



**Measuring Service Quality Delivery at Impendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal**

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This dissertation is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master

of Commerce (Marketing)

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**July 2019**

## DECLARATION

I, **Vusumuzi David Mkhwanazi** (student number **210538747**), declare that:

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

The researcher wants to thank the following persons for their assistance and support during the course of this study.

I would like to thank my family for the support they have given me during the course of this dissertation; without their encouragement, I could not have accomplished this.

I would like to thank my supervisor for his dedication and constant support; without his inspiration, I could have not achieved this. His suggestions, insight, and support have made this work possible. He has shown great patience with me throughout this project and has been of invaluable help.

I would like to acknowledge and thank all the respondents that participated in the study, particularly those who were prepared to be interviewed, and I would like to extend my humble gratitude to the Senior Management and staff for their continuous support.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this thesis to my family for nursing me with affection and love and their dedicated partnership for success in my life.

My sincere gratitude to my wife for her support, patience and sacrifices during the course of my career. To my treasured children who served as my inspiration and strength.

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to my dear family; my parents, the reason for my achievements today. I also extend my sincere gratitude to the rest of my family and friends for encouraging and supporting, moreover for being patient with me during the course of my journey.

## **ABSTRACT**

The study explored service quality provided to citizens at the Impendle Local Municipality. The study is stimulated by the continuous violent protest and sometimes taxi conflicts at the Impendle Local Municipality, resulting in poor service delivery. The service quality model was used to inform the study. A case study research design, quantitative research methodology and cluster sampling was used to select 240 community members. Reliability and validity was upheld to ensure that the findings are credible. Data was analysed using SPSS version 25. The findings show a significant gap between citizens' expectations and experiences: reliability (-3.2); assurance (-2.88); tangibility (-2.02), empathy (-2.88) and responsiveness (-3.17). Based on the findings presented in this study, in order to understand and deal with the gap between citizens' expectations and experiences of service quality, the Impendle Local Municipality management should pay special attention to the dimension of reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness as they influence service quality. The findings in this study may help the Impendle Local Municipality to understand and enhance the effectiveness of service quality efforts.

*Keywords: Service Quality, Service Delivery, Impendle Local Municipality, KwaZulu-Natal.*

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## **CHAPTER ONE**

### **INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

#### **1.1 INTRODUCTION**

Service quality is an extremely important issue in the service industry. Organisations be it in the public or private sector are expected to provide service quality to customers. Service quality is one of the critical aspect that makes customers realise economic benefits from the service provided. This study evaluates service quality through gap analysis between citizens' expectations and their experiences of the service provided at Impendle Local Municipality. The chapter provides an outline of the study: the background; the research problem; aim, purpose; study's contribution/significance; research objectives and questions. Furthermore, the research approach, conceptual basis, limitations, dissertation structure and the summary are also addressed.

#### **1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

The democratic government of South Africa took over in 1994. During the apartheid system, populations in rural areas were neglected. This resulted in the backlog in the service delivery. Welch *et al.* (2015) argue that the South African government is facing a challenge of community's declining trust of government to deliver services needed. Monkam (2014) and Cheruiyot *et al.* (2015) identified several factors that lead to people's dwindling in trust in government; corruption, poor fiscal performance, and poor quality of service. The constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 provides three spheres of government: National, Provincial and Local.

The national government makes policy, sets objectives, coordinates and regulates the mandate of government. The provincial government plans service delivery while the local government is mandated to implement, deliver and build regulations for services (Monkam, 2014). All spheres of government are expected to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Devolution of power has made municipalities engines of service delivery. Therefore, municipalities are responsible for rendering basic service *inter alia* water, refuse removal, electricity, sanitation, etc. to their

communities. Monkam (2014) found growing dissatisfaction among people of KwaZulu-Natal, including Impendle Local Municipality about service delivery.

### **1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Grewal *et al.* (2016:23) argues that a research problem is a topic of interest and to a certain level of familiarity to the researcher. A research problem can be understood by generating information on it. The study assessed and measured the gap of service quality delivered to citizens at Impendle Local Municipality focusing on expectations and experiences. There is a dearth of research on service quality and service quality management. These gaps in literature formed the basis for this study. Evidence also shows that Impendle Local Municipality had overall 4000 complaints in 2014 and 9000 in 2017 (Citizen Satisfaction Survey, 2016). The complaints received from citizens related to building regulations, zoning, water, waste removal, and street lights. The national sphere of government is encouraging local governments to deliver service quality but evidence shows that municipalities are struggling to deliver services able to meet citizens' expectations. Therefore there is a need for Impendle Local Municipality to be informed about the citizens' feelings about the service delivered to the community. There is also a need to inform management decision and growth plans. Although there are studies carried out in the area of health, education and transport (Kandampully and Suhartanto, 2003) few have been conducted in the context of delivering of service by the municipality, and in a developing economy such as South Africa. This makes it imperative to highlight factors that affect citizens' expectations and experiences of service. The study provides management with empirical evidence to develop effective service delivery focusing on reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness. As it is now, the gap between expectations and experiences of citizens with regards to service quality delivered is not known and consequently gives rise to this study.

### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

This is a very significant study because it assesses and measures what is expected by the community of Impendle Local Municipality and their experiences of service quality delivered. The study provides strategies that can help the municipality to succeed in delivering excellent service and improving quality of service. Furthermore, a platform of engagement will be created that will help citizens to understand service quality.

## **1.5 CONTRIBUTION/SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The study will reveal dimensions of service quality that affect expectations and experiences of citizens. The findings may be used by management to inform the service delivery strategy at Impendle Local Municipality.

Policy makers may get insight into service quality delivered and use the findings to generate a dependable guide for promoting and evaluating service delivery.

Stakeholders will be provided with information to make constructive suggestions for the enhancement of service quality provided at Impendle Local Municipality.

## **1.6 AIM OF THE STUDY**

The study investigated service quality provided to citizens at Impendle Local Municipality using the RATER Model (Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, 1985) to inform the study. It is noteworthy that there has not been a study undertaken in evaluating service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality, South Africa.

## **1.7 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To understand the quality of service delivery expected by the citizens at Impendle Local Municipality.
- To establish the quality of service delivery experienced by the citizens at Impendle Local Municipality.
- To ascertain the gap in service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality.

## **1.8 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What is the expected quality of service delivery at Impendle Local Municipality?

- What is the quality of service delivery experienced by the citizens at Impendle Local Municipality?
- What is the gap in service quality delivered at Impendle Local Municipality?

## **1.9 BRIEF INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH APPROACH**

This study used the RATER Model, exploratory research design, and quantitative research methodology. The target population is all community members at Impendle Local Municipality. The sample size is 240 of community members. Validity and reliability measures are upheld to increase the credibility of the findings. Cluster sampling is used to select respondents. The sample size for this study is made up of 240 community members which are representative of the whole population. Data analysis employed descriptive and inferential statistics using the SPSS version 23.1 (Braun and Clarke, 2006).

## **1.10 DEFINITION OF TERMS**

- **Reliability:** this is the ability of a business or organisation to deliver service that is promised in a dependable, accurate, and timely manner (Lee, Choi, Kim and Hyun, 2014).
- **Responsiveness:** is the willingness of the supplier of service to offer quick service to his or her consumers (Kurtz, 2014).
- **Assurance:** pertains to a firm's ability to respond effectively to the customers queries. Service providers should provide appropriate answers to customers (Kurtz, 2014).
- **Empathy:** is delivering service to customers with the care needed (Lovelock and Wirtz, 2011).
- **Tangibility:** is the appearance of the employees, equipment and surroundings (Jones and Taylor, 2012).

- **Service Quality:** the gap between what customers' wish to have and what is delivered to them (Hennig-Thurau and Gwinner and Gremler, 2010).
- **Service delivery:** is the provision of service to the community (Gayathri et al., 2015:24).
- **Municipality:** "is usually a single urban" or "rural administrative division having corporate status and powers of self-government or jurisdiction as granted by national and state laws to which it is subordinate" (Grönroos, 2010:23). Therefore, a municipality is the third domain of government in South Africa.

### **1.11 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

There are few academic studies on service quality in Local Municipalities in South Africa. As a result, mainly international studies on service quality were used to provide the basis for the study. This is, *inter alia*, a reason for undertaking such a study as this. The study only included Impendle Local Municipality, which is one of the seven local municipalities in UMgungundlovu District Municipality because of financial and time constraints.

### **1.12 STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION**

The study is organised into five chapters.

- **Chapter One:** presents; the introduction, the background, the research problem and the purpose of the study. The chapter also presents the research objectives and questions, the significance of study, the limitations of the study followed by the structure of the dissertation.
- **Chapter Two:** reviews literature related to service quality delivery. The chapter also reviews concepts on service delivery. This chapter covers service quality models, the role of a municipality in service delivery, and the South African legislative framework on service delivery. The chapter concludes by summarising the relevant literature.

- **Chapter Three:** presents the methodology that includes the research design, methodology, data collection instruments, study site, population, target population and sampling techniques. The chapter concludes by addressing the data analysis tools, ethical considerations and a conclusion.
- **Chapter Four:** presents data, analysis and discussion of the main findings, and the summary to the chapter.
- **Chapter Five:** is the conclusion and recommendations emanating from the key findings.

### **1.13 SUMMARY**

This study investigates service quality at the community of Impendle Local Municipality. The chapter presented the background to the study and other study background sections. The research approach used, limitations, the definition of terms, and the structure of the dissertation are also discussed. The following chapter presents the literature review.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

#### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

A synthesis of previous research work is called a literature review. Therefore, the literature review is created from the prevailing knowledge base. The literature review is on service quality. The quality of service is essential in many sectors including public sector this study was conducted in. It is important for service quality provided by a firm or company that meets the expectations of the customers. The study investigated service quality at Impendle Local Municipality as understood by citizens. The chapter deals with the understanding of service quality, models of service quality, service quality in the context of local government, local government regulations and functions. The chapter ends with a conclusion.

#### **2.2 SERVICE QUALITY**

The study explores the two concepts of service and quality.

##### **2.2.1 A perspective on services**

Service quality contributes to the world's economy (Machta *et al.*, 2012; Henning-Thuran *et al.*, 2010). The service industry makes up to 80.0% of the world's economy (Ojala, 2006). There is, however, no agreement on the meaning of service quality. The debate on the meaning of service quality is old, but there is no agreeable meaning as the debate seem to further complicate the meaning of service quality (Stricter, 2006).

Service quality deals with perishable and non-perishable goods. Services provide solutions to people's business problems, performance and processes. Some scholars (Evenson, 2005; de Stricker, 2006) understands service quality as unique characteristic services. Services are activities with different processes, uses many resources, and directly engages customers (Evenson, 2005).

Services aim at generating a solution to customers and need customers physical presence. Quality control processes are difficult to ascertain in services because of the close link between production and consumption (Chen and Hu, 2013).

Most services need service employees and service users to interact (Evenson, 2005). The unique nature of human beings makes services to be heterogeneous. Services are mainly intangible but can be tangible as well (Kang and James, 2004). “The intangibility of the services makes customers perceive services as being abstract and subjective” (Grönroos, 2010).

## **2.3 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICES**

Key characteristics unique to service are discussed below:

### **2.3.1 Intangibility**

Services are intangible, and this brings many problems to customers. For example, customers are not able to see, touch and smell the service when the opposite is true with products (Kouthouris and Alexandris, 2005). Therefore customers rely on the reputation of the service given by a service provider who may not always give the correct reputation because of wanting to promote their service (Grönroos, 2010).

### **2.3.2 Inseparability**

Scholars (Kouthouris and Alexandris, 2005; Grönroos, 2010) argue that it is quite complicated to dissociate the production and consumption of services in an organisation. For example, when a person is delivering a lecture to learners service as delivered as the lecture is delivered. In addition, service providers do not have an opportunity to deal with factory service that may have production and consumption problems. Service allows customers to be physically present to evaluate service being provided (Laroche, Ueltsechy, Abe, Cleverland and Yannopoulos, 2005).

