

**A PERFORMING PUBLIC SECTOR:
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**Improving Performance in Public Services Delivery –
The Case of Citizen Shops in Portugal**

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1. Introduction

Quality of the public services is considered a critical factor for the national economic performance. The main challenge that public sector faces is to offer a better service to the citizens (i.e. both people and companies) with less resources. In short, society demands more effectiveness and efficiency from public agencies, with a clear respect for citizenship, especially in what concerns equity and management of conflicting interests

Public services' delivery has been one of the major concerns of public administration reforms in most European countries over the past years. Both researchers and practitioners contend that coordination in terms of public service delivery is likely to bring important contributions in this front. Coordination at distribution level brings benefits, both to the citizens and to the agency. Such benefits are significant and tend to expand as information technologies support new advances in management, whether directly – for instance, in kiosks, web-sites or call-centres – or indirectly, supporting attendance.

In this context, one-stop-shops are an attempt to develop a new philosophy of public management. They can be regarded as a means of improving performance in public services delivery with a special focus on the relationships between citizens and the Administration, as well as on the quality of the services provided.

This paper aims at analyzing the contribution of citizen shops to public services' performance, with a special emphasis on the role of emotions and on users' satisfaction and dissatisfaction. These issues were investigated on the basis of a case study methodology. The exploratory nature of the research required an explanatory methodological approach rather than descriptive. The research context is framed by the Portuguese Citizen Shops, where service quality and distribution are central and interwoven issues. Data collection was mainly based on semi-structured interviews, by means of an adaptation of the Critical Incident Technique introduced by Flanagan in the 50's (Flanagan, 1954).

The paper begins with a brief overview of the main aspects of quality in the context of one-stop-shops in Public Administration. Then, the case study is presented and analysed. It starts with a general description of a Portuguese Citizen Shop, followed by a number of considerations on three subjects of services marketing management that are especially important to the citizen shops' framework: emotions' management, citizen's satisfaction and dissatisfaction, and back and front office reorganization.

2. New Challenges to Public Service Delivery

In most European countries, the public sector takes control over an important share of economic resources. One of the major challenges faced by almost all Public Administrations is the creation of more value, for both citizens and companies, because of the increasing budgetary constraints and demands from society. More precisely, society demands growing efficiency and effectiveness from public agencies, with a clear respect for citizenship, especially in what concerns equity and management of conflicting interests (cf. Fountain, 2001; Denhardt and Vinzant, 2000; Mintzberg, 1996; Arnold, 1995; Schachter, 1995; Frederickson, 1994; Moe, 1994).

Modern states have assumed significant responsibilities, in which participate more and more actors – private and semi-private entities – resulting in a growing fragmentation of a huge public sector which, most of the times, does not correspond to the user's perspective. Indeed, citizens have a clear preference for solving several items with the least contacts with the Administration as possible. Furthermore, they also look for new services that meet some needs still not satisfied and reduce inconsistencies and conflicts between services (cf. Moran, 2005; Keast and Brown, 2002; Ling, 2002; Hagen and Kubicek, 2000; Martinson, 1999).

In this context, it becomes urgent to rethink the way public services are delivered in order to increase their quality (Ling, 2002; Roy and Ségun, 2000), satisfying the public's needs and, as far as possible, trying to delight people and companies, favouring good governance and national economic competitiveness.

Academic research and empirical evidence elect coordination – namely in public service delivery – as a strategy that is likely to bring important contributions in this front (Pollitt, 2003). Coordination at distribution level brings benefits, both to the citizen and to the agency (Martinson, 1999). Indeed, although there are still some serious barriers to coordination (Hagen and Kubicek, 2000), their potentialities are enormous and tend to expand as technologies support new advances in information management, whether directly – in a kiosk, web-site or call-centre – or indirectly, as support in attendance. Therefore, it is urgent to get more and more cooperation among the participants involved, preventing, minimizing or removing these barriers and effectively overcoming the bureaucratic way of working, delivering more value and better public services (Agranoff and McGuire, 2001).

But how do we know if this is the right way? Evaluation of this strategy is not only urgent but also very complex (Entwistle and Martin, 2005). The practical impact of coordination, in its several dimensions, has to be assessed with citizens (cf. Wirtz and Tomlin, 2000; Vigoda, 2000; Osborne and Gaebler 1992), civil servants (cf. Montes, Fuentes and Fernandez, 2003; Schneider and Bowen, 1985) and other stakeholders – politicians, consultants, managers, professionals (Pollitt, 2003) – because there may be conflicting interests that must be taken into consideration (cf. Freeman and Evan, 1990; Freeman, 1984).

