by the research summary below:

- 13% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 9% rated 6/10

- 8% rated 7/10
- 4% rated 8/10
- Finally slightly less than 3% rated 9/10 and respondents who rated 10/10 were insignificant.

Public service institutions should not score such low ratings in this principle especially as the National Government is trying so much to ensure that public service institutions are transparent. MM will therefore need to greatly improve on this principle; also it may be possible that the communication channel used by MM to communicate and disseminate information may not be providing an efficient service to customers thus failing both the customer and the Municipality.

5.3.7 Batho Pele Principle 7: Redress (Question 7.1)

Figure 18: Redress

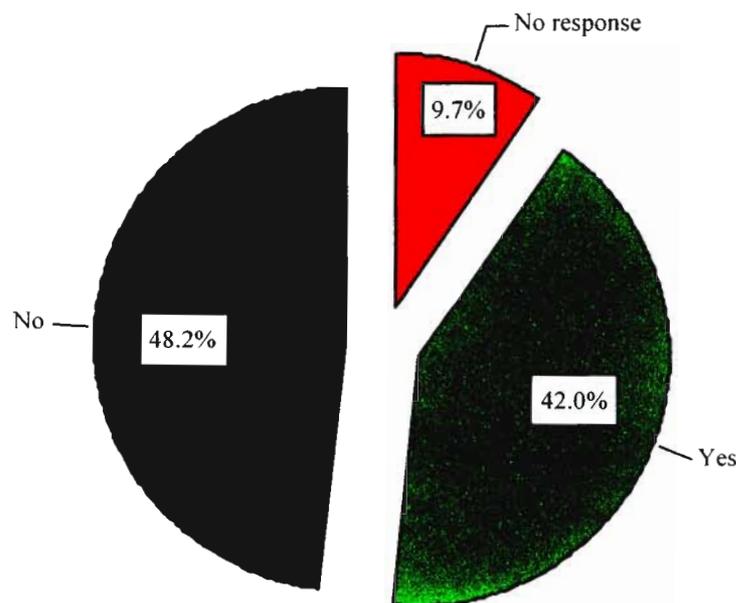
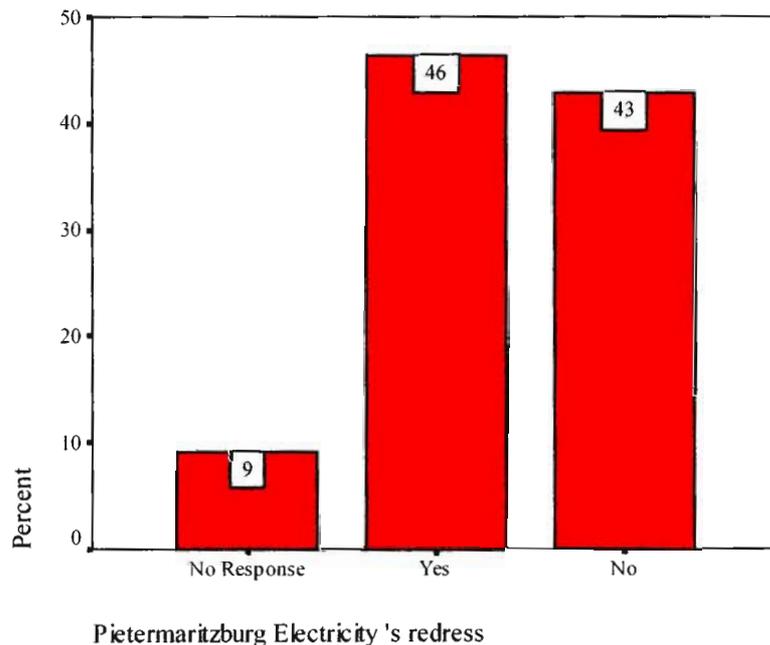


Figure 18 shows that 48.2% of the respondents believe that PE does not offer an apology, give full explanation and offer a speedy, effective solution when a

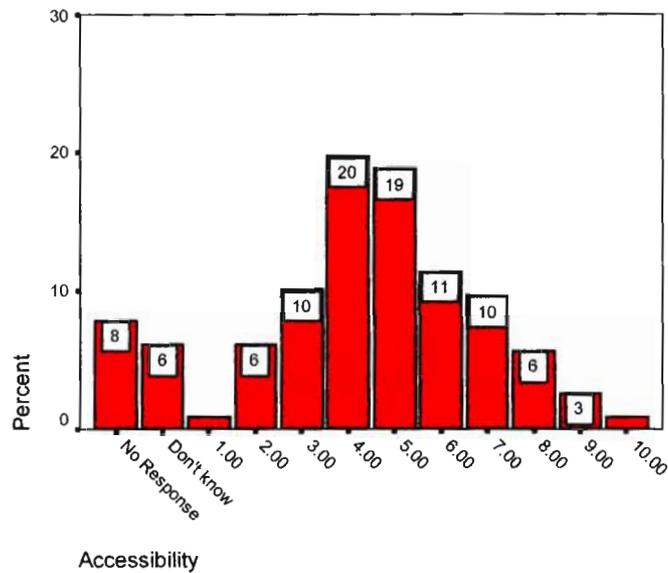
promised standard of service is not delivered whilst 42% believe that Pietermaritzburg Electricity does offer an apology, give full explanation and offer a speedy, effective solution when a promised standard of service is not delivered, and 9.7% of the respondents did not respond.

Figure 19: Rating on Redress (Question 7.2)



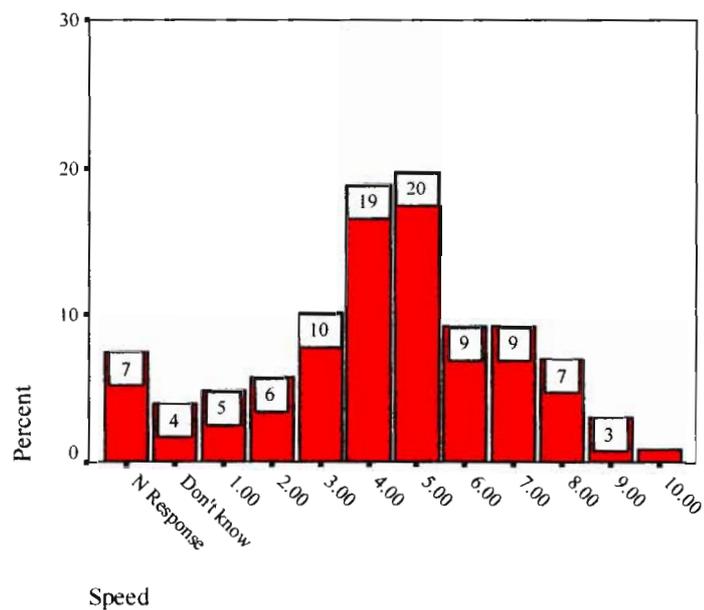
46% respondents agreed that PE gives a prompt, sympathetic and positive response when a complaint is lodged with them, however 43% did not agree with the above statement whilst 9% gave no response to the question.

Figure 20(a): Accessibility (Question 7.3.1)



37% rated the accessibility of PE's complaints handling system at below average i.e. 1/10 to 4/10 whilst 30% rated above average i.e. 6/10 to 10/10, 19% of the respondents gave an average rating i.e. 5/10. 14% of the respondents either did not respond or did not know. This indicates that 50% rated at below average whilst the other 50% rated at average and above.

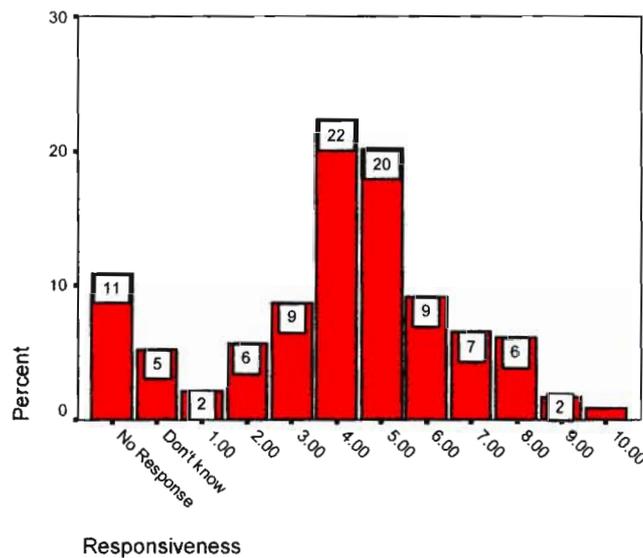
Figure 20(b): Speed (Question 7.3.2)



40% rated the speed with which PE responds to complaints and resolves them at below average i.e. 1/10 to 4/10; whilst 29% rated above average i.e.

6/10 to 10/10. 20% of the respondents gave an average (5/10) rating. 11% either did not respond or stated that they did not know. On this aspect again it could be said that the respondents were split at 50% between those rating at below average and those who rated at average and above average.

