Complaint Management in Public Services: A Case Study at Local District Municipal Authority in Malaysia

Shatina Saad, and Muhamad Halim Nizarwan

Universiti Teknologi MARA (Puncak Alam), Malaysia, shatinas@salam.uitm.edu.my, halimnizarwan@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This paper presents a conceptualization of the complaint management that focuses on daily customers' activities, which influencing the local municipal district authority organization's public image. The aim of this study is to identify the major concerning areas complaints received by the local municipal district authority organization and to improve the organization's service quality as perceived by customers. Research was conducted based on organization's historical data, which acts as public service to all residents in one of the districts in Selangor, Malaysia. Using descriptive and Pareto Analysis, several results have emerged from the data analysis. The types of complaints were identified and classified into topmost contributors of complaints. Next, major concerning areas for topmost contributors were identified. This study has successfully determined areas which the local municipal district authority organization's should be focusing more to minimize complaints and improving their service. Hence, suggestions were made to aid the local municipal district authority organization to counter the problem arises from the complaints itself.

Keywords: Complaint management, public service, local municipal district authority, service quality.

I INTRODUCTION

Local municipal district authority organization needs to ensure service quality as the highest priority in their local public agency sector. In order to improve and successfully transposed the quality concepts, it is important to know how it can be done with highly effective rate. In this paper, service qualities were measured by the rate of customer complaints received by one of the local districts municipal authority in Selangor, Malaysia. Hence, the service quality improvement in complaint management can be organized, and further suggestions can be proposed for further improvement.

Definitions of service quality revolve around the idea that it is the result of the comparison that customers make between their expectations about a service and their perception of the way the service had been performed (Lewis & Booms, 1983; Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1982; Gronroos, 1984; Parasuraman, 1985) as cited by Rodriguez, Burguete, Vaughan and Edwards (2009). Customer complaints are a measure of dissatisfaction about the quality of a product or service (Forbes, 2008). In addition, customer complaints can be used to signal the quality of the service provider towards its potential customers (Brennan & Douglas, 2002). As stated by Hsieh (2012), complaints should be as part of the quality management system. Complaint handling acts as a means of building customer loyalty and increasing the quality of the relationship to the customer (Nel, Atheron, Pitt & Ewing, 2000; Bell, Menguc & Stefani, 2004; Yapp & Skelcher, 2007). Therefore, this research focuses on what the factors that contributed the complaints received by Local district municipal authority in Selangor.

Systemically, analyzing customer complaints can help to find out what and why things went wrong, coming up and idea solutions to fix the problems and prevent them from happening again (Commonwealth of Australia, 2002) as cited by Hsieh (2012). This study too will analyze the types of channel customers report a complaint, whether by phone, form, or online form.

The chosen local district municipal authority in Selangor covers the service to the citizens from its total population of 272,893 people. The public agency consists of 14 departments to service its citizens whom each function differs from each other, and to provide a full extent of servicing towards the local residents. Namely, the various departments are: Management Services Department; Development Planning Department; Valuation and Property Management Department; Youth and Community Department; Engineering Department; Building Control Department; Landscape Department; Complaints, Public Relations and Corporate Unit; Treasury Department; Internal Audit Unit; Town and Environmental Services Department; Legal Unit; Enforcement and Security Division; and Revenue Management Division.

Local district municipal authority in Selangor receives daily complaints from its customers or specifically, local residents in form of direct call, complaint form, and online form. Various complaints were made such as animal problems, garbage dump, sewer and sometimes house problems. Due to high rate of complaints received

every day, the local district municipal authority in Selangor face problems in terms of managing these complaints. Each complaint is classified in each corresponding departments, such as garbage dump in Landscape Department, parking summons in Law Department, road damage in Engineering Department and others in their respective departments. As many complaints were reported, many of them are because of dissatisfaction from the local residents. Therefore, having good management on tackling the complaints is important in order to fulfill customer satisfaction, thus able to improve the service quality of Local district municipal authority in Selangor. This research focuses on what are the factors that contributed the complaints received by the organization.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

This section identifies few factors that included in this research, which are complaint management, customer complaints, and service quality improvement.

A. Complaint Management

This part of section discussed on how using complaints can enhance quality improvement. According to Hsieh (2012) there are three paramount dimensions for using complaints to drive enhancements, which are managerial, operational and technical.

