

THE FUNCTION OF SERVICE CHARTER AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL FOR CONSUMERS OF IMMIGRATION SERVICES IN KENYA

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Abstract

This study sought to establish the role played by communication in the on-going reform programmes in Kenya's public sector, specifically in the immigration department. In particular, it has investigated the function of the service charter as a communication tool for the users of consumers of immigration services. To interrogate the above issues, the study focused on the customers (service consumer). About 100 customers, sampled from members of the public seeking services at the department's headquarters, formed part of the study sample. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyse the data collected from the study. Some of the key findings of the study were that a large majority of service seekers at the department do not know about the existence of service charter in the ministry. The study concludes that because the customers do not know the charter exists, few of them use it to demand services. The ministry values communication as crucial component in the public service reform programmes. The study thus recommends that the ministry should use all means at its disposal to disseminate the charter to service seekers who need to know what it promises. Such means could include service points, public forums such as shows and exhibitions, churches and leaders' meetings. The ministry should also facilitate regular interactions with service seekers to inform them of what it has to offer and get feedback on their expectations.

Keywords: *Service charter, service consumers, communication.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The Government of Kenya launched the public service reform programme in 1993, with the overarching aim of infusing good governance, enhancing effective resource utilization and, ultimately, improving service delivery (Kiragu, 2005). This would be achieved through creating a leaner, well trained, adequately equipped and competitively remunerated competent workforce. Over the years, the Government has instituted a wide range of reform interventions in the public

sector. These interventions are viewed to be critical to accelerating economic growth and sustaining poverty reduction in the country. But above all, they are geared towards promoting fast, efficient and quality service delivery. The government has, thus, come up with various strategies to ensure that quality service delivery becomes the hallmark of the country's public service. This has led to the introduction of initiatives such as performance contracting (PC), rapid result initiative (RRI), which stipulate what tasks a government ministry, department or corporation, must accomplish within a stipulated time frame. This is cascaded to individual employees within the government agencies.

Communication is viewed as an integral part of the public service reform programmes. Over the years, the government has used various communications channels and tools to communicate and to get feedback on its policies and strategies both internally and externally. Such channels include mass media, circulars, letters, memos, seminars, public meetings, notice boards, suggestion boxes, meetings, and in-house publications. Although the government has got at its disposals several ways and channels of communicating with the public, who are the consumers of its services, it has remained apparent that there is a knowledge gap; Does the public know what the government has on offer and how efficiently and effectively it is offered?

In the implementation of the reform programmes, fundamental considerations have to be made with regard to communicating various key issues. The government's main intention in developing service charter was to communicate in a clear way to both the service

providers and the service consumers the services available and how to deliver or access them. The concern of this study is to examine how effectively the service charter, which is a relatively new concept - at least in the public service communication programmes, fills the existing communication gap. It seeks to establish how the government is communicating with the public using the service charter and how much the customers are involved in communicating with the government.

1.1 The Ministry of Immigration and Registration of Persons

The Ministry of Immigration and Registration of Persons is key and unique by virtue of the kind of services it offers - which are not obtainable anywhere else within Kenya. It handles three functions, namely the provision of passports, identity cards and birth and death certificates. All these documents are mandatory by law. Each citizen therefore, at one time or the other, will deal with the ministry. No other ministry, government agency or private body is allowed by law to issue these crucial documents.

The mere fact that PRSP has been on for the last 15 years, and is often dogged with interruptions leading to abandoning of one phase for a new one is an indication that there is gap in the process. Moreover, it remains a matter of conjecture as to whether the reform programmes initiated over one and a half decades ago, with a heavy state and donor investment, have had the desirable impact on the life of the citizens. Ministry of immigration and registration of persons, like many other government bodies, has continued to receive flak from dissatisfied customers who complain of delays in service delivery, inefficient and uncaring service providers or a team of downright lazy non-performers who are impervious to the professed positive change.