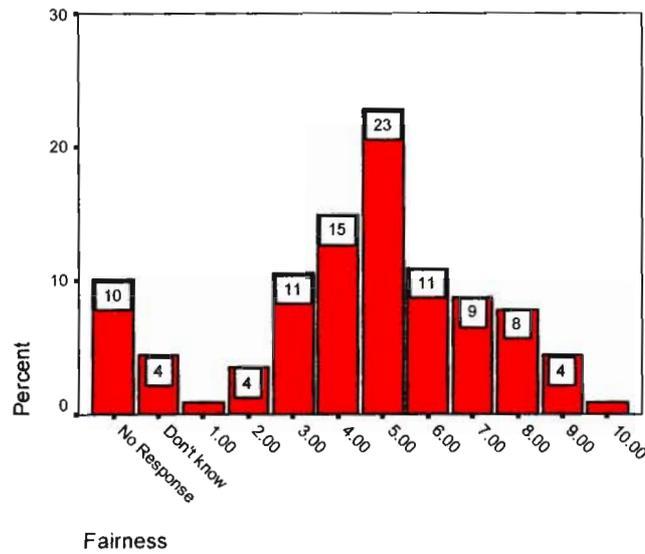
Figure 20(c): Responsiveness (Question 7.3.3)



39% of the respondents rated PE’s responsiveness to customer complaints at below average (1/10 to 4/10) whilst 25% rated above average (6/10 to 10/10). 20% of the respondents gave an average (5/10) rating. 16% of the respondents either did not know or gave no response.

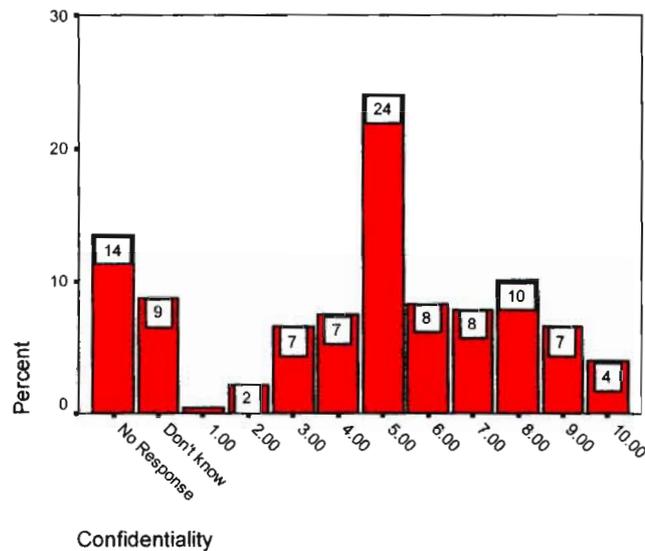
The final outcome is that the majority of the respondents rated at below average. This is really disturbing.

Figure 20(d): Fairness (Question 7.3.4)



31% of the respondents rated the PE's fairness when dealing with customer complaints at below average (1/10 to 4/10) whilst almost 33% rated above average (6/10 to 10/10). 23% of the respondents gave an average rating. Almost 14% of the respondents either did not know or gave no response.

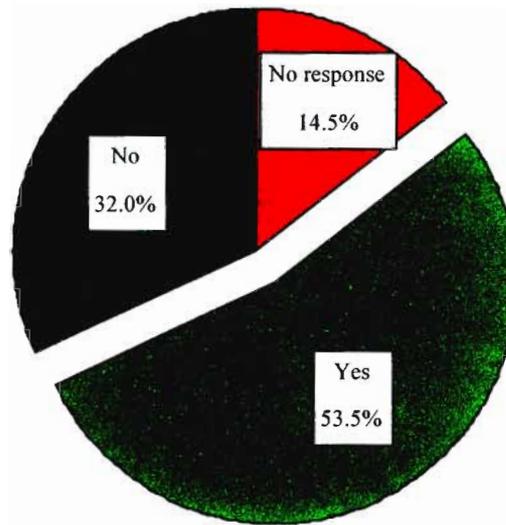
Figure 20(e): Confidentiality (Question 7.3.5)



16% of the respondents rated the PE's confidentiality in dealing with customer complaints at below average (1/10 to 4/10) whilst 37% rated above average (6/10 to 10/10), 24% of the respondents gave an average rating (5/10). 23% of the respondents either did not know or gave no response.

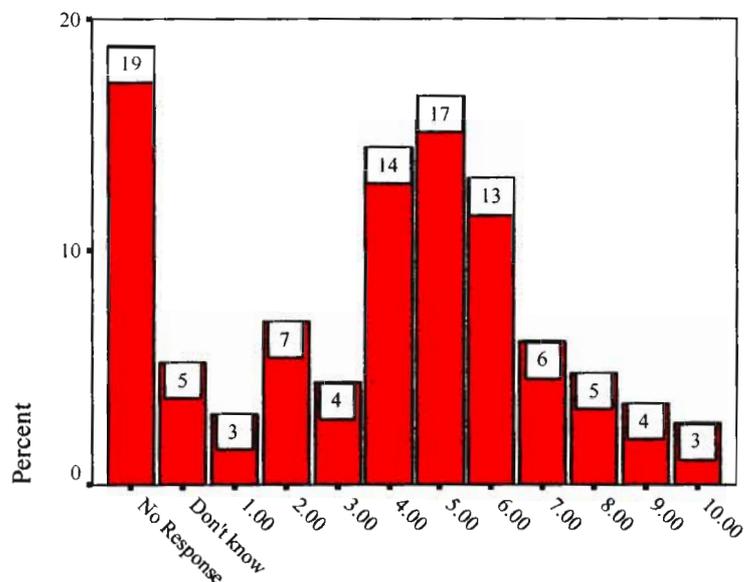
5.3.8 Batho Pele Principle 8: Value for Money (Question 8.1)

Figure 21: Value for Money



A majority (53.5%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that PE provides economical and efficient services, resulting in them as customers getting the best possible value for money whilst 32% of the respondents disagreed with the statement. 14.5 % of the respondents were uncertain, therefore did not respond to the question.

Figure 22: Rating for Value for Money (Question 8.2)



Pietermaritzburg Electricity's value rating

46.5% of the respondents who either disagreed or did not respond to question 8.1 constituted the majority 52% of respondents that rated PE's performance at either below average (1/10 to 4/10), did not know or did not respond. Approximately 6% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in question 8.1 also rated PE's performance at below average. The above can be summarised as follows:

- 19% did not respond
- 5% indicated that they don't know
- 3% rated 1/10
- 7% rated 2/10
- 4% rated 3/10 and 14% rated 4/10

However, the 48% of the respondents who agreed with the statement in 8.1 gave a rating of average and above average. This can be confirmed by the research summary below:

- 17% rated on average i.e. 5/10
- 13% rated 6/10
- 6% rated 7/10
- 5% rated 8/10

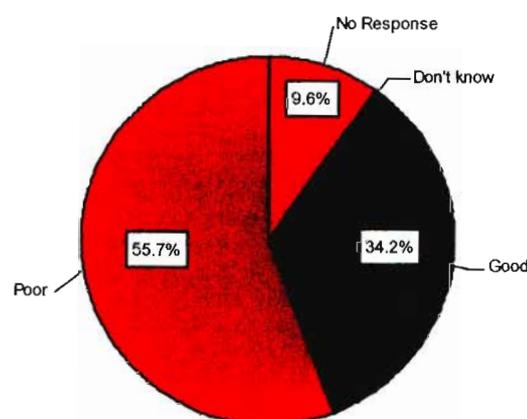
- Finally slightly 4% rated 9/10 and 3% rated 10/10.

This also indicates that the performance of PE on the 8th Batho Pele Principle is poor. Though the majority of the respondents indicated that PE provides economical and efficient services but they indicated that PE's performance is below average. This indicates that there is a lot of improvement that PE has to make in order to meet customer expectation.

5.4 SECTION C: CONSOLIDATION - SURVEY QUESTIONS

Section C of the research questionnaire attempts to test the second objective of the study i.e. to investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles. The responses from this section are to clearly determine whether industrial and commercial customers are happy with PE's customer service or not. This also gives the customer perspective.