Managerial Dimensions. The essential reasons offered in the literature for quality system achievement or failure are strategic plans, structure, leadership and staff training (Walshe & Freeman, 2002). A quality management framework obliges dynamic leadership in the organization where the managerial dimension relates to quality implementation program. It looks at whether structures and procedures are very much adjusted to improving overall quality, identified with organizational leadership (Davelin & Hand, 1993). Literature is also available on the factors related to the quality management implementation. Subsequently, the managerial dimension primarily contains strategy, structure, leadership, people (training), and culture elements.

Operational dimension. It relates to quality implementation processes involves the way in which quality implementation assets and supports are utilized and the courses of action for monitoring quality implementation work (Walshe & Offen, 2001). The implementation process forms an essential piece of a quality system. As stated by Hsieh (2012), operational dimension relates to the implementation process, organizational changes, and implementation barriers to utilizing complaints to enhance and improve service quality.

Technical dimension. It emphasizes skills, techniques or information systems required to achieve successfully continuous quality improvement (Walshe & Offen, 2001). Compared to managerial and operational issues, skills and techniques for carrying out a quality program are important components in quality program implementation (Develin & Hand, 1993). The technical dimension involves information systems that can facilitate identifying and timely adoption of improved practices.

B. Customer Complaints

Customer complaint emerges because of disappointment, and its force is connected with a level of disappointment (Devereux & Weisbrod, 2006). Customer retention can be achieved by complaint satisfaction. To gain customer retention the first fundamental requirement is complaint satisfaction (Stauss, 2002; Jackson, 2002; Bell & Luddington, 2006). The complainants can be satisfied by brief mindful administration along with polite explanation and compensation (Yavas, Karatepe, Babakus & Avci, 2004). The organizations that stress on satisfaction do not consider their investment useless in developing improvement of complaint handling (Safdar & Ghaffar, 2011). The contribution in preparing, which controls complaint handling system or management certainly is not wasted because satisfaction with complaint handling is connected with trust and commitment (Nel, Athron, Pitt, & Ewing, 2000; Tax, Brown & Chandrashekaran, 1998) as cited by Safdar and Ghaffar (2011).

C. Service Quality Improvement

Continuous and consistent effort for service improvement is required in order to survive in an aggressive competition exists in the market. To handle the dynamic competitive environment in the market, immediate response and continuous modification in service action ought to be made (Perng, Hsia & Lu, 2007). It is crucial for public sector to enhance customer service if it wants to reach admirable performance and quality service delivery (Huang, Ho & Lee,(2003). According to Kadir, Abdullah and Agus (2000), in order to attain high performance in providing quality service to the customers, public service sector should give priority to improve customer service. Organizations look for strengths and areas to bring improvement in service to become dominant in the market. Strategies then are formulated by exploring customer needs and expectations (McFarlane, 2001; Folz, 2004; Hunting, Ryan & Robinson, 2014).
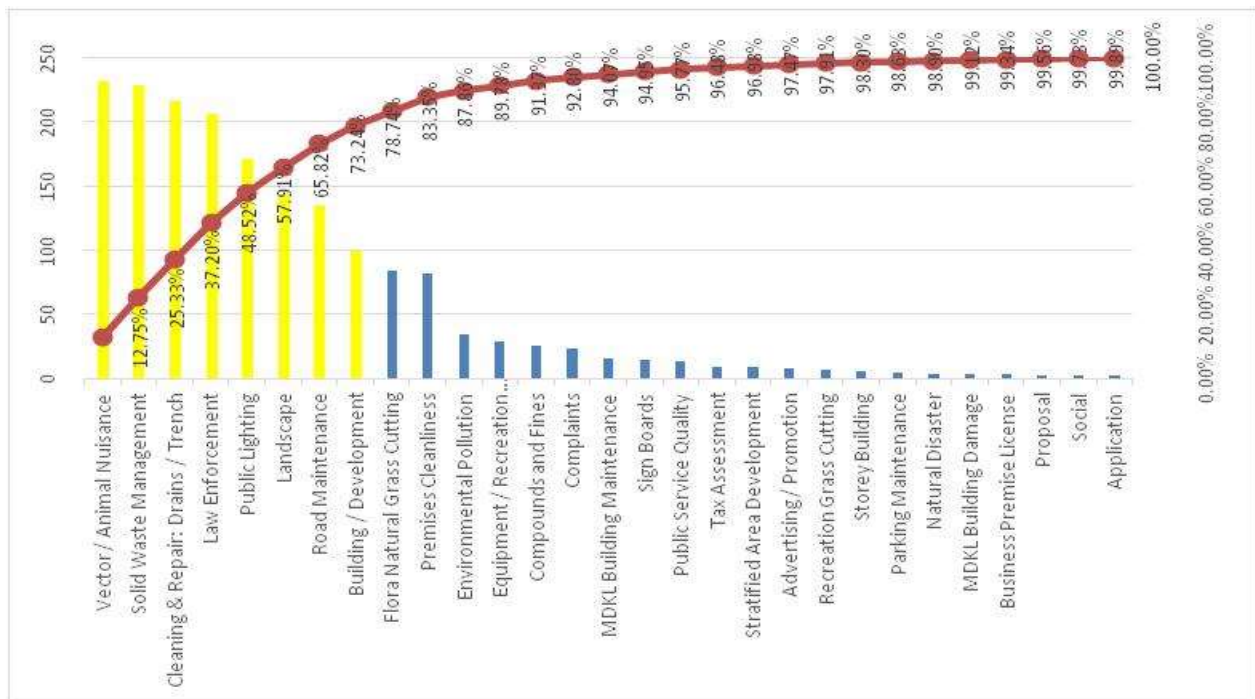
Figure 1. Pareto Analysis For Type of Complaints Received