As admitted by the ministry's communication office 'members of the public have on numerous occasions complained about the inordinate delay in the issuance of identity cards applied for...' (*People Daily* October 10, 2008). But while the communications office assures the customers that everything is being done, "as stipulated in

the service charter" to address their complaints, questions arise as to whether this promised improvement is being felt. This study, thus, sought to establish the extent to which service consumers use the service charter to demand service.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Service charter

The government of Kenya is vigorously pursuing a policy of management improvement designed to establish a service culture within all ministries and state corporations. This involves focusing ministries' attention on customers who pay for the services through taxes, and eliminating services which do not match the customers' needs. The government is fast realizing that its customers deserve value for money from the taxes they pay, and that they have a right to consultation, courtesy, information and the opportunity to express their views in relation to services offered to them by various government agencies (Kiragu, 2005). Concentrating on satisfying customer requirements ensures both management and employees to make a shift of mindset - move away from focusing on systems, and, instead, on satisfying the people (Singh, 2001). This concept calls for an attitude change to embrace the idea that the people come first. It is about building a public service capable of meeting the challenge of improving the delivery of services to the citizens. Thus, the "People First" initiative is premised on the "fact that a transformed public service will be judged by one criterion alone: the degree to which it succeeds in effectively delivering services which meet the basic needs of all citizens." (Singh, 2001).

A service charter is a communication tool which expresses clearly what services an organization provides and how it provides them. Charters are usually produced as an easy-to-read, publication in the style of a brochure. A customer service charter enables customers to check their expectations against what is offered and provides a mechanism for giving feedback if expectations are not met (Public Sector Management Office, 1994). It also enables the

organization to describe the way it allocates its resources and explain to customers the realistic level of service they may expect.

The charter is useful as a planning tool because it focuses attention on current service expectations and the needs of customers as well as future service needs and expectations. The charter is a formal mechanism which should help realize the Ministry of Immigration's commitment to improved service delivery. It clarifies what customers can expect from the ministry in terms of the type and level of services provided. The charter should convey in simple language the ministry's policy on customer service. The ministry determines the best way to communicate its service standards to its customers.

2.2 Contents of a service charter

It is generally accepted that, to fulfill its real and underlying purpose, a public service charter ought to reflect broadly four types of concern (Balogun & Mutahaba, 2000). The first is the government's (the employer's) demand for loyalty and commitment by employees to, and effective implementation of, its policy. The second is the public servant's clamour for political neutrality and fair employment conditions and practices. The customer's desire for satisfaction and constantly improved service delivery standards comes next, followed by the average citizen's (including the tax-payer's) preference for an arrangement that promotes high ethical standards - particularly, integrity, accountability, transparency and related values - in the conduct of public business.

According to Balogun *et al* (2000), the underlying aim of a public service charter is to reconcile at least four distinct influences that are likely to impact on the conduct of public affairs. Particularly where the charter is perceived as a major component of governance reform and ethical re-orientation strategy, the tendency will be to reflect the concerns of the four parties whose roles are crucial to the successful implementation of the strategy. These are the government, the employees, the clients of

government ministries and departments, and the citizenry at large.

A charter should seek to capture the concerns and orientations of all interested parties to make it adequate to cover issues deemed relevant by all parties. A good charter will address the following concerns as well (Singh, 2001): Clarity in the definition of eligibility; Access to the product or service; Timeliness/promptness of delivery; Simplicity of service delivery procedure (and accommodation of "one-stop" arrangements); Convenience of hosting facilities and of service delivery perimeters; Courtesy and politeness of service delivery agents; Accountability for actions or omissions; Provision for fault-reporting and rectification; Adequacy, reliability and clarity of information; Offer of choice; Cost effectiveness/economy of operation/value for money; and Transparency of actions.

Besides, a customer service charter should state the service values underpinning its operations. There should be an explicit recognition that the main reason for the ministry's existence is to provide the public with the services they require and for which they pay through taxes and direct charges. A list of major services and their objectives should be stated. The depth and detail will depend on the type and extent of services provided. It should be clear to customers at a glance what services are available. The customer groups who need the Ministry's services should be identified. The standard of service that customers can expect should also be specified.

There should be specific information needs to be included on how to locate, access and use services. This information should provide names and/or positions of contact people, phone numbers, locations and opening hours. The most appropriate point of contact should be clear to customers. Suggestions and complaint handling procedures should be outlined. The procedures should commence at the local level and through the appropriate channels within the agency. The staff working directly with customers should be empowered, and trained, to reconcile most grievances.

