A SYSTEMS APPROACH INQUIRY INTO THE CHALLENGES OF SERVICE MANAGEMENT.

A study of the University of KwaZulu-Natal student administrative service system

by

SIFISO V. DLUDLA

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF COMMERCE
in Project Leadership and Management

The Leadership Centre, Faculty of Management Studies
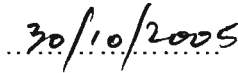## University of KwaZulu-Natal

OCTOBER 2005

DECLARATION

In accordance with a stipulation of the University of KwaZulu-Natal, I hereby declare that, except as acknowledged and except for quotations indicated in the text, this thesis is wholly my own work

....

Sifiso V. Dludla

..30/10/2005

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT :

096502

ABSTRACT :

Service management is a fascinating and complex subject. It is fascinating because, even entities that manufacture products get concerned about customer service. Management scientists such as Edward Deming developed a concept known as total quality management (TQM), which has been implemented in manufacturing companies mostly, and some of those companies include those discussed by Robbins & Decenzo (2001 : 65), namely ; General Motors, Ford, & Daimler-Chrysler. This concept TQM is implemented in order to make the ultimate customer happy and thus creating customer loyalty. If TQM was implemented only for the purpose of quality in products and not involve those employees in support departments such as Finance, Human Resources, Marketing & Sales, Customer Care/Enquiries, within one company, such an endeavour will be rendered ineffective and non-systemic. The service industry is however still lagging behind with it's own innovations. We still yet to see strategies spawned from the service sector. Service in this instance refers to the 'non-product' sector. It is for this reason that this study focuses on service management in the service industry, to make a clear distinction.

Service management is complex because, as it is argued in this study, it is intangible. The definitions of service developed by many authors such as Gronroos (1990), van Looy et al (2003), and Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004), state that service is an activity of more or less intangible nature. They further say that service involves the interaction between a customer and service employees. This is what makes it complex. Service is about people. Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) pointed it out that "the employees delivering the service frequently are the service in the customer's eyes.."(pg. 13). Human activity systems, are typically complex, and as such service is likely to be complex because it involves human interaction. Such a complex system is likely to be characterized by complex phenomena. Complex systems are best studied through systems approach. It was in this light that this study is based on a systems inquiry.

TABLE OF CONTENTS :

CHAPTER ONE

CHAPTER TWO

CHAPTER THREE

CHAPTER FOUR

CHAPTER FIVE

APPENDICES

LIST OF FIGURES :

.

LIST OF TABLES :

CHAPTER ONE

1.1   INTRODUCTION:

In this current era the service sector is making serious inroads into the whole corporate world. Gone are the days when the economy was purely dependent on manufacturing. Service authors report that in developed countries such as the United States of America, the service sector has actually overtaken, or is now dominant over the manufacturing industry. The United States of America's economy is now dependent on the service industry. In South Africa as well, (being a developing country) the service industry is a significant part of the overall economic activities. In the light of this industrial evolution, there is still a huge shortage of available literature. The service industry is growing worldwide, and in South Africa in particular, but research in this area has fallen behind. The lack of continuous research has surely created a gap between theory and practice. This study seeks to make a contribution to this small body of knowledge, as well as to influence policy where possible.

This study also seeks to gain an understanding of the challenges of managing service (both theoretically and practically). A literature review will first be conducted, followed by the study of a practical service delivery context through a hybrid approach of interacting with those that deliver the service, and those that consume the service. Most of the research projects on service management focus on customer's views and opinions only, and they result in the development of interventions based on customers' experiences. This study focuses on both customers and service employees and thus a hybrid approach.

This chapter introduces and clarifies the problem being studied in this dissertation. From the outset, this chapter begins with Schon's (1987) paradigm of practitioner's introduction and perspective. The purpose for this approach is multi-pronged, namely; introducing the researcher as a practitioner, locating the researcher in the study, and introducing the problem of a dilemma for policy decision-makers in this context. This practitioner approach to research also demonstrates the ontological assumption of the researcher. (See point 1.2 of this chapter).

A qualitative inquiry was used in this study, and this qualitative paradigm was chosen as a research methodology because of the nature of the phenomenon. As discussed in this Chapter Two of this dissertation, service is a complex concept, and this chapter starts to demonstrate this complexity. A systems approach is applied in this discussion, and the systems map will seek to illuminate this application.

Chapter Two focuses on the issues and debates in the service management fraternity, in the form of a literature review. The literature discussion is helpful in bringing academic and business perspectives to the study. Chapter Two also provides a detailed discussion on the systems approach. The systems approach is also applied simultaneously in putting forward emerging viewpoints, and entering prevalent debates.

This study did not focus on a literature survey only. Actual fieldwork was also conducted by means of live interaction with research participants in their natural settings, imparting or sharing their lived experiences. The research was conducted following a phenomenological qualitative approach, with triangulation as a research approach and for data analysis. The systems approach was again used in data collection and data analysis. Chapter Three covers a discussion of this research methodology.

The research provides interesting findings which are displayed and discussed in Chapter Four. The findings are displayed through systems diagrams, as well as in display tables containing verbatim narratives of participants, so that the reader can also draw his/her own conclusions. The last section of Chapter Four assesses and makes conclusions as to whether the research answered the questions of this study, and lastly a service management systems model (SMS model) is developed and proposed to assist with the interventions that service practitioners might develop. Chapter Five serves as a summary of the preceding chapters, and specifically discusses recommendations for future research.

1.2 PRACTITIONER'S PERSPECTIVE OF THE STUDY :

As an administration and operations manager for one of the departments at the University of KwaZulu-Natal – Howard College campus, I have a primary responsibility for the day-to-day management and coordination of, and strategic leadership within the department in which I am deployed.

The objective for my department is to provide student accommodation that is affordable and conducive to living and learning for students. As a department we provide student services which support the academic learning environment. My responsibilities briefly include the management of the provision or delivery of a variety of services within the department of Student Housing.

The challenge that one frequently encounters, is that one has to implement policies in order to fulfill the pre-determined objectives, and one such objective is ensuring that the quality of service provided is of high standard, and that the service meets or exceeds the customer's (student's) expectations. Implementing policies in a service context or environment is a big challenge. The issues of intangibility, simultaneity, perishability, heterogeneity of service make this concept quite complex and hence challenging, as has been alluded to above.

The dilemma in making policy decisions is that often, such decisions are "on high ground" (Schon, 1987). This means that policy implementation usually perpetuates the prevailing arbitrary standards, which are relatively easy to deal with from a linear management perspective, at least theoretically. The second part of the dilemma is that there are interconnections amongst stakeholders, resulting in causal loops as far as actions and problems are concerned. This complexity (and these interconnections) results in messy and unbound relationships within the system. The practitioner (service provider) finds that the pre-determined rules enshrined in policies are not very responsive to customer (student) needs. This dissertation aims at shedding some light on this complex phenomenon.

McNiff (2000) explains that the work of a manager includes helping people develop independence of mind and action. This is a very important notion for a service

3

environment because of the simultaneity and heterogeneity of service. Schlesinger and Zormitsky (van Looy, et al, 2003: 191) emphasise and support the notion of people empowerment, particularly in the service context. Quality service is one of the standards that one has to pursue, uphold, and instill in one's team. The challenge however, from a systemic perspective, is how one instills a culture of quality service in teams outside one's jurisdiction. As a research question, how can the university as a whole deliver an excellent quality service to students?

Another fundamental question that this dissertation explores is how one identifies, and or determines quality in service? An unobtrusive observation and interaction with research participants provides some practical answers relevant to this context. As is illustrated in Chapter II, this concept of service quality is extremely subjective, and encompasses all the cues that the customer picks up during the transaction (Gemmel, et al, 2003: 125). The subjectivity of the debate around service quality is one of the reasons why a qualitative inquiry was felt to be relevant, under the auspices of a systems thinking approach.

1.3   THE CONTEXTUAL BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY :

This study adopts a phenomenological inquiry whereby the lived experience of research participants (service providers and customers) will be observed, and they will be interviewed in their natural contexts, in order to acquire a spontaneous and in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being studied. A phenomenological study offers a "descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging mode of inquiry from which to derive the essence of an experience" (Morse & Richards, 2002: 44). Most organizations conduct research on customer service, and such studies typically focus on customer perception, satisfaction and the like. Such research is usually conducted through surveys or questionnaires, and the response is usually quantitative. Such a positivist approach however leaves a gap for in-depth knowledge of the softer aspects of the employee-customer relationship. Chapter Three discusses different research paradigms.

Customer service studies tend to follow a mechanistic approach, in that a survey of customer perception will be conducted quantitatively, whereupon employees are then told to meet the (discovered) needs of customers, or improve the way they deliver the service

in line with statistical research findings. This dissertation however adopts a qualitative and systemic look at the customer perception, experience, satisfaction, and other salient issues that might emerge during the research. In addition, employee experience is also studied in order to bridge the gap between what the customer expects and what the employee delivers. Patton (2002: 104) says that a phenomenological inquiry "requires methodologically, carefully, and thoroughly capturing and describing how people experience some phenomena". Such a study, according to Patton, will focus on "how people perceive, describe, feel, judge, remember, make sense, and talk with others about a phenomena". This is the main objective of this dissertation.

The nature of the problem that this research seeks to address has a continuum in that there are challenges for staff (service providers) on the one hand, and resultant challenges for customers or students at the other end of the continuum. The problems form a causal loop process whereby service employees encounter challenges imposed by the complexity of the organization which affects the quality of service delivery, and customers react due to dissatisfaction with the quality of service. Customers then influence the delivery system, and the service provider or the front line staff experience a dilemma. The researcher, as a student service practitioner has observed this iterative process over many years.

The symptoms of problems surface in the form of:

(a) Low staff morale; for instance, staff do not take initiatives in helping students, instead, students are referred from office to office, and there is a culture of reactive management rather than a proactive approach. Greenberg and Baron (1993: 171) suggest that successful organizations are ones in which morale is high, whereas those that fail are ones in which morale is low. This is, however, a debatable statement, because there may be other strong factors which could contribute to success or failure, but the emphasis here is that morale does play a significant role.

(b) Lack of teamwork; staff does not work together, instead the focus is on blame-shifting, pulling in different directions, and each minding their own business. Team-work results in 'work teams'. Among other things that Greer (2001: 48)

5

highlights among benefits of work teams are "improved quality", and "greater service efficiency".

(c) Conflicts; conflicting goals i.e. faculties want to recruit as many students as possible, while other departments such as Residences or Financial Aid Centre do not see this as a priority as they feel they have limited resources. They wish that there were fewer students instead. Conflicts are also prevalent in the form of staff quarrels and workplace politics.

(d) Inefficiencies; characterized by long queues at front offices, slow processes, and fragmented activities.

(e) Lack of shared vision; lack of common goals and not focusing on one organizational goal.

All these constitute poor service delivery. As a student service practitioner, this is, in brief, how I experience the phenomenon. The secondary data source, such as e-mails communication, reports, minutes of meetings, and practical interaction with staff formed the basis that reflected these five aspects of the phenomenon. This dissertation goes in-depth in these aspects of the phenomenon in order to solicit the fundamental essence of the prevailing challenges.

The prevailing phenomenon create a bad climate for staff members and subsequently, or consequently, the vicious circle of poor service continues. This research looks at service as a concept and interrogates how the service is defined by different research participants, as well as different authors. It also looks at quality as a measure for service standards, as well as the subjectivity of quality, especially as it pertains to service.

A systems map depicting a structure of the student administrative system (SAS):
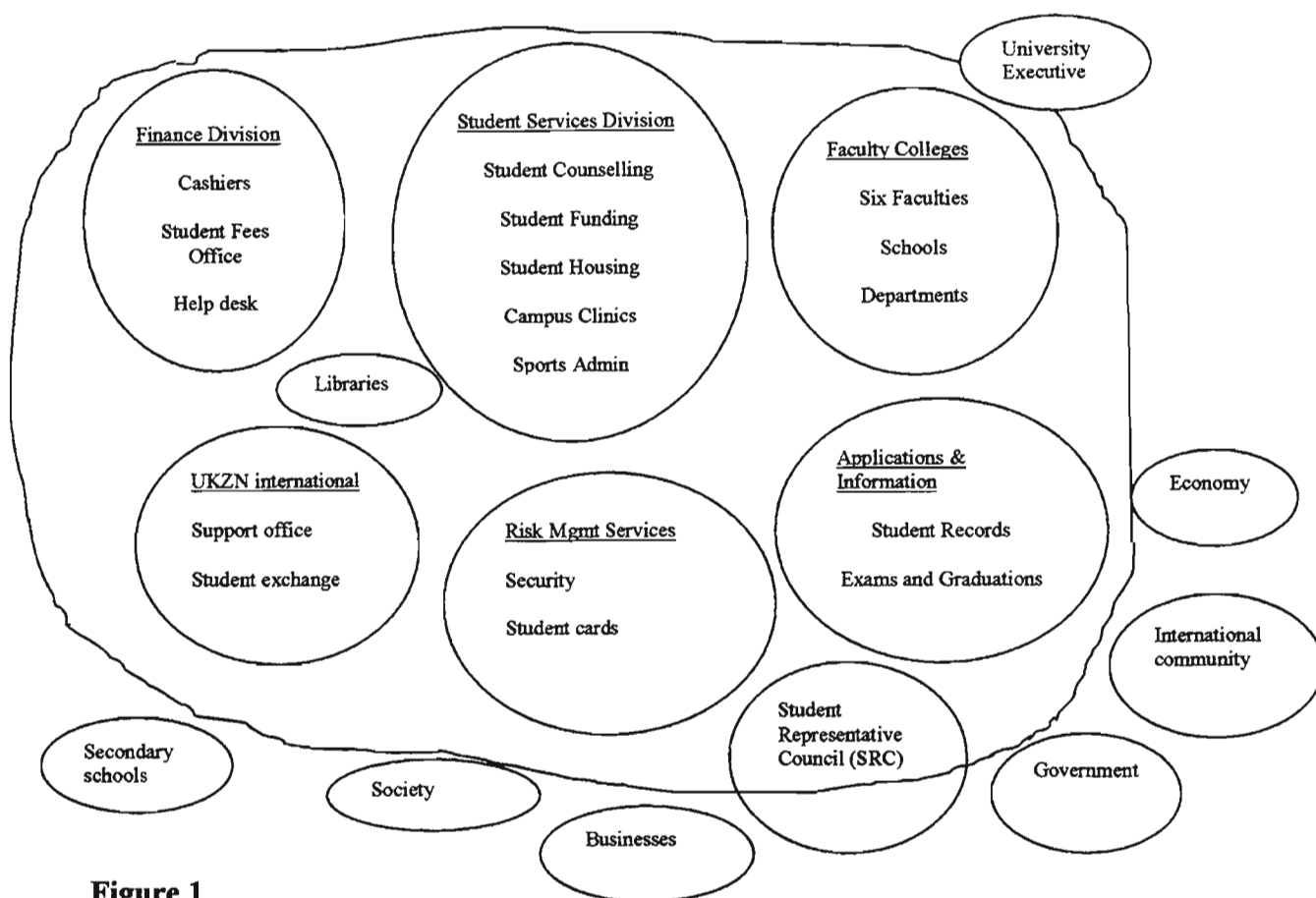
Figure 1

The systems map in figure 1 shows a synthesized view of the student administrative service system. There are departments which are termed support or non-academic departments that provide special services to students in support of the academic service (teaching and research). These departments comprise; Finance Division which handles the payment and fees related services; Risk Management Services(RMS) which deals with issuing of student/staff cards, traffic control/parking disks, and security; Student Academic Administration which deals with student applications and information, student records, examination, graduation, and student discipline; Student Services Division which provides student loans and bursaries services, student accommodation services and facilities, student career and counseling, sports administration, campus clinics; the Libraries; the International Student Support Services (UKZN International) which provides administrative services to international students.

There are six faculties which also provide student administrative services such as student recruitment, selection, admission, registration and the like. The Student Representative Council (SRC) is an 'independent' body in terms of the administrative service structure, but is partly a component of the administrative system. The role and relationship of the SRC with the administrative structure centres around student representation and collective decision-making.

The systems map shows all key stakeholders who play a role in the student service delivery process. In terms of the systems diagrams convention, the 'perimeter' line surrounding the clusters indicates the boundary of the system being identified. Outside this boundary there are other systems that immediately influence the system discussed, and inside the boundary, there will also be subsystems (the clusters) which are part of the system discussed. Other systems boundaries will overlap, indicating a strong magnitude of influence and interdependence. It is difficult to show students in this system as a subsystem or as an outside system, because they trigger the functioning of the system in that they form part of the system due to the system's interest – that is to provide a service, and the issue of service simultaneity.

CHAPTER TWO :

2. SERVICE MANAGEMENT LITERATURE REVIEW :

2.1 INTRODUCTION :

Chapter One introduced the problem situation being studied in this dissertation, and that discussion highlighted stakeholders involved in a service delivery system within the chosen research context. A systems map in figure 1 provided a snapshot of the system identified for the study. This chapter will now access the theoretical literature in service management and continue to use systems approach as a meta-discipline. Systems concepts are defined so that the reader can discern an understanding of the application of systems approach. The chapter does not list problems or issues, and leaves the reader to figure out the practicality of those issues, however, it points out challenges of service management throughout the discussion in order to link a challenge around a specific discussion, so that it becomes 'less challenging' for a reader or service practitioner to see the practical association and application of a service theory.

There is not enough literature available in the area of student administration, and in South Africa, with prevailing mergers of tertiary institutions; the student service systems are becoming larger and more complex. These conglomerate integrations are likely to lead to very dysfunctional systems. As student service practitioners converge from different institutions to form new Universities which appropriately address the needs of South Africa, there is a great need to instill a new culture of team learning, awareness and advocacy of systemic functioning, and delivering the best services to students.

McEwen in Komives et al (1996: 148 – 149), in their book titled Student Services : A handbook for the profession, emphasized that the primary goals of student practitioners are to serve students, to be student-centred, to understand and design academic environments, and to be experts about organizations and how they function. Komives and her associates' work introduces and highlights the role of student practitioners in support of student academic and social development. They also outline the functions and goals of student practitioners. The book, however, left a gap in developing a theory that synthesises these functions.

This dissertation uses the systems approach as an important qualitative research methodology in order to understand a phenomenon. Chapter Three and Four of this dissertation will illuminate this assertion in detail. Systems approach is a philosophy popularized by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, through his book titled General Systems Theory (GST) published in 1968. Ackoff 1974, Churchman 1968, Checkland 1981, Capra 1982, Ulrich 1983, Hood 1988, Flood 1988, Senge 1990, Midgley 1996, Jackson 2000, and many others, brought about inspiring illumination of the systems philosophy in an organisational context.

A systems approach has been advocated as a general approach transcending many disciplines in terms of application. Churchman (1968: 11) says that a "system is made up of sets of components that work together for the overall objectives of the whole". He further explains that a "systems approach is simply a way of thinking about these total systems and their components". In this dissertation, a system would be briefly defined as a collective of interrelated and interdependent parts that form a whole.

Components or parts of the system are elements that make up a system, but individually, each component is not a system. A university is a system itself, within which exists a student administration system. Without the student administration system (sub-system of the university system), the university will arguably be dysfunctional. Likewise, without the academic staff, the university executives, students, etc. the university would not exist. These components constitute a 'whole', that is a complete entity. This emphasis seeks to illuminate the importance of 'wholeness' of the system.

Robson (2002) puts emphasis on the purpose of the system, in his definition of the system. The purpose is important because it justifies and clarifies the existence of a given system. The purpose of the system also illuminates the demarcation of a boundary or differences among systems. "A complete system should be instead a system in which the groups work together to achieve the aims that the community has..." (Deming, 2000: 2). As a soft system phenomenogical investigation or inquiry, this study, due to time and resource constraints does not follow the seven steps of Checkland's (1981) soft systems methodology, but rather adopts and applies theoretically, the soft systems paradigm.

In systems theories there are hard systems, soft systems, and critical systems. The hard systems are "observer-independent, and representative of the real world" (Luckett, 2004). The hard systems tend to follow a scientific, positivist, and functionalist paradigm. They also tend to use quantitative methods. Soft systems, which this dissertation adopts are, "observer-dependent, and relevant to a real world phenomenon" (Luckett, 2004). The soft systems approach follow a subjective, interpretive, and systemic paradigm. They tend to use qualitative methods. There is a new trend however, to use a multi-methodology. Critical systems are emancipatory. Critical systems approach is important in that it challenges conventional systems' paradigms thus encouraging perpetual discovery of new theories.

This dissertation looks at the concept of service in general, but also aims at making a meaningful contribution to the new dawn of delivering the best student services as the core focus of student service practitioners.

2.2   THE SERVICE DYNAMICS :

Systems and service are both 'soft' and are very related concepts. However, systems approach in this dissertation should not be viewed as a topic on its own, but rather as a methodology. Service management is the topic under study in this dissertation. A systems methodology helps in this study to illuminate the dynamics, complexities, and challenges of managing a service delivery system, and the research is conducted in the university student administration context. This study highlights the complexity and richness of management in the service industry, the service employee-customer relationship and interaction, and the complexity of quality in service as opposed to products. These areas cited above could be studied independently. The use of systems approach however helped in transcending and synthesizing these important components, and thus generated a holistic understanding of the concept of service.

In the modern world, service can be found in virtually every sphere of economic activity. Service plays a major role in the economy. In fact, service authors such as Zeithaml & Bitner (1996, 2000), Van Looy et al (2003), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004), Hope & Muhlemann (1997) report that developed countries have more service industries than manufacturing (product) industries. In the United States of America, one of the

11

developed countries, for example, "the service sector now accounts for more than 80% of total employment"(Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004: 6). Also, as van Looy et al (2003: 6) alluded, services presently amount to an average of 70% of gross domestic product (GDP) in other developed economies.

There are many systems that one can find in any environment, for example, health systems, comprising; government health departments, hospitals, doctors & nurses, patients, medicines, etc. Likewise, there are education systems, comprising; government education departments, schools, universities, educators, learners, and students. A student administrative system is a collective of many university support and academic departments related, because they all provide student administrative services, but each department specializes in a certain area, for example, there are people who specialize in student finance, others in student accommodation, others in student counseling and careers, others in academic information and admissions, and many other different departments or units as depicted in the systems map figure 1 of Chapter One.

Adam Smith introduced the concept of specialization in the 18th century, and today many organizations are still following this concept. Specialization, if applied in isolation, results in a reductionist paradigm, in that the priority for managers of a given system becomes separating and reducing the 'whole' into unrelated parts. Every time there are problems or new responsibilities, they develop 'independent' units/sections to deal with those tasks. This reductionist approach would suggest that failure in one unit has nothing to do with, and does not affect other units. What is created in such an environment is divisions of teams, which eventually brings about a non-systemic culture. Chapter Four will discuss the experiences of research participants (employees) to understand what phenomenal challenges are prevalent in a scenario where each department works in isolation. Customers (students) shed some light on how they view service delivery that is characterized by a combination of good and poor quality service (see Chapter Four – student participants' responses).

The notion of interrelatedness plays a major role in the demarcation of a systems boundary – that is, what distinguishes one system from other systems. All similar (interrelated) departments are grouped together to form a system (see figure 1). The similarity referred to here pertains to the common customer, linked processes, and

common purpose. Interdependency means that one department is dependent on other departments and *vice versa*. There is mutual dependency. Again the notion of common purpose plays a major role in interdependency. If one department provides a service, other departments have to play their part as well in the process.

There are processes that sequentially precede others and the series of activities continues in order to complete the service process. For instance, for students to be registered with the university, they start by paying fees at Cashiers (Finance department), and then get cleared by the Student Fees Office (another section under Finance department) or the Funding Centre (Student Services Department/Division), then get registered by the relevant Faculty, obtain a student card from Risk Management Services department, and (if staying in residences) sign up for residences in the Student Housing department.(see appendix b for university registration flow pamphlet). This process is simplified here for the purpose of this discussion in order to show the interdependencies i.e. faculty cannot register a student academically if they have not paid the required fees at the Finance department. Interrelatedness and interdependency is about the relationship of the components of a whole.

Service simultaneity features are; service employees' capacity, organisational structure, management paradigm, and service context/environment. This list is however, not comprehensive.

The on-going debate in literature about what constitutes service, leaves much room for further contributions to this body of knowledge. As a result however, the debate leaves the reader and or service practitioner with an incomplete understanding of what the service concept is about. It is nonetheless virtually impossible to have a complete definition of a discipline that will give full understanding to everybody. Midgley (2000) argues strongly that full understanding is unattainable, and instead greater understanding is however always possible. A system analysis of the concept could perhaps give us a better understanding.

In identifying whether an activity constitutes a product output or service, it may be useful to firstly identify its primary purpose. The purpose of a system is sometimes called system of interest (SOI). The question that should be posed is, what is the primary

purpose of this (identified) system. Once this question has been answered, the next step is to draw a boundary around the purpose of the system, but, as Ulrich (1993) advises, to "sweep in" sufficient information (from a variety of different viewpoints) to paint a rich and complex picture without compromising the meaning of an analysis.

The 'sweeping in' means taking into account all interconnected components and relationships, as Midgley (2000) warns that we ought to acknowledge that no view of the world can ever be comprehensive, and hence the importance of drawing boundaries. Senge (1994) also warns practitioners who use systems analysis (especially systems dynamics) that they must not be caught up in the "abstract realization" that everything is connected to everything, hence the drawing of a boundary. Gharajedaghi (1999: 30) however pointed out that drawing a system boundary "becomes an arbitrary, subjective construct defined by the interest and the level of the ability and or authority of the participating actors".

The first section of this chapter sought to introduce the concept of systems philosophy which is applied throughout this dissertation as a meta-discipline methodology. In a nutshell, this means that systems approach will be used as an applied methodology to understand the challenges in service management. The following sections are now going to discuss the concept of service management in greater detail, and will continue to apply systems concepts. ·

2.3 SERVICE DEFINED

In discussing the definition of service, this section will briefly highlight the role of the service industry, and then begin to look at a few definitions and in that process elucidate the service concept through an 'open system' view, and will also enter the debate of service tangibility/intangibility.