### **2.3.3 Heterogeneity**

Laroche, Ueltsechy, Abe, Cleverland and Yannopoulos (2005) said that services with high labour content are heterogeneous. Services’ performance varies under different situations. Kouthouris

and Alexandris (2005) argue that it is not easy to standardize service provider and customer interactions. Consequently, it is complicated to ensure standardized service quality as one is able to do in the production of goods (Grönroos, 2010).

#### **2.3.4 Diversity in standards of service**

Services are difficult to evaluate (Malai and Speece, 2005). This is because the criteria used by customers to evaluate service is not understandable to marketers. Service quality comes from how well service is performed not based on customers' expectation of service. Customers' service evaluation is based on the process employed in service delivery and the outcome of the service (Grönroos, 2010).

#### **2.3.5 Perishability**

Agarwal and Kumar (2016) said that services are perishable and cannot be stored like products. Services are lost if they are not used at the time they are produced. However, the effects of services can be retained (Ahmad and Sungip, 2008).

#### **2.3.6 Simultaneity**

Anderson and Kerr (2002) argue that services are produced and used at the same time. Services cannot be stored which is an important aspect of service management. The phenomenon of creating and consumption happening simultaneously makes it hard to implement quality control measures. A product can easily be inspected for quality but service relies on other measures. When customers are present in the manufacturing facility and participate in service processes this exposes them to errors (Awara, 2001).

#### **2.3.7 Customer Participation**

Customers' participation in the service process requires that facilities are designed to accommodate this process (Awara and Amaechi, 2014). Most traditional companies cannot accommodate the participation of customers because they lack customer participation strategies. When a service requires participation by the customer, the service provider has to pay attention to the issue of noise, layout, decoration, and furnishing of its worksite to influence customers' positively (Bryman, 2012).

## **2.4 QUALITY**

Quality comes from the literature on the quality of goods. In many cases, quality is associated with tangible goods, not service (Laroche *et al.*, 2004). There is no agreeable definition of quality. This is because quality means different things. Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005) said that the situation determines the meaning people give to quality. The individual's perception of quality is what matters. This is because quality is relative. Quality is believed to have different features including meeting people's needs, resulting in satisfaction, being free from errors, free from deficiencies, cause satisfaction, and being able to conform to standards (Lee and Hwan, 2005).

Lorenzoni and Lewis (2004) said that quality dimensions include features, perceivable quality, performance, durability, aesthetic and reliability. Lewis and Soureli (2006) found that quality depends on individual norms; therefore, the disposition of a person should be taken into consideration when providing service.

Siddiqui, Masood, Khad and Sharma (2010) argues that quality in a product satisfies needs of customers and needs implied by the service provider. Tsoukatos (2007) said that eight dimensions of product quality could be used to ascertain quality characteristics. Some characteristics of quality reinforce each other while others do not because some characteristics are sacrificed to improve others. In the aforementioned section, quality is regarded as a multi-dimensional issue viewed from different standpoints. (Rust and Huang, 2014; ISO, 2011).

## **2.5 SERVICE QUALITY**

Quality service is understood as what customers perceive to be the service provided to them (Malai and Speece, 2005). For this reason, customers and management should be solicited for views on the meaning of service quality. Wilson, Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2012) said that service quality is a discrepancy on perceived service and service that is actually provided by a company. In short, service quality is the service that customers experience from service providers (Palmer, 2011; Malhorta *et al.*, 2005).

## **2.6 CONTRIBUTIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY TO CONSUMER'S BEHAVIOUR**

Chaniotakis and Lymperpoulos (2009) argue that service quality perception is influenced by customer behaviour. Behaviour that influences service quality perceptions can be categorized into two groups; direct or indirect through customer satisfaction (Ekinchi *et al.*, 2008).

Customers' positive experience of service quality influenced by recommendation from others (Grönroos, 2007). Recommendations have the potential to increase sales volume. Recommendations can influence customers to purchase the product that is exorbitant. Positive service quality influences customers to go back for the service provided again and again. Bates, Bates and Johnson (2003) said that the behaviour of customers can make the business to have a competitive advantage. In addition, behaviour of customers can make companies have a good standing in the market (Palmer, 2011).

Competitive advantage relies on the goods' and of services' quality (Grönroos, 2007). To maintain competitive advantage service providers should provide service quality according to customers' evaluation of service quality (Palmer, 2011).

Service quality improves business' financial performance (Palmer, 2011). While high service quality results in high-profit-margin applied to both small and big companies. Service quality has an influence on customers' buying behaviour and companies' profitability. Baran *et al.* (2008) said that the service quality profit chain should begin within organisations. This means that to achieve service quality organisations should work to satisfy employees and employee productivity before customer satisfaction. Palmer (2011) argues that service quality satisfies customer which influences the behaviour or loyalty of customers that results in an increase in sales volume and profits.

## **2.7 MEASURING SERVICE QUALITY**

Palmer (2011) explains that business firms should identify areas where service quality needs improvement. This is one sure way of ensuring customer satisfaction. For this to happen there is a need for measurement practices to determine quality and ensure that service meets customers'

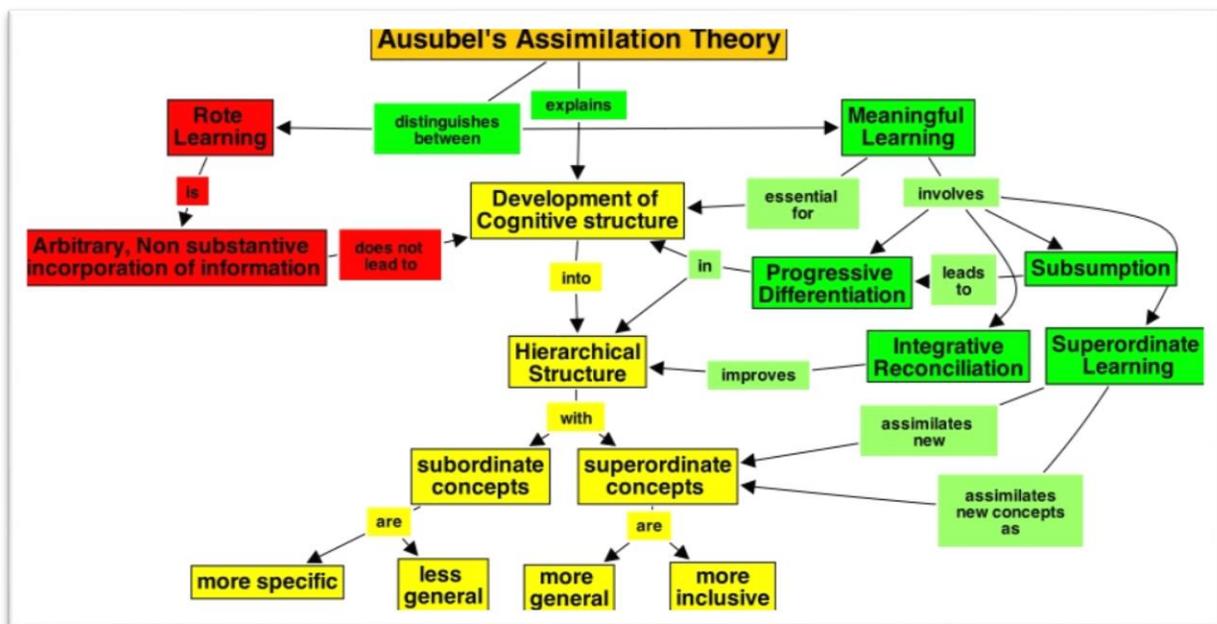
needs. Measuring a customers' evaluation of service quality is the best way to measure it (Zeithaml, 2002). There are different views and approaches of measuring the quality of service. This is caused by the complex nature of service quality. There are, therefore, different models for measuring service quality (Grönroos, 2007).

## 2.8 “THEORY OF ASSIMILATION”

This theory extends from the Dissonance Theory. The Assimilation Theory explains that customers compare the expected service and perceived performed service. The discrepancy in comparison is that it is understood as dissonance (Isac and Rusu, 2014).

To establish the dissonance post-usage perspective is important because it allows a business firm to understand customers' views of the actual service. Dissonance is used to evaluate customers' satisfaction. In dissonance scenario customers lower perceptions by lowering expectations as a way of avoiding dissonance or aligning the product with their expectations. Lankton and McKnight (2010) said that customers change their expectations to align themselves with the actual performance of the product. This results in high levels of satisfaction by reducing the level of dissonance. Figure 2.1 is the Theory of Assimilation.

Figure 2.1: “Theory of Assimilation”



Source: Isac and Rusu (2014: 82)

The theory was criticised for suggesting that customers modify their expectations and experience to get satisfied with the product or service. The theory is not practical in the current environment with well-informed customers (Lankton and McKnight, 2010). Besides, customers presented with a variety of products on the market, therefore, they prefer to get the product from another service provider than adjusting their expectations and experiences. Manufacturers are also innovative to remain. Therefore, customers need not change their expectations and perceptions because the market provides goods that can meet customers' expectations and experiences. Awara and Amaechi (2014) argue that dissatisfaction will result from service was negative from the onset.

## **2.9 THEORY OF CONTRAST**

The theory was created by Sherif in 1957 and works like the Theory of Assimilation. The theory holds that the discrepancy between service performance and expectations leads to an exaggerated discrepancy. For instance, a customer may only want to pay the price that is marked on the product. If customers are charged higher at the till point, they get discouraged, and the opposite makes them satisfied and feel positive (Lankton and McKnight, 2010). This theory is supported by many service quality scholars (Awara and Amaechi, 2014; Lankton and McKnight, 2010). The theory is an attempt to predict how customers react in the market. The theory is not an effort to reduce dissonance. Awara and Amaechi (2014) said that the theory is an explanation that human beings are happy when surprised with equal measure and dissatisfied if the product of service offered is not what is promised. This explains why businesses under promise and try to deliver better service quality to keep customers delighted (Isac and Rusu, 2014).

## **2.10 THEORY OF NEGATIVITY**

The theory was developed by Carlsmith and Aronson in 1963. Any discrepancy in the product or services performed will result in negative influence because such a service disrupts the customer's experience. Awara and Amaechi (2014) said that customers' dissatisfaction happens when performance is below or above the expectations.

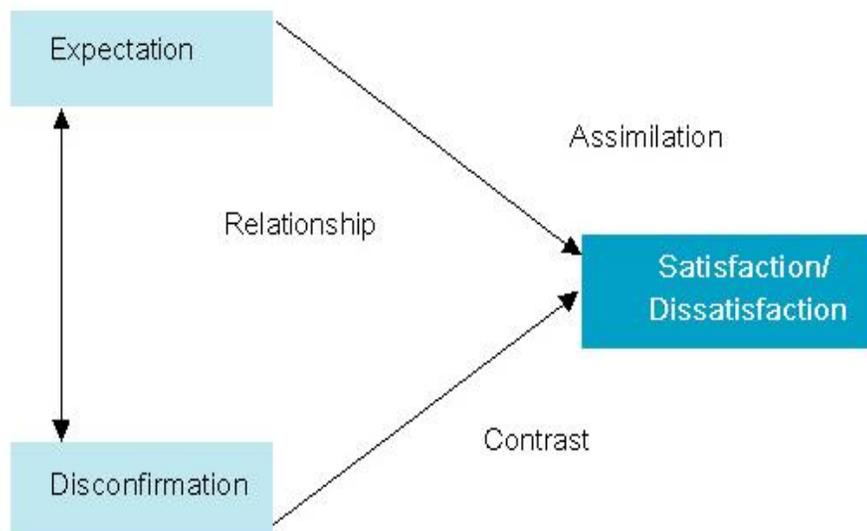
## 2.11 THEORY OF ASSIMILATION CONTRAST

This theory was developed by Anderson in 1973 and drew from two theories; “Theory of Assimilation” and “Theory of Contrast”. The theory states that customers have different rejection levels. If the product’s performance falls within the acceptance range customers disregard the discrepancy that the expectation was never fully met. If the product or service falls within the rejection range the theory comes into play magnifying negative disconfirmation (Malhotra *et al.*, 2005). Both the “Theory of Assimilation” and “Contrast Theory” are important in service quality studies.