3. COMMUNICATING IN ORGANIZATIONS

Communication has been defined as a process in which meaning is shared. It offers the meaning of creating and implementing behavioural changes both within and outside an organization (Asif and Sargeant, 2000). Communication is a transactional process between two or more parties in which meaning is exchanged through intentional use of symbols. Information processing medium is operative within the entire Government and its organs - ministries, departments and other agencies. Processed information is that which is relevant to the performance and coordination of tasks. Much of the information processing activity is determined by the division of work, the consequent differentiation, and the need for integration (Wofford, Gerloff & Cummins 1977). The manager can influence the capacity of the organization for processing both information from its environment and internal coordinative information. A number of variables affecting organizational communication are under the manager's control. The manager must work with these variables if he or she is to enhance the organization's effectiveness as an information processor.

Communication, however, is more than merely imparting meaning; it cannot be said to have succeeded until the message has been understood. Argenti (2003) says thus: "an idea, no matter how great, is useless until it is transmitted and understood by others." In external communications, the organization reaches its external publics either through the mass media such as newspapers, television, website, etc, or through narrow casting means such as letters.

A Service charter, however, occupies a special position, in that it serves the dual purpose of communicating both internally and externally. As a tool of communication, a service charter tells the service provider what the organization has committed itself to doing for the service user (customer), at the same time, it states clearly to the customer or service seeker (external publics) what services they should expect from the

organization, in what manner, and within what timeframe they will be delivered . As a communication tool between the ministry and its customers, the service charter serves to tell the customers that:

- a. They shall be treated with courtesy and consideration.
- b. They shall have full, accurate information about the public services that they are entitled to receive.
- c. They shall have equal access to the services to which they are entitled.
- d. If promised services are not delivered, citizens should be offered a full explanation, an apology and a speedy and effective remedy; and when complaints are made, citizens should receive a sympathetic, positive response.

3.1 Information and communication technologies in service delivery

Information technology has been included as one of the key strategies for public service reforms. It is now seen as an essential facilitator of service improvement, particularly when governments worldwide are fashioning an increasing trend towards knowledge-based production and communications revolution. In the recent years, expenditures by governments on computers and management information systems have risen rapidly in many countries and now represent major items in their budgets. Information and communication technology is pivotal to modern government and fundamental to the strategies for public service reform.

The establishment of new information and communication systems is seen as an essential component in the creation of accountability. When a decision is taken, information about that decision and its outcomes must flow to all those to whom the decision maker is accountable (Heeks, 1998). Without such an information flow, and without a clear information and communication system to carry that flow, there can be no accountability because there is no knowledge of the decision. Given the information intensity, reviews and changes in information and communication systems must be an integral part of all reform initiatives in Kenya, and

changes in information technology will have a great potential in gaining efficiency and effectiveness in the public sector.

Most government ministries and other state agencies are now communicating with their clients and the general citizenry through the Internet. Such ministries and agencies have their service charter posted on their websites. By so doing, it is hoped that communication with their publics both internal and external will be improved for the benefit of all.

3.2 Communication process

The process of communication is a dynamic and continuous experience. We are constantly emitting and receiving messages hence getting involved in all elements of the communication process on a continuous basis. Berlo (1960) developed a model of the communication process presented in the diagram below:

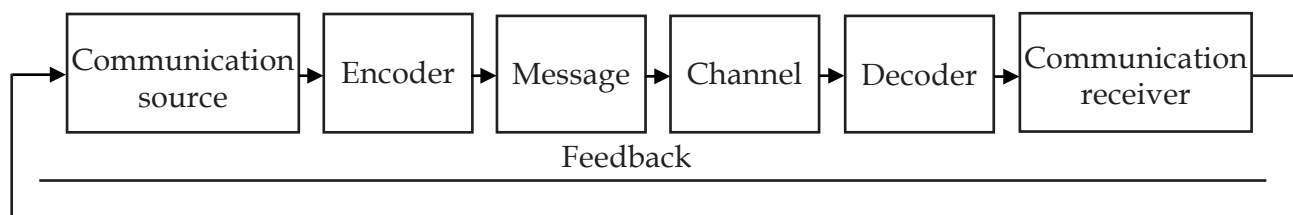


Figure 1: Berlo's model of communication process (Wofford, et al., 1977, p. 24)

Communication cannot occur where there is no originating source for the message. Nor can it occur in the absence of an adequate encoding process to prepare the message for transmission into the channel (Wofford, et al., 1977). Where the encoding process is defective or perhaps uses an incorrect language, serious distortion or a total breakdown in communication is likely to occur.