Van Looy et al (2003) categorise service into distributive services, producer services, social services, and personal services. There are many types of businesses and organisations that provide service. Traditionally, service businesses were formed to provide support to manufacturing businesses which were primary industries. For example, gold mining was a primary industry and transporting gold was a secondary

industry. While a lot of service firms still exist to support primarily manufacturing firms, such as cleaning or security companies, and many others such as auditing companies, many service firms offer their services directly to the whole market which includes the public and/or individuals, such as banks, insurance companies, law firms, repairs shops, entertainment places, and the like.

In most big cities service businesses are at the city centres, and manufacturers are on the outskirts. This indicates a shift in the market for services. A rapidly growing demand for service has been in personal services, due to the changing lifestyles of people. Most governments' responsibility is to provide services such as electricity, education, health, safety, justice, social grants and other services. Governments, however, provide facilitating services of these offerings, through government spending and delivery policies.

The term service is often used with different meanings. If government is blamed for poor service delivery, it could mean, for example, that there are not enough houses built by the government, or that if citizens visit a government department they do not get attended to appropriately and efficiently. The latter is the focus of this dissertation in the student administration service at the University of KwaZulu-Natal(UKZN). In tertiary education institutions such as UKZN, student administrative service components or departments form autonomous units that provide specific services. This is due to the fact that an institution needs to provide teaching efficiently through people who focus on and dedicate their efforts to teaching and research, while others take care of the administrative chores proficiently, so that the institution's goals are realised.

Today's universities and other institutions of higher learning have become very complex and more decentralized administratively. As discussed in Chapter One, this dissertation however, draws a boundary within a university-wide system and focuses on the Student Administration System (SAS). The theoretical questions in this chapter therefore relate to the definitions of service in general, and Chapter Four discusses service in the form of a lived experience in a university SAS environment. Jacqueline Stemmies (2004) in her PhD thesis, researching students' perception of student services in the three rural community colleges, defined student administration service as a "non-instructional program" of the university. Whereas Cathy Dove in her PhD thesis (2004) titled "The

shared service centre: A model for university efficiency", categorized student administration service as a "non-value- added function".

At the university of KwaZulu-Natal the commonly used words for defining and categorizing student administration service are: non-academic, support service, and student support services. These three can be found on the University of KwaZulu-Natal website (www.ukzn.ac.za), conditions of service for staff, and other policies.

In Dove's (2004) work, the term 'support' seems to spring out quite often when talking about the student administration service. She studied various tertiary institutions such as Cornell University, and she followed a reductionist paradigm (cause and effect) and concluded that the higher cost of running universities was caused by bloated and inefficient administrative service structures. She then adopted a model called 'shared service centre', as a model for a university's efficiency.

The model assumed a correlation between high cost and inefficiency, as well as high costs and decentralization. Komives et al (1996) referred to the student administrative service as student services or student affairs. This dissertation, while it looks at SAS inefficiency as one of the symptoms of a problem situation or phenomenon, does not support the reductionist cause and effect paradigm. Instead, this study will support a multiple-cause diagnosis process, complimented by the systems dynamics philosophy.

The above discussion aimed at introducing the concept of service in a broader sense. In general terms, service can be described as an intangible offering that transforms a person or an object, for example, transforming a sick to a healthy person, an insured person, a registered student and a graduate/expert/professional, an investor, a gambler, a happy person, a passenger, a hotel client, a fixed/repaired/service car, a cleaned house, etc. These examples suggest that while and when a service is provided and consumed there should be a change (value) to a service consumer. The following diagram in figure 2 seeks to depict the systemic view of a service system, and to demonstrate the iterative feedback and transformation process that takes place between the environment (supra-system) and a given service business system. Robbins and Dicenzo (2001: 41) define an open system as "a system that dynamically interacts with its environment".

This general definition also presupposes an open system which is constituted by an environment, input, transformation, output, and feedback, as diagrammatically depicted in figure 2. The open system shows that a person or thing comes from the environment and becomes an input, which gets transformed into output and returns to the environment to influence the environment as well, and the influenced environment will in turn send feedback to the system in various forms in an iterative manner.

Diagram depicting an open system and feedback between the system and environment

Feedback into the system
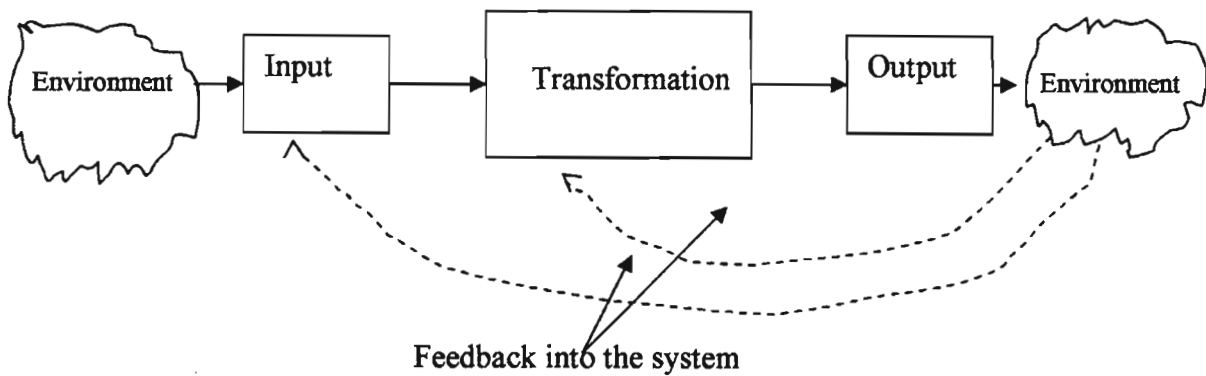
Figure 2 : open system of service

Source : Adapted and modified from the work of Jackson (2000 : 111)

In the case of a university student administration system, the society (environment) would make an input into the system in the form of prospective or unregistered students who will enter the system and become transformed into registered or enrolled students (initial output for the SAS), and academic learning will begin thereafter. The SAS will continue to collaborate with the academic learning system and ultimately the student will graduate as a professional (final output). That graduate might come back and work at the university (influencing the university system in a different form), or work for the public (directly influencing the environment).

This dissertation adopts this open system paradigm in studying the challenges of service management. It is, however, important to clarify that this open system view to service should not be seen as a linear and simple process that always has a clear start and end. A lot of services are provided and consumed continuously with no clear end, such as a life

insurance policy. Some services have a short life span such as dental service, while others have long life span such as a home loan service.

Gronroos 1990, van Looy et al, 2003, Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004, define service as an activity or series of a more or less intangible nature that normally but not necessarily, take place in interaction between the customer and service employees and or physical resources or goods and/or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to a customer problem. Contemporary service authors such as Gronroos 1990, Hope & Muhlemann 1997, Zeithaml & Bitner 2000, Van Looy et al 2003, Lovelock & Wirtz 2004, Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004, seem to agree to a large extent, that services are intangible. This main characteristic (intangibility) of service is what makes it complex, especially when it comes to quality, customer satisfaction, and identifying the unique skills necessary for service employees. Hope & Muhlemann (1997), Zeithaml & Bitner (2004) stress that there is however a continuum with regards to tangibility and intangibility of service and products.

In simple terms, a product can be categorised as tangible and service to be categorised as intangible. Hope & Muhlemann and Zeithaml & Bitner however argue that products should be seen as positioned towards the one end of the continuum, and service on the other end, with certain products (most tangible) sitting at the far opposite end, some products & services (with a mix of both tangible and intangibles) in the middle of the continuum, and certain service offerings (most intangible) at the other far end of the continuum. When buying a car for example, which can be classified as a product, extra elements such as "prestige, safety, and reliability are all intangible aspects which cannot be touched" come into play (Hope & Muhlemann, 1997: 3).

It is a point of debate whether these are elements of a product or elements of quality in that product. A product without these elements is still a product. An older car for example, may be very unreliable and unsafe, but it remains a product for a used car dealer. The purpose of a car manufacturer is to produce and sell cars (products). Unlike service, you can see a car, touch, take home, use, own, fix, and also get a car 'serviced'.

Service would generally be prevalent in the manufacturing and selling of a car, but that is not the primary purpose of a given car manufacturer.

Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) acknowledge that a broad definition of service implies that intangibility is a key determinant of whether an offering is or is not a service. According to these two authors, it is also possible that very few products are purely tangible. It is such arguments that leave the reader perplexed. There is an example where Zeithaml and Bitner categorized an aircraft manufacturer as a service organization, perhaps because that organization also provides a consultancy service to organizations that buy its planes, such as airlines. If, however, the primary purpose for such an organization is defined (manufacturing aircrafts) it would become clear that that organization provides products (aircrafts), and service (consultancy).

In a university student residence, the primary purpose would be to provide student accommodation (service). In a student room, as a student, you can touch walls, doors, facilities, etc., one can also see the overall physical residence building, but one can only be entitled to it, one cannot own it. Students do refer to rooms as "my room", which is fine, but that does not imply legal property ownership where they can alter the rooms or sell them to buyers, as home owners can do. In fact, students lease residence rooms and sign a contract with the university to pay and use the room.
Van Looy et al (2003: 12) explain that services are acts and deeds that we cannot take home, and that what we can take home is the effect of service.

Coming back to the issue of the primary purpose of the system, a university's purpose would generally be teaching and research, and a student residence is then a support service of the university's primary purpose. The debate about tangibility and intangibility of service seems to suggest a reductionist view to the issue of service – that is, deviating from taking a holistic view of the main purpose of a given system. The boundary should assist when one wants to define a system, by identifying the main purpose and sweeping in interrelated components such as supporting commodities in a service system, like a car rental business where a rented car should be seen as part of the service rather than a product, and supporting service in a products system, like in a restaurant where a waiter should be seen as a product delivery employee rather than a service representative. A restaurant scenario is a controversial example in terms of whether it's a service business or a product business, and that debate is beyond the scope of this study.

Since the current debate around the product being tangible and service being intangible leaves the reader more confused because the authors do argue that both products and services have both tangible & intangible characteristics, it may be useful to consider the fact that generally, a product is produced in the absence of a customer, and service is generally provided in the presence and/or with at least interaction with the customer. Furthermore, service is in many instances performed on the customer himself/herself (i.e. dental service, hairdressing, counseling, entertainment, teaching, etc.), and also, a customer has an input in the service delivery (i.e. completing a registration form at the university).

What could be suggested here therefore is that some services are soft (i.e. counseling, entertainment, teaching, legal, etc.) and others are hard (i.e. repairs, car rental, cleaning, security, transportation, etc.). Soft services would generally involve the emotional, psychological, and intellectual aspect of the customer, and hard services would generally involve the physical part of the customer as well as the property of the customer.

A combination of hard and soft services can be provided to a customer as well. Police services, for example, provide protection against physical injury (physical or hard part), protection against loss of property (the property part), and feeling of safety to customer (the soft or intellectual or emotional part). Defining service is not easy, since service is intangible and complex.

This discussion sought to elucidate the concept of service through applying the open systems approach, providing theoretical debates in service, classification of service, practical examples, and introducing a novel method of looking at service, such as considering soft and hard perspectives.

2.4 CHARACTERISTICS OF SERVICE

In further elucidating and highlighting the contradistinction between product and service, it is necessary to look at what characterises service in greater detail. The key characteristics identified by many authors of service are: Intangibility, simultaneity, heterogeneity, and perishability.

2.4.1 Service Simultaneity

Simultaneity, as viewed by Zeithaml and Bitner (2000: 13) briefly refers to the fact that services are typically provided and consumed simultaneously. This means that a service is not produced and stored for a customer, unlike a product, as was alluded to in the previous section, which is usually produced in the absence of a customer. A customer triggers the process of service delivery. This means that there is a high level of interdependency between a service provider and a customer. For example, for one to use an air travel service, one has to board a plane, and for a plane to be operated it would be futile to fly it without passengers. Typically, the university requires students to take part for a student registration process to be meaningful, complete and justifiable.

Taking part in the service process represents the customer's action or input. Albeit that a customer is present during the service process, there are however contexts where a customer does not need to be physically present at the service provider's premises or property. Such services are mostly hard services, such as Internet banking (management of money – physical property). Whereas in soft services, a customer is highly likely to be present, for example, counseling. Some of the soft services can however be done telephonically, but there has to be a live (present), even though distant, interaction between a customer and service provider. Even if service is delivered through communication technology, customer interaction is very important. Without a customer playing some role, service cannot be delivered.

The fact that services are produced and consumed simultaneously has implications. One of the most important things that are affected in the employee-customer interaction is quality. "The quality of service and customer satisfaction will be highly dependent on

21

what happens in real time, including actions of employees and interactions between employees and customers" (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000: 14).

According to Zeithaml & Bitner, simultaneity also affects other customers. For example, if there is an intoxicated customer in a cinema who constantly makes noise, the behaviour of that particular customer would affect the whole cinema experience of other customers. Chapter Four of this dissertation will highlight the practical implications of service simultaneity from a service employee point of view and lived experience.(See staff participants' comments on registration experience and management support in Chapter Four) This aspect of service is one of the research questions, and research participants share their lived experience.

Some of the factors that make service delivery complex and challenging and which pertain to service simultaneity are as follows:

2.4.1.1 Service employee capacity

Van Looy et al (2003: 14) emphasise that service simultaneity makes the human factor in services crucial. They further recommend that careful attention must be paid to service employees dealing with customers. Employee capacity in this discussion refers to a combination of skills, knowledge, and experience of employees.

Service simultaneity poses a great challenge for service employees with regards to their skills, knowledge, and experience. Zeithaml & Bitner advise that, in order to provide quality service, employees need on-going training in the necessary technical skills. Technical skills would include skills such as those of a motor mechanic for a motor repair business, because an engine of a 10-year-old car is highly likely to be different from that of a one-year-old car. Technology is not static and is ever-changing. A customer expects a service employee to have sufficient knowledge to enable him/her to fix his/her problem (car). Technical skills would also include computer literacy and other hard and hi-tech skills, such as flying an aircraft.

There are, however, soft skills that are very crucial for employee-customer interaction. These are things that people possess intellectually and tacitly. These are the intangible skills for providing intangibles. Unlike the technical skills, these soft skills are "qualities that are intrinsic in people and qualities they bring with them to any employer" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004: 321). The intrinsic skills include communication, patience, courtesy, empathy, understanding, creativity & innovation, problem-solving, leadership, charisma, and work ethic. Such qualities can only be enhanced and harnessed. The challenge is for service firms to identify people with such skills.

It is a challenge considering the prevailing recruitment and selection methods that appear deficient in accurately bringing such skills to the fore – the focus is normally on whether the candidates have answered interview questions correctly and impressively. There is a great need for extensive research in this area of staff selection and recruitment in order to develop new, unconventional and better ways of getting the right people into the right jobs.

Knowledge is regarded as another component of employee capacity. Knowledge would include what the service employee knows about his/her customer. It then means that feedback on consumer behaviour research must be communicated to front-line staff as well. The problem though, is that most of such research is quantitative, and based on statistical data. Knowledge is an indispensable tool for the service industry. In this information age, knowledge has become the core competency for the service industry. Spender 1996 (Barnes et al, 2002: 2) says that information and knowledge have become increasingly recognized as competitive differentiators. Spender further explains that organisational knowledge such as operational routines, skills or know-how is acknowledged as the most valuable organisational asset. "Knowledge sharing among employees, with customers ... has tremendous potential pay off in improved customer service...." (Barnes et al, 2002: 2). It is therefore important that knowledge is managed systemically, so that front line staff are well equipped.

The concept of knowledge management is discussed in more detail in section 2.6 of this chapter. Employee experience also pays a major role in shaping employee capacity, thus influencing quality of service. The dilemma though is that there may be an ill-experienced employee who is very enthusiastic and keen to help customers, but who ends

up providing poor service, such as wrong information or solutions, due to inadequate experience. On the other hand, there may be another employee who has relatively sufficient experience, but who is not keen to help customers due to a variety of other factors such as lack of motivation, personal problems, and organisational structure as discussed in the next section.

2.4.1.2 Service organisational structure

An organisational structure can have a major influence on the provision of service, as Robbins and Dicenzo (2001: 169) argue that if the structure is simple (small) or flat , its high centralization results in an information overload at the top. Decision-making becomes slow and risky, because everything depends on one (or a few) person/s. Robbins and Dicenzo (2001: 170) contend that bureaucratic structure, however, frequently loses sight of its best interests in the pursuit of functional goals. Chapter Four discusses important research findings on the issue of organisational structure as it pertains to the student administration system.

Organisational structure, sometimes known as an organogram, refers to how work or different functions are organized and coordinated, and who reports to whom in an organization. See figure 3 and 4 below. Some structures are tall and others are flat. Whether tall or flat, these types of structures are hierarchical and vertical. There are however emerging structures that are horizontal which are called matrix structures. Matrix structures are usually used in managing projects. "The matrix structure presents the temporary project lines of responsibility overlaying the functional lines of responsibility and outlines the relationship between the project manager and functional managers and their subordinates" (Burke, 2003: 286).

Functional Structure :
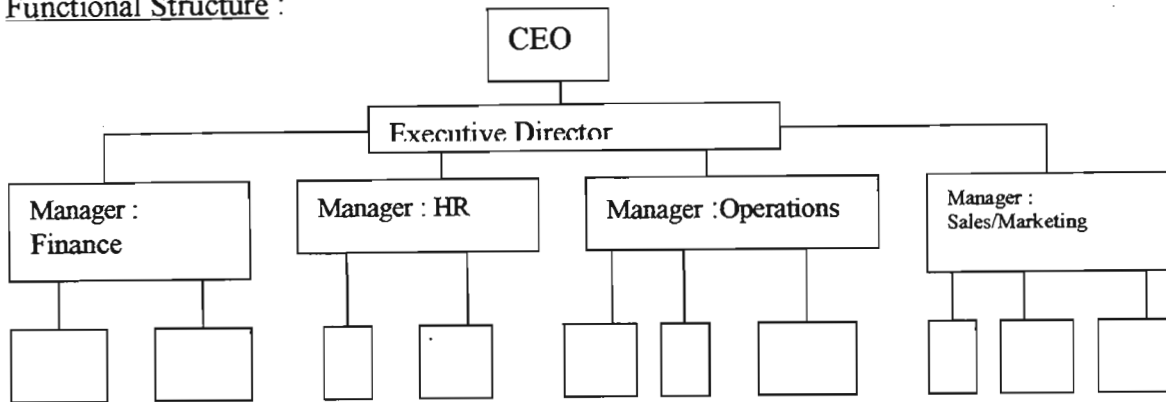
Figure 3
Functional structure
Source : Robbins & Dicenzo (2001: 163)

Matrix Structure :
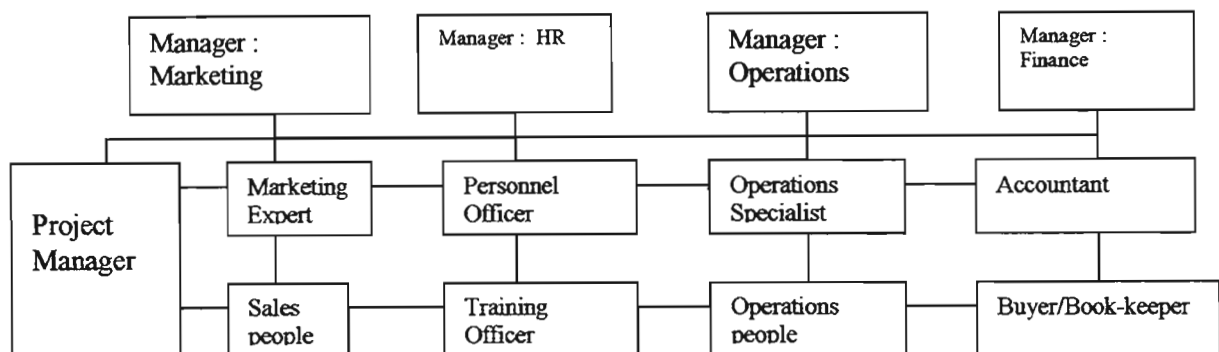
Figure 4.
Matrix structure :
Source : Burke (2003: 21)

The reason why the issue of organization structure is discussed in this study is because it is very relevant to the overall functioning of a given organization, and includes such aspects as responsibility, accountability, authority, and decision-making. These aspects of organisational structure are very important for service employees, especially because of the fact that such employees have to make decisions on the spot in order to meet customers' varying needs. Service simultaneity and heterogeneity necessitate that service

25

employees (especially front line staff) know their responsibilities, can account for their activities, and have the necessary authority to make decisions, because the customer is present, or is at least involved in the service delivery process. A customer influences the process, and may very often make unexpected demands that need urgent decisions to be taken. As is discussed in Chapter Four, research participants were asked questions around authority and decision-making, and certain themes emerged from these questions.

As an organisational structure determines the authority, if front-line employees do not have the necessary authority to completely provide the service required, there is likely to be unnecessary conflict between a service employee and a customer, resulting in a dissatisfied and unhappy customer. Likewise, the service employee may feel frustrated, demotivated, and stressed. Most customer service research endeavours focus on the one side of the coin – that is, the customer dissatisfaction, and rarely on the impact to service employees. There is a tendency to look at customers in isolation, yet as has been emphasized in this chapter, service employees and customers are both involved in the service process.

Van Looy et al (2003:14) advise that careful attention must be paid to the employees dealing with the customer. This means that an appropriate structure has to be designed. If customers keep on demanding to see the manager or the boss, this could mean, among other things, that there is a problem with the structure, particularly the delegation of authority. It could mean that the responsibility of delivering service does not come with commensurate authority. Many managers would argue against this suggested correlation between responsibility and authority, especially those who have McGregor's Theory X mindset towards their subordinates (see the next section for further discussion on McGregor's theories).

However, allocating responsibility without commensurate authority for service employees is like trying to drive through the rain with no windscreen wipers. It is counter-productive. In fact that is how bureaucracy breeds, where an unnecessarily high number of people throughout the organisational hierarchy are carrying out a single and relatively trivial activity, as Robbins and Dicenzo (2001: 170) pointed out.

2.4.1.3 Management paradigm

Managers come from different schools of thought. Looking at the previous discussion, for example, revising the theories of Douglas McGregor, assigning authority could be based on whether a manager believes in Theory Y or Theory X. McGregor (Robbins & Decenzo, 2001: 37) suggested that some managers have a Theory X paradigm, where they view employees negatively, and some have a Theory Y paradigm, where they value employees and view them positively.

These paradigms suggest that there are two extremes, namely; Theory X people who dislike work, avoid responsibility, and need to be closely controlled and supervised; whereas Theory Y is characterized by people who are self-driven, accept responsibility and like work. These theories did not offer anything in between these extremes, and did not consider any factors that contributed to employee performance. Elton Mayo identified this gap, and conducted what is known as Hawthorne experiments, where he researched, through experiments of cause and effect in a workplace environment, how this affected employee performance. The findings in such research cannot be said to be cast in stone. The findings are fallible because employees typically adjust performance deliberately if they know they are being monitored, so even though such research may be scientific and expected to be objective, interventions based on these findings may not always yield the expected results.

McGregor (Robbins & Decenzo: 2001) believed that the Theory Y paradigm was better and should guide management practice in terms of leading people. It may however be risky to adopt a Theory Y approach as a solution to all situations, because people can never always be the same. Giving 'carte blanche' authority to people blindly may have unintended consequences, for example, people may not be able and willing to take complete responsibility, and may make huge mistakes which could result in untold financial losses, whereafter it may be too late for management to remedy the situation.

Hersey and Blanchard developed a leadership model where a leader can monitor and rank employees' (followers) levels of readiness and willingness to take up certain responsibilities. They developed a four step model which determines if employees are: (i) not able and not willing (probably lack knowledge and are thus conservative),

27

(ii) able but not willing (probably have potential but are timid because of lack of knowledge and coaching), (iii) not able, but willing (probably need more development and coaching), (iv) able and willing (have knowledge and skills, and the right attitude).

Hersey & Blanchard (Robbins & Decenzo, 2001) called this approach a situational approach. This could be very useful for service managers, especially when they decide which service employees are best suited to run the front office, because service simultaneity requires that service employees constantly make decisions in the absence of their supervisors, and they know that they can account for such decisions, but also, because they have a clear knowledge of the organisation's objectives and are taking this into consideration when they make decisions. This requires that employees have a 'balanced score card' and systemic understanding of the organisation's strategic objectives.

2.4.1.4 Service context

The service context or environment where service is provided plays a certain important role in the behaviour of customers and service employees. The type of service provided also plays a meaningful role. The physical design and appearance of service offices influences the attitude of a customer, and thus the level of satisfaction. If service is provided in an environment where customers have to queue outside in the sun, and inside the office's paintwork is poor, there are broken and dirty chairs, it's stuffy, strange pictures and texts appear on the wall, such as the one observed during the research for this study, which read, "lack of planning on your part does not constitute an emergency on my part", or staff are not dressed presentably; customers are likely to develop a negative attitude. The overall service experience for a customer is subsequently not likely to be satisfactory, because today, service is viewed systemically or as a package.

Some offices are equipped with fancy decorations with paintings on the wall, fish-tanks and plants, in order to project a positive image. Service context also influences the interaction between service employees and customers. For example, when a service employee is providing a personal and confidential service such as marriage counseling, the environment is likely to be shielded from the general public and other employees, whereas in the provision of standardized services such as entertainment (i.e. cinema), the

environment is usually open, and the service is consumed by many customers and simultaneity is very high in terms of the number of customers present, but is of a relatively less complex nature. Mills & Margulies 1980(van Looy et al, 2003 : 21) identified three types (classification) of service customer interaction, namely:

(i)   Maintenance interactive services – where the employee-customer interaction is short and standardized. Employees tend to make few judgments and information is limited. The influence of service simultaneity is relatively less complex, e.g. a banking service. The service is typically governed by mutually accepted rules.

(ii)   Task interactive services – the service process revolves around tasks characterized by a high level of uncertainty, with long and intensive transactions. Decision-making is relatively complex. The customer usually has virtually no knowledge of the techniques to be used. The customer is very dependant on the service firm, e.g. architects.

(iii)   Personal interactive services – characterized by a relatively high level of ambiguity and uncertainty. The client is looking for answers, but is not sure of his/her questions. The skills of the service provider are crucial in order to discover the extent of the customer's problem, and devise a remedy, e.g. psychologists.