## 2.12 THE “EXPECTATIONS DISCONFIRMATION THEORY”

The Expectation Confirmation Theory was established in 1977. The theory explains that there are different levels of satisfaction after purchase. The theory is mostly used in consumer research. The theory explains that after buying twice or more times, customers are able to gauge if their expectation and perceived performance have been met. The theory emanated from the discipline of psychology and marketing (Bae, 2012) Figure 2.2 below illustrates the “Expectations Disconfirmation Theory”.

Figure 2.2: “The Expectations Disconfirmation Theory”



Source: Oliver (1977, p.120)

The theory is made up of three constructs. These are; expectations, perceived performance, disconfirmation of beliefs, and satisfaction.

### **2.12.1 Perceived Performance**

Perceived performance is understood as a lack of agreement between expected performance and actual performance (Bae, 2012). Customer's satisfaction is when expectations by customers are met by the service provided. Hsu *et al.* (2016) argue that positive disconfirmation is when customers' expectations are met while negative disconfirmation is when customers' expectations are not met.

### **2.12.2 Disconfirmation of Beliefs**

This is an inconsistency between the performance that the customer expect performance before purchase and actual performance (Hsu *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, Customer satisfaction is the gap that emanates from the expectations of the customer and perceptions of performance. Disconfirmation is positive when expectations are met. This results in post-purchase satisfaction. Negative disconfirmation is when the product fails to meet the pre-purchase expectations (Bae, 2012). Negative disconfirmation leads to post-purchase dissatisfaction. Disconfirmation is a subjective element as it is dependent on an individual's perceptions.

Customer fulfilment theories focus on the end-user of products. These theories argue that meeting customers' expectations results in a positive attitude to the product or service. Hsu *et al.* (2016) argue that service providers can only meet customers' expectations if they know customers' expectations. Customers' expectations are influenced by important matters that need to be taken note of by service providers. This would help to eliminate unrealistic expectations and avoid negative disconfirmations. Bae (2012) said that overpromising and underlying result in negative disconfirmation.

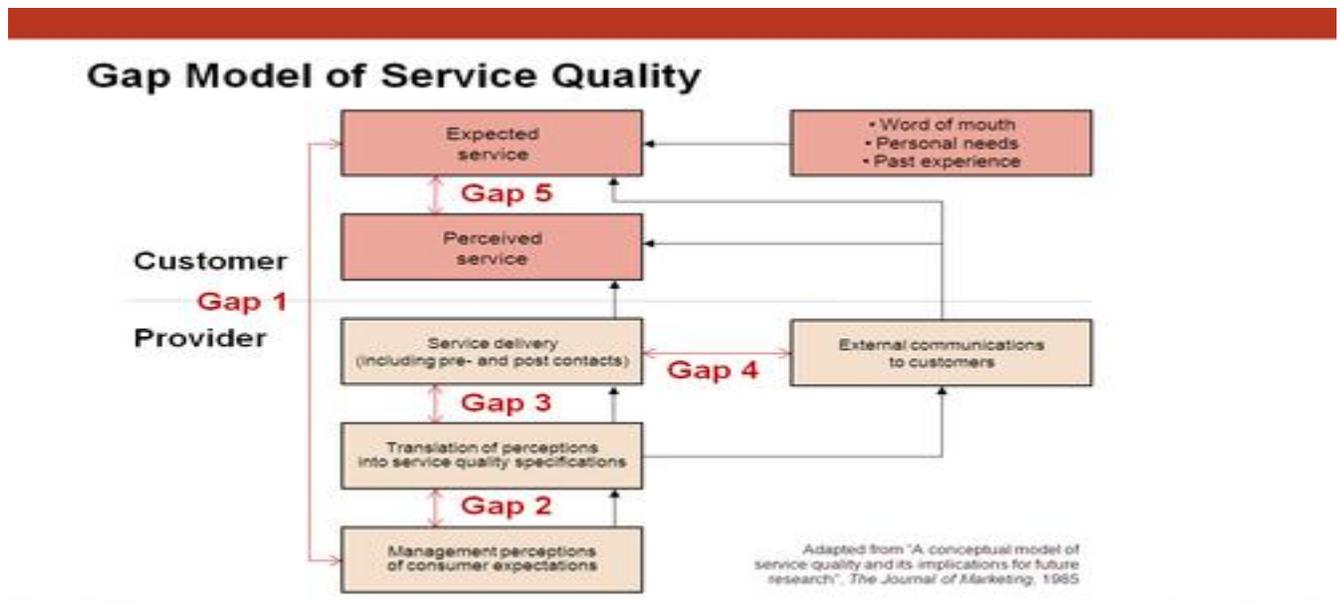
## **2.13 THE “GAPS MODEL (SERVICE QUALITY)”**

“The Gaps Model” is informed by the process of identifying gaps in the market. The model deals with means and measures for filling service quality gaps. Gaps are understood as customers

unfulfilled needs and expectations. Service quality is the gap between customers' expectations and experiences. The model deals with quality fall in the market and in the product or service (Doyle, 2005).

Parasuraman *et al.* (2002) argue that the delivery of service quality is an ongoing process for service providers. Managers should ensure that superior value is delivered in the service provided to customers. Superior value should be a tangible or intangible product or service respectively. Isac and Rusu (2014) said that products of poor quality and fail to meet customers' expectations cannot survive market competition. Parasuraman *et al.* (2002) state that the Gap model is a gap method and tool used by managers of companies that provide service. The aim of the Gap Model is to identify the gap between expectations and actual services. The Gap Model has the potential to improve service quality.

Figure 2.3: The "Gap Model of Service Quality"



**Source:** Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (2002)

The Gap Model of service quality was developed by Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry in 1985, and classifies five diverse gaps as follows:

- The Customer Gap

This gap deals with the gap between expectations and perceptions. Expectations are affected by family lifestyles, personality, demographics, cultural backgrounds, and advertisement. Perceptions are subjective based on customers' interactions with products. Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry (1985) said that perceptions come from consumers' satisfaction with the product and service quality. The customer gap is the key gap in the ideal world. Businesses need to have a customer-oriented strategy to understand their target markets then allow information on the market to inform products and service quality. Understanding customers' needs help to close the service quality gaps (Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry in 1985).

- “The Knowledge Gap”

This is the gap between what customers expect and the organisation's perceptions of such customers' expectations. When this gap exists it means that managers have not correctly interpreted customers' expectations. Gaps in this context suggest that a company is pursuing either need that are incorrect or non-existing. The gap calls for the need to understand customers' service needs. Market research can help close the knowledge gap (Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry, 1985).

- The Policy Gap

This gap comes into existence when businesses fail to translate policy into practice by providing incorrect guidance to employees. This is, therefore, failure to translate policy into service quality delivery. This gap is mainly caused by poor service design and a dearth of standardisation. This gap can force customers to seek service from other service providers (Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry, 1985).

- Delivery Gap

This gap exposes the weaknesses of employees' work performance. The gap argues that some companies claim to offer certain service, but sometimes employees are not well trained to carry

out their expected work to deliver promised service. The gaps mean that employees are ill-trained or equipped to carry out services needed by customers. This gap results in several challenges; employees' lack of knowledge of the service or product; challenges in responding to customers' queries, poor human resource policy, and lack of cohesiveness among employees in carrying out their work resulting in poor service (Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry, 1985).

- The Communication Gap

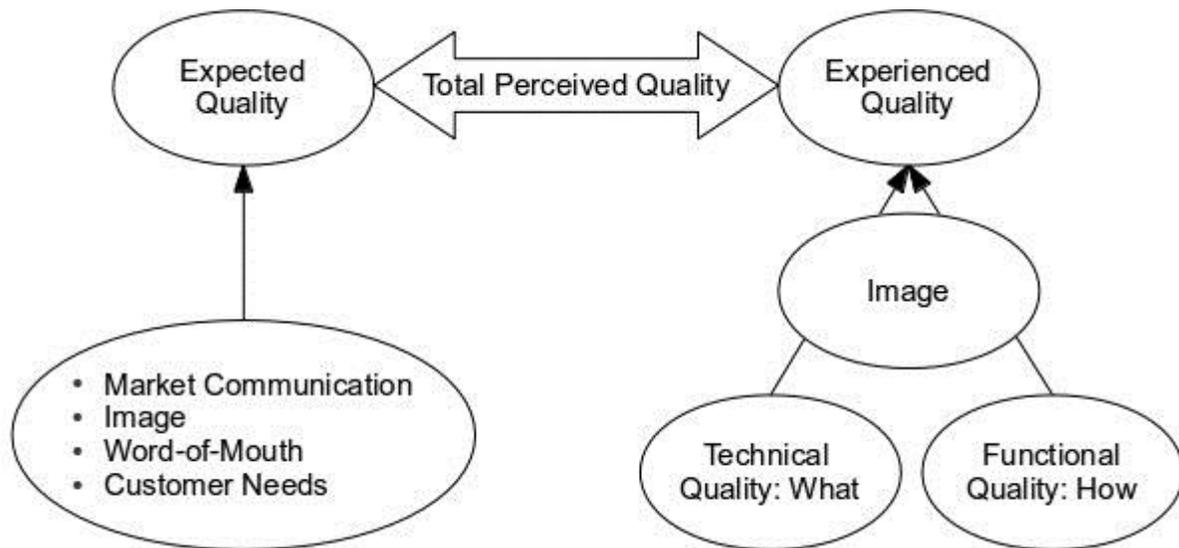
This gap explains that promises made by companies through different media such as newspaper, radio, television, online media, and others are sometimes not the services provided to customers. In other words, the services advertised do not match with the service provided. This has the potential to disappoint customers to seek the same service somewhere else (Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry, 1985).

Parasuraman, Zeithalm and Berry (1985) said that the Gap Model is one of the important bodies of knowledge explaining service quality practically and is used in this study.

## **2.14 THE NORDIC MODEL**

This model was developed in 1990 (Gronroos, 2010). The model explains that customers need to participate in service production and consumption. Service quality in this model is understood as the technical quality, which is real service provided by service providers and understood as technical which is the manner in which service is provided or delivered. The model explains that customers' expectations are influenced by the company's traditional actions that include place, price, promotion, and availability of the service. In addition, expectations are also influenced by external factors such as including ideologies, habits, political environment, and others. Both technical and functional quality have the influence of customers' expectations and experience (Gronroos, 2009).

Figure 2.4: “The Nordic Model for Service Quality”



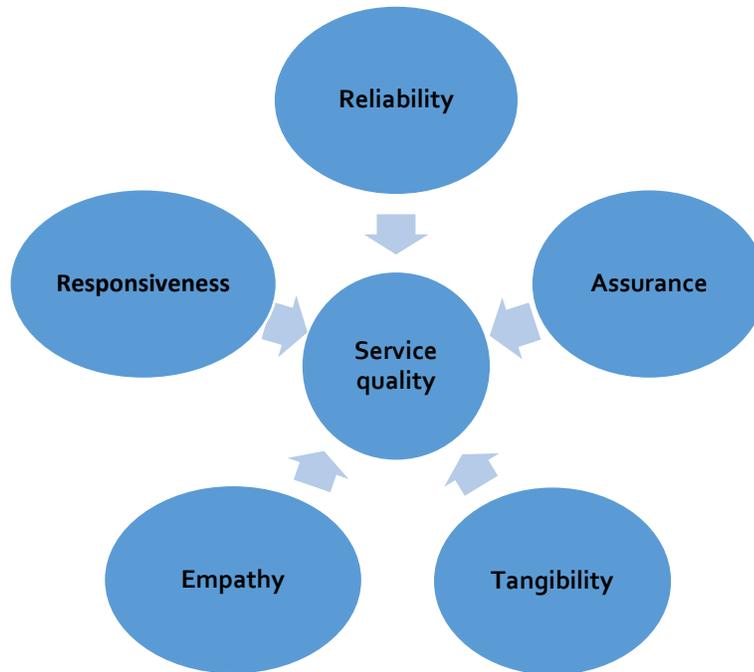
Source: Grönroos (2009, p.11)

This model is widely condemned for failing to explain the measurement of different technical and functional factors. This makes the model not be as popular as the RATER Model. In short, the model lacks practical measuring tools forced scholars of service quality to develop their own measurement tools to assess technical and functional factors of service quality (Gronroos, 2009).