The purpose of a service charter is to communicate with customers and employees. The message contained in the charter may have two sides. There is message as seen by the source - encoder and the message as seen by the receiver - decoder. The selection and interpretation of messages may differ dramatically because of differences in psychology and situation for the persons who are serving as transmitter and receiver. In part, such differences can be explained as encoding - decoding failures.

A person does not respond to all stimuli in his or her environment, but rather selects certain things and ignores others. Wofford et al., (1977) argue that it is important for the manager to understand that the degree of certainty or uncertainty regarding messages can vary drastically depending on circumstances. One situation may be such that the information source has many possible meanings, all having nearly equal probabilities of being transmitted. The manager is uncertain as to just which message will be sent at any given instant. In this situation,

the encoder - decoder systems and channels must be flexible enough to handle a variety of message forms and contents.

Perception and perceptual mechanism also influence the way in which people encode and decode messages. Berlo (1960: 175) states that 'meanings are in people.' When the source person selects a specific message for encoding and transmission, he or she has a specific meaning in mind. The symbols used to encode the message as a signal also have specific meanings, to the source person. To the person who is the decoder (receiver), however, the meaning assigned to the message and symbols may be quite a different one. The difference in perception between sender and receiver may result in different interpretations of messages contained in the service charter. As a result, it is likely that members of the public may have different expectations based on their interpretation of meanings of messages in the service charter.

The communication channel is any medium which connects the source to the receiver. Communication channels occur in an almost infinite variety of types, and the communicator is often free to choose from among several channel types for a given situation. Some of the more common channels between persons would include verbal, nonverbal, telephone, letter, memo, telegram, newspapers and books. The channel-choice decision is important due to

implications for the type of encoding or decoding required as well as the ultimate process of communication effort.

At the receiving terminal of the channel, decoding is the transformation of the received signal back into a message using the appropriate systematic code. Selection again occurs in that we assume the possibility of multiple meanings and the need to select a particular one. Finally, the message becomes an output which is ready for use or storage by the target person as the situation and her or his own psycho-social makeup demand. The choice of a particular channel and method of encoding at the transmitter necessitates the choice of the same channel and a compatible decoding method at the receiving terminal if communication is to occur. According to Argenti (2003), whatever message an organization intends to put out to any segment of its publics, using a coherent communication strategy is critical.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is based on two mass communication theories: the Systems Theory and the Mass Society Theory.

4.1 The systems theory

Ludwig (1956) defines system as a set of elements which stand in interaction, while Churchman (1968) characterizes a system as made up of sets of components that work together for the overall objective of the whole. The study of systems theory lays emphasis on structures and properties of systems in terms of relationships from which new properties of wholes emerge. According to Rodgers & Rodgers (1976), an organization is a stable system of individuals who work together to achieve a common goal. This is done through a hierarchy of ranks and division of labour.

A organization is seen as an elaborate set of interconnected communication channels designed to import and analyse information from the environment and export processed message back to the environment. When communication stops, organized activity ceases

to exist and individuals' uncoordinated activity return (Hick, 1967).

A government is a highly complex system which cannot do without communication. The government, as an organization is a system – a regularly interlinked group of units or individuals who are interdependent and who are separated by a boundary from their surrounding environment.

4.1.1(a) Systems structure

According to Budd (1972), the concept of system is the unifying ideas around which revolve the goals and methods of the general systems perspective. The term implies wholeness and suggests presence of parts in relationship. A system is considered to be some whole form in structure or operation. Concept or functions composed of united and integrated parts (Budd 1972). The parts are in continued activity in relation to the others and to the whole. The above definitions allude to integral aspect of any system, namely the structures. Structures in a system include: the subsystems, suprasystem, boundary, and environment.