It is however possible that an organization can have a combination of service interactions. For example, maintenance interactive and personal interactive services can exist in a bank, where one customer may receive a normal or general banking service such as deposits, withdrawals and queries; while another client sits in an office receiving investment advice.

2.4.2   Service Intangibility

The concept of intangibility of service has been discussed to some extent earlier in this chapter. The focus then was on the debate of the continuum raised by service management authors such as Zeithaml & Bitner, Hope & Muhlemann, and others. This section will now discuss the practical challenges posed by service intangibility. Recognizing the argument by Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), that services are more intangible, this discussion will adopt a perspective that services are intangible.

If one systemically looks at any given firm's offering as a package, service remains intangible and products tangible.

In addition to the earlier discussion about identifying a systems purpose and boundary, the process of a system should be looked at as a whole. Capra (1996: 36) advocated that one of the criteria for systems thinking is to shift from parts to the whole. He argued that systemic properties are destroyed when a system is dissected into isolated parts. For example, an advertising agency with advertising executives, creative teams, adverts, posters, billboards and other facilitating goods, is looked at in isolation from the tacit components (services) such as persuasive messages which are conveyed to a consumer, an advertising agency would be regarded as if it were a product firm, yet "services are ideas, and concepts" (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004: 25). From this perspective, services can be regarded as intangible.

The fact that services are intangible poses a great challenge for service managers, service employees and customers. Service managers can develop a service strategy, as discussed later in this chapter, but when it comes to implementing such a strategy, it is difficult to constantly observe whether there is proper implementation, because what is being implemented cannot be physically touched (e.g. a chair), tasted (e.g. food), tested (e.g. a car). Managers cannot always observe if service employees are smiling at customers, are prompt, responsive, empathetic, courteous, helpful, etc., until customers complain to them.

Whereas in regard to product, by implementing total quality management & quality circles, the quality of products can be detected before they reach the consumer, and quality can be measured through technology. Service employees also have a challenge, in that they, unlike products, are being evaluated, and also "find themselves playing a role as part of the product itself and an essential ingredient in the service experience for the consumer"(Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000: 13). When a service manager and a customer think of good service they automatically think of the service employees. The dilemma however for service employees, is whether there is an appropriate structure supporting best service delivery, whether management style and thinking is suitable for the environment, whether they have resources and adequate authority, and whether their well-being is looked after, and whether other colleagues are cooperative.

The customer also has a challenge in that s/he cannot easily show the effects of bad service. S/he perhaps does not even know much about a particular service (i.e. medical services, architecture, law, accounting, etc.). Also, a customer hardly has an opportunity to naturally state his/her view about the level of service, because most customer feedback mechanisms have predetermined answers. These are some of the challenges that this dissertation seeks to understand and highlight for service practitioners.

2.4.3 Service heterogeneity

Linked to the challenges of service simultaneity, is service heterogeneity. Because services are frequently produced by humans, no two services will be precisely alike, argue Zeithaml & Bitner (2000: 13). Because no two customers are precisely alike each will have unique demands, or experience the service in a unique way as Zeithaml & Bitner explain. This section on service heterogeneity will focus more on the latter part of Zeithaml & Bitner's arguments, because these seek to discern a challenge to quality in service. The former argument that refers to service employees is covered sufficiently in section 2.4.1.1 of this chapter.

Customers are all different, and thus there is a strong propensity for different needs and hence different services. In the service literature there is an indication that most of the customer needs surveys are based on the positivist quantitative approach, and this is where customer satisfaction intervention falls short, because the focus is directed at the needs of the majority using a Likert scale form of questioning (strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree type questions). These majority needs are treated as though they represent all customers. The fact that people are different adds an inherent diversity to customer needs which should be identified extensively through an in-depth research inquiry. Service employees ought to know these heterogeneous customer needs, and they should have "personality attributes that include flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity, an ability to monitor and change behaviour on the basis of situational cues, and empathy for customers"(Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004: 102).

31

A service organization such as a university has a wide range of people from diverse backgrounds, for example, students from different cities, different provinces in the case of a South African university, different ethnic backgrounds, who are different racially, and culturally, and are even from different countries. As if these overt diversities were not enough, people from the same group are also not homogenous i.e. people from a Zulu culture are not the same, people from China are not the same, people from one family are also not the same, and have different needs.

Generally this wide diversity cannot be found amongst service employees – in terms of matching the students' diverse backgrounds. In other words, they do not come from such wide diverse backgrounds. Instead, service employees (including lecturers) will be expected to embrace and cope with this overwhelming diverse complexity. It is a 'sink or swim' environment. Regardless of this diversity of customers, this discussion does not suggest that service employees must match the background quantitatively, the discussion merely demonstrates the challenge that service employees and managers have to embrace.

As demonstrated in figure 2 in an open system diagram, a customer comes as an input and influences the transformation process and can be part of an output. It is thus difficult to standardize service, as compared to products. In a product environment, the manufacturer produces a limited range of products where customers are subtly compelled (through either advertising or display of products) to adapt, or match their expectations to the available products. Therefore it could be said that in product environments, customer heterogeneity is harnessed, and converged or directed towards homogeneity. Whereas in a service environment, customer heterogeneity diverges far away from homogeneity, to an individualized level of heterogeneity.(see figure 5 below).

Individual customers then bring their different characteristics, and services are geared towards a variety of usually unknown, or unforeseen needs. For example, if a customer wants to buy a car, s/he cannot go to a manufacturer and ask for a certain type of a car that is completely different from those on the market. S/he would normally go to a car dealer and choose from the cars already available. While if a customer (patient) is sick s/he expects a doctor to provide a custom-made service to ameliorate his/her unique problem which may be different from the previous or the next patient. Sometimes

service can be standardized for generic problems or needs, but service managers must be wary of unintended consequences, because some of these consequences can be very costly to remedy, and very detrimental to a customer. The following diagram seeks to further illustrate the customer complexity.

A diagrammatic illustration of service needs versus product choices
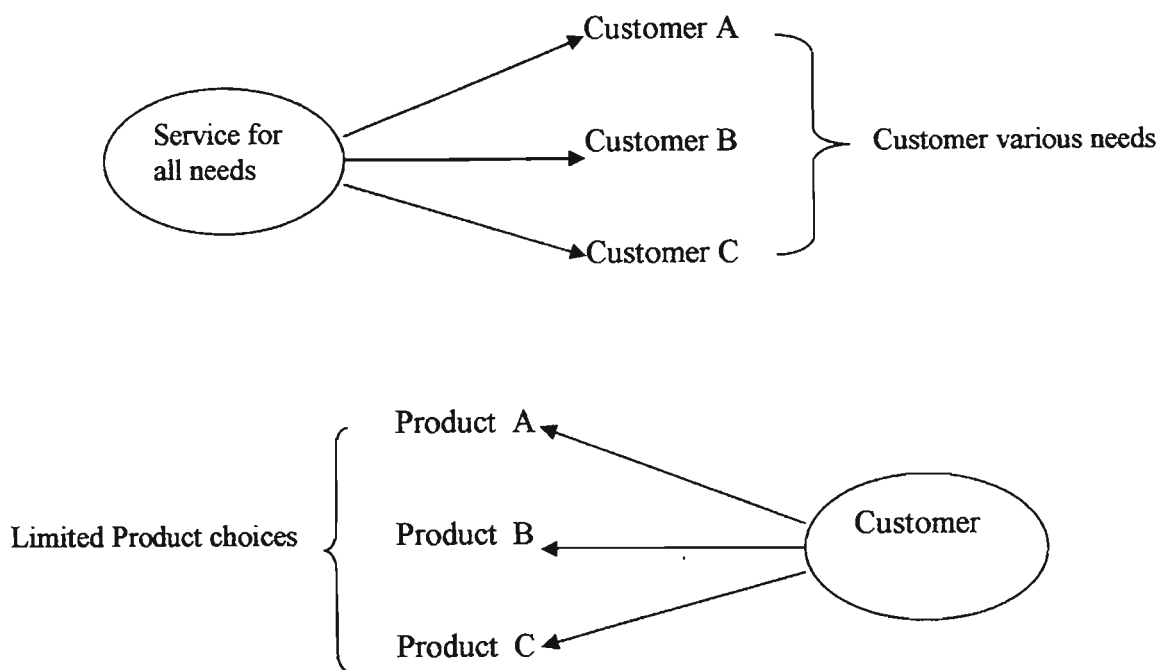
Figure 5
Customer service needs variety v s product choices
No source

The diagram in figure 5 above represents service needs and product needs. The first diagram shows service as one component that has to satisfy a variety of customers with diverse needs – which is the great challenge discussed in this section. The second diagram shows a customer as one component and with various needs again, as in the service environment, but this time also depicting the limited choices that a customer is confined to, in trying to see which products meet or come closest to meeting his/her needs.

Service managers and employees ought to make an effort to understand these heterogeneous needs systemically as shown in the influence diagram below.

Influence diagram showing factors that contribute to customer needs:

Social status

Family
Religion
Culture & tradition
Friends
Own worldview
Own perspective

Customer needs

Media
Politics
Education
Society
Business

Affordability

Environment

International dynamics

Economy
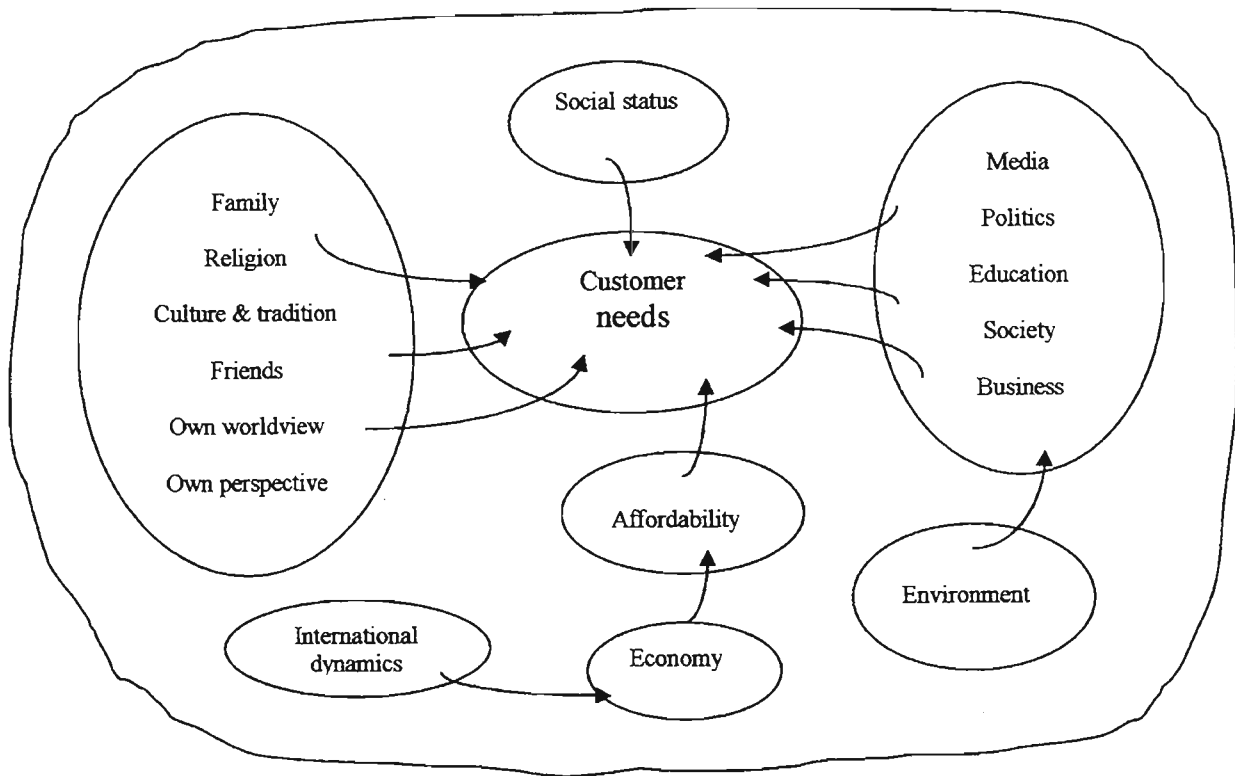
Figure 6

Influence diagram : Source , T205 course material(2004), Open University

The influence diagram in figure 6 depicts various factors that can shape and complicate customer needs. Some factors are very close to a customer, such as family, culture, and society, so they have a profound influence. Others are indirect, such as the economy, natural environment, and international dynamics which have a more holistic influence, for example, if the economy is booming, customer expectations are likely to develop faster. Such a situation contributes to customer tolerance levels as well, and most importantly, competition is likely to increase thus giving customers a wider range of choices which positively reinforces and widens customer expectations, and the vicious circle continues.

2.4.4   Service Perishability

Perishability of service in this discussion does not mean that service grows stale (old), it refers to the non-storability of, or an inability to keep service in some storeroom. Products (a lot of them) also perish literally, where they get stale after being stored, not bought and consumed. Luckily, today's businesses are able to determine the lifespan of such products, and they make necessary plans to avoid or minimize losses. On the contrary, "services cannot be stored" (Van Looy et al, 2003: 16). "Services are perishable commodities" (Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004: 23).

If a university residence room is empty, for example, that vacancy amounts to loss of revenue that can never be recouped. A student who takes occupation of that room the next day is not going to pay for previous days during which the room was empty. The residence department budget is based on the number of days of the academic year, so an empty room during the academic term particularly, creates a budget deficit. Likewise, if a flight, for example, leaves from Durban to Cape Town half full, income for unoccupied seats is lost, and those empty seats cannot be kept (stored) for the next trip, so that customers in that second trip to Cape Town pay for their current trip and for the empty seats on the previous trip.

A service organization such as a university has peak times, and these times are rather important in order to meet particular financial projections and objectives for a given year. The beginning of the year where student registration takes place is the time which determines how many students are actually admitted to the university. Any student who is turned away, or who changes his/her mind at that stage cannot be persuaded in the middle of the semester to come back, and still be on a par with students who enrolled earlier in the year. Also, if some students drop out in the middle of a semester, their places cannot be filled.

Service perishability is a big challenge for service managers and employees, and thus requires an effective service demand management plan to be put in place. As it is discussed in Chapter Four, in a service place like a university, which is heavily dependent on its peak times (student registration) for its annual finances, it is crucial that a cohesive project team with a systemic mindset is built for such peak times. Plans for service

perishability should include flexibility in service capacity, and a systemic contingency approach to cater for unforeseen turbulences that may capsize the service process. Such turbulences for a university include government policies that affect tertiary institutions, student protests, staff and community protests.

2.5 STRATEGIC SERVICE MANAGEMENT

Most businesses exist to make money. Even Universities do not merely want to break even financially, but also desire to have some money in reserve in order to continuously cater for disasters, and also for growth. South African Express Airways puts their mission succinctly "...providing best service to our customers, while optimizing profit" ("Indwe Magazine", July 2005, pg.100). See also, www.flysax.com . These are the ultimate goals for virtually any organization. In order to move towards or to achieve this ultimate goal, an organization develops a vision (the what) which usually focuses on the aspirations of the organization, the purpose of existence, and the future of the organization, and practically includes unmet needs in the market that the organization exists to satisfy. Developing a mission statement subsequently gives birth to a mission (the how) which is the strategic plan for realizing the vision. The strategic plan, sometimes known as corporate strategy, is "concerned with an organisation's basic direction for the future: its purpose, its ambitions, its people, and how it interacts with the world in which it operates" (Lynch, 2000: 5).

Lynch (2000) advocates that every aspect of the organization plays, or should play a role in the strategy. There seems to be a comprehensive and systemic paradigm in how Lynch addresses the issue of corporate strategy. One of the focus areas of the research in this study was to explore, in a service environment, how corporate strategy is understood, implemented, interpreted, and filters through every aspect of the organization. This research approach adopted Kaplan & Norton's balanced scorecard in terms of corporate strategy. Kaplan & Norton (Gemmel, 2003: 375) developed a balanced score card approach which looked at the strategy systemically, with regard to its effect on financial aspects, customers' views, internal business processes, innovation, learning and growth. When fully deployed, the balanced score card is intended to transform strategic planning from a separate management exercise into the nerve center of the enterprise, as explained by Pearce & Robinson (2003: 337).

The conventional pyramid style of management hierarchy
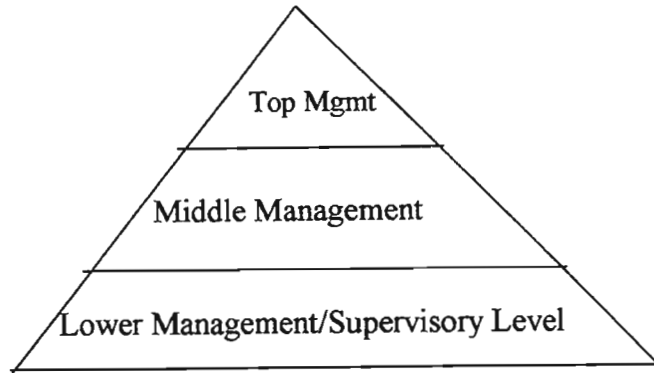
Figure 7

Conventional management hierarchy

Source : Adapted from Robbins & Dicenzo (2001: 4).

Conventional organizations have structures which serve managing hierarchy, with levels of management, and different functions that follow Adam Smith's specialization classical philosophy. Generally in hierarchical organizational structures, there are three management levels through which a corporate strategy gets filtered. See figure 7 above.

There is first line management (i.e. supervisors), middle management (i.e. managers, directors, HODs, Deans), and a top management level (i.e. managing directors, chief executive officers, Vice-Chancellors). The first level deals with "day.to day activities, and supervising operative employees" (Robbins & Decenzo, 2001: 4). The first level of management is the closest to the frontline staff who literally deliver the service. The middle management level "are typically responsible for translating the goals set by top management into specific details that lower level managers can perform"(Robbins & Decenzo, 2001: 4). This level is very crucial in terms of strategy interpretation and implementation, as well as decision-making. A lot of unhappy customers often ask to see these people. Top management level "are responsible for making decisions about the direction of the organization and establishing policies that affect all organization members" (Robbins Decenzo, 2001: 4).

37

Organisations develop different kinds of strategies depending on the management paradigm. Mintzberg 1985 (Stacey, 1993: 70 - 71) identified eight types of strategies, namely: (i) Planned: top management draw up formal plans, articulate the intentions, and exert control by monitoring outcomes against plans, (ii) Entrepreneurial: a leader personally controls the organization and strategies for him/her, (iii) Ideological: strategies are based on collective beliefs, and control is through indoctrination and socialization, (iv) Umbrella: the leaders define overall targets and set the boundaries for lower level managers, and control is exerted through monitoring outcomes against targets, and behaviour against boundaries, (v) Process: leaders control the process of strategy through setting timetables and exercising a final veto, (vi) Unconnected: no central intention, and groups produce contradicting strategies, (vii) Consensus: people converge on a common theme and agree on strategies as they emerge without central managers' prior intention, (viii) Imposed: environment dictates what has to be done. There isn't one best strategy that fits all organizations and contexts, but a combination can be found in most organizations and others do follow one type.

Once the organization has decided on a corporate strategy it then develops functional strategies, such as a strategic human resources plan, which, according to Greer (2001: 123) deals with the effective use of people to meet organizations' strategic requirements and objectives. Other functional strategic plans include financial strategy, operations strategy, sales & marketing strategy. Michael Porter is a well-known author of marketing strategy paradigms. He advocated competitive strategies. Stacey (1993) discusses two types of dominant management paradigms. He says that one management paradigm focuses its strategies on adapting the organization within the environment. Stacey says that such a paradigm must be questioned. Such a paradigm is concerned with "clear cut links between cause and effect assumed to generate behaviour that is predictable..." (Stacey, 1993: 100).

The second or new paradigm, according to Stacey, sees the dynamics of organizations, and it sees irregularity, contradiction, and creative tension as the essence of the successful organization. Hamel & Prahalad (Stacey 1993) argue that less-successful organizations follow the conventional strategy that seeks to maintain strategic fit, and as a result, organizational ambitions are trimmed down to match the available resources.

Hamel & Prahalad (Stacey 1993) further explain that unconventional strategies for successful organizations focus on leveraging resources innovatively, and "use their resources in challenging and stretching ways to build up a number of core competencies"(pg.101).

The hierarchical view of levels of management discussed here aim at providing a general management model for most organizations. Top management's conceptual philosophies and ideologies such as the ones discussed by Stacey (1993) are expected to filter through such a typical structure. On the contrary, front-line staff-customer interaction experience is not usually communicated to senior management, except if an organization follows Mintzberg's consensus strategy.

Practically, there is less implementation of consensus approach, however modern organizations may seem, and as a result, management and employees are usually on two opposite extremes in terms of their paradigms – which generates a whole lot of interconnected loops of problem situations, or complexities that reinforce one another, and when symptoms surface, people naturally address these symptoms, instead of the underlying causes of problems. The research conducted for this study looked at the congruency in thinking and understanding of the university strategy as seen by management and front line staff. The findings are reported and discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

2.6 SERVICE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT AND DECISION-MAKING

The aspects of information and decision-making are very closely related. Most decisions are based on information available and decision-making also generates more information. It is a systemic iterative and reciprocal process. Systemic, in terms of the multiple effects of decision-making, and gathering data and synthesizing information for meaningful actions, and reciprocal, because there is mutual interdependency. Information plays a primary and key role in service context. Revisiting the open system model, information could be seen as transcending through input, transformation, output, and feedback. In fact, (especially for service organizations) information is a catalyst for this type of open system to function. Because information is at the heart of the firm's operations, many organizations develop management information systems for "processing vast amounts of

information and disseminating it to managers organization-wide"(Alavi & Leidner, 2002: 15). The management information system (MIS) provides a support system for decision-making. This is a very important feature of employee-customer interaction.

This discussion began by considering information, because this is the commonly used term, and in its use, there is usually no distinction between data, information, and knowledge. In knowledge management, information is, however, seen from a different perspective. The knowledge management doctrine suggests a hierarchical process, starting from data, to information, to knowledge, and decision-making. Maglitta 1995 (Alavi & Leidner, 2002: 17) describe data as raw numbers and facts. Vance 1997 (Alavi & Leidner, 2002: 17) defines information as data interpreted into a meaningful frame-work. Based on the work of Nonaka and Huber (Alavi & Leidner, 2002) knowledge is described as justified personal belief that increases an individual's capacity to take effective action.

In a service organization, customers supply data to service employees. The data supplied by customers is usually raw – because customers are usually not sure of the problem, such as when a customer (patient) is visiting a doctor, or is unsure of the solution to their problem or need, or is not sure if the solutions suggested will meet his/her expectations – such as when a student enrolls at the university for the first time. In these circumstances, customers have a tendency to provide fragmented input (data) into the system. This is one of the challenges for service managers and employees. Lovelock & Wirtz (2004: 35) explain that, if services are of a relatively low risk nature, the interaction (transformation) becomes easier and quicker. Another challenge, however, is to make services risk-free, or mitigate the risk factor, because for as long as customers are paying for the services, and while services are consumed by a customer, while being produced simultaneously, there is always a risk, i.e. the risk of loss of money paid, the risk of wrong service, the risk of defective service, the risk of physical injury, etc.

Customers provide pieces of information they gather from different sources about the service(see figure 6). Lovelock & Wirtz (2003) call this process (stage) a pre-purchase stage. For instance, a student wanting to enroll at the University of KwaZulu-Natal could complain about the service given by the service employee, and argue that Witwatersrand University(Wits) or University of Cape Town(UCT) provide this and that (referring to

things that the University of KwaZulu-Natal may not be providing). A customer weights the risk involved in consuming service, as well as the benefits.

Lovelock & Wirtz developed a generic list of types of risks, namely: functional risk (fear of unsatisfactory performance outcomes), financial risk (fear and possibility of unexpected monetary loss), temporal risk (possibility of wasted time), physical risk (fear of possible personal injury or damage), social risk (fear of how others will think and react), sensory risk (unwanted impact on any of the five senses). The influence diagram in figure 6 demonstrates a systemic influence of customer needs. A customer brings an array of dimensions, such as fear of risk, uncertainty about the problem and or solution, and fragmented data. Virtually all customers go through the pre-purchase stage, and obliviously bring with them these dimensions. This poses a challenge for service employees, and it is not easy to anticipate all the dimensions because "no two services will be precisely alike"(Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000: 13).

Research conducted in this study looked at service delivery challenges and a variety of capabilities necessary for staff (service employees) to possess, in order to equip themselves for various types of students needs. The service employee takes data (input) from a customer, processes the data, and provides actionable information (advice), in the form of a range of service alternatives for solutions to customer problems. The customer would then make decisions with the assistance of a service employee. The transformation process takes place, sometimes with the customer involved (i.e. in a student registration, students complete forms, and in public bus transport, a passenger has to press a bell to indicate that s/he wants to descend), and sometimes without the customer involved (e.g. motor repair), and sometimes on the customer (e.g. dentistry or hairdressing).

More often than not, because of service and customer heterogeneity, employees gather information from colleagues and from computer-based sources. Furthermore, some information may be required from supervisors and managers, and for big, bureaucratic and centralized organizations, information may be sought from organizational senior management. This is one of the challenges of service management especially for service employees and customers, that information may not be readily available. For instance, a service employee in one city might have to wait for information from a head office in

another city, or a customer might be told to 'contact the head office', which might be located in another city. This is a huge challenge with regard to delivering service efficiently and satisfactorily.

Some organizations put in place Knowledge Management Systems (KMS) in order to empower employees, facilitate and expedite the service process and decision-making. Alavi & Leidner (2002: 15) explain that KMS is a management system focusing on creating, gathering, organizing, and disseminating organizational knowledge. As discussed earlier in this section, knowledge increases an individual's capacity to take effective action; thus a KMS is very relevant to service management. Knowledge is an indispensable tool for service employees and their managers. Knowledge is made up of data and information, and once information, explain Polanyi 1966 & Nonaka 1994 (Alavi & Leidner 2002: 17) is processed in the mind of an individual, it becomes tacit knowledge, and once it is articulated or communicated to others in the form of text, computer output, spoken or written, it becomes explicit knowledge.