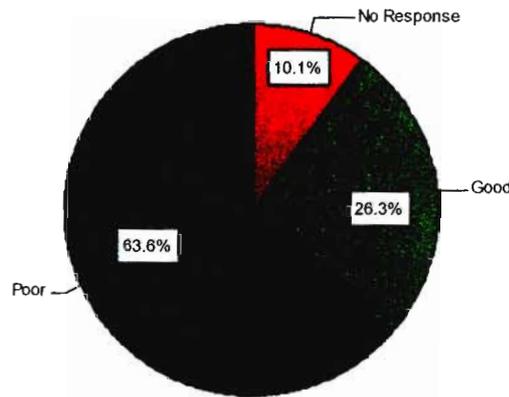
Figure 24: Consultation Process



The majority (55.7%) of the respondents rated Pietermaritzburg Electricity's consultation process as poor whilst 34.2% of the respondents felt that the

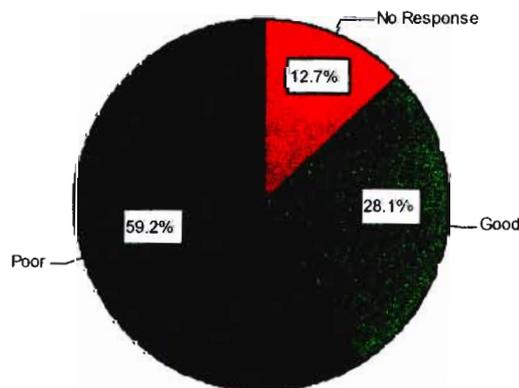
consultation is good. 9.6% did not respond to the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele first Principle.

Figure 25: Service Standards Offered by PE



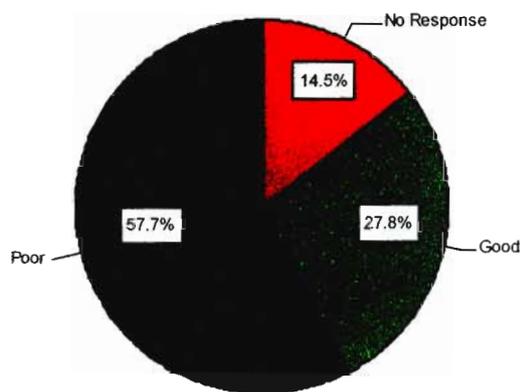
The majority (63.6%) of the respondents rated Pietermaritzburg Electricity's service standards as poor whilst 26.3% of the respondents felt that the service standards are good. 10.1% did not respond to the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele second Principle.

Figure 26: Access to PE Services



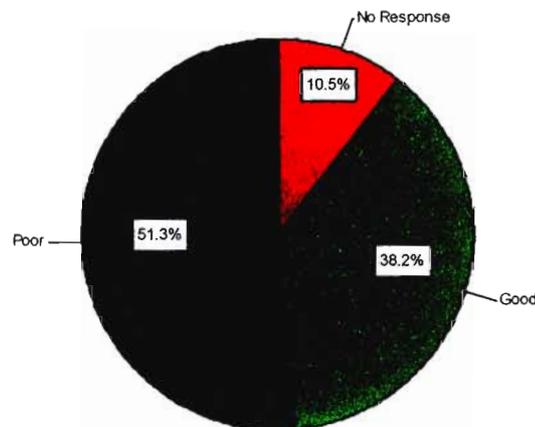
The majority (59.2%) of the respondents rated the access to services provided by Pietermaritzburg Electricity as poor whilst 28.1% of the respondents felt that access to services provided by PE is good. 12.1% did not respond to the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele third Principle.

Figure 27: Courtesy by PE Staff



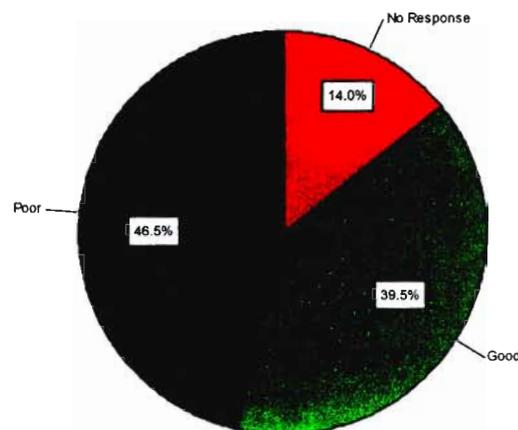
The majority (57.7%) of the respondents rated the courtesy to customers provided by Pietermaritzburg Electricity as poor whilst 27.8% of the respondents felt that courtesy to customers provided by Pietermaritzburg Electricity is good. 14.5% did not respond to the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele fourth Principle.

Figure 28: Provision of Information by PE



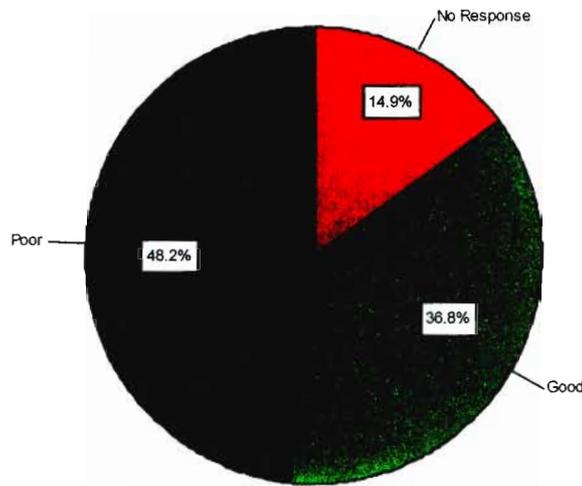
The majority (51.3%) of the respondents rated the provision of information to customers by PE as poor whilst 38.2% of the respondents felt that the provision of information to customers by Pietermaritzburg Electricity is good. 10.5% of the respondents did not respond. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele fifth Principle.

Figure 29: PE's Transparency



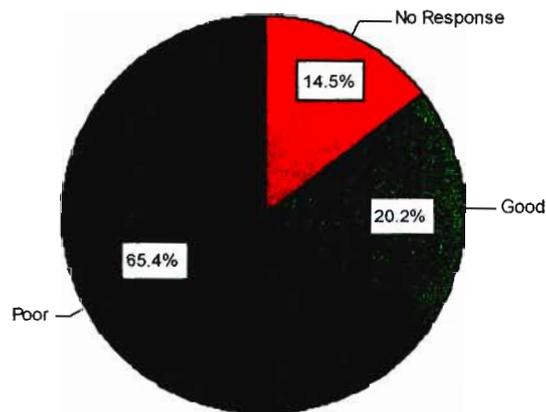
46.5% of the respondents rated transparency at PE as poor whilst 39.5% of the respondents felt that it is good. 14.0% did not respond the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele sixth Principle.

Figure 30: PE's Response to Complaints



48.2% of the respondents rated Pietermaritzburg Electricity's response to complaints as poor whilst 36.8% of the respondents felt that it is good. 14.9% did not respond to the question. This indicates clearly that industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele seventh Principle.

Figure 31: Service Provision by PE



The majority (65.4%) of the respondents rated Pietermaritzburg Electricity's service provision to customers as poor whilst 20.2% of the respondents rated as good. 14.5% did not respond the question. This indicates clearly that

industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele eighth Principle.

Figure 32: Functional Area PE Customers Deal with

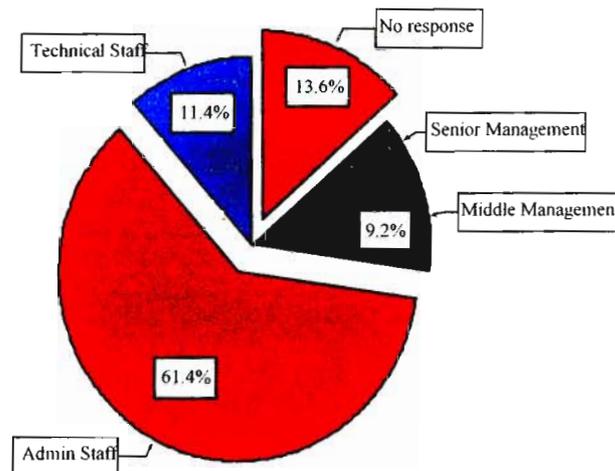


Figure 32 shows that most of the respondents (61.4%) indicated that they deal with administration staff, whilst 11.4% of the respondents stated that they deal with technical staff. 9.2% of the respondents indicated that they deal with middle management, 4.4% indicated that they deal with Senior Management. It is however to be noted that a 13.6% of the respondents were not clear which functional line of staff they dealt with.

5.5 THE PE MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW RESPONSES

5.5.1 Introduction

The qualitative interview in a focus group format with all the Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management was conducted to test the third objective i.e. to investigate whether the management of Pietermaritzburg Electricity is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele principles or not. This interview was held on Thursday, 17 August 2006, at PE's Main

Boardroom and all four managers were present at the interview. Refer to appendix E as it details the names of the managers and their appointments.

The approach that was taken was to investigate whether the management does have or does not have a system in place to deliver a service which is within the Batho Pele Principles. Therefore the questions that needed to be answered by Pietermaritzburg Electricity management were the following:

- What strategies are in place to ensure that Pietermaritzburg Electricity delivers a customer service that is in line with Batho Pele Principles?
- Does the strategy comply with the White paper?
- What implementation plan has been put in place to ensure that the strategy is not a shelf document?
- How does the organisation measure its performance in meeting the Batho Pele principles?
- What is the monitoring system put in place to ensure that the objectives are achieved and improvements made to ensure the set objectives are achieved?
- How often does the organisation conduct surveys to understand whether the implementation thereof does achieve the desired outcome?