## 2.15 RATER SERVICE MODEL

The RATER Model was developed in 1990 to measure service quality (Saurina and Coenders, 2002), and is illustrated and discussed hereunder.

Figure 2.5: RATER Model



**Source:** Parasuraman et al. (2002, p.10)

The developers of the RATER Model propose five dimensions that customers reflect on when ascertaining service quality, which is based on customer expectations and experiences, and is discussed below:

- **Reliability**

This construct refers to the ability of a business firm to deliver service to customers. Service delivered to customers should be service promised to customers (Leverin and Liljander, 2006). Martins *et al.* (2002) said that service quality is reliable when service delivered is dependable, accurate, and delivered on promised time.

- **Responsiveness**

Scholars (Malhorta, 2007; Petousis, 2008) argue that business firms should have employees who are willing to respond to the needs of customers. In other words, employees should not be forced to deliver the service needed to customers. Malhorta (2007) said that service quality entails

employees being able to provide prompt service. This means that employees should provide service when it is needed.

- **Tangibles**

This construct holds that service provided to customers must include having surroundings and equipment used looking good or appealing to customers. Therefore, physical items, personnel appearances, appearance of equipment, and appearances of material used in the communication processes should be appealing to customers (Malhorta, 2007).

- **Empathy**

Studies indicate that service quality should be service offered with care to customers. In agreement, Malhorta (2007) said that service quality involves providing service that makes customers feel a positive emotion of love or being cared of.

- **Assurance**

This is the ability of a service provider to respond to customers' concern. Malhorta (2007) said that the response to customers should be effective to be considered as assuring. In addition, customers should be provided with appropriate answers to address their concerns (Bae, 2012).

- **Experiences and Expectations**

Expectations are understood as customers' wants, needs, and desires in the service delivered to them (Bae, 2012). Two forms of expectations in service quality are; service delivered and service to be delivered (Malhorta, 2007). Experiences are understood as service delivered to customers as deduced by customers through interaction with the product or service. Experience is also understood as empirical knowledge of service delivered as interpreted by customers (Malhorta, 2007). In other words, the experience is first-hand sensing of the serviced delivered by the service providers.

## **2.16 REGULATIONS GUIDING LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

According to Basset (2016) argues that local government is an independent sphere of government whose responsibilities include providing service delivery and fostering socio-economic development. The enacting of the Municipal System Act in 2000 was the starting point for the Integrated Development Plan.

Ruwanza and Shackleton (2016) suggest that The Status Act of 1998 and the Municipal System of 2000 underscore the need for the local government to consult citizens on issues of budgeting and local development programmes. The Status Act of 1998 and the Municipal System of 2000 underscore the need for the local government to consult citizens on issues of budgeting and local development programmes.

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## **2.17 FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL MUNICIPALITIES**

Koelble and Siddle (2014) state that local government's function include rebuilding local environments and communities. Local government is also expected to promote democracy, integrated society, non-racial society, and work with different stakeholders including citizens, non-government organisations, and civil society to build sustainable communities.

Mbazira (2013) argues that that local government should meet people's social, economic and material needs. This should be done by implementing the IDP to provide service delivery and budgeting needed for development.

Koelble and Siddle (2014) referring to Section 152 of the constitution of the Republic of South Africa said that local government should be accountable, democratic, and render service delivery, socio-economic development, health and safe environment. In addition, the government should promote community participation in local economic development.

Therefore, the constitution of South Africa provides that the municipalities should plan, budget, manage and put in place structures to prioritise efforts to meet people's basic needs. In addition, municipalities are expected to take part in provincial and national programmes.

## **2.18 RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Bassett (2016) states that it is the local government's responsibility to educate the public on budgeting to be aware of the resources available for local development. According to Mbazira (2013), local government should educate the public revenue generation such as rates and taxes. Councillors should also interact with communities to share views on local development.

Khale & Worku (2013) argues that local government should engage in urban and rural planning and deal with environmental issues, and the challenge of water and waste disposal. Mbazira (2013) added his voice that local government should listen to local people, promote public service culture, accountability, and information sharing on local development. In addition, the government should provide measurable targets and goals for local development, and quality service delivery that brings value to money. In agreement, Kim (2006) states that local government should promote health, safety and citizen participation local led development. This should be complemented by local government participation in public programmes and services as well as promoting quality service quality.

## **2.19 LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND SERVICE DELIVERY**

Moletsane (2012:45) local government should invest in employee development to promote service quality delivery. In addition, local government should promote decentralisation, share power with the public and promote political stability. Monkam (2014) local government should ensure that government officers are brought close to the public they serve and promote accountability.

Waeraas *et al.* (2015) state that local government should tailor service delivery; water, electricity, roads, and others according to the needs of the people. Mbazira (2013) claims that the Municipal Systems Act argues that local government should have core principles, mechanisms and processes that can help local government move towards socio-economic development. In addition, the local government should provide affordable service delivery as well as train the public on service delivery and credit as a way of taking care of poor people.

## **2.20 SERVICE QUALITY IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT**

Musenze *et al.* (2014) said that there is a need for local government to understand citizens' needs, demands and preferences if service delivery is to be effective. It is also the duty of the local government to take municipalities to high levels of service quality delivery, satisfy public needs, encourage the public to be active in demanding for quality and ensuring that there is even flow of information between local government and the public ( Mbazira, 2013).

## **2.21 CHALLENGES FACING SOUTH AFRICAN MUNICIPALITIES**

According to Monkam (2014), South African municipalities are facing a litany of challenges including dissatisfaction of service provided, service delivery backlog and poor financial management. Khale & Worku (2013) found that corruption, poor capacity and lack of trust in government to be among the challenges faced by municipalities. Waeraas *et al.* (2015) found that current municipalities are battling with the issue of negative population growth, ageing population, and migration making it difficult for municipalities to provide service needed. Hefetz *et al.* (2014) argue that there is a dearth of microeconomic models, therefore, there is no inclusive economic development. Besides, Waeraas *et al.* (2015) said that many municipalities have dysfunctional councils, poor government to government oversight and support, and poor performance management.

## **2.22 SUMMARY**

This study interrogates citizens' expectations and perceptions of service. This chapter dealt with the definitions of service, quality, and service quality. The service quality models are discussed including the model underpinning the study. The critical aspects such as the status of local government were discussed in order to understand how local government operates to make it easy to evaluate service quality delivery. The chapter also covered the phenomenon such as regulations guiding local government, functions of local municipalities, responsibilities of local government, Local government and service delivery as well as challenges facing South African municipalities are discussed. The next chapter discusses the research methodology employed in this study.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

#### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter deals with the research methodology used to conduct the research paper by presenting the research design, research methods, study area, the target population and the whole population. The chapter also presents techniques used to select respondents, and size, as well as the data collection instruments employed in the study. The chapter presents measures of validity and reliability followed by data analysis techniques, ethical issues for consideration, and conclusion to the chapter.

#### **3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN**

A research design is essentially a comprehensive research plan on how a study is going to be implemented. A research design is important because it enables the research process to generate valid results because of the clear path of the study outlined. Data collected is able to answer research questions and achieve the research objectives. Therefore, a research design helps in understanding the research problem being studied (Creswell, 2014).

Yin (2009) argues that an exploratory research design used when very little is known about the research problem was used in this study. The design is effective studying a phenomenon that is not well known because of a dearth of research on the phenomenon which is the case in this study. The exploratory research design was chosen for this research as there is little known on the factors of service quality at Impendle Local Municipality. The use of an exploratory research design will yield insight into the most important service quality factors at Impendle Local Municipality. The exploratory research design was to come up with a comprehensive insight into service quality at Impendle Local Municipality.

#### **3.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Researchers mainly use quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods to conduct research (Yin, 2009). The methodology is a procedure on how data is collected, analysed and interpreted.

Decisions pertaining to methodology are informed by the nature of the phenomenon under study. This research paper utilised a quantitative research methodology that quantifies a research problem. Data collected using quantitative research methodology is numerical in nature. In other words, data collected is translated into statistics and is able to measure including behaviour, beliefs, views, and opinions (Morgan, 2007).

Warfield (2010) suggested that quantitative research involves the collection of data so that information can be quantified and subjected to statistical instrument in order to support or refute alternative knowledge. A quantitative methodology was utilised to study service quality at Impendle Local Municipality. The quantitative research methodology was employed to reveal patterns and generate facts about citizens' expectations and experiences with services quality rendered by Impendle Local Municipality. The study intends to provide a direction for Impendle Local Municipality administration in helping to identify areas for the improvement and enhancement of service quality as rendered to its citizens.

### **3.4 STUDY SITE**

This study was conducted at Impendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal. The Municipality is in UMgungundlovu District of KwaZulu-Natal in South Africa. The total population of Impendle Municipality is approximately 33 105. The Impendle area is diverse in its topography with a rich and complex natural environment (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

### **3.5 POPULATION AND TARGET POPULATION**

The target population for this study was the community members of the Impendle Local Municipality aged 21 and above who are the heads or acting heads of households within Impendle municipality.

### **3.6 SAMPLING METHODS**

Sampling is a process of selecting a small portion of units or subjects from the large population to be part of the study (Yin, 2006). There are two types of sampling methods; the probability that

uses random sampling technique and non-probability that uses the judgment of the researcher to select respondents.

Stratified sampling is used by the researcher to divide the target population into groups from which respondents are selected using simple random selection. This approach was used in generating a sample that was a close reflection of the population of Impendle Local Municipality.

Impendle Local Municipality was chosen for convenience purposes due to the researcher being based in Pietermaritzburg. Three strata were Batlokoa/Impendle, Kwa-Nxamalala, and Polela/other in Impendle Local Municipality. “Random Number Generator” which is a special computer-based software, was used to randomly select numbers from the three strata that were allocated randomly and exclusively to each household of each area (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2012).

### **3.8 SAMPLE SIZE**

Random sampling method was used to select respondents from the three areas outlined in Table 3.1 of the entire population of households at Impendle Local Municipality. Proportionally, 60% of households were selected from Batlokoa/Impendle, 30% from Kwa-Nxamalala and 10% from Polela/others. Taking into account the total number of respondents needed (240), the Random Number Generator proportionally selected 120 households from Batlokoa/Impendle, 80 from Kwa-Nxamalala, and 40 from Polela/others. See Table 3.1

Table 3.1: Sample Size

<b>Areas</b>	<b>Households selected</b>
Batlokoa/Impendle	120
Kwa-Nxamalala	80
Polela/others	40
Total	240

The researcher contacted all 240 prospective respondents through the phone as they had characteristics needed to participate in the study. The Consent Letter and questionnaires were distributed to prospective respondents. Participants were asked to sign the consent letter and complete the questionnaire. Completed questionnaires were assessed for completeness and quality. To accomplish credibility, the sample size should be representative of the whole population, therefore, the respondents who failed to complete and return the questionnaires within two weeks were replaced with other respondents employing the 'Random Number Generator'. The researcher's aim was to achieve a 95% confidence level, or, a 5% margin of error. Two hundred and forty respondents were selected.

### **3.9 DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENT**

Data was collected using questionnaires which was adopted from (Mbonambi, 2016).

#### **3.9.1 Questionnaire**

A questionnaire made up a series of questions on the research problem and contains prompt questions was used for conducting data collection. The questionnaire was used for a number of reasons; easy to use, easy to analyse, and easy to collect data from a vast population. Besides, the questionnaire is affordable and less demanding to administer to respondents.