Argyris (1999: 54) advises that tacit knowledge is the primary basis for effective management, and the basis for its deterioration. The latter implication for management poses a threat to organizations which do not manage tacit knowledge. Van der Heijden (1996: 62) emphasized the challenge existing in untapped or uncodified tacit knowledge. He argued that such tacit uncodified institutional knowledge must also emerge to the surface and be part of an organizational knowledge asset. The one way of managing such (tacit) knowledge would be to externalize that knowledge. Nonaka & Takenchi 1995 (Sternmark, 2002: 37) suggested this concept of externalizing tacit knowledge. Externalisation means making tacit knowledge explicit, and this can be applied in different ways, such as through knowledge sharing, knowledge management IT systems, and communities of practice. Knowledge serves as a basis for decision-making and is at the heart of an organisation's services.

2.7 SERVICE QUALITY AND CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

The research conducted for this dissertation focused (amongst other areas) on quality as it pertains to service, and the overall customer satisfaction as applied to the services at UKZN. Research participants were asked about their understanding of the term 'quality'. They were asked how they would identify it since services are intangible, how they would know students' expectations and needs, and how they would know whether those expectations and needs are satisfied. As a qualitative research project, questions asked required explanation, rather than yes or no answers.

Chapter Three will deliberate on the research methods used, and Chapter Four will report the findings and discussion. As discussed earlier, today's service marketers are unwittingly educating customers to look at service as a package, comprising of a bundle of goods and services, explain Hope & Muhlemann (1997: 123). The primary objective for marketing services as packages, is to make services as tangible as possible, and to create a competitive advantage for a given organization. Firms use "physical evidence such as brochures, websites, business cards, and reports to promote themselves and allow the customer to evaluate their service" (McColl-Kennedy, 2003: 9).

Zeithaml(Van Looy et al, 2003: 12) suggest that in evaluating service, customers encounter different kinds of service qualities including search qualities (colour, prices), experience qualities (taste, wearability), and credence qualities. The last set of qualities (credence) needs specialized skills. Bitner (1996), Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), McColl-Kennedy (2003), Hope & Muhlemann (1997), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (1994, 2004), all agree that services that are high in credence qualities are difficult for a customer to evaluate or to measure. Types of services with high credence qualities include surgery, architecture, etc. For instance, a customer (or a patient) cannot know if the surgery has been successful, but can take home the post-surgery relief experience, and conclude that the surgery must have been successful, and thus satisfying.

In trying to make services relatively easier to evaluate, service marketers create a concept of service package for customers. The service package concept includes components that a customer would relate to and can perhaps see, and according to Hope and Muhlemann (1997: 124), and Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, (2004: 20 – 22), the service package

would also include: a supporting facility (physical resources), facilitating goods (material purchased with the service), explicit services (observable services), and implicit services (psychological benefits). Implicit services have high credence qualities.

Service Quality is thus very difficult to evaluate and measure especially if the service has high credence qualities and there are no tangibles. This is the challenge for service managers. There are, however, different ways of identifying quality in service. During the research for this study, participants revealed characteristics that represent quality, and these are discussed in Chapter Four of this dissertation. Quality generally, is embedded in what and how service is delivered.

Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (Van Ossel et al, 2003: 132) developed a model for evaluating quality. They called this the SERVQUAL model, and generated a list of ten determinants of quality, namely:

(a) Reliability - consistency and dependability, which include performing the service right the first time and keeping to promises; accuracy, and performing the service at the designated time.

(b) Responsiveness - willingness or readiness of employees i.e. speed & flexibility.

(c) Competence – possession of the right skills & knowledge.

(d) Access – approachability, ease of contact i.e. easily accessible through technology, no excessive waiting, convenient hours and location.

(e) Courtesy – politeness, respect, consideration, friendliness.

(f) Communication – keeping customers informed in a language they can understand, and listening to customers.

(g) Credibility – trustworthiness, believability, honesty.

(h) Security – safe from danger, risk or doubt. Physical safety, financial security, and confidentiality.

(i) Understanding the customer – making an effort to understand the customer. Learning about the customers' needs.

(j) Tangibles – physical evidence of service. Physical facilities, appearance of personnel, tools and equipment used to provide service.

The SERVQUAL model is used by many organizations and the quality determinants appear in most service organizations. During the research, participants mentioned some of these determinants as representing quality for their services. More qualitative research studies should however be carried out to go beyond these generic determinants. Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), van Looy et al (2003), McColl-Kennedy (2003), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (20004) agree on some of the dimensions of quality, such as responsiveness, reliability, and tangibles. These authors also add assurance and empathy as other quality dimensions. What stands out though from Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry's SERVQUAL model, and what other authors identify, is that most of these dimensions have the soft aspects of quality that is difficult to measure. Service managers ought to be aware of this challenge.

Service quality deals with specific customer interaction on a short-term basis, and customer satisfaction involves the overall experience, short term and long term. If for example, a firm provides good quality service, but there is not overall satisfaction because the firm closes early, closes for lunch breaks, holidays, weekends etc., customers may become dissatisfied even though quality for each interaction may be good. That is why shopping malls which close late at night are becoming popular, because people's lifestyles (needs) are changing. Operating extended hours and 24hour services has been a competitive advantage for some organizations such as Seven-Elevens, most petrol service stations, and convenience stores. A lot of companies such as banks, insurance companies, and cell phone service providers have 24 hour call centres.

Criticism of call centres is, however, developing. Terry Bell in the business report of The Mercury newspaper of June 24, 2005, discussed research findings by Edward Webster of Wits University and Karl von Holdt of the National Labour & Economic Development Institute, where call centre managers are labeled as extreme authoritarians. In that research, call centre employees are reported to be "merely obeying orders, and their jobs depend on such obedience" (Bell, 2004). In brief, that study highlights to service managers, that, as they innovate new ways of customer satisfaction, there is a need to balance those initiatives with service employee welfare.

Bitner, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (McColl-Kennedy, 2003: 73) described service quality as an elusive and abstract concept, similar in nature to an attitude, as it represents a general, overall appraisal of a product or service. This definition already suggests that quality is a complicated concept, and that is the challenge for service managers. Gronroos 1984 (McColl-Kennedy, 2003: 81), (Carnama et al, 2000 qouted by van Ossel et al, in van Looy et al, 2003: 124) identified two key dimensions of service quality, namely functional quality – concerned with the psychological interaction that occurs during the service encounter; and technical quality – concerned with the outcomes of service interaction. The important emphasis for these quality dimensions is that they are entirely dependent on service employees and the overall service strategy.

As discussed in detail above, however difficult it is to evaluate and measure service, there is nevertheless a great need for an evaluation mechanism, otherwise customer satisfaction cannot be known, and thus the overall strategic goals are not likely to be met.

"The gap between expected and perceived service is a measure of service quality"(Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004: 133). Most service organizations follow a positivist paradigm when researching the gap between expected and received service. ABSA bank (South Africa) has a customer satisfaction feedback form at their counter, with predetermined quality service dimensions, and a customer rates these dimensions on a Likert scale (excellent, good, poor, very poor). Nedbank (South Africa) also has a customer satisfaction evaluation machine device with the predetermined answers for a customer to choose by pressing a button. Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004) explained that Club-Med, an international hotel chain, use questionnaires which are mailed to all guests immediately after their departure, to assess the quality of their experience. Such questionnaires have closed questions based on a quantitative Likert scale. Answers are predetermined and fixed on whether a customer agrees or disagrees with predetermined answers (indicating the magnitude of agreeing or disagreeing in a continuum), and the utilitarian rule of majority then applies in analyzing and taking decisions. In other words, the service provider determines what answers a customer should give back regarding his/her experience of service.

The research of such a functionalistic approach can result in a phenomenon such as the one described above by Terry Bell, where managers create a customer service system derived from non-systemic quantitative data only, and then 'compel' service employees to implement the initiative. Such an initiative is seen as non-systemic because, in addition to the fact that customers are coaxed to choose predetermined answers from surveys, employees are hardly involved in the research itself, and are also expected to just 'shut up' and implement the initiative. In an endeavour to address the gap between the expected level of service and the customer perception of the service received, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry 1985 (McColl-Kennedy, 2003: 82) developed what they called the GAPS model. This model identified five GAPS, namely:

- Provider Gap 1: refers to the lack of management understanding of what the customer expects.

- Provider Gap 2: refers to management failure to design a service that meets customer expectations.

- Provider Gap 3: the service delivery fails to meet service standards.

- Provider Gap 4: non-delivery of promises made.

- Customer Gap 5: customer's perception of service experience does not match expectations.

This GAPS model approach is discussed again and applied to research findings in Chapter Four of this dissertation to assess the gap in the student administrative services at UKZN.

Most researchers apply this model in pursuit of customer satisfaction, and they use quantitative research methodologies. Opara (2002) also tried the SERVQUAL and GAPS Models in his research. He encountered limitations and suggested that further research must be done in order to improve the data-gathering instruments. It is one of the objectives of the research conducted for this study to contribute a different dimension to the service body of knowledge, and address some deficiencies pointed out by the previous researchers, such as Komives et al (1996) who recommended that research in student affairs (or customer service) must find qualitative approaches that are reliable and valid, yet flexible to changing conditions and multiple perspectives.

2.8 SERVICE EMPLOYEES

Providing a service is a complex function, and this study recognizes this fact, and thus sought to apply an approach relevant to understanding and improving complex and unbound problem situations. Service is as complex as dealing with people. Service represents the soft aspect in people. "Service personnel usually feature prominently in such dramas and are in roles as either uncaring, incompetent, mean-spirited villains, or heroes who went out of their way to help customers by anticipating their needs and resolving problems in a helpful and empathetic manner" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004: 309). This point emphasises the key role played by people in service. "People in services can be defined as all those who play a part in the production and delivery of the service" (McColl-Kennedy, 2003: 11). People, in terms of their involvement, transcend the aspect of strategic management, knowledge management and decision-making, service quality and customer satisfaction.

In trying to understand the overall challenge of service managers and employees, this study poses people-related questions, namely:

2.8.1 How does a corporate strategy get filtered throughout the organisation, and how do service employees implement it ?

What is the service employee's understanding of the corporate strategy? How does it systematically relate to employees' individual jobs?

Churchman (1968: 146) said that the one thing that makes humans superior to animals is the ability to think ahead, that is, to plan. If one observes bees flying in and out of a hive to collect and bring material for making a honeycomb and honey, Churchman's viewpoint of animals not being able to plan could be considered and appear fallible. Churchman however explains that carrying out routine is not necessarily planning. He says that planning means laying out a course of action that we can follow and that will take us to our desired goals. Chapman explains this systematic planning further, by stating that it involves goal setting, creating a group of alternatives, implementing the plan, and evaluating how the plan worked. All these activities involve people. An anti-planner as discussed by Churchman, would be against this process, and would, as a

skeptic, suggest that managers should rely entirely on their intuition and experience, and as a determinist, suggest that planning is a waste of time because everything is self-regulatory, suggesting an anarchic kind of system.

Most bureaucratic systems such as Universities obliviously operate under this skeptic paradigm when it comes to administrative functions. Chapter Four reveals this phenomenon. This becomes a great challenge for a corporate strategy to be realized, and ultimately creates interconnected problems as discussed in Chapter One. These interconnected problems need soft systems, emancipatory and critical systems, and systems dynamics in order to improve.

Checkland's (1981) soft systems methodology adapts well in evaluating and improving corporate strategy, following a multiple perspectives approach. An emancipatory systems approach, will, explains Jackson 1991a (Midgley 1996: 14) address three human interests, namely: prediction and control, mutual understanding, and freedom from oppressive power relations. Critical systems, as discussed by Ulrich (1996) which he termed critical heuristics, is about redefining the societal notion of planning, by giving people a new understanding and competence in matters of societal change. Peter Senge (1990), and Jay Forrester (1994) promoted systems dynamics as a management paradigm. Both these systems thinkers emphasized the systems causal loops to determine the relationship and reinforcement of problems that keep on recurring. In this debate of strategy and people, the emphasis is that soft systems as defined by Luckett (2004) is an approach that is relevant for complex, unbound, and ill-defined situations, and such situations usually involve service employees. The systems approach assists in creating a holistically minded paradigm in dealing with people, be they customers or employees.

2.8.2 How do people create knowledge for decision-making in service organizations?

Management as a discipline has come a long way from Adam Smith's specialization approach, Frederick Taylor's scientific management "efficiency", "one best way" approach, Elton Mayo's human resources and behavioural approaches, systems thinking popularized by Ludwig von Bertalanffy, to Edward Deming's' total quality management (TQM), business process engineering (BPR), participative and diversity management,

and knowledge management. It is important to note that systems thinking should be seen as a philosophy, rather than a management technique, because it transcends many disciplines. Bertalanffy (Flood & Carson, 1988: 2) envisaged a framework of concepts and theory that would be equally applicable to many fields of interest. As Bertalanffy said:

> ... the concept (of systems) has pervaded all fields of science and penetrated into popular thinking, jargon and mass media. Systems thinking plays a dominant role in a wide range of fields from industrial enterprise and armaments to esoteric topics of pure science.
> (Bertalanffy, 1969).

Most of the management approaches discussed in this question were developed through hard systems paradigms. Knowledge management creates a learning process where people share knowledge through imparting tacit knowledge and communicating explicit knowledge. Knowledge management seeks to systemically synthesise data and information into actionable knowledge for decision-making.

Peter Senge (1994) suggested that the 1990's should create learning organizations. He further explained that learning organizations should discover how to tap people's commitment and capacity to learn at all levels in an organization. Forrester (1994) made it clear that system dynamics should be a catalyst for organizational learning. He explained that systems dynamics modeling is a participative activity in which one learns by trial and error and practice. This is important, because it allows people to be creative, innovative, and relentlessly try new ways of meeting and exceeding customer expectations.

Argyris (1999: 4) said that learning organizations stress the development of human resources capability for questioning, experimenting, adapting and innovating on the organization's behalf. Argyris emphasized that organizational culture can assist in the creation of organizational learning. Knowledge management is applied through a knowledge management system (KMS), and the people component of KMS establishes communities of practice (COP), and an information technology database management system. Knowledge management is compatible with learning as a soft systems approach.

2.8.3 How do service employees facilitate good quality? How do service employees facilitate customer satisfaction?

Usually when there are defective products, some managers (those who follow a hard system paradigm) look for the causes at the production department. When a quantitative customer research reports that customers are not happy with service, managers tend to look for causes from front-line employees. Generally, we tend to focus on snapshots of isolated parts of the system, and wonder why our deepest problems never seem to get solved contends Senge (1994). The machine age, explains Ackoff (1994) taught people to think that everything in the universe could be explained by cause and effect. Quality of service and the satisfaction of customers with service are very complex issues. They are complex because they cannot be clearly defined, quality is very subjective, and it is dynamic. The following causal loop diagram in figure 8 shows the vicious circle of variables that recur, continuously generating customer dissatisfaction.

Causal loop diagram depicting the reinforcement of problems in a service environment
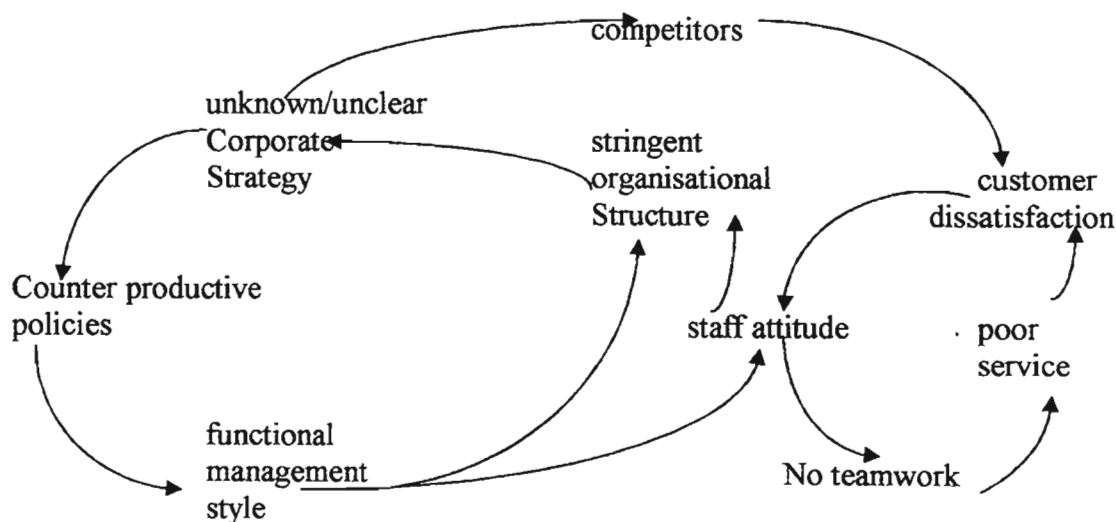
Figure 8
Causal loop diagram: customer service
Source: T205 course material (2004), Open University

51

The above causal loop in figure 8 seeks to depict multiple loops which reinforce one another positively and negatively, creating a homeostatic self-regulatory system. This shows how customer dissatisfaction can evolve and cause a serious threat to organizational survival. The diagram also shows that many factors in the system contribute, and that this view is contrary to most customer surveys that look at the problem situation non-systemically.

As demonstrated in the previous section, service employees represent quality. Now from this viewpoint, service employees should be viewed holistically, rather than as the front-office or back office, managers or supervisors. The total quality management doctrine advocates this holistic view in terms of customers i.e. internal (employees) and external customers (suppliers & consumers). In answering the question about how service employees facilitate good quality, a causal loop diagram (see figure 8) and multiple cause diagram can be used to study the relationship of all stakeholders involved in delivering service. Further questions could relate to whether quality is identified through reliability, responsiveness, competence, understanding, etc., whether everybody in the system is reliable, responsive, competent, understanding, etc. In answering the customer satisfaction question, another question arises, as to whether service employees are empowered to deliver good quality, and satisfactory service.

2.9 **SUMMARY**

As a literature review chapter, this chapter sought to engage in prevailing debates within the service management literature. Systems thinking approach was used as a meta-discipline to illuminate discussions, unravel and discern facts and synthesize issues, and generally to apply systems tools in order to clearly identify systemically the prevailing challenges for service managers and service employees.

A systems approach is a paradigm that advocates a holistic view of the world, and considers that a system has multiple connections, so therefore when one attempts to make an improvement in a problem situation, the interrelationships within a system must be recognized. A system is made up of sets of components that work together for the overall objectives of the whole, explains Churchman (1968: 11). According to Churchman, systems thinking is thus a way of thinking about these total systems and their components. The systems doctrine has different paradigms, namely, hard systems (positivist, functionalist, and quantitative paradigms), soft systems (interpretive, systemic, and subjective paradigms), critical systems (emancipatory and cultural or social paradigms). This dissertation adopts a soft systems approach. This soft systems is "observer-dependent and relevant to a real world phenomenon" (Luckett, 2004).

A university environment was chosen because it provides the researcher with a rich and high employee-customer interaction experience and environment, which offers an in-depth understanding of the challenges of service management.

In a university context, service function (excluding teaching and research) is called support service, non-academic service, student support service, student services, and student affairs. Little research has been done in the area of student services, and a few people such as Cathy Dove (2004), Jacqueline Stemmies (2004), conducted research in this area. Komives and her associates wrote a book in 1996 on student services. Most of this research and the books written are based on positivist inquiries. Most companies also use quantitative research surveys and feedback mechanisms that provide statistical data, and then these data are analysed and interpreted, using utilitarian principles.

There is quite a significant number of books on service management literature in general, however there are not many journals. Service management literature defines service as "an activity or series of more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily takes place in interaction between the customer and service employees, and or physical resources or goods and or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problems" (Gronroos 1990, Van Looy et al, 2003, Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons, 2004). A service delivery process conforms to an open system in that there are inputs, which include customers and information from the environment, a transformation that is conducted by a service employee with, and sometimes on the customer, in order to ameliorate, improve, develop, skill, facilitate, and change a customer (and or his/her property) physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Furthermore, the transformation process also changes a customer's property. The services transform a customer into an output (i.e. a registered student or a learned person). Sometimes the transformation does not change a customer and or his/her property, but rather facilitates and assists the customer in carrying out another process (i.e. transportation, hotel, etc.). Also, the transformation process changes a customer's property for better or for worse i.e. motor repairs. The output goes to the environment and affects the environment in different ways. The service process, again iteratively, gets feedback from the environment.

This chapter entered the debate about whether services are tangible or intangible. Some authors such as Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) developed a continuum which positions some services towards tangible ends, and others towards intangible ends. The continuum also positions some, and most products towards tangible ends, and others towards the intangible. This analysis suggests that some services are more intangible and others are more tangible. Van Looy et al (2003), Lovelock & Wirtz (2004), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004) agree that services are more intangible. This dissertation regards services as intangible, because components of services that are put forward as making service tangible, are actually, it is argued, supporting and facilitating goods of the service, such as physical building, just as in products there are supporting services such as marketing and sales, or customer service.

54

What that discussion spawned was that there are two types of services, namely hard services – which are those services that have more supporting goods such as car repairs, cleaning, security, transportation, etc. The hard services generally involved the physical part of the customer as well as the property of the customer. Soft services on the other hand, are those services that generally involve the emotional, psychological, and intellectual aspects of the customer, such as counseling, entertainment, teaching, legal services, etc. Other services involved both hard and soft services, such as police services (providing protection against physical harm, and a sense of security).

A systems boundary judgment and systems purpose helped in determining whether an offering is a product or service. This approach suggests that one needs to decide the purpose of the system, and then "sweep in" all the relevant components (Ulrich, 1993). For example, if one wants to determine whether university residences should be regarded as products or services offered to students, one would ask if the university was in the business of selling buildings to students, or letting them to students while they are studying at the university.

The characteristics of service were discussed in detail and these included intangibility, simultaneity, heterogeneity, and perishability. The main purpose of discussing these characteristics was to explore how these pose challenges to service managers and service employees. Service intangibility means that there are two challenges or a dual-challenge of intangibility, that is service and quality intangibility. Service simultaneity: the fact that service is produced and consumed at the same time, poses a number of challenges. Van Looy et al (2003: 14) emphasise that service simultaneity makes the human factor in service crucial.

This discussion looked at service employees' capacity to identify necessary skills, knowledge, and experience. Skills include what Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) call technical skills, which are skills necessary in the service transformation process, such as mechanical skills. Other skills are "intrinsic" (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2003: 321), and these are soft skills such as communication, patience, courtesy, etc. Knowledge includes the feedback from customers, and also includes knowledge from other employees. Experience is basically additional learning and past challenges that an employee would have encountered.

Organisational structure (tall, flat, matrix, authority, accountability), management paradigm (Douglas McGregor's Theory X and Theory Y, Elton Mayo's behavioural theory, & Hersey & Blanchard's contingency approach), and service context are all important dimensions which play a role in service simultaneity, in addition to the fact that customers are different and thus have different needs. This links to the customer heterogeneity. 'Customers are here, they are different with different needs to be met'. Service perishability means that service is not storable for customers to come and buy it readily made. So the challenge becomes more complicated. 'Customers are here, they are different with different needs, and the services are not readily available for them'.

Developing a service strategy is very important since it seeks to answer the above statement, and service employees, through Michael Porter's balanced scorecard approach and Peter Senge's shared vision, would know what is expected of them in terms of organisational goals. This process is, however, not easy to implement, because of the conventional management mechanistic paradigms. Knowledge management is another important aspect of service management because a lot of services are about information, and if knowledge is not managed systematically and systemically, service dwindles, and this contributes to customer dissatisfaction. One of the challenges is to externalize tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, so that it can be shared throughout the entire organization.

Quality and customer satisfaction are at the heart of managing services. Quality is subjective and is difficult to measure and evaluate, especially for services that are high in credence (expert) characteristics. Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, developed a model called the SERVQUAL model which is used to evaluate quality against a number of generic determinants of quality, namely: (reliability, responsiveness, competence, access, courtesy, communication, credibility, security, understanding, and tangibles). They also developed a GAPS model which looks at customer satisfaction – assessing the gap between perceived and received service quality. There is a high level of human factor and interaction in service. It is important therefore, that service employees are managed and led in a manner that will yield the expected performance.

There are many management approaches that have been developed over the years since Elton Mayo's human resources and behavioural science. Other general management approaches however have not receded, such as Adam Smith's specialization, Frederick W. Taylor's scientific management, total quality management (TQM), and business process re-engineering (BPR). These management approaches were aimed at improving organisational performance. With the exception of TQM, most of these approaches did not focus on people. They followed a functionalist paradigm. The most recent and emerging management approaches such as participative, diversity, and knowledge management focus on the management of people. Service requires such soft approaches. Systems thinking, even though it is not a new approach, is very useful in synthesizing the functions and people together to achieve organisational goals, rather than managing functions in a non-systemic way, with no consideration of people. Service management is a discipline with quite a number of challenges as highlighted throughout this chapter. These challenges are discussed again in conjunction with research findings in Chapter Four of this dissertation.

CHAPTER THREE

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY FOR THE STUDY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation examines the challenges of managing service functions. The title already suggests that there are challenges in service management. There are two methods used in determining such challenges. The first method was the preliminary literature for the research proposal, and the full literature review for the actual study. These reviews highlighted a variety of challenges for service managers and employees. The field research conducted in this dissertation was the second method that illuminated these challenges (see Chapter Four). This study recognized these challenges and sought to acquire a comprehensive and in-depth understanding through a phenomenological inquiry of a service management environment.

The research context was the University of KwaZulu-Natal(UKZN), and, as discussed in Chapter Two, the focus was the administrative service delivery system of the university. The university was chosen because it offers a context with high customer contact. Howard College Campus was the main base for the study, but Westville and Pietermartzburg campuses' contexts were also studied on a smaller scale in order to see if there was any consistency in the data. This chapter reports on the research methodology, method, and techniques used for this study. This first section of this chapter seeks to discuss a few research methodologies in order to reflect on the strengths and weaknesses of these different methodologies.