From the above questions it would be quickly ascertained whether the organisation did implement the Batho Pele initiative or not. It is however important to note that it was not the intention of the study to understand how much the management know about Batho Pele Principles but what machinery they have instituted to ensure that the desired outcome is achieved.

5.5.2 Management Interview Results

The interview was conducted with Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management and the interview was handled such that all managers could be

given an opportunity to provide their input. The minutes of the meeting were taken by the organisations executive secretary.

5.5.2.1 Batho Pele Principles Implementation Strategy

PE does not have a documented strategy to implement Batho Pele Principles. Instead PE have a service charter which was established from the following: Batho Pele Principles, customer care literature, EDL, National Electricity Guidelines (2003) in providing electricity service and the National Rationalised Standards 047 and 048. The Customer Service Charter (Mashoko, 2005) was studied and it was found to be a good document, which when implemented well will advocate for a very high level of service standards to customers.

5.5.2.2 Compliance with WTPSD (DPSA, 1997)

The management provided sufficient evidence to prove that the Service Charter was communicated with all the staff at PE. The Service Charter was also implemented within PE. However, the management was quick to point out that the implementation thereof was constrained by the fact that there was not sufficient human resource capacity to ensure its proper and effective implementation. Also the systems currently in use cannot support the initiatives especially as all the systems are paper driven (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997).

The frontline staff members that are responsible for interacting with customers were work-shopped on the Service Charter but they have never received any formal training in its implementation. It could be stated that from the hiccups mentioned by management in the implementation of the Service Charter as the only source document or strategy to comply with Batho Pele Principles, that it is highly likely that PE does not fully comply with the dictates of the WTPSD (DPSA, 1997).

5.5.2.3 Implementation Plan

All employees were work-shopped on the service charter, the frontline customer care staff members were given a chance to study the document and raise issues that could not be implemented due to system's problems and capacity issues. However, most of the contents of the service charter were implementable except a handful that required PE to implement Information Technology to be able to integrate the systems and avail the customer data electronically to frontline customer staff (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997) for them to be able to assist the customers from the computer platform rather than going through piles of documents.

The complaints handling procedure and the relevant documentation were established which helps to track each complaint from the time it is reported to the time it is resolved and communicated with the customer.

The telephone system and the associated equipment were identified as a weak link. Msunduzi Municipality is currently implementing a call centre system which will include the fault reporting and management system that will assist in electronically tracking each report from reporting to completion. It will also allow the frontline customer consultant to access the customer data from the computer as he/she is talking to the customer, store the new information and be able to alter information and dispatch the information to field staff electronically thus affording the customer a speedy response to each report (Shonhiwa, 2001:100).

Unfortunately the system is still in the pipeline and its benefits could not be evaluated as yet.

5.5.2.4 Monitoring of Batho Pele Principles

Pietermaritzburg Electricity does not necessarily monitor the implementation of Batho Pele or the service charter. What was raised by the management is

that the service charter was initiated at business unit level (Infrastructure, Services and Facilities), and its monitoring is therefore conducted at that level. During the quarterly Infrastructure, Services and Facilities Business Unit's Senior Management meeting, the monitoring of the service charter implementation is discussed. The Branch Manager Customer Service, who is the custodian of the Service Charter reports monthly on the implementation of the Service Charter.

It was also stated that PE conducts customer complaints review meetings on regular basis which assist in identifying the trends and the recurring issues that result in complaints. These get resolved as they are identified. Also the media is followed very closely as the majority of customers who are dissatisfied normally air their views, some anonymously, through the media. PE has a policy of responding to all media complaints, providing points of clarity. Those complaints are accepted as an opportunity offered by the customer to improve the service offering and get used as constructive criticism (Cheales, 1994:103).

5.5.2.5 Reviews and Surveys Conducted

Pietermaritzburg Electricity does hold quarterly reviews to ensure that the complaints received are dealt with appropriately and within the time specified in the Service Charter. Also the complaints are categorised and analysed to understand the type of complaints that are normally received and what needs to be done to correct the situation to ensure that the service rendered is free from issues that could be regarded as complaints.

No surveys have been conducted to understand the customer satisfaction levels. It should also be stated that the management stated that the service charter is only used internally, and customers have not yet been informed of the availability of such a document. The above does not complement the customer care literature which advocates for continuous performance reviews. According to Cheales (1994:33)

"if you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it".

5.6 SUMMARY

The data from the research instruments and the responses of the PE management interview was analysed and interpreted. The three objectives that the study is testing were discussed extensively. The research findings and the conclusions are presented in chapter six.

CHAPTER 6

CORRELATION OF CUSTOMER RESPONSES AND PE MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter briefly draws a correlation between the PE management responses and the survey results. The chapter concludes by stating the PE management commitments after understanding the shortfalls in their service offering and the fact they do not comply with the dictates of Batho Pele principles as per WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997.

6.2 MANAGEMENT INTERVIEW VS SURVEY RESULTS

From the interview, it could be clearly stated that PE is committed to providing an all encompassing customer service. However, there was not convincing evidence that their commitment was implementing customer service within the context of Batho Pele Principles. There were statements found in the Infrastructure, Services and Facilities three year Strategic Plan (Mashoko, 2004) referring to Batho Pele Principles, but it was just quoted as part of the documentation, its implementation and monitoring as per the requirement were not evident (WPTPSD, DPSA, 1997).

The survey results indicate clearly whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele principles or not.

It was revealed that the customers felt that PE is not offering a service which is in-line with Batho Pele Principles. It was also confirmed that the industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

It could be further confirmed from the interview held with PE Senior Management that they are not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele principles.

It could therefore be concluded that PE's management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele principles.

6.3 PE MANAGEMENT'S COMMITMENT

PE management acknowledged the shortcoming as revealed by the interview questions and they openly agreed that probably adequate effort has not been put in this area for a number of reasons resulting in the service to customers falling below the expected. They however committed themselves to the following:

- To implement the Batho Pele Principles as dictated by the (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997) within two years,
- To improve the Service Charter and align it to Batho Pele Principles,
- State upfront the level and standard of service the customers are entitled to in their communication with customers,
- Produce flyers that will be made available at all points of call where customers engage PE on electricity issues,
- Publish the service standards to all electricity customers and state the applicable lead times,
- Regularly conduct customer satisfaction surveys at all their customer service centres,
- Conduct an investigation, in particular with regard to the Industrial and Commercial Customers, to understand the preferred channel to be used when communicating with them and use that channel rather than the current system of the Council structures and the local Media,
- Put more effort in the newly established Customer Communication

- Forums where industrial and commercial customers interact with PE,
- When the Councillors are tasked with the responsibility to consult with the communities they service on electricity issues, PE to conduct a follow up investigation to ensure that the community was consulted by requesting the Councillor to provide the minutes of the meeting with the Ward Committee or the community members.
 - The Service Charter once refined, would be published as PE's service contract with its customers.

It was felt that the above would assist in the right direction in ensuring that PE customers get the best customer service and that the (WTPSD, DPSA, 1997) was not waste of time but its objectives are realised by the ordinary person on the street.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSIONS

7.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents objectives of the study and a detailed discussion of the key findings as they relate to the literature reviewed and the Batho Pele Principles. Finally the conclusions are drawn from the discussion.

The objectives of this study are established from the Batho Pele principles which were presented in chapter one. The objectives remained the focal point of the study to ensure that it does not lose objectivity. The Objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE.
2. To investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.
3. To investigate whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

The first two objectives were tested using the research questionnaires which were sent out to a sample [242] of industrial and commercial customers within the Pietermaritzburg area. For the third objective, an interview with all four PE senior managers was held. This was a focus group type interview and all senior managers were given an opportunity to respond to structured questions. The purpose was to establish whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

7.2 RESEARCH FINDINGS

The overall response to the research was very good. 98% (238 of 242) of the questionnaire sent out were received. The response rate was adequate to infer plausible findings from the study. It is however important to note that a significant percentage (13%) did not respond to the question which tried to establish whether the respondents when completing the survey questions were representing their organisation or not, whilst 1% stated that they did not represent their organisations.

It could also be stated that from the data collected, on average, between 8 and 14% of the respondents provided no responses to some of questions of the survey, this could be a study limitation.

The presentation of the research findings deals with the responses from the respondents as they relate to objective one and two. These findings are correlated with the literature reviewed and the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997). The PE management responses are analysed and conclusions drawn from them as they relate to objective three.

7.2.1 Consultation

Becker, (1998:241) states,

“If you are really happy with a vendor or a company, if that company really goes out of its way to show you that it cares, if that company proves that it puts you first, and if that company makes you feel you were taken care of in the right way – then you the customer will stay with that company and continue to buy its products”.