III METHODOLOGY

This research is descriptive research as it involves an ongoing event in relation to a particular outcome and interest. Salkind (2010) also stressed some advantages of descriptive design. Descriptive design enables a more in-depth examination of a particular situation than other designs. In this research, the researchers focused on the complaints' management in the local district municipal authority in Selangor. Each result of the data obtained were examined for completeness before being entered into a data analysis system. After that, the data collected were analyzed using charts such as Pareto and simple graph charts. Pareto was used as the analysis tool because it highlights the most important among a typically large set of factors. In quality control, it often represents the most common sources of defects, highest occurring type of defect or the most frequent reasons for customer to complaints, and so on (Wilkinson, 2006).

IV RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

For the research work, researchers have collected data starting from 1st January 2014 until 23rd March 2015. As the local district municipal authority in Selangor receives daily complaints from its customers, researchers have observed that there are nine channels for the customers to make a complaint.

Based on result from Table 1, the highest channel used by the residents is e-complaint, meaning they

Table 1. Complaint Channel dated 1st January 2014 – 23rd March 2015

No.	Complaint Channel	Total
1.	E-Complaint	607
2.	Complaint Form	576
3.	Telephone	387
4.	Stars	77
5.	E-Mail	58
6.	Oral	44
7.	Fax/ Mail	38
8.	BPA	19
9.	Others	17
	Total	**1823**

use the organization web homepage to make a complaint. Regarding complaints form, it accounts almost similar with the e-complaint, and these two items contributed the most-used channel in the complaint management.

Next, the researchers compiled and classified the complaints received. Using Pareto analysis, combined data of the period and the types of complaints received been analyzed. From this analysis, identification of the "Vital few" areas where the high number of complaint receive are recognized. The analysis is shown in Figure 1. Here horizontal axis represents the type of complaints, while the vertical axis represents the complaint amount with the cumulative percentage.

Among other complaints, contributions were as follows: Cleaning and Repair: Drains/Trench is 11.87%; Law Enforcement 11.31%; Public Lighting 9.39%; Landscape 7.91%; Road Maintenance 7.41%; Building/Development 5.49% and Flora Natural Grass Cutting 4.61%.

These nine top complaints are the vital few where 78.73% of total complaints received.

Later, further Pareto Analysis is used to perform on those complaints to identify the vital few complaints' types that are responsible for the maximum amount of complaints.

As Public Lighting, Landscape, Natural Flora Grass Cutting, Cleaning and Repair: Drains/Trenches are individually or merely has below four items of each type, there is no need for additional analysis for identifying top complaints in those four positions. So, just Vector/Animals Nuisance, Solid Waste Management, Law Enforcement, Road Maintenance, and Building/Development are needed for additional Pareto Analysis. From this analysis, researchers have identified "vital few" complaint types for each position.

After the Pareto Analysis done it is found that total, eight types of complaints in the identified top complaints areas are responsible for the highest contribution amount of complaints. The complaint types and the corresponding areas with their respective amount are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Total Amount of Complaints in Major Concerning Areas

Complaint Types	Complaint Position	Amount
Vector / Animal Nuisance	Wild Dog	85
	Pet Dog	64
Solid Waste Management	Uncollected Garbage	101
	Illegal Waste	61
Cleaning Repair: Drains / Trench	Cleaning and Repairs Drains / Trench	216
Law Enforcement	Business Without License	86
	Traffic Obstruction	44
	Heavy Vehicles Nuisance	33
Public Lighting	Damaged Public Lighting	154
Landscape	Cutting Tree	130
Road Maintenance	Damaged Roads	77
	Traffic Congestion	21
Building / Development	Building Without Permission	29
	Property Developer Problem	27
	Building Renovation Work	24
	Total Amount	**1152**

Based from the analysis below are details needed for further improvement in the local municipal authority organization.