3.2 THE META-METHODOLOGY IN RESEARCH

The meta-methodology involves critically looking at the methodology, and "explores the nature and use of methodology" (Jackson, 2000: 11). Any research project has an objective. This objective is pursued, guided by the researcher's paradigm and this informs a methodology, method, and techniques. Denzin & Lincoln (1994: 99) define a paradigm as a basic set of beliefs that guide action. A paradigm is also defined "as a set

of beliefs or assumptions we make about the world, normally beneath the level of awareness and therefore mostly never questioned" (Stacey, 1993: 78). The common word is 'belief', but Stacey included an important point, that paradigms are beneath the level of awareness, and that they are therefore mostly never questioned. A meta-methodology and or meta-theory is therefore a way of questioning these paradigms that drive the methods. Peter Senge (1990, 1994) made popular what he called personal mastery, which is a way of questioning and understanding mental models (images, assumptions, stories which we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world), explains Senge (1994).

Many researchers believe and advocate one methodology in a given piece of research. This study followed a multi-methodology approach, in that it used systems approach to study the overall concept of service management, as well as the qualitative method of data collection. Over the years, and currently, there is a fierce debate about research methodologies, and these debates themselves prompt researchers to question their paradigms and look for fresher discoveries and worldviews. This reflection on methodologies creates a meta-theory of methodologies. This chapter itself is a reflection on the methodology. The reflection helps in further developing and improving a methodology.

3.2.1 A Positivism Paradigm

A positivist tradition has been the well-known classical and philosophical approach advocated since the 19th century. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 21) explain that Auguste Comte "the father of positivism" developed the main ideas of positivism around 1826. A positivism paradigm has been used for a long time, and it gained huge successs and popularity in natural sciences. Positivists then felt that if it was successful in natural sciences, it should be equally applicable and successful in social sciences. The term positivist refers to "scientific claims that have been postulated on the basis of empirical evidence as opposed to claims based on religion or metaphysical beliefs" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 22). Comte, explain Babbie & Mouton, was convinced that a positivist philosophy, based on scientific principles, was the only way that would guarantee social progress.

Emile Durkheim was another philosopher among many such as Karl Popper, who supported a positivist paradigm. Durkheim focused on the causal relation between variables, and his methodology was quantitative. A quantitative methodology is the most popular research method even today. It focuses on statistics and quantification of data. Notwithstanding it being scientific, it has also become the daily language of reporting. For example, if a media report states that crime has risen by 60% in a given area, people react instantly, or if a report says 50% of a given organisation's employees are HIV positive, people will be alarmed. The emphasis and focus is on figures. Mathematics/statistics is resonant in today's society. In a positivist world, a phenomenon is measured through statistics. The whole philosophy of economics popularized by Adam Smith in the 18th century is also based on mathematics. Schiller (2000) defines economy as referring to the 'sum' of all our individual production and consumption activities.

Mathematics has transcended many disciplines as a result, such as engineering, medicine, architecture, chemistry, natural sciences, as well as economics, and management in social sciences. Lake and Hickey (2002: 178-179) in their book titled <u>The customer service workbook</u>, advocate the use of quantitative questionnaires based on Likert scale methods, in order to determine customer satisfaction. This study does not, however, follow this statistical paradigm, because the objective was, as a phenomenological study, to gain a holistic, descriptive, reflective, and interpretive insight to the challenges in service management from the lived experience of those involved in the delivery and consumption of service. Chapter One briefly delineated the reasons why a quantitative approach was not preferred, and this chapter also elaborates thereon. Most chapters of this dissertation discuss the relevance of a qualitative methodology for this study.

This discussion focussed on general issues of the quantitative paradigm in order to highlight in brief, the historical evolution of the positivist approach and its role and impact on today's society. The next section will now discuss the specific aspects of qualitative research methodology.

3.2.2 Interpretivism, Constructivism, or post-positivism Paradigm

The previous discussion highlighted and examined the positivism philosophy.

A quantitative approach is, to some extent, a robust methodology. It is most recognized by academia, policy-makers, and funders, and, as was alluded to earlier, research findings that have statistics are profound and resonant even in social sciences. The question is then why one should bother about a different research methodology, if the quantitative approach is acceptable, so popular, so useful, and so relevant to today's social needs? Positivists could ask this question to someone who explores a different approach.

If researchers do not answer this question, it could mean a few things, namely, that society now has a full and complete understanding of the complex world, that there is no need for new knowledge, that there is complacency, that human beings are converging towards homogeneity and becoming less complex, that a multi-perspective society is receding, that there is a paradigm shift in thinking and worldview that leans towards the ancient mechanistic paradigm, and that society's learning is becoming extinct.

On the contrary, as Midgley (2000) argued that no view of the world can be comprehensive, a different methodology would provide new and further understanding of the complex world, provide new knowledge, provide room for further development of methodologies, while it would attempt to address the heterogeneity and complexity of human beings and their ever-changing needs, creating a society that embraces pluralism, and Argyris'(1999) double-loop learning. and Senge's (1994) generative learning. A different methodology will accommodate different worldviews, and create a learning society that understands and recognize the complexity of the world. Churchman (1968) made it clear that boundaries are social or personal constructs that define the limits of the knowledge that is to be taken as pertinent in an analysis. The paradigm of this research recognizes this multi-perspective notion, and thus the methodology that embraces a pluralist view of the context, and a need for a multi-perspective of the lived experience.

Alfred Schutz 1940 (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 28) was one of the philosophers who argued that the fact that people are continuously constructing, developing and changing the everyday interpretations of the world should be taken into account in any conception of social science research. The focus then changed to a paradigm that is "grounded in a

61

philosophical position which is broadly interpretive in the sense that it is concerned with how the social world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced or constituted"(Mason, 2002: 3). Generally, a qualitative approach is concerned with an interpretive, subjective, naturalistic, holistic, and inductive, as opposed to a positivistic, objective, quantitative, linear and deductive paradigm. The ongoing debate of research methodologies and meta-theories also answers the questions posed earlier in this discussion.

Interpretivists, constructionists, constructivists, anti-positivists, or post-positivists as Henning et al (2004) call them, did not support the imposition of natural sciences positivists' methodologies on social sciences. Guba and Lincoln 1990 (Patton, 2002) in their constructivism theory, were of "the premise that the human world is different from the natural, physical world and therefore must be studied differently, ...because human beings have evolved capacity to interpret and construct reality..."(2002: 97). But Sheddish 1995b (Patton (2002: 97) pointed out that constructivism is about constructing knowledge about reality, and not constructing reality. The two terms 'constructionism' and 'constructivism' are complementary, but this study, even though it embraces both, will focus on and make use of the latter, because the former is mainly used in ethnographic and cultural studies, and constructivism is more relevant to phenomenological inquiries. However, the objective is to socially construct knowledge by systemically combining different methods and different stakeholders in the context.

The idea is not to reach social consensus in the way that Thomas Kuhn suggested, as there is a danger of this confining society to a certain cultural ontology, because following that approach will lead to a utilitarianism paradigm and the result is hypothetico-deductive. Kuhn (1996: 66) however later advocated scientific revolution, where he argued in his 1996 book called "the structure of scientific revolution", that the discoveries are achieved by discarding some previous standard beliefs. The point here is to embrace multi-perspectives, and that is what the systems paradigm advocates.

The former discussion which focused on the positivist doctrine, and the subsequent quantitative methodology, and the latter discussion on interpretivism, constructivism, and constructionism serve to highlight the meta-theory in research. These discussions are important because though very brief, they highlight what informs a given paradigm and

its inherent methodological conventions. The next discussion focuses on quantitative methodology which has already been introduced this section.

3.3   QUANTITATIVE METHODOLOGY

Scientific quantitative methodologies have certain conventions that have prerequisites for conducting research under their banner, in order for the research to be acceptable in so far as positivists are concerned, and if such conventions are violated, such research is rejected as unreliable and invalid. The criteria for these conventions include objectivity, reliability, validity, and statistical analysis. Essentially the quantitative approach, as explained by Coldwell & Herbst (2004: 15) describes, infers, and resolves problems using numbers, and the emphasis is placed on the collection of numerical data, the summary of these data, and the drawing of inferences from the data.

The fundamental principles for quantitative methodology are cause and effect (logical positivism), and hypotheses testing or "hypothetico-deductive" (Brewerton & Millward, 2001: 11). Komives et al (1996) explained that in quantitative methodology there is an assumption that something certainly exists, and the goal is to confirm, whereas qualitative approach will involve the discovery of the unknown.

The questions in quantitative research are, 'what are those specific things happening there?', or 'what are the connections between what's happening here and what's happening there?', and the qualitative approach will ask, 'what is happening there?'. The quantitative approach will identify the events 'happening' and look for causal connections and deductively eliminate other hypotheses or possibilities, until there is a single truth.

A systemic structure perspective into research methodologies
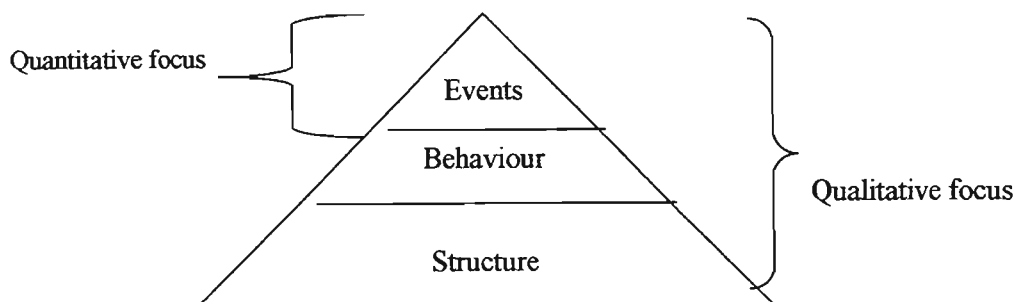
Figure 9

A systemic structure perspective into research methodologies

No source

In quantitative methodology, the research is conducted in order to confirm or dispute a hypothesis.

A simple example to demonstrate how hypothetico-deductive works, is that of a small baby who is crying. The hypothesis could be that she is hungry. Food or milk could then be prepared and the baby could be fed. If she continues to cry after feeding, the first hypothesis (hunger) will then be discarded, and the second hypothesis could be pursued, such as changing the nappy, and, should the baby continue to cry after the nappy-changing, the second hypothesis (nappy) will be rejected as well, and the third hypothesis such as checking the baby's temperature to see if the baby is sick could be pursued. If the temperature is high, then the third hypothesis (sickness) will be accepted. This is how Popper's falsification paradigm works. The example of hypotheses development, testing, and rejection or acceptance also demonstrates the cause and effect nature of the positivist paradigm.

Popper (2002) "contends that a principle of induction is superfluous, and that it must lead to logical inconsistencies" (2002: 5). This cause and effect experimentation in quantitative research is done through selecting an experimental sample of subjects or respondents that are representative of the population. An unnatural setting is then created to experiment with the sample, and findings are then generalized to the population. Sometimes two samples of two groups are selected, consisting of a controlled group and

an uncontrolled group, and the two will be compared, like the well known Hawthorne studies conducted by Elton Mayo, to see the difference in performance between employees whose environment was tampered with or changed, and those whose environment remained the same. Other studies are called longitudinal, explains de Vaus (2001: 113), where respondents are subjected to pre- and post-testing to see change over a long period of time.

Another important issue in quantitative research is objectivity as discussed above in this section. "Positivism signals an approach to research in search of objective truth which in turn is assumed to be made of general principles and laws"(Brewerton & Millward, 2001: 11). The emphasis is on objectivity, finding the truth in a clinically objective way. Komives et al (1996: 423) argue that the quantitative method reduces the qualitative weakness of investigator bias. It is also characterized by a more independent instrumentation and design process, and participation or non-participation biases and errors are singled out. This means that quantitative studies assume or require that the researcher be completely objective.

The clinical objectivity in social sciences is, it is argued, fallible, because the researcher has a certain paradigm that is beneath his/her level of awareness as explained by Stacey (1993), which will drive and influence the whole research, be it in developing a hypothesis, developing predetermined questions, choosing research subjects, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data according to his/her understanding of the data. Furthermore, human beings respond differently if they know that they are being monitored, such as in the Hawthorne studies.

The second criterion for quantitative convention is validity. One of the rules is that a research design must be internally and externally valid. In terms of internal validity, the research must have eliminated all alternative explanations and drawn unambiguous conclusions from the results, explains de Vaus (2001: 28). External validity "refers to the capacity to generalize findings to other similar situations and contexts" (Coldwell & Herbst, 2004: 17).

Reliability is another criterion in quantitative methodologies. It basically refers to the instrument used in conducting research. The instrument "must be a reliable measure that

gives the same indications when used on repeated occasions" (de Vaus, 2001: 30). Statistical analysis is a mathematical presentation of data collected from quantitative research. Babbie and Mouton (2001: 460) explain that it is a scientific analysis that involves the reduction of data from unmanageable details to manageable summaries. There are different kinds of statistical analyses. It depends on the objective of the research.

Babbie & Mouton discuss a descriptive analysis which provides quantitative descriptions of variables, such as nominal variables (i.e. gender), ordinal variables (i.e. order of events), and ratio variables (i.e. age). The second one is inferential statistics, which draws data from a sample and infers the findings to the relevant overall population under study. The sample used is very crucial in this analysis in order to make the findings significant, credible, and tenable. One of the popular computer programmes used in statistical analysis is called SPSS.

3.4   QUALITATIVE METHODOLOGY

The interpretivist paradigm is in contrast with the positivist paradigm, and this paradigm (interpretive) was in reaction to the application of natural sciences methodologies to social sciences. The convention of external validity as discussed earlier, and generalization, is perhaps the reason why positivists thought they could generalize natural science methodologies to fit perfectly in social sciences. The interpretivism, and constructivism paradigms spawned soft and pluralist methodologies such as qualitative methodology. Others include action research, cultural, and critical or emancipatory approaches. However qualitative methods can be ,and are usually applied in these other methodological approaches.

The qualitative approach will identify a context and or problem situation, look for patterns in the underlying relationships of a system, in order to uncover and understand the structural problems and intervene inductively (holistically). (See figure 9 below). Qualitative methodology provides an in-depth understanding of reality or a phenomenon, and this understanding cannot be gained where a researcher tries to be clinically objective in a study. Qualitative methodology therefore embraces subjectivity in research, but this must not be confused with bias. Any researcher, irrespective of the methodology, tries to be unbiased in terms of conducting research, otherwise the findings cannot be accepted.

66

Subjectivity in this context means being involved in the context and getting a naturally lived experience, as opposed to creating unnatural settings and hoping to implement findings in natural settings.

Morse & Richards (2002: 6) explain that qualitative inquiries involve organizing the undisciplined confusion of events and experiences of those who participate in those events, as they occur in natural settings. The researcher becomes the instrument himself or herself as he/she engages with the participants (see last section of this chapter). Qualitative inquiry is less structured and the researcher pursues new and emerging themes, and "new techniques when confronted by challenges" (Morse and Richards, 2002: 5). A qualitative paradigm encourages triangulation, and Morse and Richards recommend strongly that triangulation should be used in order to obtain rigorous data. There are different interpretations of triangulation, and in this study it would refer to a combination of research techniques. There is an elaboration of this issue later in this chapter.

A quantitative research process aims at analyzing variables and the relationships between them in isolation from the context or setting, so as to increase generalisation, while the qualitative research aims at describing and understanding events within the concrete and natural context in which they occur, explain Babbie and Mouton, 2001: 272). Objectivity and subjectivity are important issues for both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. The use of multiple methods and or triangulation serves as a research validity mechanism. Trustworthiness, according to Babbie & Mouton is a qualitative alternative of objectivity. It involves the following criteria:

a) Credibility of the research which is measured by prolonged engagement. This is not the same as longitudinal study.

b) Persistent observation which involves consistently pursuing interpretations in different ways.

c) Triangulation, referring to a combination use of data collection techniques.

d) Referential adequacy referring to the material used in data-collection such as audio and video taping.

e) Peer debriefing is another criterion where similar status colleagues provide a fresher and critical perspective.

f)   Member check is another criterion where there is revisiting and verifying of research participants iteratively occurs.

Transferability of research findings falls into another set of criteria for research rigour in qualitative methodology. It would refer to the applicability of the findings to the real world by a reader or user, rather than the researcher, as emphasized by Babbie & Mouton (2002). The researcher has a responsibility, however, where s/he has to provide thick descriptions in the form of sufficient data, so that the reader can make judgements about transferability (see Chapter Four). Also, the researcher must make use of purposive sampling in order to facilitate transferability. The second criterion in this group is dependability, which involves an independent auditor who checks the research documents and interview notes used in research, the findings, interpretations, and recommendations, and attests that these are supported by data and that there is coherence.

The third criterion is confirmability, which is almost similar to the dependability check. The auditor checks the researcher's bias in the interpretations, conclusion, and recommendations by checking raw data, data reduction and the analysis process, data reconstruction and synthesis, process notes, material, and instrumentation. These are some of the processes that are applied in qualitative research in order to ensure research rigour. Lincoln & Guba (1988) developed these criteria, and Babbie & Mouton (2001) also advocated these principles. This study followed a lot of these criteria. Applying these criteria is one of the tedious tasks in qualitative research, but they are important for research rigour.

3.5   **RESEARCH METHODS**

Research methods include tools or processes and techniques used in collecting research data. Research authors (meta-theorists) discuss research concepts such as philosophies, theories, and methodologies and methods. Henning et al (2004: 36) describe a research method as a way of doing something. Using this definition therefore, a methodology can be said to be an approach, and philosophy as a worldview that drives the methodology. Theories emanate from the philosophies, so they are confined to certain paradigms. Generally there are three methods that qualitative research tends to adopt. Babbie & Mouton (2001) discuss some of these methods, namely, Alfred Schutz's phenomenology,

Garfinkel's ethnography, and grounded theory. Patton (2002) calls the methods perspectives, and discusses these three and more methods. (see table 1).

Perspective	Disciplinary Roots	Central Questions
Ethnography	Anthropology	What is the culture of this group of people?
Phenomenology	Philosophy	What is the meaning, structure, and essence of the lived experience of this phenomenon for this person or group of people?
Grounded theory	Social sciences, methodology	What theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed?

Table 1: Research Methods (perspectives according to Patton)
Adapted from Patton (2002: 132-133)

Denzin & Lincoln (1994) also highlight the three, but they admit that how these methods are named or regarded varies from author to author. Some see them as philosophies, others as methods. For example, Morse & Richards (2002) see these concepts as methods, and in this discussion, phenomenology, ethnography, and grounded theory will be regarded as methods, as discussed by Morse & Richards. (see table 2).

.

Method	Data Source	Analytic technique
Phenomenology	Audiotaped, in-depth conversations, literature	Theme-ing, phenomenological reflection, memo-ing and reflective writing
Ethnography	Primary : Participant observation, field notes, structured or unstructured interviews	Thick, description, rereading notes, storing information, and coding by topic, storying, case analysis
	Secondary : documents, focus groups	Coding, recording field notes, and diagramming to show patterns and processes
Grounded theory	Primary : audiotaped interview, observations	Theoretical sensitivity, developing concepts, coding at categories, open coding for theory generation
	Secondary : comparative instances, personal experience	Focused memo-ing, diagramming, emphasis on search for core concepts and processes.

Table 2 : Research methods

Adapted from Morse & Richards (2002: 32)

3.5.1 Phenomenological Method

Van Maanen 1990 (Morse & Richards, 2002) explains that "phenomenology offers a descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging mode of inquiry from which to drive the essence of an experience" (2002: 44). The focus is on the lived experience of those involved in the phenomenon under study. While a quantitative method would seek to find the truth through a hypothetico-deductive process, the qualitative method considers the overall experience of the individual, including "perceptions of his/her presence in the world at the moment when things, truths, or values are constituted" (Morse & Richards, 2002: 44).

Phenomenology focuses on "how we put together the phenomena we experience in such a way as to make sense of the world and in so doing develop a worldview" (Patton, 2002: 106). Patton however cautioned that phenomenology has been so popular and widely

used that the meaning has become confused and diluted. He quoted Hussel (1967) who refers to phenomenology as a philosophy. Lincoln (1990) sees philosophy as a paradigm. Denzin & Lincoln 2000b(Patton, 2002) refer to phenomenology as an interpretive theory. Harper (2000), and Schutz (1967, 1970) both had a social science analytical perspective, and Moustaken (1994) sees phenomenology as a research method. Morse & Richards (2002) also consider phenomenology as a method. This is one of the challenges which prevails in qualitative methodology, that is, there is no "unitary" (Jackson, 2000: 358) agreement on the definition of concepts.

According to van Maanen 1990 (Morse & Richards (2002: 44) four existentials guide phenomenological reflection, namely, temporality (lived time), spatiality (lived space), corporeality (lived body), and rationality or communality (lived human relations). In phenomenological inquiries, the researcher has to 'bracket' all prior knowledge, be it from experience, or from literature, and enter the field with no presuppositions, as pointed out by Morse and Richards (2002: 47).

3.5.2 Ethnographic method

The ethnographical method provides an understanding of cultural dimensions (see table 1 & 2). Peggy Sanday in van Maanen (1983: 20) and Henning et al (2004: 42 - 43) emphasise that an ethnography researcher has to spend a relatively long time in the field with participants and observe and participate in their daily settings and activities. These authors also emphasise the use of a variety of data collection techniques such as key-informant interviewing, collection of life histories, structured interviews, questionnaires and ethnoscience. Other forms of techniques such as art and dancing are also recommended by Henning et al (2004: 42). This triangulation process fulfils the research requirements of trustworthiness and rigour.

Ethnographic research can be useful in understanding organisational culture because societal culture and organisational culture have common principles, in that they both have certain beliefs, values and norms. This also works well if there is belief in constructionism. "Theories of culture generally agree that cultural beliefs, values, and behaviours are learned and transmitted and shared among individuals" (Morse & Richards, 2002: 49).

3.5.3 Grounded Theory

Glasser & Strauss (1967) developed the grounded theory method. Strauss & Corbin (1994: 275), Morse & Richards (2002: 54) agree that grounded theory is a method for developing theory that is grounded in data. According to Strauss & Corbin (1994) and Glasser 2000 in Patton (2002), grounded theory is a general method. It is not confined to one methodology. It can be used in quantitative or qualitative methodologies. This method begins with a question, explain Morse & Richards (2002: 55). It includes interviews, field observations, as well as documents (including diaries, letters, autobiographies, biographies, historical accounts, and newspapers and other media materials) explain Strauss & Corbin (1994: 274).

In a qualitative paradigm, the researcher is the instrument who engages with research participants in discussing a phenomenon. The researcher will spend time in a context discussing aspects of the phenomenon, and pursuing emerging themes and patterns in order to generate thick descriptions of the phenomenon. Qualitative research is derived from interpretive paradigms, and conventional ones focused on constructionism/constructivism, and unconventional ones based on critical and feminist paradigms. There are different kinds of computer programmes that are used to analyse qualitative data such as NVIVO, NU*DIST, and ATLAS.

Data analysis in qualitative research is, however, a continuous process. It is "an ongoing, emerging, and iterative or non-linear process" (Henning et al, 2004: 127). Qualitative data can also be analysed manually. Data are coded and arranged into themes that indicate certain patterns which the researcher interprets and uses to make recommendations. The following table seeks to highlight the comparison of the quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Methodological comparison :

Quantitative	Qualitative
Natural Sciences	Social Sciences
Positivism philosophy	Interpretivism philosophy
Realism philosophy	Relativism, constructionim, constructivism
Scientific	Natural (scientific) inquiry
Empirical, experimental (unnatural)	Contextual (real world)
Quantitative methodology	Qualitative methodology
Objectivity	Subjectivity, intersubjectivity
Validity, reliability, generalization	Trustworthiness, credibility, transferability
Hypothesis testing, deductive, linear	Inductive, holistic, non-linear
Prove or disprove	Multi-perspective, descriptive, discovery
Truth, falsification	Emancipation
Utilitarianism	Phenomenology, ethnography, grounded theory
Structured method	Triangulation, un- and semi-structured
Statistical analysis	Textual analysis

Table 3

Methodological comparison

3.6 METHODOLOGY FOR THIS STUDY

The preceding section discussed generally the two research paradigms in order to experience the debates in research literature in general, and to appreciate the strengths and weaknesses of the two well-known quantitative and qualitative methodologies. This section will now discuss the methodology adopted in this dissertation.

This study sought to gain an in-depth understanding of challenges in service management using the systems thinking approach. As discussed in Chapter One, the research adopted a qualitative phenomenological paradigm, in that it sought "a descriptive, reflective, interpretive and engaging mode of inquiry from which to derive the essence of an experience" (Morse & Richards, 2002: 44).

A qualitative methodology was used in this study which derived qualitative research methods and techniques, and systems approach is applied throughout the dissertation as a meta-discipline for the service management discipline/subject. As discussed in Chapter

One, a qualitative method was chosen because of the topic or subject or phenomenon being studied. The purpose of the study is to understand the challenges of the service management. A context was therefore chosen where service is delivered and managed, and the researcher has been involved in that context of service delivery for quite a number of years, but that prior knowledge and experience of the researcher had to be 'bracketed', as Morse & Richards (2002) insist, in order to enter the field with no presuppositions. Also, prior knowledge and experience had to be bracketed because the purpose of this study is to gain a holistic or systemic understanding or socially construct knowledge from different perspectives.

Studying, through various research methods, the actual context helped a great deal in understanding the discipline. A quantitative approach, because of its deductive nature, would arguably not have provided this holistic epistemology. A qualitative methodology, complimented by the systems approach was therefore found to be more appropriate in order to understand the phenomenon.

It was argued as well in Chapter Two that service is a soft subject which should not be studied through hard, functionalist methodologies. Soft, qualitative, interpretive, and multi-perspective (constructivism) methodologies were seen to be appropriate, and were therefore adopted in literature review and in field research for this study. In Chapter Two, service was generally regarded as an intangible offering that transforms a person or object. In order to avoid rewriting Chapter Two discussions, this chapter will refer only to key features of that discussion, with a view to linking the subject of service management and the research methodology.

Gronroos (1990), van Looy et al (2003), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004) indicated consistency in seeing service as intangible activities. These activities are performed by people, for people. It was therefore concluded that services are people (service employees & service customers). This chapter therefore regards the service management to be about people in that context and thus a soft (qualitative) methodology. Likewise, the fact that service is intangible, a qualitative methodology which embraces subjectivity and intersubjectivity and an interpretive approach would be more appropriate, as opposed to objective, statistical, logical positivism, a linear approach.