The above statement by Becker gives an impression that the success of the encounter is determined from the customer's perspective. The company needs to take control of certain aspects of the encounter to ensure that the

customer have experience good feelings to frame a good perception. Cook, (2002:80) gives a fascinating observation when she states,

“A recent survey found that 86% of company executives see themselves as being customer-centric. Yet often employees stop being consumers as soon as they walk into their place of work. Often organisations believe that they have an understanding of their customer’s requirements; this may however be based on a subjective rather than an objective viewpoint”.

The WTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 1.3) encourages the public service institutions to listen to customer’s views and to take those views into account when making decisions about what and how services should be provided. The WTPSD (DPSA, 1997) dictates that customers should be consulted about the level and quality of services they receive.

The research findings provided a very interesting observation as far as the first Batho Pele Principle is concerned i.e. Consultation. When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; 54,4% disagreed with the statement in question 1.1 stating that PE does not consult them when deciding to introduce, alter or change the level and quality of service offered, whilst 44.3% agreed. The respondents indicated that PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele’s first Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial customers. The second opportunity was given to the respondents to rate whether PE consults with them when deciding to introduce, alter or change level and quality of service, and the response was average.

However when testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the response was loud and clear that it is poor. 55,7% of the industrial and commercial customers rated as poor and 34,2% gave a good rating.

The survey therefore revealed that PE's performance on the first Batho Pele Principle dealing with consultation is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does not adhere to Batho Pele's first Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's second Principle.

Objective three: PE's management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's first Principle. The responses from PE's senior management indicated clearly that there is nothing that the organisation is doing to ensure that they consult with their customers on a regular basis. PE management indicated that they depend on the Council's committee structure to consult and the recently established Customer Communication Forum. However, the industrial and commercial customers indicated clearly that they are not adequately serviced by the current Council Committee structures.

Customers are well informed about the services and products they should receive, partly due to competition, intensive studies by consumer groups, professional associations and other organisations (Wellemin, 1995:14). In the case of Batho Pele principles, communities know how the public institutions should function and what governs them.

The WPTPSD, (DPSA, 1997, par 4.1.2) suggests that there are many ways to consult users of services, these include customer surveys, interviews with individual users, consultation groups and meetings with representative bodies like NGOs, CBOs just to name a few.

The investigation into records of previous communication by Pietermaritzburg Electricity to its customers through media has always been on clarifying issues raised by media and probably normal operating notices. Nothing was found where PE was communicating with its customers on customer related

issues (Process Manager Electricity, 2004-06). The WPTPSD, (DPSA, 1997) indicated clearly that consultation is the cornerstone of transformed public service institutions in delivering a service to public. The Literature reviewed also clearly and repeatedly stated the importance of asking the customer what he/she wants (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000:4), (Becker, 1998:170) and (Cheales, 1994:13).

Canning (1999:33) states that customer views help the organisation to improve in an area that is valued by the customer, it is therefore vital to allow the customer's comments into the organisation's processes. She goes on to say that customers want the organisation to deliver aspects of service that are important to them (34). She concludes by saying that treasure their input and think of it as free market research because they are giving the organisation very valuable information.

Buchanan (2002:11) states that when customers think they got a better deal and vote with their feet, whether or not they actually got a better deal is totally unimportant! Perception is much more important than reality when it comes to survival. This therefore indicates that by listening to the customers and also feeding them with good information on the services offered, this could be good work in the right direction. Unfortunately PE has not started this process.

Cook (2002: 80) states that an essential first step in the development of all service initiative is gaining feedback from customers. She went on to say that listening to customers is vital if organisations wish not only to attract new customers but also to retain existing ones.

Cook (2002:169) concludes by stating that the best-practice organisations use information which customers provide to draw up training and development objectives for their organisations and to ensure they keep a clear focus on the business. She also declares that customer service is what the customer says it is and this can be ascertained only by asking the customer his/her opinion; only then can a business gain a true perspective on what matters to customers.

7.2.2 Service Standard

Kook, (2000:5) states that a company's ability to attract and retain new customers therefore is a function not only of its product or product offering but also the way it services its existing customers and the reputation it creates within and across marketplaces. This indicates that the product may be of superior quality but if not augmented with matching good service, the exercise may not be a profitable one.

Public Service institutions mostly provide unique services that cannot be sourced from anywhere, and this has resulted in them not putting much effort in raising their service standards. Also the market forces are non-existent in the public service arena WTPSD, (DPSA, 1997). It is a known fact that if the customer is not satisfied with the service offered by PE, the customer cannot make a switch to the next service provider to show his/her dissatisfaction with the service. That is why the WTPSD, (DPSA, 1997) was promulgated to deal with such ills. The public service institutions are provided budgets annually that do not necessarily match their business requirements; their poor utilisation of human and financial resources manifests itself in poor quality service to the customers. Blem (1995:13) states that organisations reduce their operating costs to an extent that their service drives customers away, but on the other hand if they enhance their service the customer will repeat the purchase and even buy other products of the organisation, this makes retaining the customer a profitable decision. However these market forces are not applicable to public service institutions.

The WTPSD, (DPSA, 1997) states that the public service institutions should set demanding yet realistic standards; they should publish them and conduct annual reviews to measure their performance against such set standards. The WTPSD goes on to state public service institutions should improve on their standards year on year.

The research findings provided a very interesting observation as far as the second Batho Pele Principle is concerned i.e. service standard. When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; 54% agreed with the statement in question 2.1 stating that PE publish the standard of service the customers should expect to receive, whilst 37% disagreed. The respondents indicated that PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's second Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial customers. In the second opportunity given to the respondents to rate the PE's service standard, the response was average bordering to above average.

However, when testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the response was loud and clear that it is poor. 63,6% of the industrial and commercial customers rated as poor and 26,3% gave a good rating.

The survey therefore revealed that PE's performance on the second Batho Pele Principle dealing with service standards is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's second Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's second Principle.

Objective three: PE's management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's second Principle. This is due to the fact that though some documentation (Msunduzi Municipality Service Charter, 2005 and Infrastructure, Services and Facilities Strategic Plan 2004-2007) did appear to be trying to address the issues a requirement of the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997), the management revealed that the target was not compliant with the Batho Pele Principles.

Therefore the performance of Pietermaritzburg Electricity on the second Batho Pele principle; could be said to be average but bordering on poor.

7.2.3 Access

Dorrian (1996:40) states,

“People prefer and expect to have a certain degree of personal interaction in their purchase and their dealings with an organisation. He concludes by saying that there is no substitute for personal touch.”

Wellemin (2003:40) states that customers must be able to contact the supplier not only when they have an inquiry prior to making a purchase, but also after sale. He then cautions that to complete the circle, company procedures and systems must be made accessible to the customer and be more customer friendly.

The WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par 4.4) states that the public institutions are required to specify and set targets for progressively increasing access to their services for those who have not previously received them.

Gabbott and Hogg (1998:79) state that a number of authors have indicated that the environment in which the service takes place have a direct impact upon consumer's perceptions.

The research findings again provided an interesting observation as far as the third Batho Pele Principle is concerned i.e. access to services. When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; 69,3% agreed with the statement in question 3.1 stating that PE provides equal access entitled to the customers whilst 18% disagreed. The respondents indicated that PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's third Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial customers. The second opportunity given to

respondents to rate PE's provision of access to services, the response was also good.

However when testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the response was clear that it is poor. 59.2% of the industrial and commercial customers rated as poor and 28,1% gave a good rating.

The survey therefore revealed that PE's performance on the Third Batho Pele Principle dealing with service standards is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's third Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's third Principle.

Objective three: PE management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's third Principle. This is due to the fact that though this customer bracket easily access PE services using the latest technology such as internet and other forms of systems that could make information transfer easy, they are still provided the same service like all other customers. PE acknowledged that this is the most profitable and sophisticated customer segment, and require a unique treatment due to their unique needs. But they are treated differently.

It could be concluded that the access to equal services at Pietermaritzburg Electricity is average but bordering on poor. Improvement on the principle is necessary.

7.2.4 Courtesy

The literature reviewed (Blem, 1995:13) confirmed that there is a very close relationship between the organisations profitability and its effort to retain the customers. Blem (1995:18) summarised it nicely when he states that the reason for some organisation's success is that they treat their customers, suppliers and staff with great respect, caring and consideration. He goes on to say that naturally their customers, suppliers and staff respond positively.

Cook (2000:12) presents a different dimension on customer care when she says

“Often a service provider cannot be separated from the service. When buying a service customers are buying the whole person. ...Encouraging staff to go one bit further for the customer is one of the difficulties facing the service organisations”.

Cook asserts that customers therefore must be treated as individuals; they want to be valued and feel that their custom is important. She concludes by saying that when the organisation provides uniform standard service, irrespective of customer's needs, there is a danger that customers may form the impression that they are just another account number, rather than a valued individual.