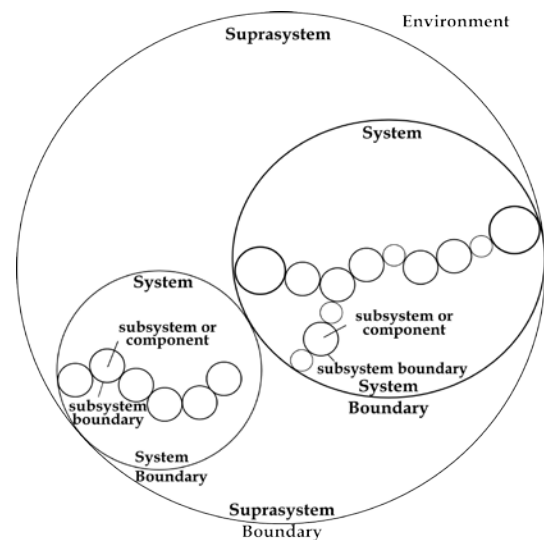


Figure 2: Systems Structure (Source: Approaches to Human Communication)

4.1.2(b) Subsystem and suprasystem

A subsystem, as the name suggests, are the various components of the system. Taking the example of an organization, the subsystems would include staff equipment and tools all of which combine together to make the whole.

According to Miller (1965) the components, or subsystems, of suprasystem are systems. The suprasystem of every living system is the next higher system of which it is part. We can use the Ministry of Immigration and Registration of Persons to illustrate this point thus: The Ministry is a system with the department of immigration and the national registration bureau as its subsystems. But as a system, the Ministry is a component of a suprasystem known as the Government of Kenya which is the next, higher, system.

4.1.3(c) Boundaries and environments

Boundaries hold together the components which make up system. They are the outside edge of a system which will exclude or permit various types of information. Environments are the physical, spatial, temporal and, sometimes, symbolic conditions in which systems are embedded (Miller, 1965). Environments are significant in the study of organizations as systems in the sense that they invariably affect the systems which interact with them and in turn are affected by the systems.

Churchman describes environments as the conditions that are relevant but not directly under the influence of systems. This description is significant because it widens the scope of environments to include all the parties in interaction with an organization. This is what, in the public relations context, is referred to as the public (Jefkins, 1998).

4.1.4(d) Open system

One of the key components of the current phase of the PSRP is the emphasis on enhanced communications between the employees and the managements as well as between the entire organization and its diverse client portfolio. The PSRP is encouraging a shift from a situation where the government is reluctant to let known to the public its operations (closed system) to an open system in which there is free interaction and exchange of information between itself as service provider and the public who are the service consumers (open system).

Budd describes open system as one in which there exists open exchange between the system

and its environments. In an open system, communication is regarded as the backbone of an organization. According to Thayer (1972), communication is the indispensable functions of people (subsystems) and organizations (systems) through which the organization relates to its environment and its parts and its processes to the others. One of the key goals a service charter seeks to fulfill is to create knowledge of the government operations among its employees and members of the public which it (the government) exists to service.

4.1.5 Mass society and integration theory

Mass society theory takes as its starting point the proposition that members of such a society are integrated or not integrated in a healthy way. According to Budd (1972), the very presence of large numbers of only loosely organized and committed people summons efforts of leaders to mobilize and manipulate them.

The theory is relevant to the study because the public servants (service providers) and members of the public (service consumers) are seen to relate in a healthy way and most Kenyans feel manipulated and cheated by public servants. The very concept of mass has a built-in dimension of non-integration, referring to people who are isolated, anonymous to each other and poorly regulated (McQuail, 1987). Research has made some contribution to modifying the large claims of mass society theory. It has tended to reassert the resistance of the audience to manipulation and control and the persistence of strong influences from group, class, locality and other beliefs as a limitation on effects from the media.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 Research design

The study uses a descriptive survey design. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (1999), a survey is an attempt to collect data from members of a population in order to determine the status of that population with respect to one or more variables. A survey as careful, detailed examination of the perception, attitudes and

opinions of a given population. Questionnaires were used to survey the populations of the customers of the ministry.

5.2 Target population of study

The target population for this study included those members of the public who sought passport-related service at the Ministry. These are the consumers of the services of the ministry and their involvement in evaluating effectiveness of the charter cannot be ignored. In addition a senior official in charge of public communication at the ministry was engaged in an in-depth interview.

5.3 Sample and sampling procedure

The study focused on the members of the public who are service seekers at the department. Simple random sampling procedure was used in selecting 70 customers from members of the public seeking services at the department’s

headquarters. The questionnaires were administered as they visited the headquarters between 9.00 am and 1.00 pm and 2.00 pm and 5.00 pm.