3. Citizen Shops in Analysis

Over the past few years, public services improvement has created a rather new concept of delivery. In fact, e-government and one-stop-shops have flourished significantly across all European countries, with a great impact in the way citizens and companies relate to Public Administration. Indeed, it is a recent strategy, and in most of the cases still very incipient, but tends to develop significantly.

Citizen Shops were introduced in Portugal in the late 90s in order to reinforce service quality and to improve the relationship between Administration and the citizen. One of the main

objectives of the Public Administration reform in Portugal since mid 80's is to provide better public services, giving priority to the relationship between citizens and Administration and to the quality of the service provided. In short, Public Administration aims at implementing a kind of management that meets the needs of the citizen and not of the bureaucracy. In this sense, there has recently been an attempt to revitalize public services, delivering them to citizens and companies through the concept of one-stop-shop. Apart from e-government, this strategy also resulted in the creation of Citizen Shops, Citizen Attendance Posts and Centres for Formalities and Companies. The former is certainly one of the most interesting cases because of the importance of the services provided to every day's life and the huge number of citizens that go regularly to the Citizen Shop.

3.1. The Concept of Citizen Shop

The idea to create Citizen Shops in Portugal was inspired in the Citizen Attendance Service in the Brazilian State of Bahia. This is a huge state, where citizens have to travel long distances to have access to some public services.

In Portugal, the first Citizen Shop was founded in Lisbon in 1999. Since then, nine more have been created, spread among the principal cities. Meanwhile, the same idea has resulted in the development of the Citizen Attendance Posts since 2000. These are smaller and intend to serve the population's main needs of small cities. Today there are more than seventy, all over the country. A similar structure was developed for services provided to companies – the Centres for Formalities and Companies. All these entities are coordinated by the Citizen Shop Management Institute, in Lisbon.

Citizen Shops were designed to implement the administrative modernization started in the 1980s inspired in the main principles of New Public Management. This aimed at breaking with the traditional slow and bureaucratic delivery, following a logic of concentration, accessibility, simplification and speed of response. Citizens Shops intend to be citizen-focused, in order to deliver better service quality and improving the relationship between administration and the citizen. In practice, they are like a shopping centre where the citizen can find a large variety of services that do have a great importance for their daily lives and, consequently, have a very significant demand. Although not all the Portuguese public services are present at the Citizen Shops, mainly due to some resistance to change, there have already been established more than fifty partnership agreements with government agencies that deliver the services in the Citizen Shops, which define the services to deliver – conditions, processes and staff. Currently, there are eleven categories of services delivered through Citizen Shops in Portugal - Water, Electricity, Gas and Telephones; Banks; Certificates and Registrations; Post-office; Personal Documents; Taxes; Labour Relations and Professional Training; Social Security; Health Services; Services for Public Servants; Communications and Transports.

There is a great concern about the physical infrastructures. The building for each Citizen Shop has to have good accessibility, including for disabled people, good working conditions and a modern layout. Some supporting services are also available such as coffee shops, cash machines, copies and photo services, waiting areas and places for attendance of disabled people. The opening hours are extended, compared to traditional offices, and there is a special emphasis on recruitment based on skills and competence, which is constantly improved by training courses and motivation techniques. There is also an extensive use of information technology facilities and databases.

3.2. Managing Satisfaction and Dissatisfaction

Citizen Shops were created to provide a service of high quality compared to traditional public administration. Consequently, they concentrate in raising users' satisfaction. In practice, they do it in two ways. On the one hand, as already referred, by following a logic of accessibility, concentration, simplification and speed of response. On the other hand, by offering some supporting services - coffee shops, cash machines, copies and photo services, waiting areas and places for attendance of disabled people.

However, besides satisfaction maximisation, it is important to minimise dissatisfaction. Although this has been neglected in most empirical works in services area (Liljander, 1999; Dawes and Rowley, 1999), satisfaction and dissatisfaction cannot be considered opposites (Johnston, 1995). Like SERVQUAL (Berry, Zeithaml and Parasuraman, 1985), service quality literature attempts to identify the dimensions or the attributes that generate positive evaluations of quality by customers - concern in understanding and defining positive concepts such as quality and satisfaction, instead of the negative ones - dissatisfaction. Bleuel (1990) synthesizes this idea as follows: "I am always amazed at the naiveté of so many experts who preach or imply that dissatisfaction is simply the opposite of satisfaction. Their obvious conclusion is that if you identify the areas where satisfaction is low and then raise those levels, the customers are then satisfied" (op. cit., p.49). Investigators in other fields of knowledge have pointed out the importance of the analysis of dissatisfaction, without considering it merely as the opposite of satisfaction. This is the case of Scitovsky (1976) in neurophysiology, Herzberg (1968) in psychology, and Kano et al. (1984) in quality studies.

