Chapter 15
Understanding Expectations, Perceptions and Satisfaction Levels of Customers of Military Engineer Services in India

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ABSTRACT
Customer satisfaction and client orientation concepts are needed in all service providing organisations, including those engaged in construction and infrastructure provision within the public sector where the public perception about their services is at its lowest. This study measures the expectations and perceptions of various service elements among clients of Military Engineer Services (MES) in India. Customers’ survey mode was used to measure the expectations, perception, importance and satisfaction. The perceived quality of services provided by this department was measured with SERVQUAL instrument on selected attributes using the Gap approach for identifying priorities. Additionally, this study also examines the influence of demographic characteristics of clients on expectations and perceptions of the clients. The results can be used by similar organisations for cultural and structural change to increase accountability and performance, in which the results indicate that the three most important dimensions in the order of importance among the clients of MES are tangibles, responsiveness and reliability.

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INTRODUCTION

Execution of public works has been an organized function of the state from the times immemorial in India and elsewhere. But, the inadequate job descriptions, low productivity, indifferent attitude among the employees of public sector organisations are among few of the factors which contribute to inefficiencies in the whole system and poor service delivery to the citizens.

The forces of globalisation and liberalisation and the consequent changes in the economic environment have created new challenges for the government departments the world over. Military Engineer Services (MES) and Central Public works department (CPWD) are among few large departments in Govt. of India that are engaged in the building construction and maintenance industry among other activities. The departments as of now enjoy near monopoly in service provision to clients in their designated jurisdiction under Government of India. The pressure for change is being felt by the users of such organisations from the rapidly changing economic-political environment, increasing demand for better value for money, pressures for greater effectiveness, efficiency and performance, rapid technology changes and increasing awareness; all these factors leading to increasing expectations for citizen participation. The Administrative Reforms Commission (2007) in its recent report titled “Ethics in Governance” recommended for identifying areas within government where existing monopoly of functions could be tempered with competition.

Customer satisfaction and customer orientation concepts are therefore, increasingly being adopted to identify and prioritise the areas for improvement in the quality of services provided by government departments. It is necessary to understand the needs and expectations of the clients and define quality standards according to their expectations. There should also be institutional mechanisms to continuously assess the quality of the service provided and to take appropriate measures to improve the service quality based on the feedback from clients. The focus of the administrators in public sector departments therefore needs change from provision of construction and maintenance services to providing these services with quality above minimum acceptable standards. These departments, however, do not have any arrangements for evaluation of expectations and perceptions of clients and for monitoring client satisfaction.

The obvious approach to gauge the satisfaction level is to ask the clients themselves. Construction and Maintenance of buildings etc. is one of those services that are difficult to measure and monitor, with very little research on service quality in this field. The predominant amount of research on the measurement of service management quality has taken place in the fields of retail industry, health care and financial services. The little amount of research in the construction industry involving empirical surveys has focused on the quality of consultancy services (Hoxley, 1998; Love, Smith, Treloar, & Li, 2000). SERVQUAL based survey using Gap model have also been carried out for service quality in the maintenance of mechanical and engineering services (Wan, Bridge, & Skitmore, 2001).

It was therefore, thought appropriate to have a systematic study and find out the extent of client satisfaction in Public Sector Construction and Maintenance Organisations and to identify the areas for improvement. Military Engineer Services (MES), which is engaged in providing construction and maintenance services for all organs of Ministry of Defence for their infrastructure needs was selected for this study. The focus in this study was on customer satisfaction with particular emphasis on service quality in Public Sector Construction and Maintenance departments so as to provide the necessary inputs and desired impetus to the department to improve and excel in the future. The main objective of the study was to bring out the customer satisfaction gaps and analysis of these gaps. The results of the analysis are used to suggest ways and means to improve the delivery of