5.4 Data collection and analysis

Data for this study were collected using questionnaires. Both quantitative and qualitative methods were used to analyze the data collected from the study.

6. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

6.1 Knowledge of the ministry’s service charter

As illustrated in the figure below, only 46.6% percent of the customers are aware of the service charter of the ministry of immigration.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	27	46.6	46.6	46.6
	No	31	53.4	53.4	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 1: Percentage of those who know the service charter exists

1. If the above is yes, through what channel

As illustrated in Table 2, of all the channels, majority of the customers heard about the ministry’s service charter through the radio. Information through the radio accounts for 15.5%

followed by friends accounting for 8.6% while 6.9% of the people got the knowledge of the service charter from television and government offices. Internet and family sources account for 1.7% each.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	TV	4	6.9	6.9	6.9
	Radio	9	15.5	15.5	22.4
	Newspaper	3	5.2	5.2	27.6
	Government offices	4	6.9	6.9	34.5
	Family Members	1	1.7	1.7	36.2
	Friends	5	8.6	8.6	44.8
	Internet	1	1.7	1.7	46.6
	Not Applicable	30	51.7	51.7	98.3
	No response	1	1.7	1.7	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0		

Table 2: Channel through which the customers heard about the service charter

2. Use of the charter as basis for demanding services from the ministry

Only 22.4% of respondents said they used the service charter as a basis for demand service from the department. 51.7% do not, while 25.9%

gave no response. This figure, of those who said no, is in line with the response by the customers on whether they know about the service charter. Over 53% said they did not know about the charter, hence cannot use it to demand services.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	13	22.4	22.4	22.4
	No	30	51.7	51.7	74.1
	No response	15	25.9	25.9	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 3: Customers' use the charter to demand service

6.4(a) Expected timeline for issuance of passport

Of all the customers interviewed, 24.1% would like, as first applicants, to get their passports within two days (48 hours). 15.5% want their applications processed within three days while

12.1 would like to get their passports between four and seven days. 10.3 % want their passports processed within one day. A large majority did not respond to this question. This may mean that they do not care how long it takes provided they get it.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	24hrs	2	3.4	3.4	3.4
	48 hrs	14	24.1	24.1	27.6
	3 days	9	15.5	15.5	43.1
	4-7days	7	12.1	12.1	55.2
	Two weeks	2	3.4	3.4	58.6
	twelve hours or less	6	10.3	10.3	69.0
	No response	18	31.0	31.0	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0		

Table 4: Expected time for issuance of new passport

6.4 (b) Expected timeline for passport replacement

As illustrated in Table 4, 24.1% of the customers expect to have their passports replaced within 48 hours while 8.6% want this done two days.

Incidentally, those asking for the passports to be replaced in three day also account for 8.6%, while four to seven days account for 6.9%. Those who preferred one day and below account for 10.3%. 32.8% did not indicate their preference.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	24hrs	5	8.6	8.6	8.6
	48 hrs	14	24.1	24.1	32.8
	3 days	5	8.6	8.6	41.4
	4-7days	4	6.9	6.9	48.3
	Two weeks	1	1.7	1.7	50.0
	twelve hours or less	6	10.3	10.3	60.3
	Not applicable	4	6.9	6.9	67.2
	No response	19	32.8	32.8	100.0
Total	58	100.0	100.0		

Table 5: Expected time for replacement of passport

6.4 (c) Expected timeline for renewal of passport

As indicated in Table 5, a total of 24.1% of customers want their passports renewed within two days. 19% would like to have them renewed

in four days while only 5.2% want it done from four to seven days. Those who want their passports renewed within one day constitute 12.1% of the respondents. Again, 32.85, apparently, did not care how long the process takes.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	24hrs	7	12.1	12.1	12.1
	48 hrs	11	19.0	19.0	31.0
	4-7days	3	5.2	5.2	36.2
	twelve hours or less	14	24.1	24.1	60.3
	Not applicable	4	6.9	6.9	67.2
	No response	19	32.8	32.8	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 6: Expected time for renewal of passport

6.4(d) Expected time for issuance of temporary passport

Of all the respondents, 39.7 would like to have their temporary passports processed within

twelve hours. 10% want the temporary passports within one day while the same percentage wants them within two days.