#### **3.9.2 Development of the Questionnaire**

The RATER Model was used to design a questionnaire. The questionnaire measured the gap between expectations and experiences of service quality. Experiences that were below expectations were taken as negative scores and experiences above expectations were taken as positive scores. The questionnaire evaluated service quality at Impendle Local Municipality using citizens. The questionnaire was also translated into isiZulu. The questionnaire had four sections:

- **Section A: Biographical data**

The questionnaire collected data on gender, age, race, education, income, employment status) as well as other issues.

- **Section B: Expectations**

Data was collected on the expectations of service quality of customers at Impendle Local Municipality focusing on the reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and responsiveness of service quality provided to citizens. A five-point Likert scale was used.

- **Section C: Experiences**

Data was collected on the experiences of service quality by citizens at Impendle Local Municipality. The questionnaire was informed by the five RATER Model constructs of service quality delivered. A five-point Likert scale was used. The items in the questionnaire identified factors contributing to service quality at Impendle Local Municipality.

### **3.10 RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY OF THE STUDY**

Data control measures used were validity and reliability.

#### **3.10.1 Validity**

Validity was used to measure constructs under study. In particular, content validity was used to ensure that the questionnaire used was able to cover all factors under study. Therefore, content validity was used to cover expectations and experience of service quality focusing on reliability, assurance, tangibility, empathy and responsiveness as proposed by the RATER Model underpinning the study.

#### **3.10.2 Reliability**

This measure was used to ensure that there is consistency of measure of expectations and experiences of service quality. Six citizens participated in the pilot study and helped refine the

research process and questionnaire. Test-retest and observe reliability were used to realise reliability required in the study.

### **3.11 DATA ANALYSIS**

Data analysis involves inspecting, cleaning, transforming, and the modelling of data. The aim of data analysis is to discover valuable information (Morgan, 2006) through conclusions that are proposed and reported (Creswell and Clark, 2009).

#### **3.11.1 Quantitative data**

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (Version Windows 23.1) was used to analyse data. The research objectives underpinning the study determined the measures used. Tests were done on several dependent and independent variables.

### **3.12 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The ethics policy of UKZN was followed. The nature of the study was communicated to respondents, and their voluntary participation was highlighted. The researcher ensured that anonymity, confidentiality and privacy, and respondents' rights to withdraw at any time from the study were upheld. The questionnaire was only distributed after the UKZN's ethics committee together with a gatekeeper's letter were received from Impendle Local Municipality.

### **3.13 SUMMARY**

The chapter assessed methods used to study service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality, South Africa. Presented in this chapter include the research design and methodology. The chapter also presents the study site and the target population. The study also presented the sampling methods, sample and sample size. The questionnaire used, data analysis issues and ethical considerations are also dealt with in this chapter. The following chapter deals with data presentation and analysis.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS**

#### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter deals with the research findings of this study. Section one is a summary of the research process. Section two is a recap of the research objectives. Section three deals with five key findings on reliability, responsiveness, tangibility, assurance, and empathy. Section four summarises the chapter.

#### **4.2 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

- To understand the quality of service delivery expected by the citizens at Impendle Local Municipality.
- To establish the quality of service delivery experienced by the citizens at Impendle Local Municipality.
- To ascertain the gap in service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality.

#### **4.3 A RECAP OF THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

The ethical clearance was obtained from the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN) Ethics Committee. Impendle Local Municipality provided the gatekeeper's letter. The study upheld research ethics including human rights, privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity. A questionnaire was used to collect data with 21 items of the RATER Model. The questionnaire dealt with the biographical data, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibility. Two hundred and forty (240) questionnaires were successfully completed and collected. The study realised a hundred per cent response rate.

#### 4.4 RELIABILITY

The Cronbach's alpha score for all the items studied in the questionnaire are in the table below. The SPSS (Version 24.1) was used to analyse data collected using a RATER Model questionnaire. The study realised 0.70 or higher reliability coefficient. Findings are presented using descriptive statistics by employing figures, tables, graphs, cross-tabulations, and others as it fits. Inferential analysis techniques are used mainly for chi-square and correlation.

**Table 4.1: The Cronbach's Alpha Scores for each Construct**

<p>Reliability Statistics Reliability</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th> <th>N of Items</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>.906</td> <td>6</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.906	6	<p>Reliability Statistics Assurance</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th> <th>N of Items</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>.885</td> <td>10</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.885	10
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<p>Reliability Statistics Tangibles</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th> <th>N of Items</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>.984</td> <td>4</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.984	4	<p>Reliability Statistics Empathy</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th> <th>N of Items</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>.734</td> <td>8</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.734	8
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<p>Reliability Statistics Responsiveness</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Cronbach's Alpha</th> <th>N of Items</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>.871</td> <td>5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items	.871	5					
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items								
.871	5								

As presented in the table below, the reliability scores for all sections are above the recommended Cronbach's alpha. The Cronbach's alpha indicates that there is consistency in the scores of the sections and therefore acceptable in this study.

## 4.5. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

This section presents summaries of the socio-demographic data of respondents in this study.

### 4.5.1 Gender of the Respondents

Table 4.2 shows that out of 240 respondents, 128 (54.4%) were females and 112 (45.6%) were males.

**Table 4.2: Responses on Gender**

<b>Gender Status</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Male	112	45.6%
Female	128	54.4%
	<b>240</b>	<b>100%</b>

The findings indicate that data was collected from a sample that had an adequate representation of males and females.

### 4.5.2 Age of the Respondents

The findings indicate that 51.4% of the respondents were older than 31 years and those less than 30 years old accounted for 48.6%.

**Table 4.3: Responses on Age**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
21-30	114	48.6%
31-40	76	32.8%
41-50	50	18.6%
	<b>240</b>	<b>100%</b>

The findings show that the sample for the study compromised older people than young people because the total percentage of respondents aged between 31 and above was more than half. Therefore, data was collected from people who may have their own homes and with a better experience of service quality delivered by Impendle Local Municipality. The study also indicates that young people visit Impendle Local Municipality offices more than any given group in the sample. This may be attributed to the finding that the majority of people at Impendle Local Municipality are young people heading their own households (Statistics South Africa, 2016).

#### **4.5.3 Marital Status**

The findings show that the majority of the respondents reported being married 138 (58.6%) while 102 (41.4%) reported being single. This finding does not come as a surprise because people who are married may have families and therefore more concerned about service quality delivery, as a lack of it would disrupt their family life more than those that are single.

**Table 4.4: Marital Status**

<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>	<b>% of Respondents</b>
<b>Single</b>	102	41.4
<b>Married</b>	138	58.6
	<b>240</b>	<b>100%</b>

The finding that the majority of the respondents (58.6%) reported being married is in agreement with Statistics South Africa (2016) that found that rapid urbanisation and increase in families means more people are in need of service quality delivery in big cities such as Pietermaritzburg.

#### **4.5.4 Frequency of visiting Impendle Local Municipality offices**

The results indicate that 45.8% of the respondents visit Impendle Local Municipality offices two to three times a week, 40.3% visit once a week, 11.7% visit less than once a week, and 2.2% visit five times a week.

**Table 4.5: Frequency of visiting Impendle Local Municipality offices**

<b>Times</b>	<b>Count</b>	<b>%</b>
Barely once a week	28	11.7%
Once a week	94	40.3%
2-3 times a week	110	45.8%
4-5 times a week	8	2.2%
	<b>240</b>	<b>100%</b>

The findings reported above did not come as a surprise because Impendle Local Municipality is one of the local municipalities in UMgungundlovu District of KwaZulu-Natal experiencing an enormous rapid urbanisation that is putting pressure on service delivery. The finding is supported by Malabie (2009) who argues that 10 years ago, local municipalities in South Africa had less than half of the current service quality delivery complaints reported. The situation of rapid urbanisation is caused by a number of factors including internal and external migration into South African towns and cities (Roberts-Lombard and Du Plessis, 2012). Therefore, it is logical to argue that the high frequency of visiting the Municipality shows that people have many service delivery issues, and these issues cannot be resolved remotely.

#### **4.6 EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE IMPENDLE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

The study set out to understand Impendle Local Municipality customers' expectations of service quality delivery.

#### 4.6.1 Reliability of Service Quality

**Table 4.6: Reliability**

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
<b>Responds as promised</b>	0	0	0	7.1	92.9	100
<b>Service specification followed</b>	0	0	0	10.5	89.5	100
<b>Accurate statements</b>	0	0	0.4	16.3	83.3	100
<b>Municipality reports to be accurate</b>	0	0	0.4	13.8	85.8	100
<b>Service to be carried out correctly the first time</b>	0	0	0	13	87	100
<b>Consistently good service</b>	0	0	0	10.9	89.1	100

Six (6) questions were used to study assurance of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality. The study found that 92.9% of the respondents strongly agreed while 7.1% agreed achieving 100% response rate to the statement that responses should happen when promised ( $p < 0.001$ ) and that specific service requested should be provided (10.5%) and (89.5%) ( $p < 0.001$ ) respectively. Table 4.6 above shows that the same pattern of responses to the other statements reliability of service quality expected by citizens. The finding is supported by Tolpa (2012) who argues that customers expect service quality delivery that is accurate and dependable. The finding indicates that respondents are largely concerned about the outcome of the service quality delivery and hence have higher service quality delivery expectations. Furthermore, this finding corroborates with that of Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009) who reported reliability as critical element of service quality delivery because the dimension is concerned about meeting customers' expectations than empathy, assurance, responsiveness and tangibility that are concerned with the process of providing service quality important in surpassing customers' expectations.

## 4.6.2 Assurance in Service Quality

**Table 4.7: Assurance**

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD (%)</b>	<b>D (%)</b>	<b>N (%)</b>	<b>A (%)</b>	<b>SA (%)</b>	<b>Total (%)</b>
<b>“Staff to provide service without fumbling”</b>	0	0	0	12.1	87.9	100
<b>“Staff to be courteous”</b>	0	0	0.8	19.3	79.9	100
<b>“The materials provided to be appropriate”</b>	0	0	0	12.6	87.4	100
<b>The materials provided to be up to date</b>	0	0	0	12.1	87.9	100
<b>“Staff to have the knowledge to use technology quickly”</b>	0	0	0	21.3	78.7	100
<b>“Staff to have the knowledge to use technology skilfully”</b>	0	0	0	17.6	82.4	100
<b>“Staff to have a good reputation”</b>	0	0	0	18.8	81.2	100
<b>“The responses given by staff to be accurate”</b>	0	0	0	13.8	86.2	100
<b>“The responses given by staff to be consistent”</b>	0	0	0	11.3	88.7	100
<b>“The materials used to be easily understood”</b>	0	0	0	11.7	88.3	100

Ten (10) questions helped to study the assurance of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality. The study found that 12.1% and 87.9% agreed and strongly therefore achieving 100% response rate to the statement that service should be delivered without fumbling ( $p < 0.001$ ), the study found that 10.5% agreed and 89.5% strongly agreed to the statement that materials used by the municipality should be appropriate ( $p < 0.001$ ). Table 4.7 above shows that the same pattern of data was found for the other statements on the expectations of the assurance of service quality. The finding resonates well with Jones and Taylor (2012)’s study that found that

customers expected service to be delivered by experts. Overall, the findings indicate that assurance of service quality is one of the key factors that influence citizens' service quality satisfaction at Impendle Local Municipality.

#### 4.6.3 Tangibility of Service Quality

**Table 4.8: Tangibility**

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Physical items to be appropriate</b>	0	0	0	5.4	94.6	100
<b>Modern technology is used</b>	0	0	0	8.4	91.6	100
<b>Neat facilities</b>	0	0	0	8.4	91.6	100
<b>Presentable staff</b>	0	0	0.4	4.6	95	

The study used four (4) statements to assess the tangibility of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality. The findings show that 5.4% of the respondents agree and 94.6% strongly agreed, therefore, achieving 100% response rate to view that physical facilities need to be customer appropriate ( $p < 0.001$ ). The study also found that 8.4% agreed and 91.6% strongly agreed with the view that technology used at the municipality should look modern ( $p < 0.001$ ). Table 4.8 above shows that the same pattern of data was found for the other statements on the expectations of the tangibility of service quality. The finding indicates that respondents are largely concerned about the appearance of the equipment used in service quality delivery. Though scholars (Egan, 2010; Palmer, 2011; Leonard and Sasser, 2012) argue that tangibility is the least important dimension of service quality delivery, customers the Municipality want attractive equipment.