In fact, when we consider the concerns of customers with information accuracy, waiting time, attendance duration, bad attendance, etc. - negative incidents - satisfaction becomes to some extent a secondary concern (Dawes and Rowley, 1999; Johnston, 1995). But as far as minimum quality criteria are respected dissatisfaction tends to decrease.

Without a strategy that includes both dissatisfaction removal and increase of satisfaction, or at least that starts by eliminating dissatisfaction, employees and customers might become sceptical about the attempt of service quality improvement in the organization. It is, therefore, important to identify the causes of the problems that lead to dissatisfaction. These results can be used to establish a priority for corrective measures, namely in terms of back-office rearrangements.

3.3. The Role of Emotions

When we deal with services, emotions exert a great influence in satisfaction. Individuals may already have a predisposition to see incidents as negative, or positive. When we evaluate only one particular episode we usually assume that it is a good sample of how the supplier of the service is generally perceived, not taking into account that he/she may have had a bad day, or that he/she is under pressure for being evaluated or for any other reason, or even that the citizen may already have expectations about that service or may even be in a bad mood. In this line, Johnston (1995) contends that these feelings may not result from incidents. Rather, satisfaction can be related to the mood of the customer when he/she receives the service. So the role of emotions must be carefully analyzed. In fact, both positive and negative emotions that customers associate with the service have a growing importance in literature in the creation of satisfaction. It is shown that customers experience positive and negative emotions related to the service and that these emotions influence their degree of satisfaction. However, with few noticeable exceptions (cf. Bitner, 1992) there still exists a lack of research on the

links between emotions and post-consumption variables, such as satisfaction (Liljander & Bergenwall, 1999).

Therefore, it is a challenge to understand these emotions, as well as to analyze their intensity e frequency (Friman, Edvardsson and Gärling, 2001). Citizens Shops have to manage them in order to promote positive emotions and to reduce the negative ones. In the Portuguese Citizen Shops, personnel training give an important attention to emotions management, especially in attendance, service recovering and conflict management. In this context, understanding emotions from both the citizen and the staff viewpoint may give new insights to the understanding of satisfaction and dissatisfaction determinants.

3.4. Front- and Back-Office Reorganisation

This conjoint way of delivering public services also involves back-office cooperation. Kernaghan and Berardi (2001) explain the benefits of clustering: “Service providers must work together to bring together related services in a one-stop format. They must share power or resources, or both, in a mutual beneficial effort to enhance service delivery” (p. 426).

In general, citizens are only aware of the front-office. They are rarely conscious of the hidden infrastructure, namely partnerships and technological integration. The implications of clustering are huge, namely at financial level and to human resources management, and it should be designed in a segmented way, taking into account the significant diversity of users.

In this respect, there are still a few constraints to citizen shops’ efficiency. This model of citizen shop is in an early stage of cooperation, which raises some limitations to the quality of the services delivered. Some traditional features still persist. “There is no liaison among services with little lateral communication among them. Citizens have to go from one service to another, shopping as it were for bureaucracy. Decisions are taken at the centre and implemented through a hierarchy in a similar way to that of the traditional services” (Araújo, 2001, p. 927).

Therefore, although in the Portuguese Citizen Shops almost 90% of the citizens go for only one or two items (IGLC, 2004, p. 57), it is important to understand how back-office reorganisation may have positive impact in citizen satisfaction and a significant contribution in reducing dissatisfaction.

4. Methodological Considerations

The above issues are being investigated on the basis of a case study methodology. The exploratory nature of the research required an explanatory methodological approach rather than descriptive. As a matter of fact, case studies are considered an adequate methodology for exploratory and explanatory research (Yin, 1994).

The research context is framed by the Portuguese Citizens Shops, where service quality and delivery are central and interwoven issues. Dubois and Araújo (2004) advise the use of case studies in this context since methodologies relying on statistical inference cannot be used in the study of networks, as they require independence among sampling units. Data collection is mainly based on semi-structured interviews. The analysis follows the principles of the grounded-theory approach, aiming at the emergence on new theoretical constructs on the basis of data analyzed (Strauss and Corbin, 1990).

There is a need to develop new forms of assessing the impact of these new ways of delivering public services in the degree of satisfaction of both citizens and organizations.