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	24hrs	6	10.3	10.3	10.3
	48 hrs	6	10.3	10.3	20.7
	twelve hours or less	23	39.7	39.7	60.3
	Not applicable	3	5.2	5.2	65.5
	No response	20	34.5	34.5	100.0
	Total	58	100.0	100.0	

Table 7: Expected time for issuance of temporary passport

6.5 General customer satisfaction levels

As illustrated by table 4.2.11, in general, the ministry of immigration’s customers are satisfied with the various tenets of service provision offered there. The average level of satisfaction

2.2, which falls within the “satisfied category” (see appendix). Access to service and clarity with definition of eligibility are the best scored with a mean of 1.9. Provision for fault reporting appears to be the lowest ranked at 2.7.

Descriptive Statistics	N	Satisfaction level			
		Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Timelines	37	1	4	2.2	0.9
Access of services	37	1	3	1.9	0.7
Simplicity of service procedure	37	1	5	2.1	1.0
Courtesy and politeness of staff	37	1	4	1.9	0.8
Convenience of office	37	1	4	2.1	0.8
Clarity with definition of eligibility	37	1	5	1.9	1.1
Provision for faulty reporting	37	1	5	2.7	1.3
Willingness to take responsibility for actions/omission	37	1	5	2.5	1.3
Valid N (list wise)	37			2.2	0.98
Average level of satisfaction with service delivery is 2.2 implying satisfied					

Table 8: Customer satisfaction levels

7. DISCUSSIONS AND INTERPRETATIONS

7.1 Customers knowledge of the existence of service charter

The study has revealed that there is little knowledge of the ministry's service charter. A large majority of those interviewed did not know about the charter's existence. A customer service charter enables customers to check their expectations against what is offered and provides a mechanism for giving feedback if expectations are not met (Public Sector Management Office, 1994). It also enables the organization to describe the way it allocates its resources and explain to customers the realistic level of services they may expect. Thus, if the customer, who is the interlocutor in this communication process, does not know of the existence of a communication tool, the communication cannot be said to be complete. The fact that about all those who confessed to not having seen the charter said they would like to read it means the customer has the interest.

That the service seekers do not know about the existence of the charter was further confirmed by their response to the question of how much they use the charter to demand services. A large majority say they do not use the charter to demand service. This finding reinforces the fear that was the basis of the study: that a service charter, rather than being perceived as a communication tool which serves to link the service provider and the service consumer, is seen as an administrative document. According to Budd (1972) an organization comes alive and becomes meaningful through communications. Its very existence and success depends on how its communication functions are managed.

One of the key components of the current phase of the PSRP is the emphasis on enhanced communications between the employees and the managements as well as between the entire organization and the diversified portfolio of clients. The PSRP is encouraging a shift from a closed system where the government is reluctant to let the public know its operations to an open system in which there is free interaction and exchange of information between itself as service provider and the public as service consumers.

7.2 Customers' source of knowledge of the charter's existence

The findings reveal that a large majority got to know about the service charter through the radio. Television follows closely but not before word of mouth from friends.

The fact that, as Steadman says, radio is the most listened to mass communication channel could be the likeliest possible reason why majority of respondents got to know about the service charter. About ten years ago, Kenyan media channel distribution stood as follows: four daily newspapers; 10 non-daily newspapers, eight television stations; 38 radio stations. The radio receiver ownership stood at 3,070,000, representing 99.8 radios per 1,000 persons. Compare this with television ownership at the same time of 730,000 representing 23.7 sets per 1,000 persons. This scenario has improved even more over the past couple of years, especially in the case of radio which has witnessed a tremendous growth. This is an important factor for the ministry's communication department to consider when formulating the communication strategy.

On the other hand, it is instructive that, although the service is prominently posted in the ministry's website, only a handful - 1.7% of those interviewed - said they got the information from the internet. This can be attributed to the twin challenge of low literacy level and access when it comes to computers in a developing nation such as Kenya. And even where these two problems are surmounted, access and knowledge of computer do not necessarily mean availability of internet services. Nevertheless, despite this seemingly not-so-rosy state of affairs, the website remains the channel to invest in. With the rapid growth of ICT, infrastructure in the country, the access to internet is poised to rise significantly.