#### 4.6.4 Empathy of Service Quality

**Table 4.9: Empathy**

<b>Item</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Staff to know citizens' specific objectives</b>	0	0	0	4.6	95.4	100
<b>Consistent service levels</b>	0	0	0	9.2	90.8	100
<b>Costs afford</b>	0	0	0.4	12.1	87.4	100
<b>Polite service providers</b>	0	0	0.8	15.9	83.3	100
<b>Respect for customers</b>	0	0	1.3	16.3	82.4	100
<b>Considerate staff</b>	0	0	2.5	17.6	79.9	100
<b>Staff to outline options of services</b>	0	0	0	10	90	100
<b>No jargons used</b>	0	0	0	12.1	87.9	100

Eight (8) statements helped to ascertain the empathy of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality. The data (see table 4.9) above shows that 4.5% agreed and 95.6% strongly agreed to the statement that staff at the municipality should be capable of determining the particular objectives of the citizens in the municipality ( $p < 0.001$ ). This pattern of responses is reflected in other statements studied. The findings can be interpreted to mean that Impendle Local Municipality customers expect caring and personalised attention service quality delivery. Tolpa (2011) in agreement argues that organisations could meet customers' needs for service quality if they provide customers with individual attention and make an effort to understand customer' specific needs.

#### 4.6.5 Responsiveness of Service Quality

**Table 4.10: Responsiveness**

<b>Item</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Quickly way of solving issues</b>	0	0	0.4	3.8	95.8	100
<b>Staff answering questions</b>	0	0	0.4	10.9	88.7	100
<b>Knowledgeable staff</b>	0	0	0	10	90	100
<b>Service access points easy to find</b>	0	0.4	0.4	12.1	87	100
<b>completing in time</b>	0	0	0	7.1	92.9	100

Five (5) questions were used to study the responsiveness of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality as shown in Table 4.10. The findings show that 7.1% agreed and 92.9% strongly agreed achieving 100% with the statement that specific times for winding up work should be stated. In addition, the study found that 10% agreed and 90% strongly agreed to the statement that staff at the municipality should be knowledgeable ( $p < 0.001$ ), and a similar pattern of findings are presented in the table above. The finding implies that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality want service providers whose response is quick, prompt and instant. Carman (2010) added his voice by stating that responsiveness in service quality delivery accounts for one-fifth of customers' service quality delivery assessment (see also Beytell, 2010).

#### **4.7 EXPERIENCES OF SERVICE QUALITY AT THE IMPENDLE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

The research objective was to ascertain customers' experience of service quality delivered by Impendle Local Municipality.

#### 4.7.1 Reliability of Service Quality

**Table 4.11: Reliability**

Item	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
<b>Responses happen as promised</b>	41.4	57.7	0	0.9	0	100
<b>Specifications are followed</b>	40.2	59	0	0.4	0.4	100
<b>Municipality statements are accurate</b>	32.6	61.5	4.6	1.3	0	100
<b>Municipality reports are accurate</b>	31.8	62.3	5	0.9	0	100
<b>Service carried out correctly at the first time</b>	34.3	64.5	0.4	0.4	0.4	100
<b>There are consistently good level of service</b>	32.2	66.2	0.8	0.8	0	100

Six statements were used to investigate citizens' experience of the reliability of service quality. The number of respondents who disagree or strongly disagree with the statements employed to assess reliability was high. For example, the data shows that the majority of the respondents disagreed to the statement that responses happen at the time promised (99.1%);  $p < 0.001$ ; exact requests are taken into account (99.2%);  $p < 0.001$ ). The same pattern of findings is reported on the remaining statements on the citizens' experiences of the reliability of service quality. This is to say that the Municipality is failing to provide service quality delivery promised to customers. This finding is reinforced by Isac and Rusu (2014) who stated that customers want service providers they can count on to provide what they promise their customers. Kumar and Reinartz (2012:2) argue that it is three times more desirable to customers to have reliable service quality than to have employees looking neat or have shiny and new equipment.

#### 4.7.2 Assurance Service Quality

**Table 4.12: Assurance**

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
<b>Service without fumbling</b>	32.2	65.3	1.7	0.4	0.4	100
<b>Courteous</b>	21.3	61.5	10.9	6.3	0	100
<b>Appropriate material</b>	19.2	60.7	1.7	18	0.4	100
<b>Use technology fast</b>	17.2	61.9	12.6	8.3	0	100
<b>Use technology skilfully</b>	15.9	63.6	10	10.5	0	100
<b>Municipality have a good reputation</b>	16.3	67.8	6.7	9.2	0	100

<b>Accurate responses</b>	20.5	74.9	2.9	1.3	0.4	100
<b>Consistent responses</b>	27.6	70.3	1.3	0.8	0	100
<b>Easily understand materials used</b>	18	74.4	3.8	3.8	0	100

Nine questions were used to investigate citizens' experience of the assurance of service quality delivered. The data show a common pattern where the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statements employed to explore the experience of the assurance of the service quality provided. The study found that 97.9%;  $p < 0.001$  disagreed that the service is consistent, 92.4%;  $p < 0.001$  that materials used at the municipality are easy to understand, 95.4%;  $p < 0.001$  that responses from staff are accurate. The remaining six statements (see Table 4.12) shows a similar trend. In other words, the findings show that customers' experiences of the assurance of the service quality delivered do not convey trust, instil confidence, and make customers feel that employees are courteous and knowledgeable. This finding is supported by Beytell (2010)'s views that when service providers fail to exhibit knowledge and courtesy they undermine their own ability to inspire confidence and trust in customers.

#### 4.7.3 Tangibility of Service Quality

**Table 4.13: Tangibility**

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Suitable facilities</b>	2.5	50.2	4.2	37.2	5.9	100
<b>Modern technology</b>	2.5	51	5.4	30.5	10.5	100
<b>Neat facilities</b>	3.8	49.8	7.1	32.2	7.1	100
<b>Neat/presentable staff</b>	2.5	51.5	5.4	33.5	7.1	100

The study used four questions to assess the experience of the tangibility of service quality. There was no significant difference on statements on the tangibility of the service at Impendle Local Municipality. The study found that 52.7% disagreed while 43.1% agreed to the same statement on the experiences of the assurance of service quality. The study shows that 52.6% disagreed and 41% disagreed to the statement that technology at the municipality appears modern respectively. A similar pattern on findings is reported in Table 4.13 on statements on the experiences of the tangibility of service quality. Therefore, the staff at Impendle Local Municipality seem to be making an effort to look attractive but failing in other aspects of service quality delivery that as well influence citizens' experience of the tangibility of the service quality delivery. In support of

the findings, Hsu (2016) argues that for customers to have high tangible service quality delivery there is a need for service providers to focus on communication materials, physical facilities, equipment and personnel. The view above is also reinforced by Beytell (2010) who said that the form of physical facilities, employees, communication assets, and tools are among the issues that customers expect from the service providers that lead to assessing service as of expected quality.

#### 4.7.4 Empathy Service Quality

**Table 4.14: Empathy**

<b>Items</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Staff determine specific objectives</b>	34.3	63.2	0.8	1.7	0	100
<b>There is consistent service</b>	33.5	65.3	0.4	0.8	0	100
<b>Cost is affordable</b>	25.9	72.4	1.3	0.4	0	100
<b>“Staff are polite”</b>	8.8	62.8	12.6	15.8	0	100
<b>“Staff show respect”</b>	8.4	66.5	15.9	8.8	0.4	100
<b>“Staff are considerate”</b>	9.6	68.2	13.4	8.4	0.4	100
<b>Staff are clear in their explanations</b>	21.8	72.8	3.3	1.7	0.4	100
<b>No jargon used</b>	15.1	77	5	2.9	0	100

Eight questions were used to assess the experience of empathy. The data presented shows that the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with all statements used to assess empathy. The study for example, found that 94.6%;  $p < 0.001$  of the respondents disagreed to the statement that staff are able to clearly explain the various options of service available. 92.1%;  $p < 0.001$  disagreed that staff avoid using technical jargon when speaking, and 98.3%;  $p < 0.001$  disagreed that cost is affordable. Table 4.14 above shows a similar pattern for the other five statements on the experiences of the assurance of service quality. The findings imply that empathy in the service quality delivered is not impressive to customers especially in the area of providing personalised service and being caring to customers. The finding ties well with Kaura and Datta (2012)’s finding that it is possible for customers to feel that their service provider does not care about them that may negatively affect how customers evaluate service delivered to them.

#### 4.7.5 Responsiveness of Service Quality

**Table 4.15: Responsiveness**

Items	SD	D	N	A	SA	Total
<b>Staff respond quickly</b>	33.5	63.6	1.7	0.8	0.4	100
<b>Willingness to answer questions</b>	28.9	66.1	2.9	1.7	0.4	100
<b>Staff are knowledgeable</b>	36.8	61.6	0.8	0.4	0.4	100
<b>Conveniently access points</b>	29.7	68.6	0.4	0.8	0.4	100
<b>tasks completed on time</b>	32.6	65.8	0.8	0.4	0.4	100

Five questions assessed the experience of the responsiveness of service quality. Majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with all the statements used to study the responsiveness of service quality. The data shows that the majority of the respondents disagreed to the statement that service access points are conveniently located 98.3%;  $p < 0.001$ , specific times for completing tasks are given 98.4%;  $p < 0.001$ . Table 4.15 above shows that the same pattern of data was found for the other three statements on the experiences of the empathy of service quality. Deducing from the findings presented above, Impendle Local Municipality is making an effort to provide service quality that is responsive. However, there is a need for the municipality to do more in the area of indicating exactly when customers would get the service they need, ensure that customers get prompt service, and employees should be willing to provide service. A study by Beytell (2010) in agreement argued that customers' happiness is critical otherwise an organisation risks losing clients. Therefore, it is important for organisations to be responsive by providing prompt service quality such as addressing customers' inquiries to increase their satisfaction. When customers are provided with responsive service, problems and service issues will decrease (Chan et al., 2014).

#### **4.8 GAP ANALYSIS OF EXPERIENCES AND EXPECTATIONS OF CUSTOMERS AT IMPENDLE LOCAL MUNICIPALITY**

The study set out to understand the gaps of service quality delivered at Impendle Local Municipality. The largest gap was -3.2 in the reliability of service quality while the least gap was -2.02 in the tangibility of service quality as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.16: Gap analysis of service quality**

Variables	Experiences Mean Score	Expectations Mean Score	Gap	SD	SE	<i>t</i> – value
<b>Reliability</b>	1.68	4.88	-3.2	3.55	0.23	13.9373*
<b>Assurance</b>	1.97	4.85	-2.88	6.48	0.42	6.848*
<b>Tangibles</b>	2.92	4.94	-2.02	1.31	0.08	23.8404*
<b>Empathy</b>	1.98	4.86	-2.88	4.9	0.32	9.1196*
<b>Responsiveness</b>	1.73	4.90	-3.17	2.76	0.18	17.8151*

\* $p < 0.05$

#### **4.8.1 Reliability of Service Quality**

The scores on expectations of the reliability service quality ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 3.55$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of experience of reliability ( $M = 1.68$ ,  $SD = 0.23$ ),  $t=13.9373^*$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Furthermore, the findings show that the reliability of the service quality was the largest service quality delivery gap score. In short, the Municipality is struggling to deliver service quality promised to customers. In Egan (2010)'s view, it means that the Municipality is not able to carry out services to citizens dependably. The finding is highlighted by Ekinchi (2008) who found that customers want to deal with service providers able to carry out promises of service accurately and dependably. Grönroos (2009) added his voice by saying that customers want to engage in a transaction with service providers whose service upholds the promised service attributes and outcomes.