Wild Dog is the highest contribution factor in animal nuisance with 36.63% of the total amount. Pet Dog is the second highest contribution in animal nuisance with 27.58% of the total.

Uncollected Garbage contributes the highest amount of complaints in Solid Waste Management data with 44.10% of the total amount. Illegal waste is the second most contributions in the total amount with 26.2%

Business without License has the highest contribution in law enforcement complaints with 41.75% of the total amount. Among other, complaints are traffic obstruction with 21.36% and heavy Vehicles Nuisance with 16.01%. These three complaints types are responsible for 79.13% of total Law Enforcement complaints.

Perforated/Damaged Roads has the highest contribution in Road Maintenance complaints with 57.04% of the total amount. Second highest of the complaint contribution is Traffic Congestion with 15.55% of the total amount. Both complaints' types are responsible for 72.59% of total Road Maintenance complaints.

Building without Permission contributes the highest amount of the complaint in Building/Development with 29.00%. Second is Property Developer Problem with 27.00%. Third with 24% is Building Renovation Work. These three complaint types are responsible for 80.00% of total Building/ Development complaints.

From the researchers' observations, literature review and interviews with the local municipal authority staff, some suggestions are provided to efficiently handle complaints and for moreover improvement in service quality. Table 3 discusses further the details for improvement.

Table 3. Total Amount of Complaints in Major Concerning Areas

Major Concerning Areas		Suggestions for Improvement
Complaint Types	Complaint Position	
Vector / Animal Nuisance	Wild Dog	• Strategize with Veterinary Control Agency.
		• Weekly inspection on areas with high frequency rate.
	Pet Dog	• Hires contractors specialize in adopting, fostering or terminating the wild dog.

Category	Complaint Type	Suggestions
Solid Waste Management	Illegal Waste	• Review contractor's assessment of those who are not following terms and contracts.
	Uncollected Garbage	• Evaluate thoroughly on contractor's performance to choose the best-in-class contractors that suits the task.
Cleaning Repair: Drains / Trench	Cleaning and Repairs Drains / Trench	• Review contractor's assessment. • Evaluate contractor's performance. • Create awareness towards citizen for their surrounding residential areas to do self-maintenance on drains surrounding their homes. • Awareness to promote residential hygiene in areas with high frequency rate.
Law Enforcement	Business Without License Traffic Obstruction Heavy Vehicles Nuisance	• Creates clear instructions and warning on business without license. • Send officers to regularly patrol on areas frequently having obstruction and vehicles nuisance.
Public Lighting	Damaged Public Lighting	• Create awareness towards citizens on public lighting. • Awareness on vandalism in citizens' residential areas. • Terms with contractors to do monthly maintenance on public lighting, especially areas with high population.
Landscape	Cutting Tree	• monthly inspection on residential areas density with trees and most top areas related with tree cutting complaints. • Remove dead trees
Road Maintenance	Damaged Roads	• Review contractors' assessment. • Evaluate thoroughly on contractor's performance to choose the best-in-class contractors that suits the task. • Investigate the frequent road damaged, so that investigation will find the right causes that contribute to road damage such as condition of land or heavy vehicles.
	Traffic Congestion	• Team-up with local police department to control the traffic during peak hours. • By using company's complaint data on traffic congestion, data related on this problem should be shared with police team to lower the rate of congestion.
Building / Development	Building Without Permission Property Developer Problem Building Renovation Work	• Creates easy and clear instructions regarding building permission and renovation work. • Creates new or efficient process flow regarding building permission and renovation work. • Evaluate contractors related on residential projects, thorough evaluation to them to avoid future problems regarding property development projects.

By taking effective measure on tackling those complaints, it is possible to achieve high efficiency in improving service quality provided by the local district municipal authority in Selangor. So, the more successfully those suggestions can be applied, the more complaints can be minimized.

V CONCLUSION

It has been established that complaints in the local district municipal authority arises from dissatisfaction with services, given the complexity of district services and the diversity of departments involved; it is not surprising. Complaint management should be an important component in the quality system because it can identify areas that need improving, providing an opportunity to give service and satisfactions towards dissatisfied customers, strengthens customer support and gives them the opportunity to have their complaints considered in a clearly defined process.