WPTPSD (DPSA,1997, par 4.4) states that public servants should treat the members of the public as customers who are entitled to receive the highest standards of service. The WPTPSD further states that the concept of courtesy goes much wider than asking the public servant to give polite smile and to say 'please' and 'thank you'.

For the staff to be courteous with customers they need to be treated well, in concurring with this Becker (1998:82) states:

“Treat employees right; they will treat your customers right. People want to feel good about themselves and they have fun at work”.

The research findings also provided an interesting observation as far as the fourth Batho Pele Principle is concerned i.e. courtesy and consideration. When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; 69% agreed with the statement in question 4.1 stating that PE treats its customers with courtesy and consideration whilst 22% disagreed. The respondents indicated that PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele’s fourth Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial customers. In the second opportunity given to respondents to rate PE’s provision of access to services, the response was good.

However when testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the response was clear that it is poor. 57.7% of the industrial and commercial customers rated as poor and 27.8% gave a good rating.

The survey therefore revealed that PE’s performance on the fourth Batho Pele Principle dealing with service standards is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele’s fourth Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE’s industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele’s fourth Principle.

Objective three: PE’s management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele’s fourth Principle. There was nothing evident during the interviews and documents investigated (Msunduzi Municipality Service Charter, 2005 and Infrastructure, Services and Facilities Strategic Plan 2004-2007) that gave an impression that the management is committed to providing

the service which is inline with Batho Pele Principles.

It could be concluded that PE needs to improve on its service offering (courtesy and consideration) and the management commit to service offering that adheres to Batho Pele.

7.2.5 Information

The WTPSD (DPSA, 1997) states that information is one of the most powerful tools at the customer's disposal in exercising his or her right to and ensuring good service. It goes on to state that the implementation of Batho Pele will require a complete transformation of communication with the public.

Prior to a decision to procure a product or service, the customer firstly seeks information about the product or service (Gabbott and Hogg:1998). They continue to state that faced with any purchase decision, it is assumed that the consumer requires information with which to inform product/service choice (1998:46).

The industrial and commercial customers make key decision about their businesses on regular bases, they need full, up to date and accurate information from PE for their decision making process especially due to the fact that PE provides one of the most valuable production inputs (electricity).

The research findings revealed that there was a very narrow gap between respondents who agreed and those who disagreed with the statement that PE provides full accurate and up to date information about the level and quality of service customers are entitled to. When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; 48.5% agreed with the statement in question 5.1 whilst 43.3% disagreed. This indicated that PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's fifth Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial

customers. In the second opportunity given to respondents to rate PE's provision of access to services, the response was average.

However when testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the gap widened indicating clearly that it is poor. 51.3% of the industrial and commercial customers rated as poor and 38.2% gave a good rating.

The survey therefore revealed that PE's performance on the fifth Batho Pele Principle dealing with provision of information to customers is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's fifth Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's fifth Principle.

Objective three: PE the management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's fifth Principle. The PE management could not provide convincing evidence that they do have a communication strategy to deal with their customers. This gave a strong impression that the management is not committed to providing the service which is inline with Batho Pele Principles.

It could be concluded that PE needs to improve on its communication with customers as per the dictates of the WTPSD (DPSA, 1997) that states that the implementation of Batho Pele requires a complete transformation of communication with the public.

Wellemin (2003:29) states that it is not enough to provide excellent customer support, organisations also have to make it known to customers that they are doing so... Surely customers should know that they are getting superior service.

7.2.6 Openness and transparency

The WTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par. 4.6) states that openness and transparency are the hallmarks of democratic government and are fundamental to the public service transformation process. The WTPSD emphasises that the public should know more about the way the public institutions are run, how well they perform, what resources they consume and who is in charge.

When testing the first research objective, i.e. whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; the research findings revealed that the majority of respondents (52,6%) agreed with the statement that PE is transparent on how it operates whilst 39,5% disagreed with the statement. In the second opportunity given to respondents to rate PE's transparency, the respondents presented a different perception as they rated at below average. This indicated that currently PE's adherence to Batho Pele's sixth Principle when offering a service to its industrial and commercial customers is bordering from average to poor.

When testing the second research objective, i.e whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; the survey results indicated that 46.5% of the industrial and commercial customers felt that it is poor whilst 39,5% felt that it is good.

The survey therefore revealed that PE's performance on the sixth Batho Pele Principle dealing with openness and transparency is as follows:

Objective one: PE currently does not adhere to Batho Pele's sixth Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's sixth Principle.

Objective three: PE's management is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's third Principle. PE management's indicated that they use only one channel to communicate with their customers about their operational costs and how the organisation is run, it was through the annual municipal public meetings. These public meetings which are normally referred to as Izimbizo, are organised by politicians as part of community participation. The Msunduzi Municipality by law has to present its budget to communities living within its jurisdiction and in all these meetings the Process Manager: Electricity, who is in charge of Pietermaritzburg Electricity did attend. This therefore is an indication that these meetings do not address all the customers, especially this customer segment.

This gave a strong impression that management is not committed to providing the service which is inline with Batho Pele Principles.

It could be concluded that PE needs to improve on its openness and transparency as per the dictates of the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997).

7.2.7 Redress

Basch (2002:18) states that in customer focused organisations the sun never sets on an unresolved problem, meaning that, if the problem cannot be resolved, at least it will be dealt with and the people involved will be aware that it is being dealt with.

Jude (1998:35) gives a fascinating statement when dealing with how organisations loose customers. He says that they loose customers for many reasons, some as a result of something that was done but sometimes customers are lost for something that was neglected to be done.

Dorrian (1996:34) reveals that customers who complain are more likely than non-complainers to buy again from the company that upset them. The determinant of a repeat purchase has been found to be the manner and

speed with which the complaint was resolved. He goes on to say that the customer who had a complaint and the company satisfactorily resolved their complaint, tell, on average five people about the treatment they received.

This above statement made by Dorrian indicates that in case of an unfortunate circumstance where the customer experience a problem, that incident can either be turned into good marketing or bad marketing; it all depends on how it is resolved.

The majority of respondents in all three opportunities given rated the performance of Pietermaritzburg Electricity with regards to redress as poor. Respondents felt that Pietermaritzburg Electricity does not offer an apology, give a full explanation and a speedy and effective remedy when complaints are made. However when respondents were asked to rate the response when a complaint was lodged by them, the majority of respondents indicated that PE does give a prompt, sympathetic and positive response.

Respondents also felt that PE performs on average with regards to accessibility, fairness, and confidentiality whilst performs below average on responsiveness and speed.

This therefore indicates that for objective one: PE currently does not adhere to Batho Pele's seventh Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's fifth Principle.

Objective three: PE management is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's seventh Principle. Also PE has established systems and they are in place to ensure that complaints are handled and responded to speedily. The Senior Management does hold complaints reviews however due to capacity constraints issues their performance is not at the level they would want it to be.

Wellemin (2003:64) advises that once the immediate 'fire' has been put out, the company must take further advantage of the complaint by examining the underlying cause of it to ensure it does not occur again. He concludes by saying that well-run organisations, customer complaints are being taken very seriously. he further suggests that a senior member of staff (executive) should take charge of coordinating all activities involved in handling and managing customer complaints; he goes to the extent of recommending that these complaints should be reported to the board on a regular basis.

7.2.8 Value for Money

The majority of respondents in two out three opportunities confirmed that Pietermaritzburg Electricity provides economical and efficient services, resulting in customers getting good value for money. However, in the third question addressing the second objective, where the respondents were asked to rate by indicating whether Pietermaritzburg Electricity provides good or poor value for money, the majority of respondents gave a poor rating.

This therefore indicates that for objective one: PE currently does adhere to Batho Pele's eighth Principle when offering services to its industrial and commercial customers.

Objective two: PE's industrial and commercial customers are satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele's eighth Principle.

Objective three: PE management is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele's eighth Principle. PE has established systems to ensure that the utility is run efficiently and effectively. It should be stated that the PE management acknowledged the fact that costs of services are not proportional to the price the customer pays. The tariffs are set based on Council's revenue requirements. If the input costs are reduced, the unit costs levied to the customer are not accordingly reduced.

7.3 CONCLUSIONS

From the data analysis and the research findings of all eight Batho Pele principles and the literature reviewed it could be concluded as follows:

Objective one

- To investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE.