#### **4.8.2 Responsiveness of Service Quality**

The findings show that the scores on expectations of reliability ( $M = 4.90$ ,  $SD = 2.76$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of experience of reliability ( $M = 1.73$ ,  $SD = 0.18$ ),  $t=17.811^*$ ,  $p < 0.001$ . Responsiveness of service quality was the second largest service delivery gap score. The findings imply that employees at Impendle Local Municipality seem not to be willing to provide service promised and are not prompt in their service quality delivery. Malhotra (2007)

said that it is difficult to provide responsive service quality to customers when service delivery employees are failing to be attentive and prompt when responding to customers' questions, requests or complaints. Mokhlis (2012) suggests that to have a responsive service delivery, service providers should customise their services and be flexible to meet customers' needs.

#### **4.8.3 Assurance of Service Quality**

The findings show that the scores on expectations of reliability ( $M = 4.85$ ,  $SD = 6.48$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of experience of reliability ( $M = 1.97$ ,  $SD = 0.42$ ),  $t=6.848^*$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and the third largest score gap of service quality. The findings, therefore, can be understood to mean that the Municipality's service delivery is lacking in terms of courtesy and instilling confidence and trust in customers. A study by Peelen (2005) argues that the assurance of service quality is important especially in municipalities where people tend to be violent in protesting poor service delivery, in addition to being difficult to assess.

#### **4.8.4 Empathy of Service Quality**

The findings show that the scores on expectations of reliability ( $M = 4.86$ ,  $SD = 4.9$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of experience of reliability ( $M = 1.98$ ,  $SD = 0.32$ ),  $t=9.1196^*$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and the fourth largest score gap of service quality. The findings imply that the Municipality is failing to deliver caring and personalised service quality desired by customers. A study by Sattari (2007) reinforces this finding by stating that it is important for service providers to deliver individualised services as this helps to satisfy customers' desires and needs. Read (2009) also said that empathy should be part of service quality delivery as it plays an important role in enhancing customers' loyalty, confidence and trust.

#### **4.8.5 Tangibility of Service Quality**

The findings show that the scores on expectations of reliability ( $M = 4.94$ ,  $SD = 1.31$ ) were significantly higher than the scores of experience of reliability ( $M = 2.92$ ,  $SD = 0.08$ ),  $t=23.8404^*$ ,  $p < 0.001$  and the fifth largest or smallest score gap of service quality. The finding shows that customers find the equipment at the Municipality to be old therefore there is a need to have modern looking equipment. However, scholars (Egan, 2010; Palmer, 2011; Leonard and Sasser, 2012) argue that tangibility is the least important dimension of service quality delivery.

In spite of this, it is important to ensure that municipalities have attractive equipment because good appearances have an influence on customers' experience and the opposite is also true as depicted in the gap above.

In summary, the findings show that there is as a statistically significant difference between the mean scores of expectations and experiences of municipal services. The study ascertains that service provided by the Impendle Local Municipality does not meet the desires of the customers as shown in the table below.

**Table 4.17: Gap summary analysis of service quality**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Experiences Mean Scores</b>	<b>Expectations Mean Scores</b>	<b>Gap</b>
<b>Reliability</b>	1.68	4.88	-3.2
<b>Assurance</b>	1.97	4.85	-2.88
<b>Tangibles</b>	2.92	4.94	-2.02
<b>Empathy</b>	1.98	4.86	-2.88
<b>Responsiveness</b>	1.73	4.90	-3.17

In short, the actual service quality provided by the Impendle Local Municipality is falling short of what customers expect. The Impendle Local Municipality needs to take note that customers employ their expectations or desired services as reference points against which they judge the Impendle Local Municipality service quality. In addition, the findings indicate that customers and the Impendle Local Municipality have different expectations for service performance, this explains why service quality provided fails to meet customers' expectations.

The Impendle Local Municipality, therefore, has a challenge of putting in place measures to continuously and accurately measure and understand customers' expectations to have a competitive advantage. The Impendle Local Municipality's inability to understand the service quality expected by customers may trigger protests, and the municipality may lose credibility. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009) argue that when service providers' fail to meet customers desires it means that the organisation is failing in its mandate and may force customers to seek the same service somewhere else.

The findings show that the reliability of service quality exhibits the largest gap score and the tangibility of service quality the smallest gap score as demonstrated in the figure below.

**Figure 4.1: Largest and smallest score gap**



The findings imply that the poorest service is in terms of the Municipality's lack of ability to perform the promised service dependably while doing well in terms of the appearance of equipment, appearance of employees and physical facilities.

#### **4.9 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter presented and discussed the findings. Section one outlined the research process, section two presented the research objectives, section three key five findings on the expectation of the service quality on reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy, reliability and tangibility. Section four presents the key five findings on the experiences of the service quality. Section five deals with findings on the gap score of service quality. The smallest and largest service quality gap score is highlighted. The next chapter concludes the study based on its results in relation to the research objectives and makes recommendations.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

#### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations generated from the findings. The conclusions and recommendations are emanating from the key findings on the empathy, tangibility, responsiveness, empathy, assurance, and reliability of service quality delivered by Impendle Local Municipality. A chapter summary winds up the chapter.

#### **5.2 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON THE RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The section presents conclusions and recommendations based on the key findings.

##### **5.2.1 Customers' Expectations of Service Quality**

###### **5.2.1.1 Reliability**

The study found that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality had very high expectations of the reliability of service quality. The findings indicate that 7.1% agreed and 92.9% strongly agreed with the statement that responses should happen when promised ( $p < 0.001$ ) therefore achieving 100% response rates, and the same pattern of findings was observed for other statements. It is therefore sensible to conclude that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality expect high service quality delivery. Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremler (2009) argue that reliability is the most valued dimension of service quality delivery because the dimension is concerned about meeting customers' expectations.

###### **5.2.1.2 Assurance**

The assurance of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality achieved 100% rate response for both respondents who agreed (12.1%) and strongly agreed (87.9%) with the statement that staff should provide service without fumbling ( $p < 0.001$ ), and the same pattern of findings was found for the other statements on the expectations of the assurance of service quality. The finding,

therefore, suggests that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality expect high service quality to be delivered by experts. Carman (2010), in support of the findings, explained that service quality is incomplete if service providers do not exhibit knowledge and courtesy towards customers and fail to convey confidence and trust.

### **5.2.1.3 Tangibility**

The study found very high expectations of the tangibility of service quality at the Impendle Local Municipality. For example, 5.4% of the respondents agreed, and 94.6% strongly agreed with the statement that physical facilities should be suitable ( $p < 0.001$ ) achieving 100% response rate, 8.4% agreed, and 91.6% strongly agreed with the statement that technology should look modern ( $p < 0.001$ ), and a similar trend of findings was found for the other statements. It is therefore rational to conclude that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality expect to be provided service using appealing physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communication materials.

### **5.2.1.4 Empathy**

The findings show that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality have very high expectations of the empathy of service quality. For example, 4.5% agreed and 95.6% strongly agreed to the statement that staff should be able to determine customers' specific objectives ( $p < 0.001$ ) and the same trend was observed for the other findings on empathy. The conclusion can, therefore, be drawn that customers at the Impendle Local Municipality have very high expectations of the empathy of service quality. Tolpa (2011) in agreement argues that customers want service providers who are caring, and able to provide personalised attention to them.

### **5.2.1.5 Responsiveness**

The study found that 100% response rate for both respondents who agreed (7.1%) and strongly agreed (92.9%) with the statement that specific times for completing tasks should be given, 10% agreed and 90% strongly agreed with the statement that staff should be able knowledgeable ( $p < 0.001$ ). The similar trend was observed with regards to other dimensions of the expected responsiveness of service quality. The findings imply that the Impendle Local Municipality customers have high hopes of how quick, prompt and instant the service quality at the Municipality should be. In agreement to the findings above, Carman (2010) said that

customers desire to transact with service providers that are willing to assist them and delivery to them prompt service (see also Beytell, 2010).

## **5.2.2 Experiences of Service Quality at the Impendle Local Municipality**

The research objective was to ascertain customers' experience of service quality delivered by Impendle Local Municipality.

### **5.2.2.1 Reliability**

Findings indicate that the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with all statements used to assess reliability. This can be seen in the findings that the majority of the respondents disagreed to the statement that responses happen at the time promised (99.1%);  $p < 0.001$ ; disagreed to the statement that specifications of service quality are followed (99.2%);  $p < 0.001$ , and the rest of the statements. The conclusion to these findings is that the Municipality is failing to provide service quality delivery promised to their customers. This finding is supported by Isac and Rusu (2014), who stated that customers' service quality desires are not met when a firm fails to perform the promised service dependably and accurately.

### **5.2.2.2 Assurance**

The study found customers' experience of the assurance of service quality provided to be low. For example, the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with all statements used to assess assurance such as responses given by staff are consistent 97.9%;  $p < 0.001$ , materials used are easy to understand 92.4%;  $p < 0.001$ , and the same trend was observed for other items. The findings imply that the Municipality is failing to meet customers' desired service quality on assurance. In other words, the Municipality is failing to convey trust, instil confidence, and make customers feel that staff are knowledgeable and courteous. In agreement, Beytell (2010) explained that when firms fail to exhibit knowledge and courtesy and fail to convey trust and confidence in their services, it means that they are failing in their service quality.

### **5.2.2.3 Tangibility**

The findings show that the tangibility of service quality at Impendle Local Municipality is swinging from being positive and negative. For example, findings show that 52.7% disagreed to the statement that facilities are suitable, 43.1% agreed to the same statement, and 3.2% were

neutral. The same pattern of findings was observed for the other statements on the experiences of the tangibility of service quality. The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings is that the Impendle Local Municipality is trying to have appealing communication materials, personnel, equipment, and physical facilities.

#### **5.2.2.4 Empathy**

The findings show low experiences of the empathy of service quality because the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with all statements used to assess empathy. The majority of the respondents disagreed to the statement that staff are able to clearly explain to the various options of service available 94.6%;  $p < 0.001$ , and the same pattern of findings was found for the other statements. The logical conclusion to this finding is that empathy in the service quality delivered is very low. Kaura and Datta (2012) argue that when the service provided does not make customers feel cared for it negatively affect how customers assess service delivered to them.

#### **5.2.2.5 Responsiveness**

The study found very low experience of the responsiveness of service quality. Findings show that the majority of the respondents disagree or strongly disagree with the statement that service access points are conveniently located 98.3%;  $p < 0.001$ , specific times for completing tasks are given 98.4%;  $p < 0.001$ , and other statements. This means that staff at the Impendle Local Municipality are not able to provide prompt service and help customers as desired by customers. In agreement, Chan *et al.* (2014) argued that when customers get low responsive service quality, it means that they are not getting the service quality they desire.

### **5.2.3 Gap Analysis of Experiences and Expectations of Customers at Impendle Local Municipality**

#### **5.2.3.1 Tangibility**

The findings indicate that the best service quality delivery dimension to customers at Impendle Local Municipality was with regard to tangibility. The mean gap score was the smallest at -2.02 among the service quality dimensions. It is, therefore, logical to conclude that the Impendle Local Municipality has good appearing physical facilities. In support of the findings, Grönroos (2009)

argued that when customers' expectations of the tangibility of service quality delivery are met, it is an indication that the service providers' physical representation of the service meets the aspirations of the customers. This is because customers use tangibles to evaluate quality service delivery and the opposite is true. There is a need for the management at Impendle Local Municipality to channel their resources to improving their equipment and put in place measures to ensure that facilities are well maintained and become visually appealing to customers.

### **5.2.3.2 Empathy**

The study found a mean gap score of -2.88 in relation to the empathy of the service quality delivery. The findings indicate that the empathy gap score was the second smallest gap score among the service quality dimensions. The implication of the finding is that the municipality is not able to deliver individualised attention and care that customers expect. There is a need for the Municipality to have the best interest of their customers at heart and the ability of employees to understand customers' particular needs. Based on the findings, it is logical to recommend to the Municipality to invest resources to train employees in matters of empathy service quality delivery. The management at Impendle Local Municipality should promote a culture of empathy in service quality delivery as this is one of the sure ways of improving the quality of care and personalised attention in service quality delivery.