Quality was another concept that was discussed in the literature review as well as pursued in the field research (see Chapter Four for findings). In products, quality can be measured in quantitative methods, but in service it is not easy. In products, quality is measured in the actual products through defects, and can be experienced through colour, durability and robustness of a product as well as reliability. These features of quality in products can be measured by customers wherever they use the product, in the absence of the employees who manufactured that product. Whereas in service, quality is experienced through speed, competence, courtesy, friendliness, and service surroundings, among other things. These features are difficult to measure because they are embodied in people (mostly) and are extremely subjective (depend on the service provider as well as the influence of a customer). A methodology which does not dig out (discover) these subtle, soft, and tacit issues that constitute quality in service, would not have been appropriate, and or adequate for this research.

Parasuraman, Zeithamal & Berry developed what they called the 'SERVQUAL' model which determines whether quality exists in a given service context, and all the key determinants in this model evaluate service employees. They also developed what they called the GAPS model for measuring the gap between perceived and received service. Opara (2002) who applied these models in his research in customer retention using a quantitative method, recommended that there be more studies that would improve data gathering. Komives et al (1996) who are experts in student services, recommended qualitative approaches which would yield multi-perspective knowledge. The ontological assumption subsisting in this study is that service and people cannot be separated because they are so interdependent and interwoven. Without employees, service (to a large extent) cannot be produced, and without customers, services cannot be consumed.

de Vaus (2001: 53) explained that the classical experimental approach is not well suited to provide a picture of the complex set of factors that produce a given outcome. The hypothetico-deductive approach of quantitative methodologies discourages multi-perspective and inductive methods. It was in this light therefore, that a qualitative methodology was preferred and used in this study. Systems approach is used throughout this dissertation, and, as explained in Chapter One, as a meta-discipline. Systems approach was found to be quite congruent with a qualitative approach, as well as the

subject of service management. The following section discusses the systems approach in more detail, as a methodology for this study.

3.6.1 Systems approach as a methodology

The systems approach is used in this dissertation to study the subject (service discipline), illuminate prevailing challenges as highlighted by the literature, elucidate the problem situation in UKZN student administrative service system, and collect data in the research context.

The systems approach transcends the philosophy, methodology, methods, and techniques' boundaries in this study. It has therefore been discussed in the preceding chapters, this chapter, and the subsequent chapters. In this chapter, systems approach will be revisited as a research methodology. Systems approach as a paradigm in the researcher's thinking prompted the notion that service management is a complex discipline that needs a holistic approach. It is due to this line of thought that the research is qualitative and triangulation data collection methods were used. It was because of systems thinking that the researcher serendipitously opted to develop a holistic research strategy based on constructionism and constructivism which focuses on both service providers and service consumers.

The second level of systems approach was the practice or application of the concepts in theoretical discussion, as in Chapter One and Two, as well as in field research. The term approach in this discussion is used to incorporate thinking and doing, and is derived from Checkland's (1981) work in his book 'systems thinking, systems practice'. "The central concept 'systems' embodies the idea of a set of elements connected together which form a whole, this showing properties which are properties of the whole" (Checkland, 1981: 3). The thinking part is very important in systems theory because it sets out the course of action to be taken. If the evaluator of the system has a hard systems paradigm and thinking, s/he is likely to see a system as a simple, well-definable, and goal-oriented system, explains Checkland (1981), and Luckett (2004). Whereas a soft systems paradigm (and thinking) sees systems as complex, with ill-defined goals, as O'Connor & McDermont (1997) explain that systems involve seeing beyond what appear to be isolated and independent incidents to deeper patterns (1997: 1).

76

A (soft) system thinker would not attempt to create quick-fix solutions, but would look for patterns of behaviour and structural causes of a phenomenon, and then develop interventions for improvement. This qualitative study sought to identify these patterns of behaviour, and emerging properties within the system through noting emerging themes at different levels, and pursuing these, through a triangulation method.

When faced with a complex situation, a systems thinker identifies the stakeholders, draws a boundary of the system according to his/her understanding, and then studies the system holistically in order to find interrelationships and interdependencies of the relationships, so that system deficiencies can emerge or be brought to the surface. A systems researcher would therefore, explains Patton (2002), "gather data on multiple aspects of the setting under study, to assemble a comprehensive and complete picture of the social dynamics of the particular situation" (2002: 60). The following soft systems methodology is a process that a (soft) systems thinker would follow in entering, understanding, and improving a phenomenon. It is similar to a SUDA process discussed in the section under the research design of this chapter.

A Soft systems methodology:

Figure 10:   SSM : Source = Checkland (1981)

The practice of systems approach would involve stakeholder analysis, developing what Checkland (1981, 1999), Wilson, Luckett et al (2001) call a Human Activity System (HAS), entering the problem situation (usually) through a rich picture diagrammatic representation of complex issues, developing a root definition which describes the system and stakeholders, building a conceptual model, comparing the conceptual (metaphoric world) with the real world (context), improving the model, taking action to improve the problem situation. This process is called soft systems methodology (SSM), developed by Peter Checkland. It deals with the doing part of the systems approach. The systems approach was a very useful research methodology for this study, as it provides a systemic thinking to the researcher and thus allows for a much more holistic process in gathering rich data that illuminates the challenges in service management.

3.7 **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The previous section discussed the research paradigm that served as a framework and as a guide for the whole study. This section is going to discuss research methods and techniques used in this study. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, a quantitative (logical positivism) research paradigm is more popular. Society does not observe, or pay too much attention to patterns until those patterns manifest into complex and sensational events. What is required for today's complex problems is a paradigm that perpetuates holistic thinking in addressing events, patterns, and the systemic structure of messy situations. A systemic qualitative (multi-method) approach is important as it was used in this study.

It is not easy to advocate qualitative methods because such methods are still at the development stage, and have not received equal acceptance among academia, funders, etc., as discussed earlier. Research gurus such as Popper argue that scientific research must be testable, and open to falsification. From that perspective, Herbst & Coldwell (2004: 16) argue vehemently that qualitative research as a naturalistic inquiry is not scientific, because findings are difficult to replicate and are therefore not amenable to falsification. The research for this study takes this criticism into consideration, and the advocacy of quantitative doctrine, rather than focusing solely on the qualitative methods. That is how the meta-theory discussion helped. The researcher had to be aware of the "long-standing methodological paradigm war" (Patton, 2002: 68).

As discussed in Chapter Two that studying service management cannot be done in isolation from studying people's attitudes, behaviour, opinion, and lived experiences, a qualitative method which includes in-depth interaction with people was necessary, and was used in this study. The concepts of reliability, validity, and generalization of findings determines the acceptance or rejection of a research method and findings, (according to quantitative methods) and these three concepts "have obtained the status of a scientific holy trinity" (Kvale, 2002: 300). Lincoln & Guba 1985 (Morse & Richards, 2002: 167) argue that these concepts have no place in qualitative research. The important concepts in qualitative research however, are trustworthiness, consistency, and naturalistic participation.

This study does not adopt such a strong opposition to the quantitative research paradigm, because the very fact that trustworthiness (verification), and triangulation are used is derived from the fact that the research has to be credible (reliable), and transferable (valid & generalisable). Also, as is discussed in the next section, the units of analyses are presumed (or purposefully selected) to be generally representing the general views of the population in that context, otherwise, if this was not the case the context would not have been so important in qualitative research. There is quite a significant element of representativeness, and thus generalization, at least of that context. Furthermore, if this representativeness was not important in qualitative research, it would mean the findings should be inferred to be only applicable to research participants, and not the context.

3.7.1 Sampling

Sampling refers to "the process of selecting observations" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 164). Perhaps to clarify this definition, especially for social sciences, sampling would generally involve the decision of the researcher about from whom, with what, and where to obtain data. Sampling decisions take into consideration the research context, research participants, research methods and techniques, and the kind of data to be collected. In this study, the research included UKZN staff members and students, documents, books, and the internet. Units of analysis are then the first thing in sampling that a researcher has to consider, guided by the research methodology and purpose of the research. Sampling will therefore "depend on prior decisions about the appropriate unit of analysis to study" (Patton, 2002: 228).

Sampling is the key to good qualitative inquiry and also to understanding the dilemmas of qualitative validity, explain Morse & Richards (2002: 172). These two authors further advise that qualitative researchers deliberately select participants for their studies. "A worst case or best case of the event rather than the average experience... because average characteristics get diluted and mixed in with other characteristics from other experiences" (2002: 173). Morse & Richards strongly recommend that purposeful sampling is one of the most useful sampling methods for qualitative research, "in which the investigator selects participants because of their characteristics".

Spradley 1979, in Morse & Richards (2002: 173) explains that good informants/participants are those who know the information required, are willing to reflect on the phenomenon of interest, have the time, and are willing to participate. The units of analysis therefore should be carefully and purposefully chosen. These could be individuals or groups. In this study, there were two types of units of analysis, namely, staff members and students. The fundamental objective of this research is to acquire an understanding of challenges in service management, and as a systemic study, the sample had to incorporate people who deliver the service and the consumers of that service.

The sampling strategy chosen was a purposeful random sampling as recommended by Babbie & Mouton (2001), Morse & Richards (2002), and Patton (2002). Babbie & Mouton (2001: 166) call this type of sampling purposive or judgemental sampling, where a sampling decision is made, based on the researcher's knowledge of the population, its elements, and the nature of research aims or purpose of the study. "Purposeful random sampling provides credibility of the results". As discussed in Chapter One, a phenomenological study seeks to understand the lived experiences of participants, and this was considered in choosing a sample that will provide thick description of the experience.

The guiding rule of the staff sample was that participants must be chosen from all departments which provide a student administrative service including libraries and faculties. These departments included the Student Academic Administration Affairs, International Student Support Office, Student Housing, Student Funding Centre, Student Fees, Cashiers, Student Counselling Centre, the Clinic, Sports Administration, and the main Library. Faculties chosen were Humanities, Law, Engineering, Management

Studies, and the Medical School. Staff Participants included front office staff, back office staff, and management people (Heads of Departments, & Directors). The student sample unit was categorized into three, namely, students who are funded by the university through loans and bursaries(who have experienced or received Student Funding Centre services), students who stay in residences (who have experienced or received services that are provided by Student Housing), and students who do not fall into the two preceding categories. The first two categories were purposefully chosen, because not all university students use those services but all students use the rest of the services listed above. A number of students were individually interviewed, and they included first years and postgraduate students from different faculties, and a smaller group of students were interviewed in focus groups. The sample had to cover a wide spectrum of services. These categories of different staff members and different students were purposefully or deliberately chosen, so that data collected systemically covers all areas of service delivery and views, opinions, experiences, from different staff and students' perspectives.

Morse & Richards (2002), and Babbie & Mouton (2001), discuss the work of Spradley (1979) on selecting participants, where Spradley suggested criteria, namely; (a) enculturatism referring to a participant who has been in the context, been researched for a reasonable time and become encultured (b) current involvement, referring to a participant who is currently involved in issues concerning the study, and (c) adequate time, meaning spending enough time with participants. This study took these criteria into consideration in choosing the sample and conducting the research.

3.8 RESEARCH TECHNIQUES

A combination of four research techniques was used in collecting data. This triangulation research technique is important for research trustworthiness, rigour, credibility, analysis, and data consistency. There are different views as to what constitutes triangulation. Morse & Richards (2002) argue that triangulation refers to using different research methods in "completed studies that have been conducted on the same topic and that address each topic" (2002: 76). According to Patton (2002) triangulation means "using several kinds of methods or data, including using both quantitative and qualitative approaches" (2002: 247). Denzin (1978b) in Patton (2002) identified four basic types of triangulation, namely; (a) data triangulation - use of various data, (b) theory triangulation

– using multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data, (c) methodological triangulation – use of multiple methods to study a single problem. All these interpretations are not congruent with one another. Huberman & Miles (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) admit that triangulation is "a term with multiple meanings" (1994: 438). This is the difficulty experienced in using qualitative methodology, in that there are no common sets of principles.

Morse & Richards (2002) and Patton (2002) all explain that triangulation is derived from the land surveying discipline, quoting Goffman (1989) and Fielding & Fielding (1986) respectively, but there have been contrasting interpretations, nevertheless what was learned from this debate is that the purpose of using triangulation is however common, and that is challenging, illuminating, and verifying the findings, as explained by Morse & Richards (2002: 76). According to Patton (2002: 248) the purpose is to illuminate, validate, check, and test for consistency, and eliminate the errors and weaknesses of using a single method. These are also the reasons for using triangulation in this study. The techniques used in this study were, unobtrusive observation, document study, in-depth interviews, and focus groups.

As a soft systems study, the research process followed what is called in-systems thinking, "SUDA"(T205 course material, 2004), referring to SENSING the problem situation (through unobtrusive observations of people in a research context), UNDERSTANDING (seeking some understanding through reading documents of the context), DECIDING (through choosing units of analysis and sampling) ACTION (through conducting interviews and focus groups). Because SUDA is not necessarily a linear process, data analysis is part of the SUDA understanding of the data, and action forms part of the interpretation and recommendations. The SUDA process can be entered at any stage in the process and it is iterative.

3.8.1 Unobtrusive observations

Unobtrusive observation was done by getting into the field and observing the natural settings as functions and activities were carried out, without any form of interference or control. This technique is in contrast with the laboratory observation which is usually used in quantitative research, where the research subjects or respondents are influenced and controlled. Positivists will then call this lab observation process objective, and the

question is how a researcher can be seen as clinically objective where s/he interferes and controls the setting, and then the findings are generalized in the uncontrolled world (real world).

Mintzberg (van Maneen, 1983) asked an interesting question regarding the lab observation when he said "what is the use of describing a reality that has been invented?" (1983: 112). Qualitative research has been criticized by positivists because it embraces subjectivity. The claim that quantitative methods are objective, is fallible however, considering the argument of interference and control of subjects, an invented reality and generalization of findings. Naturalistic observation has been criticized, explain Denzin & Lincoln, (1994) stating that problems are "legion, involving questions of validity and reliability, observer and setting bias, observer effects, and the absence of member checks" (1994: 354). Qualitative research embraces subjectivity and perpetuates trustworthiness, because in order to understand a phenomenon, the lived experience should be observed without interference, because in conspicuous observations, "there is always a possibility that people will behave differently under conditions where an observation is taking place" (Patton, 2002: 291).

This study is a phenomenological inquiry, and such a study acknowledges, explain Morse & Richards (2002), "that people are their worlds and are understandable only in their contexts". The observations in this study began in January 2005 and were intense during the student registration period, which is the peak time for the student administrative system at the university. Staff members were observed unobtrusively, in terms of how they behaved and communicated with one another, and with students. Students were also observed in how they communicated and reacted to the service delivery processes. Notes were taken on notable and persistent behaviour.

The weaknesses of this technique were that since the observation was unobtrusive, the researcher could not spend enough time in a given area, because that would make the observer appear suspicious and thus change the behaviour. Also, the observations were unstructured or incidental, whereby the researcher would visit a given office to discuss a work-related matter or deliver or fetch a certain document, as well as make use of any opportunities in meetings. Observing students' behaviour was relatively easier because

students were observed in queues, as well as when the researcher was also attending to them.

The other question was whether it was ethical to observe people without them knowing. The researcher did not invent reality, as the observations took place during the researcher's natural performance of his duties. It is an acceptable practice that managers particularly, unobtrusively observe relationships of staff members and then call meetings, and so-called team-building workshops, and training sessions, to intervene, as well as intervening immediately when they notice conflicts, without getting the employees to report such conflicts.

Ethics is about good virtues. Henry Sidgwick (1892), says that "the subject of ethical investigation is all that is included under the notion of what is ultimately good or desirable..." (1892: 2). Good virtues include socially acceptable norms and practices. It is normally acceptable practice that managers create and maintain harmonious work environments through, among other things, resolving conflicts and building teams. Employees reciprocally and obliviously accept such practices by reporting conflicts to managers. It is in this light therefore, that the unobtrusive observations conducted in this study should be regarded as ethical. The research report in Chapter Four also does not disclose names of persons and/or departments that were observed. The observations served as a starting point (sensing) to gain an understanding of the phenomenon.

The subsequent interviews probed questions around behaviour displayed during the service delivery. It was important and useful to pursue this 'emerging behaviour' in order to get rich data and discard unimportant data, because as Babbie & Mouton (2001: 377) explain, participants can also tell you what they think you want to hear.

3.8.2 Documents

Documents are another source of data that was used in this research. Documents and artefacts are valuable and rich sources of information, admit Henning et al (2004: 99), and Patton (2002: 293). Documents studied in this research included University of KwaZulu-Natal's mission & vision, and different policies available on the University website (www.ukzn.ac.za), hardcopy policy documents, minutes of student registration meetings, and electronic mail between staff members, and from and to students. These

documents provided more insights in terms of gaining some understanding of the phenomenon. They illuminated the problem situation and served as a bedrock for planning interviews, and for what could further be observed.

The limitation of this technique was that the researcher could only have access to documents that were readily and freely available, and that a lot of documents are being changed due to the merger which took effect from the 1st of January 2004, between the Universities of Natal and Durban-Westville to form the University of KwaZulu-Natal (UKZN). Documents however also proved useful. As Patton (2002) explains that documents "prove valuable not only because of what can be learned directly from them, but also as a stimulus for paths of inquiry that can be pursued only through direct observations and interviewing"2002: 294).

3.8.3 Interviews

Interviews are the most common techniques in qualitative research. As discussed in the first section of this chapter, this study adopts an interpretive and constructionism/contrustivism approach in gathering data. It assumes that as discussed in Chapter Two, service is a soft concept and is about people, there can therefore be no better understanding of the challenges in service management without interacting with people in the service context.

This study also recognized the pluralist nature of the current system, in that there are a variety of different departments (see figure 1). With this understanding, it becomes clear that the research had to follow a multi-perspective technique for data collection, such as interviewing, because it is one of the most powerful ways we use to try to understand our fellow human beings. This study used a semi-structured interview technique with standardized open-ended questions. The questions were developed from a variety of sources, namely; unobtrusive observations, documents studied, and a literature review. These sources gave the researcher some knowledge to develop, as Morse & Richards (2002) pointed out, "questions about the topic in advance of interviewing, but not enough to be able to anticipate the answers" (2002: 94).

Each research participant received a written request to obtain consent from the participant, and the participant would also grant a written permission/consent. Each

request was sent with a covering letter giving the background and a brief description of the research, as well as a written assurance of strict confidentiality and anonymity. Participants were individually interviewed in their offices(natural settings). The question structure was adapted from Patton's (2002: 348 – 351) work, which has six categories, namely;

a)   Background/demographic questions:

These questions were aimed at getting background or demographic information about the participants, to see if they properly met the research sample requirements, and to establish and prove that participants are within the identified service delivery context, see the relevance of their responsibility, and determine the length of experience in the service environment in their current positions.

b)   Knowledge questions:

These questions were included in order to determine the participants' knowledge of the service and quality concepts. Also, to see if customers understood the processes involved in the service delivery.

c)   Sensory questions:

Sensory questions were used for determining the degree of tangibility of service and quality in the student administrative service system. Also, to determine how service providers (staff members) make tangible the concept of service, and how customers see quality.

d)   Feeling questions:

Feeling questions were included to see emotions of participants, such as happiness, satisfaction (or unhappiness and dissatisfaction) about the service environment, as well as the service they are providing, because, if service providers are not happy themselves about the service (as it would appear – see Chapter Four), service consumers (customers) are not likely to be happy. These questions were also aimed at determining students' satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the service.

e)   Opinion & values questions:

These questions were aimed at determining what people think about the service they are involved in, be they students or staff members. This included inviting suggestions for improvement from participants.

f)   Experience and behaviour questions:

These questions were used to determine the overall experience in terms of challenges, relationships, and interconnections.

The interviewing process was guided by the above scope of Patton's question categories, and questions were also drafted so that they uncovered whether staff members understand the systemic interdependencies and interconnections of their functions as one system. The interview had to be semi-structured, rather than unstructured, due to time constraints on both the researcher and research participants, because the research was conducted in the natural setting of participants, but probing was used continuously, in order to gain thick descriptions of the phenomenon. The interviews were very helpful in providing rich data in terms of the lived experience which elucidates the challenges in the high customer contact environment of service management.

3.8.4 Focus groups

Focus groups are interviews where a group of generally 6 to 10 people are convened together to discuss a topic. Three focus groups were conducted in this study. Two groups were for staff members, and another was for student participants. There were two main purposes of these focus groups. The first one was to verify and further explore issues that emerged from the individual interview sessions. The second purpose was to further socially construct knowledge. The former also served to strengthen the research rigour, and the latter served to determine social behaviour and generate multi-perspective data.

Babbie & Mouton (2001: 292) caution that focus groups are unnatural settings. This is true to some extent, because participants were taken out of their natural workstations (offices), to a boardroom and mingled with others, thus generating peer pressure, but very often staff members do meet in boardrooms to discussion common matters, so focus group settings were not foreign territory, and did not change the participants' settings.

The focus group gives participants an opportunity to reflect on their experiences. Focus groups provide "high quality data in a social context where people can consider their own views in the context of the views of others" (Patton, 2002: 386), and this social construction of knowledge also provides "direct evidence about similarities and differences in the participants' opinions and experiences" (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 291).

3.9 RESEARCH INSTRUMENT

Quantitative researchers develop valid and reliable research instruments for collecting data. The researcher is also expected to be clinically objective. On the contrary in qualitative research however, the researcher is the instrument. Positivists strongly criticize interpretivists for embracing subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Popper was one of the well-known philosophers whose view reverberated throughout the world. He advocated logical positivism as discussed in the first section of this chapter, and he argued that for research to be acceptable, it has to be open to falsification.

Subjectivity in a qualitative researcher also means that the research gets exposed to multi-perspectives and s/he embraces this social construction of knowledge. Popper's doctrine did not tolerate this multi-perspective approach. However, other philosophers such as Appiah (2003) explain that Popper's falsification advocacy meant that a theory must be provisionally accepted until it can be falsified. This reductionism approach would, however, have resulted in a linear view to understanding the challenges in service management – in that it would have re-invented the wheel, and/or provided narrow focus data which are not sufficient for improving and developing a systemic service management model.

The purpose of this brief philosophical discussion is to show the researcher's paradigm. As an instrument, the researcher adopted a constructionism/constructivism paradigm, and systems thinking. In addition to studying research literature, the researcher attended three research workshops organized by the University of KwaZulu-Natal and the Durban Institute of Technology during this study. Three students were also recruited and trained as research assistants to assist in fieldwork, for four reasons, namely; (a) to assist in conducting some of the students interviews, (b) to assist in inviting student participants for focus groups, (c) to interview staff members who worked 'too' closely with the

researcher, such as the researcher's senior management and subordinates, (d) to assist in testing research questions.

It would be cumbersome for the researcher to interview all participants given the time constraints of this dissertation. The researcher also had a dilemma as to whether to interview his superiors and subordinates and not disclose the purpose of the research to such participants, so that those participants would be less prejudiced in their responses, and thus provide honest data, or whether to disclose the genuine purpose of the research to those participants and expect biased data. Two problems were identified with these options. The first option was seen to be posing ethical problems, and was thus harmful or deceitful in respect of participants and could compromise the research trustworthiness. The second option was also seen to be problematic in that participants who are subordinates of the researcher "may feel the need to be less than honest with their boss who is undertaking the research" (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001: 68). Participants who are senior to the researcher may just decide to tell what they think the researcher wants to hear, and it may be difficult for them to admit, or speak about management weaknesses.

Conducting research in your own organization is a challenge. Coghlan & Brannick (2001) recognize this challenge, and they, building from the work of Kotter(1985) developed "key power relationships" (pg.65), for managing political relationships when doing research in your own organization. These authors were however discussing action research. These key power relationships include; relationship with your sponsor, relationship between sponsor and executives, relationships amongst executives, relationships between you (the researcher) and others, relationships between executives and others, relationships between executives and organisation's members, interdepartmental relationships, relationships between researcher and his/her subordinates, relationships with customers, and relationships between you (researcher) and your peers (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001: 65 – 69).

It was rather important for the researcher to manage some of these relationships in order to collect data, maintain cooperation, and avoid jeopardizing the research project and the permanent relationship with these stakeholders. There were instances where cooperation could not be solicited due to, among other things, organizational politics. In order to mitigate bias in researcher-subordinate and researcher-superior relationships, student

research assistants were used to interview such participants, but the research objectives including the research originator were disclosed.

Coghlan & Brannick (2001) also recognize this dilemma when they recommend that in such circumstances "having a third party gather data may be essential" (2001: 68).

3.10 SUMMARY

Among other reasons, research is conducted in order to provide new knowledge or contribute to the body of knowledge in a given discipline, through scientific inquiry of data collection, analysis, and interpretation. The main focus of this chapter was the data collection stage which was conducted under the research methodology framework. The analysis and interpretation stage is discussed in the next chapter of this dissertation. The literature review (Chapter Two) formed the basis of conducting research which gave birth to this chapter. The literature review assisted in highlighting the current debates on service management, and that review identified the lack of a multi-prong approach and holistic view to conducting research on service management.

As discussed in Chapter Two, most customer service research initiatives are focused on quantitative, restrictive data-collection techniques, and they also focus mostly on customers and not service employees. This study therefore sought to address this deficiency in service management, and took a systemic view to understanding the challenges of service management. In addressing this deficiency, this study focused on both customers and service employees.

This chapter served as a report on the research methodology used, as well as a reflection on what challenges are inherent in qualitative methodology. There are debates, or as Patton (2002) puts it "long-standing methodological paradigm war" (pg. 68), between quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Quantitative methodology has been around for much longer, and has been widely or universally accepted, and that is why Patton (2002) warns that "students attempting to do qualitative dissertations may have to defend philosophically as well as methodologically, the use of a qualitative inquiry" (pg. 68). This study was not immune from this phenomenon, and it entered the debate through what Babbie & Mouton (2001) call meta-theory. It was important to enter this meta-theory process of reflection (on scientific inquiry) because, as it was argued in this chapter, research is guided by the researcher's paradigm, and the paradigm informs a methodology.

