

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE QUALITY OF
SERVICE IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR IN TONGA**

**A dissertation submitted by
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**In partial fulfillment of the award of Doctor of Business Administration
Faculty of Business, University of Southern Queensland,
2013**

ABSTRACT

The Government of Tonga embarked for the first time in a public sector reform program starting in 2001 with the objective, among others, to improve the quality of service delivery to the public. This was the government's response to address the growing concerns from the public and the media over the integrity and quality of the overall public services, and relating in some instances with alleged malpractices and corruptions in the government's ministries, including the Ministry of Revenue Service (MRS). The quality of the service delivery of MRS was expected to be improved greatly as a result of the public sector reform program in providing a holistic approach to developing the capacity, and modernisation of the processes in the operations, of the organisation. Eleven years have lapsed from the implementation of the public sector reform program. This research has assessed the level of expectation and perception of external customers over the quality of the service delivery of the government, focussing on the performance of MRS.

The analysis has identified notable critical gaps between the level of expectation and level of perception of customers for the factors of service dimensions in the customer service of MRS. This research used MRS as the case study, and conducted field work through questionnaire survey, with 92 participants responded, and a follow up interview with 22 interviewees to clarify their responses to the survey. The field work focused on the three principal external customer sub-groups of MRS, which are: individual customers, business customers and government department customers, and they are also importers and taxpayers interacting with MRS on an on-going basis.

The research findings have shown that all three customer group overalls rated a high level of expectation over the service of MRS. They have also indicated that the level of perception over the service of MRS was lower than the level of expectation, revealing gaps in most of the factors of service dimensions. In addition, there were no significant differences existed in the expected level and perceived level of the service of MRS among the three customer groups' overalls, and within the three customer sub-groups. These results indicate the consistency of rating across the levels of expectation and perception in all customer groups' overalls and within three customer sub-groups. However, there were significant differences observed in the expected level within the three customer sub-groups in the customer group overall interacting with MRS within 10 years, showing customers different levels of expectations on the ability of the public sector reform to deliver its goal of providing quality service with efficiency. There were also significant differences in the perceived level of the service of MRS within three customer sub-groups in the aggregate customer group overall. These differences in customers' perceptions reflect their different experiences with the performance of MRS. There were further significant differences found between the expected performance level and perceived performance level of MRS customer services in all categories of customer groups' overalls, and also within all customer sub-groups indicating critical performance gaps. Moreover, significant differences were shown up

between the expected level and perceived level for all twenty two factors of service dimensions for MRS customer service in all categories of customer groups overalls and within customer subgroups. In terms of critical gaps there were nineteen critical gaps identified out of twenty two factors of service dimensions altogether across all customer group overalls. These critical gaps indicate the serious concerns of the customers with almost all aspects of the service of MRS. These critical gaps are clustered into the five broad service dimensions. The highest performance gaps were associated with reliability of MRS performance with five critical factors, followed by responsive and empathy with four critical factors each, and then assurance and tangible with three critical factors each. MRS has to address as top priority the serious concern with the reliability of its customer service.

The research concludes that there are significant differences existed between the level of expectations and level of perceptions of customers over the factors of service dimension of the MRS performance. These critical gaps need to be eliminated or reduced so as to improve the quality of the current customer service and its credibility to, and relation with, the public at large. The results of the research reveal that the public sector reform has somewhat failed to meet the high expectation on its objective to deliver a better customer service. Actually, the customer service of MRS has been weighed and found wanting. MRS has therefore had to devise a strategy as a matter of urgency to address the customers prevailing low perception over its customer service.

CERTIFICATE OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, case study work, results, analyses, software, and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the considerable support from academic supervisors, contributing participants, friends, relatives and my family.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors, Dr Latif Al Hakim, and Associate Professor Geoff Cockfield, for their invaluable guidance and assistance throughout my academic journey to complete the dissertation.

The case study research would not have been conducted successfully without the generous time provided by the participants in the survey and the interview, and also the crucial assistance by the Research Team from Tupou Tertiary Institute (TTI) led by Dr. 'Ungatea Fonua Kata, Dean of Academics, in managing the survey and the interview in compliance with the requirements of the University's Ethic Committee. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to the participants for their willingness to share their views on the customer service of MRS, and also to TTI for administering the field work.

I would also like to acknowledge with heartfelt gratitude the scholarships provided by the Australian Government through Ausaid and also by the University of Southern Queensland through the Vice Chancellor scholarship to fund this postgraduate study. Thank very much for these financial supports.

On a personal note, I would like to thank all members of Eke Family for their encouragement and moral support. To my mother, Setila Lahi, and my late father, Valu, thank you very much for giving your all to afford us the opportunity for education. You have shown me the real spirit of commitment which has inspired me all along in this study to stay the course and never give up, no matter what. I dedicate this dissertation to you both as our devoted parents working hard to make a better future for the family. Malo lahi e 'Ofa. A sincere gratitude also goes to Feleti, Meleane, Tila Ieka, Samuela, Leti Ieka, Toakase, Eta, Lolo, Moni, Feletoa, 'Ake, Maikolo, Vika, Huluni, Saane, Uinise sii, Siosifa, Manase sii and Viliami, and all my nieces and nephews for all your support. A special thank is further extended to Siva, Uinise, Vea, Tavale, Kafoa and Mele, Isileli, Siniva, 'Enele, Timote, and Sione Taulava for all your encouragements. Malo aupito a e tokoni.

I would also like to acknowledge with much gratitude the invaluable support and assistance rendered by Mr. Aholotu Saafi Palu all along during the course of this study. In that regard, a sincere appreciation is also extended to Vei Saafi Palu, Heleni and the kids. Malo lahi e tokoni.

Furthermore, I would like to thank with humble heart to the God Almighty for providing the opportunity and strength to undertake this study right through to the end. Ke 'A'au aipe 'a e langilangi mo e kololia o ta'engata pea ta'engata.

Finally, this dissertation would not have been completed without the sacrifice made by my mother in Law, Fane, and my wife, Lusitania, in making time available for me to concentrate on the study. Thank you very much for all that help and moral support. I finally thank my son, 'Aisake Valu Alexandre Eke Jnr (III), for keeping me going with his smiling face all the times. Malo e tokoni. Son, dare to dream big, for you can do everything through Him who strengthens us. To God be the glory forever.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AUSAID	Australian Agency for International Development
EIPA	European Institute of Public Administration
MRS	Ministry of Revenue Services
OECD	Organisation for Economic Corporation and Development
PSC	Public Service Commission
TCC	Tonga Communication Corporation
TTI	Tupou Tertiary Institute

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