The analysis revealed that on some principles, the respondents felt that PE do adhere to Batho Pele Principles in their service offering, however the study also revealed that PE never implemented the Batho Pele Principles according to the WTPSD (DPSA, 1997). Whatever the respondents perceived as compliance was just a coincidence. There was no evidence in PE's documentation suggesting that the Batho Pele Principles were implemented. It was however found that the Msunduzi Municipality issued golf shirts with Batho Pele Principles ascribed on them. A number of key principles of Batho Pele such as consultation were not evident at PE. It could therefore be concluded that **Batho Pele Principles are currently not being adhered to in the service offering of PE.**

Objective Two

- To investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

From the data analysis to the research findings the message from the customers was loud and clear that **the industrial and commercial customers are not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles.**

Objective Three

- To investigate whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

The PE Senior Management interview revealed a lot about the way things are done to ensure that they provide a good customer service to their customers. It was also evident that there was never a time where the management put together a strategy to comply with the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997). The WPTPSD detailed how to implement this initiative and what annual performance measurements need to be done to ensure that the customers are given a decent service. The WPTPSD also detailed that employees need to be trained on Batho Pele Principles. It could therefore be stated that PE did not comply with any of the above. It is therefore concluded that **the management of PE is not committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles.**

CHAPTER 8

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RECOMMENDATION FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

8.1 INTRODUCTION

The objectives of this study were; to investigate whether Batho Pele Principles are currently being adhered to in the service offering of PE; to investigate whether industrial and commercial customers are satisfied or not satisfied with the current service offering within the context of Batho Pele Principles; and finally to investigate whether the management of PE is committed to customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles or not.

This chapter presents the recommendations framed from the results of the investigation. The recommendations are to assist PE management in improving their customer service, and to comply with WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997). The chapter concludes by stating the limitations of the study and the recommendations for further research to improve the lives of citizens of Msunduzi Municipality.

8.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that PE implements the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997) which is a requirement to all public service institutions. In their implementation of the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997), in addition the following recommendations are made:

- An effective customer consultation strategy should be established outlining clearly how customers are going to be engaged. Serious considerations should be given to selecting the media channel to be used and the messages to be communicated. The consultation process

should not only be targeting the existing customers but also the prospective customers, the previously disadvantaged, and other organisations such as NGOs and CBOs should be included WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997).

- The organisational structure should be re-organised to ensure that the organisation is structured to deliver a service which is in-line with Batho Pele Principles. The structure must be staffed with the right people who are adequately skilled and have the right attitude to provide the service that is within the context of Batho Pele. Wellemin (2003:45) states that greater emphasis should be placed in the recruitment process to ensure newly engaged staff have the right attitude towards the company and towards customers. Dorrian (1996:107) reveals that the companies that are really geared towards customer friendly service take care to screen new recruits and assess whether they have the appropriate personality and skills to deal with customers.
- Frontline customer staff should be trained in Batho Pele and customer care principles. Dorrian (1996:107) emphasise the aspect of training as he states that employees should be well trained before being assigned to customer contact positions.
- The newly formed Customer Communication Forums be utilised to engage the customers. This forum should be expanded to include all customer segments.
- PE needs to improve its processes to ensure that they do consult with their customers. The existing consultation processes should be refined to ensure that they reach the industrial and commercial customers because the survey clearly indicates that the majority of customers are not reached by the existing consultation programmes.
- The decision making process should be intertwined with consultation processes. This therefore will need a serious investigation into the effectiveness of the existing Council committee structures in communicating with customers. The outcome of such investigation should inform the improvements necessary to the consultation process using the committee structures.

- PE refines the Customer Service Charter to include the other Batho Pele Principles such as Consultation and get the Municipal Council to approve it as its pledge to good customer service and extensively publish it, so that customers use it to hold PE accountable to its dictates WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997, par. 4.2).
- PE should improve its electronic systems so that customers can be able to access and communicate electronically. Currently the organisation is using paper driven systems. The complaints handling and fault reporting systems are all paper driven and very cumbersome to investigate a customer complaint, and as a result the customers are not given the best efficient and effective service within acceptable time frames.
- PE trains their frontline staff in Batho Pele Principles. The outcome of the study revealed that the service offered by the admin staff is far from adequate.
- PE establishes a policy that will deal with provision of information to customers. The white paper emphasises the fact that information empowers the customers and they can use it to judge whether the institution's performance is acceptable or not. The emphasis when communicating information should be on simple but full disclosure, accurate and up to date, free from jargon and in a language that will be easily understood by the target audience. Blem (1995:31) concurs that a potential customer needs information in order to find the right product or service. According to Jude (1998:39) "One of the most significant skills the frontline staff need in the customer service environment is the ability to communicate properly." He goes on to recommend that the communication must be in the customer's language.
- PE investigates the channels it uses to communicate its operations with customers and whether it is the best method to reach the industrial and commercial customers. Once the best channel that will be suitable to communicate with industrial and commercial customers is found, PE should use it and periodically conduct customer surveys to ensure its

relevance. Jude (1998:55) states, "Do not use a particular communication strategy if its not effective"

- PE improves the complaints handling procedure and ensures that customer complaints are dealt with promptly and that a sympathetic and positive response is offered.
- The organisation has a position of a customer Liaison officer that is vacant and from talking to PE management it was clear that it was not to be filled soon. This position should be filled by a suitably qualified and experienced person in customer care issues. The person will be valuable in dealing with customer care issues and develop the customer relations which are currently non existent.
- PE regularly conducts surveys to understand its service offering from a customer perspective. The surveys should be used to measure its performance in their service offering. According to Cheales (1994:94) "If you cannot measure it, you cannot manage it"

8.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

- The questionnaires for this study were administered during the months of June and July 2006. There was a concern that the responses to the study could be biased to the negative as the respondents were greatly affected by at least 3 major electricity supply outages, one of which lasted for nearly the whole day. Customers were very frustrated by this and the comments to that effect were made by some of the respondents.
- PE is not fully responsible for the full business process i.e. purchasing electricity, distributing, billing and revenue recovery. It is not their function to read the electricity meters, bill the customers, recover revenue and resolve related customer complaints or deal with such problems. However the respondents have made numerous comments that deal with meter reading, billing, disconnection for non payment and

resolving billing errors. By the mere fact that PE does not deal with the full customer value chain, it is highly possible that the respondents have rated the activities that are not the functions of PE but the functions of Municipal Finance Business Unit such as meter reading, account queries, billing, disconnection for non payment and accuracy of electricity bills. Electricity staff have indicated that sometimes they deal with water account queries and even rate account queries. The reason is that if the customer has not paid any one service, the Municipality disconnects the electricity supply. Therefore it is in the interest of PE to get the complaint resolved. Unfortunately not all complaints are resolved. The customer then gets their electricity supply disconnected and the blame is with PE. Also customers are not informed of the above, and as a result they refer to the Municipal consolidated bill as their electricity account. Also the administration function dealt with at PE is very limited. Mostly PE admin staff deals with new electricity supply connections and electricity supply upgrades. All administration functions which deal with customer account management and account reconciliations are the functions of Finance Business Unit which is not at all PE.

- The above however, should also be understood in the customer perspective. It does not matter whether a particular function is a competency of PE or the Municipality (Dorrian, 1996:16); the bottom line is that PE disconnects electricity supply when the issues relating to the Municipal bill are not resolved. Therefore the customer responses are valid and the Municipality should provide a customer service that complies with Batho Pele Principles.

- The researcher is employed by Msunduzi Municipality and currently he is the Head of Electricity. Though in the process he tried to be as objective as possible, there may be areas where it may be felt that he was biased.

8.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- The next phase of the study, which is to establish whether the domestic and small power users are satisfied or not with the customer service offered by PE.
- To investigate whether the Msunduzi Municipality does comply with the dictates of the WPTPSD (DPSA, 1997)
- The progress on implementation of PE management's commitment as contained in chapter 6 of this study.
- Investigation into the effectiveness of the existing Council Committee Structures in communicating with the industrial and commercial customers.

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Survey Questionnaire - Industrial and Commercial Customers

This questionnaire is a survey of Msunduzi Municipality (Electricity) on their Industrial and Commercial Customers. Opinions are being solicited on Pietermaritzburg Electricity's customer care within the context of Batho Pele Principles.

Please answer all questions. Tick where appropriate

Name of the Company

Name of the respondent

Contact details of respondent

Section A

1 Is your company industrial or commercial?

Ind	Com
-----	-----

2 Do you get your electricity supply from Pietermaritzburg Electricity?

Y	N
---	---

3 Are you representing your company in participating in this survey ?

Y	N
---	---

4 How many years has your company been operating in Pietermaritzburg?

Section B

Please tick the box that most accurately reflects your level of satisfaction with the service you receive from Pietermaritzburg Electricity: Tick **Y** for yes and **N** for no; Rating: **1** for very poor up to **10** for excellent.

1 Consultation

1.1 Does Pietermaritzburg Electricity consult you as a customer when deciding to introduce, alter or change the level and quality of service to be offered?

Y	N
---	---

1.2 Please rate Pietermaritzburg Electricity's consultation process.

2 Service Standards

2.1 Does Pietermaritzburg Electricity publish the standard of service you should expect to receive. i.e. quality and levels of service?