As Doukakis and Proctor (2003) say, the website can be a valuable tool of communication. According to its public communications office, the ministry has put a lot of premium on the website and the service charter as a veritable pair of communication tools. They are mutually reinforcing in that the website contains a soft - downloadable - copy of the service charter while the charter in its hard copy form directs the reader to the ministry's website.

7.3 Customer service expectation vis-à-vis service charter promise

The ministry promises to give passport to new applicants within 30 working days upon application. Renewal of passport after five years will be done in 30 minutes while replacement of passport after 10 years or those that are lost or mutilated will be done within 14 working days, according to the service charter. Issuance of temporary passport (pass) will be done within a day or "as you wait."

The customers' expected timelines for various services are at variance with the timelines promised by the service charter. For instance while the charter promises 30 working days for issuance of new passport, the customer are proposing different timelines of between 12 hours and one week. The vast majority want their passports processed within two days followed by those who want it done in three days and those advocating for four to seven days.

For renewal, the charter promises an implementation timeline of 30 working days while a large majority of customers want it done in two days, three days and 24 hours in that order. The scenario is more or less the same for replacement, with the customer demanding a shorter timeline than the ministry is promising. Interestingly, the ministry seems to have exceeded the customers' expectation when it comes to issuance of temporary passport. While some customers ask for two days the ministry is promising to give you a temporary passport within one day in the case of Nairobi head office and Mombasa Kisumu regional office or "while you wait." The majority, however, seem to be in sync with the ministry as they see 12 hour or less as the ideal timeline for temporary passport.

The role of communication is to reduce misunderstanding between an organization and its publics. There seems to be a disagreement between the ministry and its customers in terms of service delivery timelines. Jefkins (1998) talks of public relations as a tool to help an organization to rally its publics to its side through seeking to get them to understand its position. It is a process where the organization seeks to convert the publics' hostility to understanding, change their apathy to empathy.

Public relations is about creating understanding through knowledge. The ministry, thus, must not stop at creating the service charter; it must go the extra mile to engage the customer explaining to them why the time lines cannot be as the customer want. Issue of vetting and other logistics may come in. But this has to be explained failure to which, it will be merely using the charter to inform its customers rather than communicate with them. As Argenti (2003) says... "true communication consists of meeting of minds and gaining consensus".

7.3 Levels of satisfaction with service parameters

A crucial majority of customers say they are satisfied with the way they are handled by the ministry. They level of satisfaction was tested under some key tenets in service provision which included: clarity in the definition of eligibility; timeliness/promptness of delivery; simplicity of service delivery procedure; Convenience of hosting facilities and of service delivery perimeters; courtesy and politeness of service delivery agents; accountability for actions or omissions; provision for fault-reporting and rectification; courtesy and politeness of staff.

Although a large number of them have not seen or read the charter, it can be seen from their response that the ministry has followed these key tenets, which, as Balogun et al (2000) says, are the key to satisfactory service delivery. The service charter goes further to give the customer a definitive avenue to present their grievances - telling them that is the service is below expectations then they should channel their complaints to the highest ranking officer - the permanent secretary, who is the chief executive officer of the ministry.

8. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Some of the key findings of the study were that a large majority of service seekers at the department of immigration do not know about the existence of a service cheater in the ministry. Understandably, only a handful of the customers were found to use the charter to demand services

- this because, in the same way, only a few know it exists.

Majority of those seeking services at the Nyayo House headquarters are from within Nairobi. The number diminishes as one move away from Nairobi, thanks to the availability of services in far flung areas like Mombasa, Kisumu, Eldoret, Malindi, Lamu and immigration offices at the country's border points.

Other key communication tools used by the ministry to communicate within and outside were identifies in the decreasing order of effectiveness as notice boards are the most effective followed by SMS, suggestion boxes, mass media, in-house publications and lastly open forums.

This study concluded that not many customers know about the service charter and therefore only small number of them uses it to demand services. The study, therefore, recommends that to improve on the general communication in the ministry. The ministry should use all possible means to disseminate the charter to service seekers who need to know what it promises. Such means could include service points, public fora such as shows and exhibitions, churches and leader's meeting. The ministry should also organize regular public fora to interact with service seekers to inform them of what it has to offer and get feedback on their expectations.

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