As a systems student who embraces a constructivism paradigm in the generation of knowledge, the researcher adopted a qualitative methodology. Furthermore, as was

argued in Chapter Two that service is a soft concept that cannot be separated or seen in isolation from people (service employees and customers), a qualitative methodology was seen to be more relevant. The debates on paradigm and methodologies begin with the reflection on positivism, interpretevism, and constructivism/constructionism as the driving forces of research methodologies and methods. Positivism (developed by Auguste Comte) initially developed for natural sciences, was seen by Comte and others as the only way that would guarantee social progress through empirical evidence. Durkheim also advocated this paradigm and introduced what is known as logical positivism (cause and effect).

One of the popular laws related to logical positivism was what Popper called falsification. Positivists argue that if the research cannot be falsified, such research cannot be accepted as scientific. They then developed a quantitative methodology which they later imposed on social sciences. The positivist thinking and experience in natural objects influenced researchers to think that human beings too should be researched mechanistically with clinical objectivity, as advocated by positivists, and what works in laboratory or 'unnatural settings' as Patton calls such settings, should also work in other large contexts, or in the real world. These assumptions are clearly fallible, especially when it comes to human beings and or social sciences. A positivist also advocates that data must be reduced to statistics.

Interpretevists on the other hand reacted negatively to positivists' paradigms and inherent methodologies which were being imposed on social sciences. Some authors call interpretevism, anti-positivism. Interpretevists felt that logical positivism was not sufficient in addressing social complex problems which need phenomenological understanding of lived experiences of people in social sciences. A new breed of softer, qualitative methodologies thus emerged. Interpretevists, and later constructionists and constructivists argued that quantitative methodologies are mechanistic, non-systemic, linear and deductive and thus not relevant to social sciences. Subjectivity, inductivity, multi-perspective, and systemic methods were then developed (see table 3).

This dissertation thus used a qualitative methodology complemented by systems approach. A systems approach was used as a paradigm or thinking about research and the phenomenon under study, as well as applying the concepts of systems approach in a

theoretical literature discussion, and in developing research questions. The research conducted in this study adopted a triangulation method which included techniques such as unobtrusive observation, documents study, interviews and focus groups. The research was conducted over a period of ten months at the University of KwaZulu-Natal focusing on the student administrative service system as a high customer contact research context. Participants included administrative staff (front line and management staff) and students. The research provided enlightening results which offer a better understanding of the hallenges in service management. The next chapter provides a detail report or analysis and interpretation of these research findings.

CHAPTER FOUR

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter Three of this dissertation discussed in detail the research methodology, methods, and techniques used in this study. This chapter is now going to report (data display), interpret (find meaning), and make some conclusions and recommendations.

The data are displayed in tables with text rather than numbers. The first tables provide a synopsis of characteristics of units of analysis as discussed in Chapter Three, so as to demonstrate authenticity, reliability and richness of data and sources used in the study. In qualitative research, data analysis is a continuous and iterative process (see figure 11 below). It is a continuous process because analysis starts from the first set of data collected in the field. The data are analysed and further subsequent data collection is, to some extent guided by the first set of data. It is iterative, because the researcher enters the context or field and acquires data, analyses the data, identifies emerging themes and patterns to be further pursued, goes back to the field and acquires more data to continue analysing.

In qualitative research, data may be overwhelming because they do not get reduced into statistics, but remain large chunks of perpetually analysed data of various forms i.e. field notes, audio and video tapes, transcriptions, artefacts, etc. These data need to be managed properly. Data management is a framework for data analysis. Huberman & Miles (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 428) define research data management as the operations needed for systematic, coherent process of data collection, storage and retrieval. In systems thinking language, data management would be the main system and data analysis the sub-system. In fact, data management fits well with systems thinking, because the process or steps of data collection, storage, and retrieval are interdependent, and, as emphasised by Huberman & Miles (Lincoln & Denzin 1994), a high quality of data is dependent on the management of data.

As discussed in Chapter Two, service conforms to open systems in that there are inputs which include customers, information from environment, a transformation process that is conducted by service employees with, and sometimes on the customer, in order (as an output value) to ameliorate, improve, develop, skill, facilitate, and change a customer or his/her property, physically, emotionally, and intellectually. This paradigm guided the analysis process. The underlying issues include communication, which is the key to service management, relationships which are the core aspects of human activity systems as advocated by Checkland (1981). Jackson (2000) sees relationships of parts of the system as important in the complex problems. The following diagram depicts the data management process as already discussed earlier in this chapter.
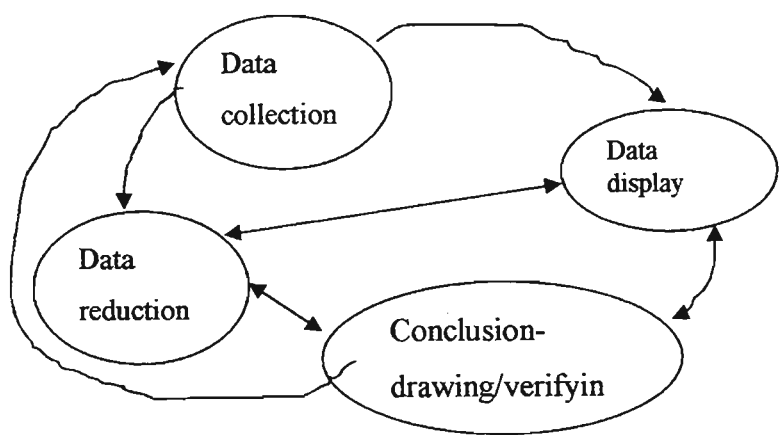
Figure 11

Components of data analysis – interactive model

Adapted from Huberman & Miles (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 421)

Most authors seem to agree that qualitative data analysis means working with data, and involves looking for patterns and themes, and categories emerging in order to describe those patterns and themes. Huberman & Miles (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994), Silverman (2000), Burns (2000), Babbie & Mouton (2001), Morse & Richards (2002), Patton (2002) seem to agree that the primary purpose of analysing qualitative data is to find meaning. The process of organising data is the core activity of analysis. Data are "organised so that comparisons, contrasts, and insights can be made and demonstrated" (Burns, 2000: 430). As discussed in Chapter Three, the research paradigm guides the whole research project, and this goes on to affect "the researcher's approach to analysis" (Crabtree & Miller, in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 345).

The stage of analysing one's own data is also continuous – that means that every data collection session must be followed by analysis. Strauss (1987) sees this analysis process as inductive (collecting data), deductive (choosing important themes), and verification (assessing if such themes can be held as hypothesis and pursued). Until the research is complete, the continuous data analysis becomes an "interim analysis – in that it spreads collection of and analysis throughout a study ..."(Huberman & Miles in Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 431).

This study made use of data analysis techniques for generating meaning developed by Miles & Huberman (1994: 12), also discussed by these two authors in Denzin & Lincoln (1994: 432). The techniques are discussed in the next section of this chapter. The diagram in figure 11, depicts the iterative process of continuous data analysis. The research for this study followed this interplay process between data collection and interim analysis.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the data collection techniques included unobtrusive observation, document study, individual interviews and focus groups, as Wolcott 1992 in Miles & Huberman (1994) puts it simply, "watching, asking or examining" (pg. 9). Glaser 1978, quoted by Huberman & Miles in Denzin & Lincoln (1994: 438) advocating triangulation, explained that grounded theorists have long contended that theory generated from one data source works less well than slices of data from different sources. Huberman & Miles go on to explain that triangulation converges different strengths, and that this eliminates or mitigates biases of a single source. Each of these research techniques used in this study was linked by a process of data analysis. Each preceding technique served as a springboard for the inductive collection of data at the next level.

The SUDA model was a useful systems tool complementing the SSM, in systemically alternating between data collection and interim analysis. The SUDA cycle was entered at any stage depending on the research activity to be carried out. Soft systems methodology and SUDA work as a hybrid methodology. The SSM is a framework for the study and SUDA compliments the research techniques. The following section discusses in more detail the actual process followed in analysing data and sources of data.

4.2   DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

4.2.1   Units of analysis display table

Staff Participants (interviews):

Job rank		Faculty staff	Student services staff	Experience				
Front line staff	Mgment			>5 years	<5 years	10 and more years	<10 years in one job	<20 years with University of KwaZulu-Natal
15	11	5	26	5	11	6	6	4

Total = 31

Table 4

Focus Groups Participants:

Total   =   16

Students Units of Analysis:

Student Interview Participants

Sample category	Number of participants
Funded by university	20
Staying in university residences	38
Other (day students)	7
Engineering faculty	6
Law faculty	3
Management studies faculty	9
Humanities	13
Science & Agriculture	8
Education	1
Medicine	7
Pietermaritzburg campus	15
Westville campus	7
Howard College campus	25
3rd and 4th year of study	23
1st and 2nd year of study	22
Graduates	2

Student interview total participants   =   47

Table 5

Student focus group total participants   = 8

The above units of analysis display tables (Table 4 & 5) seek to demonstrate the characteristics and different backgrounds of participants interviewed during the research. A total of 45 staff members participated in the research, with 26 individual interviews and 19 in three focus groups. The majority of them had five years or more experience in their current positions.   Fifteen were frontline staff and 11 were in supervisory/management positions. Twenty-one staff members were within the Student Services departments, including Finance and the Library.   A total of 55 students participated, with 47 individual interviews and eight participants in a focus group. The

majority of them were in the final year of their 1st degree (3rd & 4th years). This means that they had undergone three or four years' experience of the phenomena. They were thus assumed to be knowledgeable about the services. A significant number of student participants were doing their first and second year of their junior degrees.

Student participants came from different faculties of the university, which meant the experience was quite diverse. The majority of students stay in the university residences, and a significant number of them are funded by the university. The rest were neither in residences nor funded by the university. This variety was deliberately created during the sampling (see Chapter Three).

All students in all categories make use of, or consume the general administrative services as depicted in the student registration flow chart (see appendix A). The sampling can therefore be said to have met the intended criteria for this research as discussed in Chapter Three, as Morse & Richards (2002) advise that the investigator has to select participants because of their characteristics, and participants who know the information required.

Spradley 1979(Morse & Richards, 2002: 173) said participants must have been in the context, have been researched for a reasonable time, and become encultured, as well as the utilization of participants who are currently involved in issues concerning the study. These criteria are supported by Babbie & Mouton (2001), and Morse & Richards (2002).

4.2.2 Data analysis methods/techniques used in this study

Data analysis determines the quality of the whole research. Qualitative analysis involves the processing of information in a meaningful and useful manner. This definition is taken from Robson (2002: 459). Miles & Huberman 1994 (Robson 2002: 459) provide a more concise and succinct framework for qualitative data analysis. This guide or framework was followed in this study. The framework includes:

a) Giving codes to the initial set of materials obtained from observation, interviews, documentary analysis.

b) Adding comments, reflections (creating memos as learning journals – see also Hardy and Bryman, 2004: 537)

c)   Going through materials, trying to identify similar phrases, patterns, themes, relationships, sequences, differences between subgroups, etc.

d)   Taking these patterns, themes, etc., out to the field to help focus the next wave of data collection.

e)   Gradually elaborating a small set of generalisations that cover the consistencies discerned in the data.

f)   Linking these generalisations to a formalised body of knowledge in a form of constructs or theories.

Recording and tracking analytical insights that occur during data collection is part of fieldwork and the beginning of qualitative analysis, explains Patton (2002: 432). Using codes, looking for patterns and developing categories and or themes, are valuable tools used in different data analysis methods in qualitative research. The common analysis methods include content analysis, conversation analysis, semiotic_analysis, discourse analysis, lexical analysis, code-based analysis, grounded theory. In data analysis the work of Miles & Huberman (1994) was used to a great extent.

As in data collection, this study used a triangulation approach in analysing data in order to find meaning that would elucidate the challenges in service management.

It was the intention of the researcher not to stick to one method, and the purpose of the study, it was felt, would not be achieved if the analysis was confined to one method. The first data analysis method used was conversational analysis. This method was developed by Harvey Sacks in the 1960's. Clayman & Gill (2004) explain that conversational analysis involves observing naturally occurring interactions. Atkinson & Heritage (1984), Button & Lee (1978) and Psathas (1990) all quoted in Clayman & Gill, (2004: 594) agree that conversational analysts work with data drawn primarily from ordinary conversations, and seek to describe highly general interactional practices and systems of practice such as those governing the organisation, the sequencing of action, the repair of misunderstandings, the relationships between vocal and non-vocal behaviour.

Bodden & Zimmerman 1991, Drew & Heritage 1992 b (Clayman & Gill, 2004: 590) focus on conversational analysis that seeks data from an institutional setting – such as doctor-patient interactions. This method was used mostly in analysing data from the unobtrusive observations of natural interactions between staff and staff, and students and

staff, as discussed in Chapter Three. This process was quite inductive in nature as it was a sensing stage of SUDA (Sensing, Understanding, Deciding and Acting), and it represented the first and second stages of Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). Addler & Addler (Denzin & Lincoln 1994) explain that the chief criticism against observational research lies in the area of validity, referring to researcher or analyst bias on interpreting the observed context. In dealing with this question of validity (or bias) the researcher used triangulation where observed patterns were pursued further, using different data collection and analysis methods and techniques in order to verify whether the same salient patterns would emerge.

The second analysis method used was content analysis which focuses on communication, and documentary material according to Babbie (1998, 1999), Babbie & Mouton (2001). Content analysis was used in analysing the semantics of service quality, and was used mostly for data collected from interviews and focus groups. It was also used in analysing documentary material of communications such as e-mails and other artefacts. The reason for using this method was to see "how social objects are made meaningful" (Holsten & Gubrium(Denzin & Lincoln, 1994: 263). This was the paradigm advocated by Alfred Schutz who argued that language is the central medium for transmitting, typification, and thereby meaning. Communication is one of the core functions in service management, and therefore content analysis was found to be a method that can facilitate the construction of meaning in this regard.

The third analysis method used in this study was systems approach and systems diagrammatical analysis. This method was used in two ways, namely, the first purpose being to guide the conversational and content analysis methods, and the second purpose being to use systems diagrams as tools to illuminate data and synthesize themes for interpretation. This systems method is also used in the final analysis of the study.

Strauss (1987), whose work advocates grounded theory, recommends an analysis process which uses three phases, namely; induction, deduction, and verification. The three phases were followed in this study, but in an iterative rather than a linear process. The inductive process gathers as much information as possible at the entering phase of SSM, in order to obtain what Strauss & Corbin (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) call multi-perspectives. The following diagram depicts an iterative process that was followed.

096502

Data collection	Coding	Memoing
	Deductive (understanding)	Reflection (deciding)
Inductive process (sensing)		
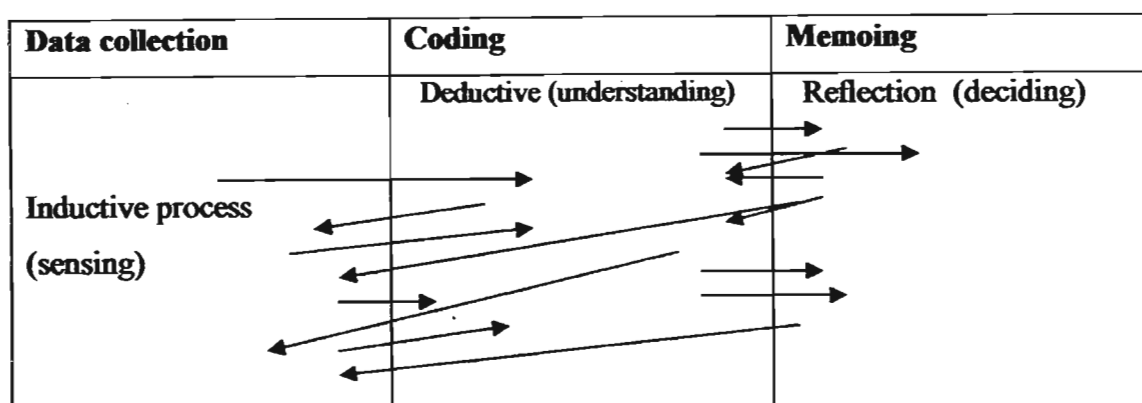
Figure 12 : Coding iterative process

Adapted from Strauss (1987: 19)

Open coding was mostly used at this level, as Miller & Crabtree (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) advise that if the goal of the study is seeking to understand experiences of others, the analyst must use an analytic method that keeps him/her more open and intimate with the text. The deductive phase is where boundaries were drawn through sifting relevant and important concepts that were swept in, as explained by Midgley (2000), within the boundary. The researcher would then go back into the field to verify consistency. The boundary judgement was derived from the research questions.

Strauss (1987) sees coding as naming a class of events and behavioural actions as indications. Coding creates a category, and the existing categories are compared with the emergent ones.

Coding is defined as "working the segments of data with symbols, descriptive words, or category names"(www.southalabama.edu/coe/bset/johnson/lectures/ch1.pdf). Figure 12 above illustrates the iterative process that was followed in the interim analysis.

Memo-ing was a complimentary technique or a researcher's journal " to record the subjective experiences of the fieldworker..."(Hardy & Bryman, 2004: 537). It helps in reflecting theoretical learning from the literature review and experiential learning from the field. The arrows in figure 12 indicate the interplay between data collection and coding, data collection and memo-ing, as well as coding and memo-ing.

The following systems diagrams depict the systems data analysis process with categories that were developed during the research.

Spray diagram : Conceptualisation of categories (Observations)
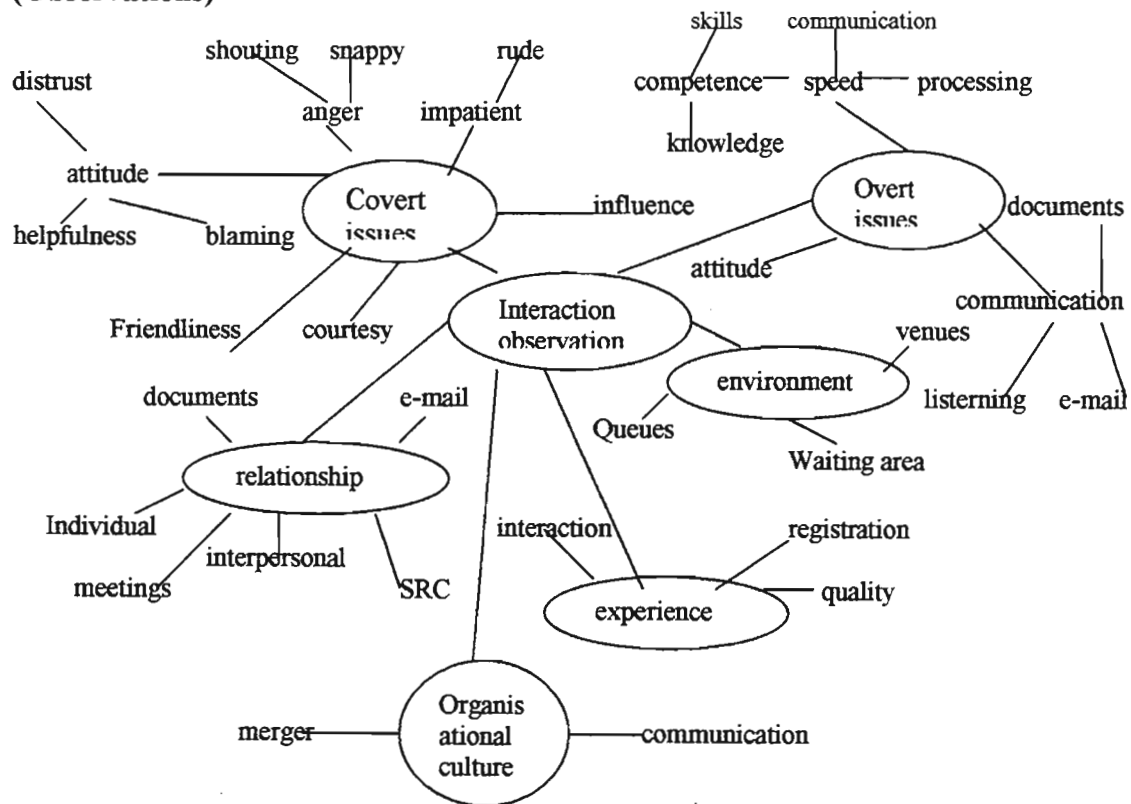
Figure 13

Spray diagram   :   Source: T205 course material (2004), Open University

Systems map : Systemic categories
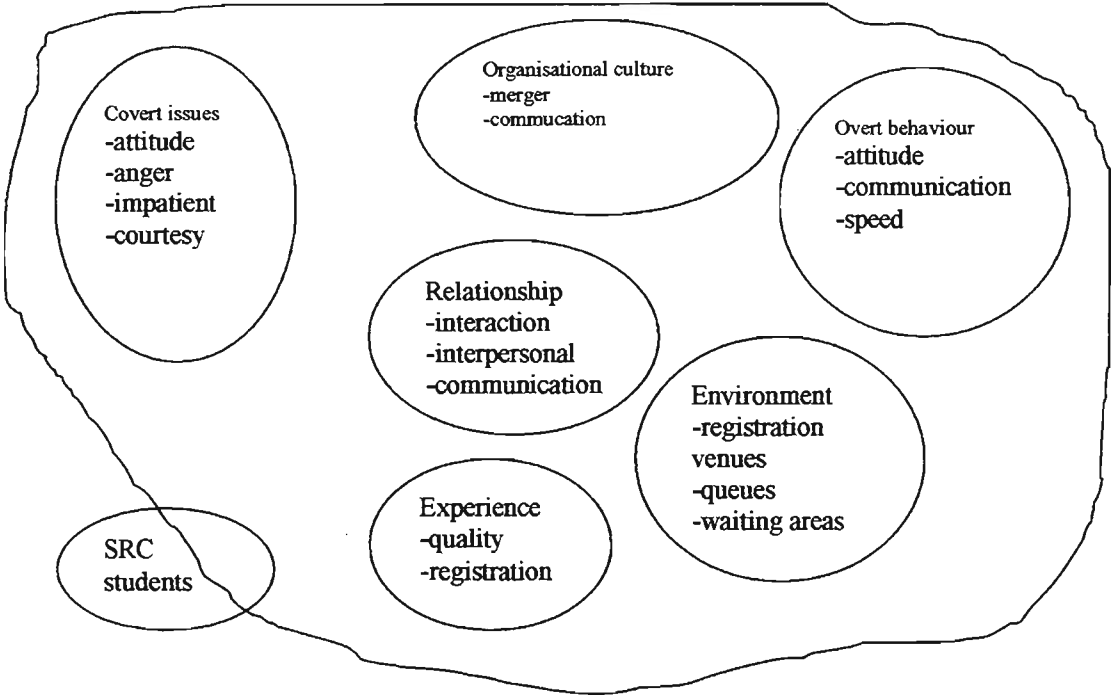
Figure 14
Systems map :   Source : **T205 Course material (2004), Open University**

Spray diagram :   Listening to lived experiences
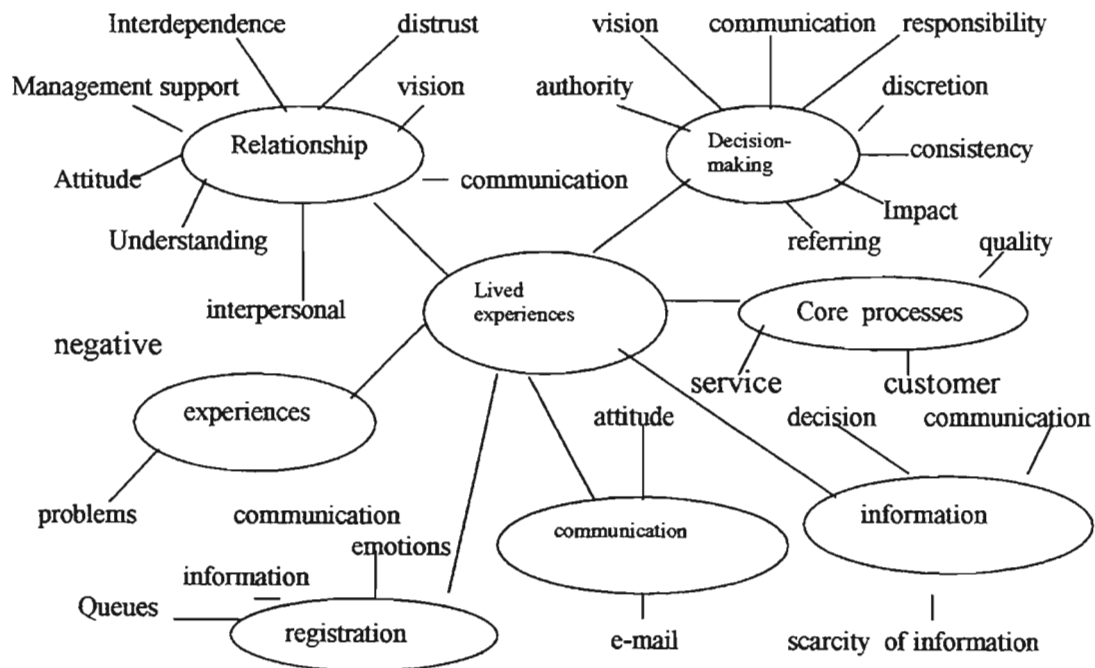
Figure 15
Spray diagram   :   Source: T205 course material (2004), Open University

Systems map : systemic patterns and new themes

Relationship
-attitude

-interdepence

-communication

-vision

Decision-making

-Authority
-discretion
-communication
-consistency
-responsibility
-impact

Communication
-interpersonal
-attitude
-e-mail
-students

Information
-decisions
-communication
-scarcity

problems

Core
processes
-services
-quality
-customer

Negative
experience

Registration
-queues
-emotions
-frustrations
-information

Mgmt support

Figure 16
Systems Map   :   Source: T205 course material(2004), Open University

Data was collected and stored in the Nvivo computer program. The analysis process was used manually and transmitted into Nodes of the Nvivo. The codes were developed and named after the data collection technique, namely; observation (OBS...), interview (ITV...), focus group (FCG...), and the category type. The first three characters of a code represent the data collection technique, and the last three represent a given category, i.e. observing relationship = OBSREL, or interview communication = ITVCOM. Each category has a sub-category.

This section demonstrated the methods and techniques used in analysing data for this study. The next section is now going to display the data in the form of findings, and compare and contrasts data, thereby making it easy for interpretation and conclusions.