### **5.2.3.3 Assurance**

The assurance of the service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality is reported as the second best service quality dimension with a mean gap score of -2.88. Even then, findings indicate that the Municipality's service quality delivery is below customers' expectations especially in the area of employees exhibiting knowledge, courtesy, and the quality of inspiring confidence and trust in customers. It is recommended that the management at Impendle Local Municipality should provide training and information to employees as a way of enhancing employees' skills to effectively and efficiently deal with customers' requests and problems. The management should ensure that employees-job-fit so that employees with appropriate knowledge and skills carry out roles and responsibilities that are strategic to service quality delivery.

#### **5.2.3.4 Responsiveness**

The dimension of the responsiveness of the service quality delivered to customers at Impendle Local Municipality was reported to be the second worst service dimension with a mean gap score of -3.17. The findings indicate that employees at the Municipality fail to deliver service quality that is prompt and is not willing to help customers as expected by their customers. In agreement, Kaura and Datta (2012) stated that responsive service quality delivery is difficult to achieve if service providers fail to provide instant service and are not willing to serve customers as expected. It is recommended that the management at Impendle Local Municipality should address the issue of the responsiveness of the service quality delivery by putting in place measures to make the systems used in service quality delivery faster than they are now. This can help to reduce the backlog and time taken to respond to customers' requests or problems.

#### **5.2.3.5 Reliability**

The findings indicate that the reliability of service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality to be the worst service quality delivery among all the five dimensions of service quality delivery with a mean gap score of -3.2. The implication of the finding is that the Municipality is failing to meet customers' expectations, such as upholding the core attributes of service quality delivery and keeping promises made to customers. The issue of employees carrying out promises as promised and at the promised time had the highest gap score. It is recommended that the management at Impendle Local Municipality should put in place measures to enhance the existing communication systems and channels employees and customers use to help employees keep their promises to customers.

### **5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

- There is a need to conduct research using qualitative research methodology to delve deeper into the service quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality.
- Further research is needed on the influence of socio-demographics on the expectations and experiences of service quality in the municipalities.

- The RATER model should be used to assess service quality delivery as an important contribution to service quality delivery in other municipalities.
- Based on the findings, it is recommended that a comparative study of all municipalities in Umgungundlovu District Municipality be conducted to determine the differences in the status of service quality from different topographical sites.
- Researchers should replicate this study at different levels of governance to have an understanding of service quality delivery.

#### **5.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY**

The chapter presented conclusions and recommendations based on the findings in this research project. The conclusions and recommendations are based on the responsiveness, assurance, tangibility, empathy, and reliability of service quality delivered by Impendle Local Municipality. This chapter summary closes this chapter.

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# APPENDIX 1

## ETHICAL CLEARANCE



29 May 2018

Mr David Mkhwanazi (210538747)  
School of Management, IT & Governance  
Pietermaritzburg Campus

Dear Mr Mkhwanazi,

Protocol reference number: HSS/0397/018M

Project Title: Measuring Service Quality delivery at Impendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal

### Approval Notification – Expedited Application

In response to your application received 07 May 2018, the Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee has considered the abovementioned application and the protocol has been granted **FULL APPROVAL**.

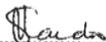
Any alteration/s to the approved research protocol i.e. Questionnaire/Interview Schedule, Informed Consent Form, Title of the Project, Location of the Study, Research Approach and Methods must be reviewed and approved through the amendment /modification prior to its implementation. In case you have further queries, please quote the above reference number.

**PLEASE NOTE:** Research data should be securely stored in the discipline/department for a period of 5 years.

The ethical clearance certificate is only valid for a period of 3 years from the date of issue. Thereafter Recertification must be applied for on an annual basis.

I take this opportunity of wishing you everything of the best with your study.

Yours faithfully

  
.....  
Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

/ms

Cc Supervisor: Dr Sanjay Soni  
Cc Academic Leader Research: Professor Isabel Martins  
Cc School Administrator: Ms Debbie Cunynghame

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Humanities & Social Sciences Research Ethics Committee

Professor Shenuka Singh (Chair)

Westville Campus, Govan Mbeki Building

Postal Address: Private Bag X54001, Durban 4000

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**APPENDIX 2**

**GATEKEEPER'S LETTER**

**Gatekeeper's Consent**

I Z. C. Shabafala in my capacity as Acting M.M. hereby give permission to  
Student name: Vusumuzi David Mkhwanazi Student No. 210538747 to conduct research in my Local Municipality.

The student MAY/MAY NOT (delete whichever is not applicable) use the name of the organisation in the dissertation.

Signature of Manager/Owner/Gatekeeper:..... Z .....

Company Stamp:

**Local Municipality**  
2018 -04- 20  
Private x 512  
3227

Date: 17/04/2018

## APPENDIX 3

### QUESTIONNAIRE

#### RESEARCH TOPIC

#### Measuring Service Quality Delivery at Impendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal

The RATER (SERVQUAL) service quality framework asks customers about their expectations and experiences across the five RATER dimensions of quality. The measure of quality is the gap between expectation and experience. Please complete your responses with specific regard to the concepts of enquiry by placing a TICK in the appropriate box.

**RESPONDENTS MAY WITHDRAW THEIR PARTICIPATION AT ANY TIME,  
SHOULD THEY SO WISH**

#### PARTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE

Part One: Demographic information

Part Two: Concepts of inquiry:

Customer EXPERIENCE of the service quality

Part Three: Concepts of inquiry:

Customer EXPECTATIONS of the service quality

#### PART ONE: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

*Please tick the most appropriate response*

1	Gender of respondent	Male			Female	
2	What is your race group?	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Other (specify) _____
3	What is your age?	21 – 30		31 -40	41 -50	51 – 60
4	Please indicate your income group	<R10000	R10001-R20000	R20001-R30000	R30001+	
5	What is your present marital status?	Legal married	Divorced	Widowed	Single	Other
6	Highest level of education successfully completed?	No schooling	Primary Education	Secondary Education	Tertiary Education	Other

7	Current occupation?	Student	Businessman	Government Servant	Private Sector worker	Unemployed
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<b>PART TWO:</b>						
<b>CLIENT EXPERIENCE OF THE SERVICE QUALITY</b>						

Indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your EXPERIENCE with service delivery at the Impendle Local Municipality

SECTION 1: RELIABILITY						
	IN MY EXPERIENCE...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	When a service delivery response is promised in a certain time, it does happen					
2	My exact specifications of service quality are followed e.g. sincere interest from employees in solving a problem					
3	Municipality statements are accurate and error-free					
4	Municipality reports are accurate and error-free					
5	Service delivery is performed right the first time					
6	Levels of service delivery are consistently good					
SECTION 2: ASSURANCE						
	IN MY EXPERIENCE...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Staff at the Municipality provide service without fumbling					
2	Staff at the Municipality are courteous					
3	Materials provided are appropriate					
4	Materials provided are up to date					
5	Staff at the Municipality can use technology quickly					
6	Staff at the Municipality can use technology skilfully					
7	Staff at this municipality have a good reputation					
8	Responses given by staff are accurate					
9	Responses given by staff are consistent					
10	Materials used are easy to understand					

<b>SECTION 3: TANGIBILITY</b>						
	<b>IN MY EXPERIENCE...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	Facilities at the Municipality are suitable					
2	The technology at the Municipality looks modern					
3	Facilities at the Municipality are neat					
4	Staff at the Municipality are neat					
<b>SECTION 4: EMPATHY</b>						
	<b>IN MY EXPERIENCE...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	Staff try to determine what my specific issues are					
2	The level of service is consistent with what I require					
3	The level of service cost is consistent with what I can afford					
4	Staff at the Municipality are polite					
5	Staff at the Municipality show respect					
6	Staff at the Municipality are considerate					
7	Staff are able to clearly explain to me the various options of service available					
8	Staff at the Municipality avoid using technical jargon when speaking to me					
<b>SECTION 5: RESPONSIVENESS</b>						
	<b>IN MY EXPERIENCE...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	When there is a problem staff at the Municipality respond quickly					
2	Staff at the Municipality are willing to answer my questions					
3	It is easy for me to talk to knowledgeable staff when I have a problem					
4	Service access points are conveniently located					
5	Specific times for completing tasks are generally given					

**PART THREE:  
CLIENT EXPECTATION OF THE SERVICE QUALITY**

Indicate your agreement with the following statements regarding your EXPECTATIONS of service delivery at the Impendle Local Municipality

SECTION 1: RELIABILITY						
	I expect ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Responses to service delivery happen when promised					
2	My exact specifications of service quality are followed					
3	Municipality statements to be accurate and error-free					
4	Municipality reports to be accurate and error-free					
5	The service to be performed right the first time					
6	The level of service to be consistently good					
SECTION 2: ASSURANCE						
	I expect ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Staff at the Municipality to provide service without fumbling					
2	Staff at the Municipality to be courteous					
3	The materials provided to be appropriate					
4	The materials provided to be up to date					
5	Staff to have the knowledge to use technology quickly					
6	Staff to have the knowledge to use technology skilfully					
7	Staff to have a good reputation					
8	The responses given by staff to be accurate					
9	The responses given by staff to be consistent					
10	The materials used to be easily understood					
SECTION 3: TANGIBILITY						
	I expect ...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
1	Physical facilities at the Municipality to be suitable					

2	Technology at the Municipality to look modern					
3	Facilities at the Municipality to be neat and presentable					
4	Staff at the Municipality to be neat and presentable					
<b>SECTION 4: EMPATHY</b>						
	<b>I expect ...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	Staff at the Municipality to be able to determine my specific issues					
2	The level of service delivery to be consistent with what I require					
3	The level of service delivery costs to be consistent with what I can afford					
4	Staff to be polite to me					
5	Staff show respect to me					
6	Staff to be considerate to me					
7	Staff to be able to clearly explain to me the various options of service delivery available					
8	The staff to avoid using technical jargon when speaking to me					
<b>SECTION 5: RESPONSIVENESS</b>						
	<b>I expect ...</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
1	Staff to be able to respond quickly when solving problems					
2	Staff to be willing to answer my questions					
3	To easily be able to talk to knowledgeable staff when I have a problem					
4	Service access points to be conveniently located					
5	Specific times for completing tasks to be given					
<b>Thank You</b>						

## APPENDIX 4

### CONSENT LETTER

**Title of research project:**

Measuring Service Quality Delivery at Impendle Local Municipality in KwaZulu-Natal

**Name and Position of Researcher:**

I David Postgraduate student, School of Management, IT and Governance, University of KwaZulu-Natal.

### CONSENT FORM

I, \_\_\_\_\_, confirm that I have read the information sheet that describes this study and have had an opportunity to ask questions so as to understand the purpose of the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without giving any reason.

I understand that if I do not wish to answer any or all of the questions I may take a break or leave the interview at any time.

I understand that if I have any questions or concerns about my rights as a study participant, or if I am concerned about an aspect of the study or the researchers then I may contact:

**Mrs Mariette Snyman**

Humanities and Social Science Ethics (HSSREC) Research Office,  
Govan Mbeki Building, Westville Campus, Private Bag X54001, DURBAN 4000  
Tel: 031 260 8350 [Snymanm@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:Snymanm@ukzn.ac.za)

I am aware that any information I provide will be treated in the strictest confidence.

I agree to take part in an audio-recorded interview.

I give permission for brief extracts of my interview to be used for research purposes with strict adherence to anonymity.

Please tick box

**Yes**                      **No**

<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
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<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
--------------------------	--------------------------

**Signature of participant:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of witness:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(where applicable)

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Signature of translator:** \_\_\_\_\_  
(where applicable)

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## **APPENDIX 5**

### **DECLARATION LETTER**

This is to declare that I, **Vusumuzi David Mkhwnazi** undertake to ensure that the privacy of the respondents will be protected. I will not use the participants' name in any part of this research report. Any information received in this study will be coded and securely stored. When the study is completed, all the codes relating to the participants will be destroyed.

I also confirm that participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

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