REFERENCES

Bell, S. J., & Luddington, J. A. (2006). Coping with customer complaints. *Journal of Service Research*, 8(3), 221-233.

Bell, S. J., Menguc, B., & Stefani, S. L. (2004). When customer disappoint: A model of relational internal marketing and customer complaints. *Journal of Academy of Marketing Science*, 32(2), 112-216.

Brennan, C., & Douglas, A. (2002). Complaints Procedure in Local Government. *International Journal of Public Sector Management*, 15(3), 219-236.

Develin, N., & Hand, M. (1993). *Total Quality Management: Breaking down the Barriers*. London: Chartered Accountants Hall.

Devereux, P. J., & Weisbrod, B. A. (2006). Does "satisfaction" with local public services affect complaints and georaphic mobility? *Public Finance Review*, 34(2), 123-147.

Folz, D. H. (2004). Service Quality and Benchmarking the Performance of Municipal Services. *Public Administration Review*, 64(2), 209-220.

Forbes, S. J. (2008). The Effect of Service Quality and Expectations on Customer Complaints. *Journal of Industrial Economics*, 1.

Glezerman, M. (1999). A model of efficient and continuous quality program improvement in a clinical setting. *International Journal for Quality in Health Care*, 11(3), 227-32.

Hsieh, S. Y. (2012). Using complaints to enhance quality improvement: developing an analytical tool. *International Journal of Health Care Quality Assurance*, 25(5), 453-461.

Huang, J. H., Ho, S. H., & Lee, B. C. (2003). Who are the adorable customers-men or women? Service quality improvement via customers' positive responses. *Total Quality and Business Excellence*, 14(7), 789-800.

Hunting, S.A., Ryan, R. & Robinson, T.P. (2014), *Service delivery review: a how to manual for local government*, 2nd edn, Australian Centre of Excellence for Local Government, University of Technology, Sydney

Jackson, R. (2002). The customer is Always Right. *The Reference Librarian*, 35(75), 205-216.

Kadir, S. L., Abdullah, M., & Agus, M. (2002). On Service Improvement Capacity Index: A case study of the public service sector in Malaysia. *Journal of Total Quality Management*, 11(4), 837-843.

McFarlane, D. G. (2001). Managing Improvement in the Public Sector. *Total Quality Management and Business Excellence*, 12(7), 1047-1053.

Nel, D.. Atheron, T., Pitt, L., & Ewing, M., (2000). Customer Evaluations of Service Complaint Experiences in the Public Sector. *Journal of Non Profit & Public Sector Marketing,* 7(3), 3-30.

Perng, Y. H., Hsia, Y., & Lu, H. (2007). A service quality improvement dynamic decision support system for refur-bishment contractors. *Journal of Total Quality Management,* 18(7), 731-749.

Rodríguez, G. P., Burguete, V. J., Vaughan, R., & Edwards, J. (2009). Quality Dimensions in the Public Sector: Municipal Services and Citizen's Perception. *International Review on Public and Nonprofit Marketing,* 6(1), 75-90.

Safdar, M., & Ghaffar, Q. d. (2011). Customer Complaints and Service Improvement. *Journal of Business Strategies,* 5(2).

Neil J. *Salkind* (Ed.). (2010). *Encyclopedia of Research Design.* Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.

Stauss, B. (2002). The dimensions of complaint satisfaction: Process and outcome complaint versus cold fact and warm act complaint stisfaction. *Managing Service Quality*, 12(3), 173-183.

Walshe, K., & Freeman, T. (2002). Effectiveness of Quality Improvement: learning from evaluations. *Quality & Safety in Health Care,* 11(1), 85-87.

Walshe, K., & Offen, N. (2001). A very public failure: lessons for quality improvement in healthcare organisations from the Bristol Royal Infirmary. *Quality in Health Care*, 10(4), 250-256.

Wilkinson, L. (2006). Revising the Pareto Chart. *The American Statistician*, (60), 332-334.

Yapp, C., & Skelcher, C. (2007). Improvements Boards: Building capability for public service improvement through peer support. *Public Money and Management*, 27(4), 285-292.

Yavas, U., Karatepe, O. M., Babakus, E., & Avci, T. (2004). Customer complaints an organizational responses: A study hotel guests in Nothern Cyprus. *Journal of Hospitality Marketing and Management,* 11(2), 31-46.