Based on the academic literature, and proposing a considerable set of adaptations of the original Critical Incident Technique summarized below, it is suggested a new approach for evaluating the impact on both satisfaction and dissatisfaction of citizens using Citizen Shops. The research aims at answering four fundamental questions:

- Which are the determinants of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in public services from the citizens' point of view?
- Which are the determinants of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in public services from the civil servants' point of view?
- Does frequency of positive and negative incidents affect satisfaction and dissatisfaction?
- How do emotions affect the perception of quality in public services?

The Critical Incident Technique was developed by Flanagan on a seminal paper published in 1954. In the 70s this technique was introduced in marketing literature (cf. Swan and Rao, 1975) but, according to Gremler (2004), its use in services marketing has developed substantially only after the study of Bitner, Booms and Tetreault (1990). Since then, several works have been published, developing several techniques of incident analysis (cf. Olsen, 1996; Stauss and Weinlich, 1995; Decker and Meissner, 1997; Bostschen et al., 1996; Roos and Strandvik, 1996; Roos, 1999; Holmlund and Strandvik, 1999 a, b).

Taking into account further developments of the original technique, which is considered in the academic literature to be specifically adequate to the study of services, we intend to use an incident-based technique that captures the aspects of some of the above studies. In fact, they give most interesting and valuable contributions to the specific reality of our research – public services – covering not only the rare and unique incidents, “that are especially satisfying or especially dissatisfying” (Bitner, Booms and Tetreault, 1990, p. 73), but also those with a certain degree of regularity (Stauss and Weinlich, 1997). Indeed, one of our basic premises is that satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not opposite concepts but, instead, have different determinants (Johnston, 1995).

The duration and frequency of the incident is an important issue inasmuch as there are several studies about the impact of frequency of incidents in satisfaction (cf. Greene, 1984; Friman and Garling, 1999; Friman, Edvardsson, and Garling, 2001).

This research is currently being developed not only with the citizens who use public services. Rather, it follows a dyadic approach. The perceptions and behaviours of civil servants are incorporated in order to understand the point of view of both parts involved in each interaction. This will provide a richer perspective (cf. Schneider and Bowen, 1985; Bitner, Booms, and Mohr, 1994; Holmlund and Strandvik, 2003). The idea is not to get distinct events and behaviours, but rather different perspectives of the same incident (Edvardsson, 1992; Gremler, 2004).

Although most of critical incident studies focus on interpersonal interactions, neglecting the role of physical evidence (cf. Wels-Lips, Van der Ven and Pieters, 1998; Edvardsson and Strandvik, 2000; Gremler, 2004), the environment where the service is delivered – the servicescape – is likely to have a relevant effect upon satisfaction and dissatisfaction. Therefore, incidents related to the physical evidence are considered in the study.

Finally, the study is also designed at determining the effect of citizens' and civil servants' emotions on satisfaction and dissatisfaction. In fact, satisfaction with the encounter may be significantly affected by the strength of positive and negative emotions as Holmlund and Strandvik (2003) suggest.

From a managerial point of view, the key questions are (i) how to prevent the occurrence of the negative incidents and (ii) how to develop abilities to deal with them in a professional way, even with those that, despite of all efforts, always happen. On the other hand, positive incidents must be regarded as learning experiences for the organization.

In summary, the empirical work, which has been started with semi-structured interviews with the Oporto Citizen Shop manager and the service coordinators, involves both qualitative and a quantitative analysis of the determinants of satisfaction and dissatisfaction of public services' users of Citizen Shops. The qualitative approach proceeds with semi-structured interviews with the staff. Some pre-testing will be done before the final questionnaire is used with the citizens. Data is to be analyzed using Nud*ist software.

5. Conclusion

Facing increasing budgetary constraints and demands from society concerning Public Administration, public services delivery has been one of the major concerns of public Administration reforms in most European countries.

In this context, Citizen Shops have been created not only to improve public service quality but also to operate as a different way the state relates to citizens. This paper presents the case of the Portuguese Citizen Shops. Its interest derives mainly from encapsulating a new approach resulting from one of the latest innovations in public management: the adoption of the concept of one-stop-shopping to Public Administration, a subject still neglected in most of the academic literature.

From a public management perspective, the paper has four main contributions. Firstly, it offers a new perspective on customers' dissatisfaction, considering that this is not the opposite of satisfaction. Secondly, it emphasizes the role of emotions in public services management. The implications in terms of front and back-office reorganisation, an important step towards delivery coordination, are also considered. Finally, it proposes an adaptation of the Critical Incident Technique to the assessment of these issues, preserving the most valuable original characteristics and adding some interesting contributions from the academic literature.

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