Y	N
---	---

2.2 Please rate Pietermaritzburg Electricity's service standards.

2.3 Please rate electricity service choices offered by Pietermaritzburg Electricity to you as a customer

Y	N
---	---

3 Access

3.1 Does Pietermaritzburg Electricity provide equal access to services you are entitled to?

Y	N
---	---

3.2 Please rate Pietermaritzburg Electricity's performance with regards to the above statement

4 Courtesy

4.1 Does Pietermaritzburg Electricity treat you with courtesy and consideration.

Y	N
---	---

4.2 Please rate their courtesy

5 Information

5.1 Does Pietermaritzburg Electricity provide full, accurate and up to date information about the level and quality of service you are entitled to?

Y	N
---	---

5.2 Please rate the quality and accuracy of information you receive from Pietermaritzburg Electricity

--

6 Openess and Transparency

6.1 Is Pietermaritzburg Electricity transparent on how it operates? i.e. internal costs and who is in charge

Y	N
---	---

6.2 Please rate their openess and transparency

--

7 Redress

7.1 If the promised standard of service is not delivered, does Pietermaritzburg Electricity offer an apology, give a full explanation and offer a speedy, effective remedy/solution?

Y	N
---	---

7.2 When complaints are lodged, does Pietermaritzburg Electricity give a prompt, sympathetic and positive response?

Y	N
---	---

7.3 Please rate Pietermaritzburg Electricity's performance in dealing with customer complaints with regards to the following concepts

7.3.1 Accessibility

 7.3.2 Speed

 7.3.3 Responiveness

7.3.4 Fairness

 7.3.5 Confidentiality

8 Value for Money

8.1 Does Pietermarizburg Electricity provide economical and efficient services, resulting in you as a customer getting the best possible value for money?

Y	N
---	---

8.2 Please rate Pietermaritzburg Electricity with regards to the above statement

--

Section C

1 Is Pietermaritzburg Electricity's consultation process poor or good?

P	G
---	---

2 Are the service standards offered by Pietermaritzburg Electricity to your organisation poor or good?

P	G
---	---

3 Is access to Pietermaritzburg Electricity services poor or good?

P	G
---	---

4 Is courtesy at the Pietermaritzburg Electricity poor or good?

P	G
---	---

5 Is provision of information by Pietermaritzburg Electricity poor or good?

P	G
---	---

6 Is Pietermaritzburg Electricity's transparency level poor or good?

P	G
---	---

7 Is Pietermaritzburg Electricity's response after a complaint poor or good?

P	G
---	---

8 Are services porvided by Pietermaritzburg Electricity poor or good?

P	G
---	---

9 Who do you deal with at Pietermaritzburg Electricity?

Middle Management	Senior Management	Admin Staff	Technical Staff
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Any other comments



RESEARCH OFFICE (GOVAN MBEKI CENTRE)
WESTVILLE CAMPUS
TELEPHONE NO.: 031 - 2603587
EMAIL: ximbap@ukzn.ac.za

22 JUNE 2006

MR. SE MCHUNU (201500035)
MANAGEMENT STUDIES

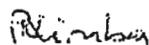
Dear Mr. Mchunu

ETHICAL CLEARANCE APPROVAL NUMBER: HSS/06271A

I wish to confirm that ethical clearance has been granted for the following project:

"Msunduzi Municipality Customer Care: An investigation into customer care offered to Industrial and Commercial by Pietermaritzburg Electricity within the context of Batho Pele Principles"

Yours faithfully



MS. PHUMELELE XIMBA
RESEARCH OFFICE

PS: The following general condition is applicable to all projects that have been granted ethical clearance:

THE RELEVANT AUTHORITIES SHOULD BE CONTACTED IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE NECESSARY APPROVAL SHOULD THE RESEARCH INVOLVE UTILIZATION OF SPACE AND/OR FACILITIES AT OTHER INSTITUTIONS/ORGANISATIONS. WHERE QUESTIONNAIRES ARE USED IN THE PROJECT, THE RESEARCHER SHOULD ENSURE THAT THE QUESTIONNAIRE INCLUDES A SECTION AT THE END WHICH SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY THE PARTICIPANT (PRIOR TO THE COMPLETION OF THE QUESTIONNAIRE) INDICATING THAT HE/SHE WAS INFORMED OF THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT AND THAT THE INFORMATION GIVEN WILL BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL.

cc. Faculty Officer (Post-Graduate Office)
cc. Supervisor (Sanjay Soni)

THE MSUNDUZI MUNICIPALITY
INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES AND FACILITIES BUSINESS UNIT
ELECTRICITY

Appendix C

111 Havelock Road
PIETERMARITZBURG
3201

Telephone : 033-355 1411
Email: electricity@msunduzi.gov.za



P O Box 399
PIETERMARITZBURG
3200

Fax : 033-355 1559

Enquiries: S. Mchunu

Our ref: 101/B

Your Ref:

2 May 2006

Dear Pietermaritzburg Electricity Valued Customer

I, **Simpfiwe Emmanuel Mchunu**, employed by Msunduzi Municipality, operating from Pietermaritzburg Electricity, am currently conducting a research which is a requirement for Master of Business Administration Degree qualification with the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg Campus. My research Supervisor is Mr **Sanjay Soni**, his contact details are as follows: 033 260 5735 and Soni@ukzn.ac.za

The research is being conducted on behalf of Msunduzi Municipality under the direction of Mr Phil. Mashoko, the Strategic Executive Manager: Infrastructure, Services and Facilities, his contact details are as follows: 033 392 2013 and philemon.mashoko@msunduzi.gov.za.

The research is investigating customer care offered by Pietermaritzburg Electricity to you as a customer, within the context of Batho Pele Principles. Msunduzi Municipality as part of the public service sector should provide a high standard of customer service, in line with the Batho Pele Principles as promulgated in the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery, published on 18 September 1997. The performance of Local, Provincial and National spheres of government in delivering a service is measured by the Batho Pele Principles. It was therefore felt that the Msunduzi Municipality should measure the Electricity Department's performance in delivering the customer service against the Batho Pele Principles.

The outcome of this research, conclusions and recommendations will be presented to Msunduzi Municipality's Senior Management for their consideration. It is believed that Senior Management will make decisions based on your input to improve the Customer Service at Pietermaritzburg Electricity to ensure that your future encounter with their staff is memorable one.

The research is voluntary. You are at liberty to participate or not too. If you want to participate, you are therefore requested to spare a few moments of your time to fill the attached easy to understand questionnaire. At any moment whilst filling in the attached questionnaire, you feel you want to withdraw, and you are at liberty to do so. Spaces have been provided for your details, however, you are at liberty not to disclose them.

To ensure your rights are respected as the prospective respondent, the research questionnaire has been cleared by the UKZN Ethics Committee. The data gathered will not be used for any other purpose, but only for this research. On completion of the research the data will be shredded and disposed off through the paper recycling Companies. You will therefore be requested to sign the attached consent form and return it with your filled in questionnaire.

Enclosed please find the return envelop, fully paid for and addressed to Process Manager: Electricity, Customer Survey. It will be appreciated if your response can reach us by 15 June 2006.

Should you require any further clarity in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact **Mr S. Mchunu on 033 355 1400**.

Yours Faithfully



PROCESS MANAGER ELECTRICITY



DECLARATION

I, _____ hereby confirm that I understand the contents of this document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the project at any time, should I so desire.

SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT

DATE

.....

NOTE:

You are entitled time to read, understand and question the information given before giving you consent. This includes time out of the presence of the investigator and time to consult friends and/or family.

THE MSUNDUZI MUNICIPALITY
INFRASTRUCTURE, SERVICES AND FACILITIES BUSINESS UNIT
ELECTRICITY

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 3201

Telephone : 033-355 1411
 Email: electricity@msunduzi.gov.za



P O Box 399
 PIETERMARITZBURG
 3200

Fax : 033-355 1559

Enquiries: G Buitendach

Our ref: 101/B

Your Ref:

24 August 2006

To whom it may concern

Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management Designations

This serves to confirm that **Simphiwe Emmanuel Mchunu**, employed by Msunduzi Municipality, operating from Pietermaritzburg Electricity, conducted a focus group interview with Pietermaritzburg Electricity Senior Management on 17 August 2006.

It is understood that Simphiwe is conducting a research which is a requirement for Master of Business Administration Degree qualification with the University of KwaZulu Natal (UKZN), Pietermaritzburg Campus.

The following **Pietermaritzburg Electricity** senior managers participated in the interview:

Mr Don Cameron: Branch Manager Operations
 Mr Chris Jerrier: Acting Branch Manager Customer Services
 Mr Max Mthembu: Branch Manager Planning
 Mrs Nadine Thomas: Chief Accountant

Should there be any need for further clarity in this regard, please do not hesitate to contact **Mr G Buitendach** on 033 355 1450.

Yours Faithfully

PROCESS MANAGER ELECTRICITY