4.3   RESEARCH FINDINGS :

The main purpose of this section is to display the findings in a verbatim narrative format. The issues highlighted in section 4.2 (see tables 6 – 16), will be revisited in interpreting data because those salient issues form the basis of the categories discussed in this section. The display tables represent the understanding part of SUDA, and the second stage of SSM (see rich picture as well, figure 17). Flood & Carson's (1988) work regarding what constitutes complexity includes among other things, people, relationships, values and beliefs, systems, communication, etc. Checkland would call this a human activity system (HAS). The rich picture represents this human activity system.

The temporal root definition of this system is a **complex system of service employees and students, coordinated by university management, engaged in a service delivery and consumption process which is commonly believed to be problem-stricken.** This root definition is derived from the research conducted. It was assessed against CATWOE criteria. CATWOE is an acronym for Customers, Actors, Transformation, Worldview, Owners, and Environment. Customers are students, actors are service employees. Transformation is the delivery and consumption of service. Worldview is represented by the belief that the system is problem-stricken. Owners of the system are university management, and the Environment is the main university system and the public as depicted in figure 1 of Chapter One.

The following soft systems rich picture diagram depicts the problem. situation as the researcher's perspective or understanding of what was conceptualised during the research.

107

Rich picture : Depicting the context
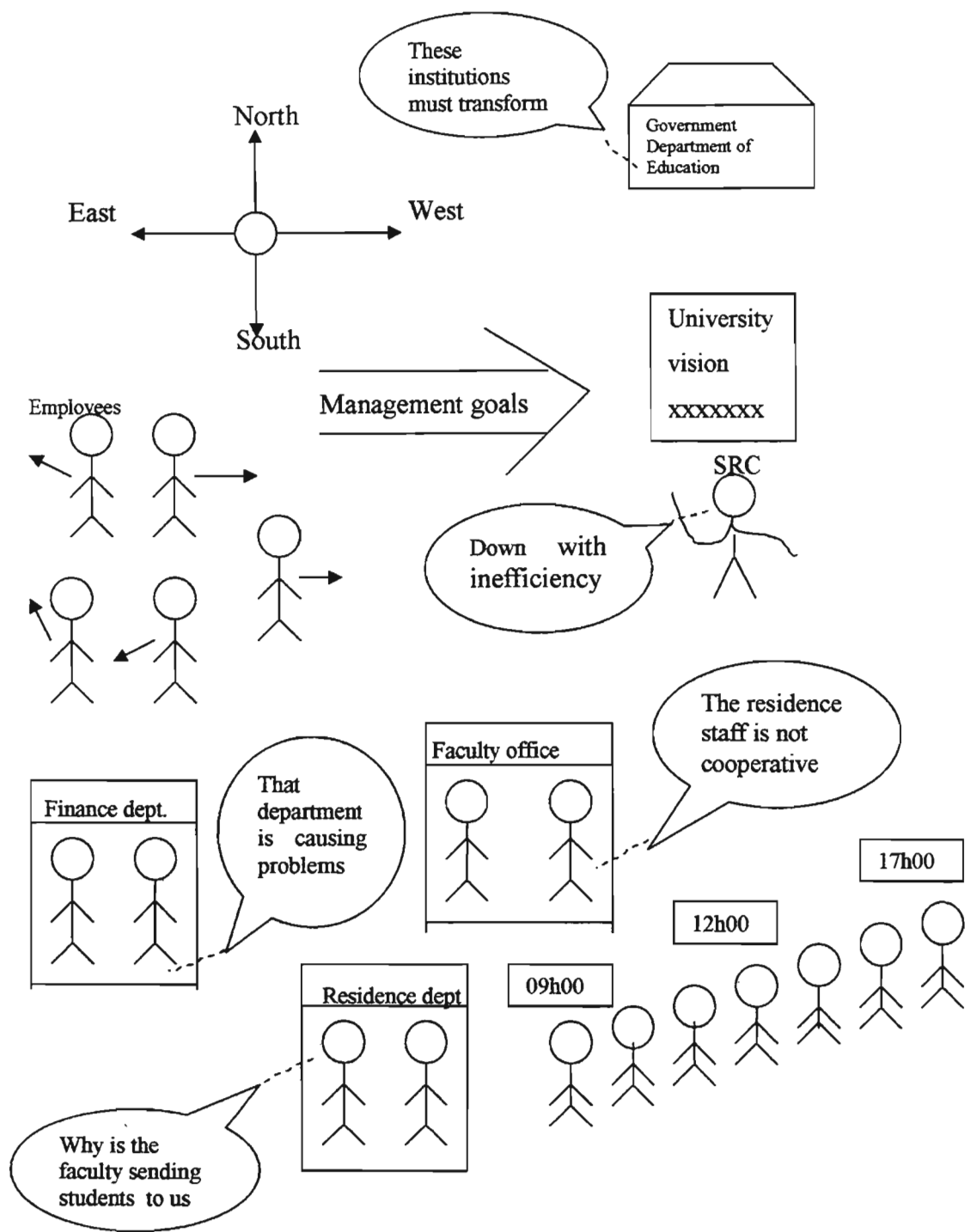
Figure 17

Rich Picture : Source: T205 course material(2004), Open University

4.3.1 Data Display Tables

As discussed, the next tables are going to display persistent themes, contrasting issues, and similar or congruent issues, so that the researcher and the reader are able to draw conclusions and take necessary action, as advocated by Miles & Huberman (1994). Where there are contrasting views between students and staff, or amongst staff, this may be an indication of the gap between what the service employee offers and the customer's expectations, and where there are similarities and consistencies it is an indication of the existence and prevalence of the phenomena. The format of the designing tables was adapted from the work of Miles & Huberman (1994).

Data Display Mattrix :
Constrasting meaning :

Category	Staff participants	Students participants
Core Processes (Quality meaning)	"pleasant" "approachable" "attending to needs" "sensitive" "smiling people" "I don't know any University quality standards"	"listening ear" "efficiency" "safety" "way people treat you" "relating" "explaining" "showing interest" "listening carefully" "understanding" "know exactly what people want" "comfortable" "passion" "satisfying" "speed" "effectiveness" "faster" "on time" "best value" "meeting expectations" "patience" "fairness"

Table 6

Similarities :

Category	Staff	Students
Core processs (Registration)	"registration must be streamlined" "empower staff" "decision-makers step back" "limited manpower" "need one stop shop" "frustrating" "confusing" "if centralised could be better" "students are sure" "students are not getting what they deserve" "long queues" "communication problem" "database not always reliable"	"don't know where to go" "frustrating" "long & inefficient queues" "annoying" "tiring" "very stressful" "ugly" "a nightmare" "registration here sucks" "shove you around" "long procedures" "no direction" "more people to help"
Service meaning	"performing a duty" "help" "get"	"satisfy" "providing" "help" "assist" "offered" "can't touch or see" "consume"
Relationship	"no respect" "don't obey instructions" "impose decisions" "no consistency" "no regular meetings" "no teamwork" "need to change attitude" "need mutual respect"	"staff seem tired & fed up" "not helpful" "quite rude" "service to be faster" "impatient" "respond quicker" "frustrated people" "they are stressed out" "no good communication" "they forget we are customers" "no understanding" "not reasonable" "they are mean" "they are passive" "arrogant" "need people skills" "don't care"

Table 7

110

Emerging Issues

Category	Staff	Students
Communication	"lack of communiction" "people don't respond to e-mails" "conflicts" "we communicate most by e-mail" "communication is a big problem" "other departments don't communicate" "others communicate through hearsay" "poor communication"	
Interdependency	"other departments don't communicate" "I'm not dependent on others" "others depend on me" "our office is disregarded"	
Student expectations		"understanding" "respect" "fairness" "on-line registration" "increase office hours" "more clearer information" "approachable people" "put people first" "anticipate and plan for problems" "better house-keeping and facilities"
Other issues	- no clear link between University mission/vision and functional departments - no quality standards	

Table 8

Customer lived experience :

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
1. Communication & Information	Correspondence, interaction, attitude, information	"okay but need to improve on interaction and relationships" "more interactive staff" "some vital procedures weren't mentioned" "no one gave us clear explanation" "no direction or clarity at all" "procedures should be made more clear" "always had to ask where to go, what to do" "I wasn't informed..." "did not know where to find help" " slow communication" "people say go there, then there, someone else something else" "I did not understand the process" " they did not know or explain what students should do" "explain things clearly, especially to first year students" "..process wasn't clear" "no clear information" "they hardly interact with us, because when I get time to see them they are on lunch" "processes are not fully explained" "difficult, no good communication throughout the university"

Table 9

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
2. Relationship	Negative attitude Poor communication Lack of understanding Lack of customer care Poor interaction	"They are mean" " they are not helpful" " some of them are rude" "...need to improve on interaction and relationship" "Impatient after some time" "...at some point it seems like they lose their patience" "some seem tired and fed up and not helpful" "they can be nasty if they want to" "they don't, they care passive, you don't

112

		know where to take your issues as a student" "some are arrogant" "they don't have people skills" " they don't care" "sometimes moody, but we still expect to get the service on good days or not" "...they forget we are customers" "they take too many breaks and can be bit rude at times" "no understanding, no compassion" "no interaction" "their offices are never open" "sometimes you find frustrated people" "they are rude and insensitive to issues of students and they aren't reasonable"

Table 10

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Experience	Registration experience Service meaning Quality meaning Expectations	Registration "was more like an adventure" "it is not easy to register" "...you don't know where to go" "long queues" "registration process is hectic" "frustrating, long lines" "one can never complete registration in a single day" "process wasn't clear" "long, inefficient queues and frustration, because of .." "not pleasant, don't like the process" "annoying, takes long" "tiring & frustrating" "did not understand the process" "very frustrating – takes too long, got robbed" "no steps – people would say go there, then there..." "applying for....and...was especially bad" "so frustrating" so frustrating – felt like crying and going home" "long, tiring process" "very stressful" "ugly" "was a nightmare" "registration here sucks" "a hellish nightmare" "queues after queues" "exhausting" "shove you around, not good experience" "very tiring long procedure with no direction or clarity at all" "terrible" "It was an awful procedure since it was hot, standing in endless queues"
	Service Meaning	"trying to satisfy the other person, and not being rude" "providing" "assistance" "to help" "somebody rendering something to someone" "it's what a person gives you" "giving what has been promised or expected" "quick streamlined process"

			"general attentiveness to what has to be done" "the act of doing something for someone else" "something to assist people who have needs" "something offered" "to give yourself to others using your skills to better stakeholders who are in need of it" "something you can't touch, or see, but you consume" "something done to you, that makes things easier for you" "what people do for you" "unseen entity" "service is the kind of help that the University offers to students in need"
		Quality	Expecting a listerning ear" "efficiency, safety" "when you are satisfied with service that you are getting" "the way people treat you, relate to you" "explain things clearly" "when you attend to each person with best of your interest, not rushing, listen carefully" "understanding what they are trying to say, refer them to the right people" "about service providers knowing exactly what the people want" "people should know about it" "comfortable" "service providers should have passion for their work" "the better the quality the better the service" "satisfying the person being served" "something that gets done within reasonable amount of time" "consistency, professionalism, effectiveness" "the faster and less hassle, the better" "fast and doing on time" "quality means the best" "value for your money" "promised

| | | expectations met" "understanding" "being able to cater for people's queries" "giving people options and solving problems" "offer assistance appropriately" "patience & fairness" |
| | Expectations | "understanding" "respect" "fairness" "on-line registration" "increase office hours" "more clearer information" "approachable people" "put people first" "anticipate and plan for problems" "better house-keeping and facilities" |

Table 11

Staff Lived experience

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Communication & Information	-Attitude - Interpersonal -Communication -Lack of information	"we meet once a month" "we communicate by e-mail" "I never see my seniors" "communication is a big problem" "information on database is always reliable" "other departments communicate through hearsay" "communication is difficult" "sometimes they exercise a top-down decisions" "they inform by e-mail" "they don't tell us, they tell students about decisions" "lack of communication" "sometimes verbally but I always ask for written confirmation" "sometimes students give us incorrect information" "people don't respond to e-mails" "when you phone, they keep on referring you to someone else"

Table 12

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Relationship	-lack of common vision -communication problem -attitude -lack of management support -interdependency & teamwork	"my job does not meet the University mission" "no regular meetings" "lack of teamwork" "our seniors don't know what we are doing here" "they take decisions alone" "no involvement" "only top people communicate amongst themselves" "I have a terribly problem with ...." "I don't understand the system of ...." "lack of communication" "our seniors don't trust us" "lack of understanding by people from outside" "they don't meet deadlines" "they don't see interdependency" "my seniors make decisions and I deal with consequences, but I do get their support " "people need to change attitude" "there is no respect amongst colleagues" "sometimes they don't obey my instructions" "other departments don't communicate" "there is lack of respect from both staff and students" "we are not the cause of problems" "sometimes they impose decisions" "we meet at board meetings and when we have workshops" "the merger demotivates me" "communication with my seniors is very poor" "they communicate through other people" "there is poor delegation" "the senior don't communicate their expectations" "there is no consistency" "my seniors don't have time for me"

| | | "improve staff attitude" "need mutual respect" "how do you fix attitudes" "a lot of people are dependent on me, but I'm not dependent on them" "people are dependent on others but they don't see that" "office is disregarded" |

Table 13

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Experience	-Registration -negative experience -management support	"sometimes I need more staff" "information on database is not always reliable" "communication is difficult" "SRC must stop fighting for students who do not qualify" "the biggest problem is lack of understanding by people from outside" "physical office set up is not conducive" "outdated computers" "registration is frustrating for us" "long queues" "streamline registration" "decision-makers step back during registration" "there is limited manpower" "staff need to be empowered with information" "we have not mastered registration"

Table 14

118

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Decision-making	-Authority -Responsibility -Impact of decision -descretion -consistency -communication -vision	"they take decisions alone" "no involvement" "there is lack of planning..." "they change instructions for other people" "I only suggest things, I don't take decisions" "I want to be able to take decisions" "they make decisions, and I deal with consequences, but I do get their support" "rules must be kept every time" "if they bend rules, students undermine us" "they don't communicate to us but they tell students" "they inform me by e-mail" "instil a degree of responsibility" "there is poor communication of decisions" "people wait for minutes of meetings before they can act" "we need quicker decisions" "I need more authority" "sometimes I need approval" "I want to delegate more" "I need information on time" "we can't afford delays" "we don't comply with University mission, the way students and staff are treated" "you need to tell people about their responsibility" "I don't like to make decisions for unusual requests" "not enough authority"

Table 15

119

Category	Sub-category	Verbatim Narratives
Core processes	-Service meaning -Quality meaning -Customer service	"I would define service as performing a duty to someone who requires your help and making sure that they get exactly what they want" "making sure that someone who requires something they get"
	Quality	"Quality means being professional" "come across as pleasant" "approachable" "attending to needs of students" "sensitive" "not stubborn" "firm – think about what you do before you do it" "be cautious" "we can measure quality through surveys" "we can measure quality by looking at students pass rate" "we must decide on what is quality"

Table 16

4.4 DATA INTERPRETATION AND DISCUSSION

This section of this chapter seeks to interpret data displayed in those tables. Another important purpose of this section is to compare the theoretical concepts of service management discussed in Chapter Two with the findings of the real world experience uncovered by research, and lastly, to assess whether the research answered any questions of the study.

One of the guidelines that Miles & Huberman (1994) propose for a qualitative research report is that "a good report should provide basic data, preferably in a focused form (vignettes, organised narratives, photographs or data display) so that the reader can, in parallel with the researcher, draw warranted conclusions" (1994: 304). Robson (2002) also advocated this guideline. Patton (2002) explains that qualitative studies "share the

capacity to open up a world to the reader..." (2002: 438), and that is what tables 6 – 16 sought to do by providing thick and detailed real world narratives/data. Geertz 1973, and Denzin 2001 (Patton, 2002) also pointed out that qualitative research should provide thick descriptions "in such a way that we can understand the phenomenon studied and draw our own interpretations about meanings and significance" (2002: 438). The spray diagrams (in figure 13 & 15) and tables 6 – 16 attempted to fulfill these conventions by displaying verbatim narratives of a variety of lived experiences in the context of service delivery.

The four systems diagrams (spray diagrams and systems maps, figures 13, 14, 15, & 16) depict the salient issues that emerged during the interim data analysis. These systems tools were very helpful in consolidating and performing the inductive and deductive data analysis process, as advocated by several authors such as Strauss (1987), Huberman & Miles in Denzin & Lincoln (1994), and Patton (2002). Silverman (2000) emphasized the importance of early and ongoing data analysis. Analysing as you go is very important, and that is one of the lessons learnt in this study. Silverman also supported the process of data reduction (selecting, focusing, simplifying, abstracting & transforming), data display (organised assembly of information for conclusion-drawing and action-taking), and conclusion (drawing meaning, noting regularities, patterns, and explanations, etc.).

The unobtrusive observation provided vital information and served as the bedrock for further research/data gathering. The guiding paradigm was sensing the phenomenon, and the aim here was "not to delimit particular problems out there in the real world but to gain an understanding of the situation"(Jackson, 2000: 202). The result of that activity (observation) was the spray diagram in figure 13, which highlighted the following:

a) **Overt behaviour**

This was the behaviour portrayed by service employees (or the observed) while interacting with students and amongst themselves. The researcher noted that some staff members displayed a negative attitude and seemed stressed, particularly during the student registration. The second issue which was noticeable was the speed of service delivery. This drew the attention of the researcher because of the conspicuously long queues outside offices and at registration venues. The third issue was communication, especially the e-mail system, and the actual interface with students.

121

b)   Covert issues:

Tied up with overt behaviour was what the researcher calls 'covert' issues. This name basically referred to the overt behaviour which indicated that there were covert or underlying structural issues which fermented the ostensible behaviour, and this thinking drove the researcher to uncover such issues using the triangulation inquiry method. The researcher observed behavioural actions such as attitude, anger, impatience, friendliness and courtesy.

c)   Relationships

Relationships are the core part of systems thinking, as Jackson (2000) explains that the relationships between the parts can be more important than the nature of the parts themselves. Stacey et al (2000) have done some work on chaos and complexity, and their work is derived from the relationship aspects or view of systems. The relationship issue is closely tied up with the behavioural issues, and as a systems approach inquiry, this study considers this issue as crucial to the phenomenon. The relationship category included assessing the documents (artefacts), communication, and interpersonal relationship with students among staff and with Student Representative Council (SRC). The observation process noticed a very poor relationship.

d)   General experience and expectations

The observation did not reveal strong data on two issues which were subcategories of this segment, namely; service and quality. It was however noted, that quality was not an issue, or did not seem to be within peoples' daily language or conversation. The absence of noticeable quality characteristics motivated further discovery. The registration was one event or milestone where observation yielded a variety of behavioural issues and challenges sought by the study.

e)   Environment

Environment refers to the physical set-up where service is delivered and consumed. An observation was made of offices and registration venues, office decorations, and waiting-areas and other building aesthetics. This was not pursued vigorously, but emerged spontaneously, especially when people talked about the student registration venues, and sometimes, their front offices.

f) Organisational culture

The last category which was explored through documents, observing, and listening to conversations, and asking people about the effects of the merger, is termed here organisational culture. It became cumbersome to pursue this issue vigorously, and it was collapsed under the relationship category.

These six salient categories are depicted in a succinct and summarised way in figure 16. These categories served as preliminary confirmation of the existence of a problem situation (or challenges). From this first phase of research a rich picture was then drawn (see figure 17).

Subsequent research conducted through interviews and focus groups revealed a lot of the above issues again, and consistently, as well as other emerging issues, as it can be noticed that some categories changed. The interviews were conducted over a period of six months (May to October 2005). The interviews and focus groups provided themes such as relationships, experience, communication, information, decision-making, and core processes. These categories formed patterns during the research and they are interpreted as follows:

i) Relationship

The research found that there is a very poor relationship between service employees and students, among service employees, and amongst departments.

Other findings were:

- Lack of common vision among service employees. It was uncovered that there is no clear link between the university vision and the administrative functions. Research participants provided different interpretations or meanings of the university vision as it related to their respective departments and their individual portfolios or positions. Departments also, were found to lack a common vision. The rich picture in figure 17 also depicts this phenomenon, as pictures of people are shown pulling in different directions in terms of their goals.

- Research participants also agreed that there was no demonstrated interdependence among departments. Some participants reported with

confidence that other departments were dependent on them, but not the other way round. In other words, they reported that there was no reciprocal or mutual interdependency. They also (maybe as a consequence of non-systemic relationships) reported that people in one department do not understand the activities and functions of other departments.

- Research participants (students and service employees) overwhelmingly agreed that communication is a big problem. They consistently reported that there is poor communication among students, and among service employees, including communication from their managers. They (service employees) also reported consistently that there was a lack of management support.

This study was not a cause and effect kind of an inquiry, but there is a degree of confidence that the phenomena that exist as discussed in this section, could cause poor quality in service rendered.(see table 10 & 11). The findings of student interviews confirm this conclusion. Because there is no leveraging or systemic intervention to improve the relationship in the student administration system (SAS), the system is completely self-regulating, reinventing problem after problem. The attitude portrayed by staff, lack of management support, poor communication, lack of common vision, distrust, poor relationships all generate a butterfly effect surfacing in the form of poor service as described by student participants, and one student in particular, as a "hellish nightmare".

ii) Experience
As a phenomenological study,, the guiding principle was to identify service management challenges from the lived experiences of the service employees and customers. In this category the salient issues or experiences pertained to the student registration process, the service quality, and customer expectations.

The research found that there are congruent experiences between staff and students with regards to registration, and the experience is quite negative. The registration experience was described by students and staff as characterised by very long and frustrating queues, slow processes, poor communication, and frustrating procedures. These are events that emanate from deep-rooted causes, such as those discussed in the first, third, and fifth points of this discussion.

The challenges that prevail during student registration surface and recur every year. This was noticed from (besides the researcher's experience in the context) previous years' minutes of meetings, and responses from research participants. O'Connor & McDermott (1997: 164 – 165) explain that events which occur repeatedly generate or become a pattern. "This is a strong clue that there is a system structure operating that keeps running in the same way" (1997: 164). The difficulty is that if practitioners keep on implementing interventions that address these events and overlook the underlying structure, the problems will perpetually crop up.

The analysis did not focus on frequency coding *per se*, but rather on consistency. The consistent response relating to challenges of the student registration process however prompts a conclusion that there are indeed challenges around the registration process, and that is why in section 4.6 of this chapter there is a specific recommendation for this process.

iii)   Decision-making

The research probed whether service employees had commensurate, and/or adequate authority to make the necessary decisions in their respective portfolios. The research found two contrasting views. Participants who are in management positions reported that they have enough authority and so do their subordinates, some even said they make all decisions. Whereas those in non-managerial positions, and frontline staff felt that they needed more authority in order to deliver their service effectively. They also felt that they needed more management support, especially in peak hours such as during the student registration period. They also reported that there was a need for better communication of decisions by their seniors and by other departments. Some were quoted as saying that they relied on the grapevine in order to get information on decisions made in meetings or by other departments.

It can be concluded that the organisational structures within the SAS are too centralized, and that authority is confined to the top of the functional hierarchies. This also indicated that departments operate independently of others, and therefore when a decisions is made in one department, there is no regular communication of such decision to other departments.

iv)   Core processes

Student participants provided a long list of what represents quality in service, or what they expect or identify as good quality in service. In brief, they expect to see passion, speed, consistency, professionalism, patience, fairness, respect from service employees, who are also expected to interact more with students, and provide clear information and explanations. On the contrary, staff participants felt they should be pleasant, approachable, sensitive, and professional. The two groups' responses hardly correspond. What was also of note was that staff participants had varying meanings, and some did not even know any characteristics of quality in service, and most importantly they acknowledged that they did not know of any university quality common standards. This was an important finding.

Most staff participants regard students as customers. A lot of them also see students as being more than customers. Most student participants saw themselves as customers. There was a great deal of congruency and consistency in participants' responses. Some saw students as different customers because they say students come to learn and spend a long time in the university. It can be concluded therefore, that students are indeed customers, because even businesses strive to keep customers for a long time

v)   Communication and information

Communication included verbal, telephonic, written, and electronic. These are the communication means that were reported to be in frequent use amongst staff and students. There was an overwhelming agreement from both students and staff that communication is a big problem. Communication is the key to service, and in many respects it is service itself, for instance, customer enquiries are largely about communication.

A lack of, and poor communication generates a butterfly effect, impacting on services delivered. It goes without saying that since departments and individual staff felt they were not interdependent, they did not see the need for communicating. It can be concluded therefore that poor communication exists, and is one of the biggest challenges.

126

4.4.1 Comparison of concepts highlighted in literature and real world findings

In Chapter Two there were quite a number of concepts that were discussed and highlighted as very important in service management. This section serves as an assessment and comparison of the theoretical issues in literature and real world issues which emerged from the research findings. Maylor & Blackmon (2005) emphasise that in qualitative research it is important "to link what you have found to the literature" (2005: 385). The literature review (in Chapter Two) identified and discussed the following concepts pertaining to service management:

4.4.1.1 Definition of service

In their definition of service, it is noticeable that authors such as Gronroos (1990), van Looy et al (2003), Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004), use words such as "activity or series of activity", "intangibility", "interaction between customer and service employees", and "providing solutions to customers". In verifying this definition in the real world, through asking participants (employees and students) what they understand about the term service, they included words such as "performing a duty", "help", "satisfy", "providing", "rendering", "giving", "offered", "can't touch or see", "consume". It can be concluded that there were some similarities in defining the term. The generalisation of such findings is quite possible, but what is also important is that the words students used provide a blueprint for developing a service strategy that is grounded or derived from students' expectations.

4.4.1.2 Service characteristics

Service characteristics included service intangibility, simultaneity, perishability, and heterogeneity. The research did not explore in the real world the concepts of service intangibility and perishability. Simultaneity covered a few issues and these related to relationships, decision-making, communication and information. Simultaneity was found to pose a great challenge for service employees as they were quoted as saying there is "no respect among service employees", "subordinates don't obey instructions", "departments don't communicate", "communication with management is poor", "there is no consistency", "not enough authority", "poor response to e-mails", "people feel that others are dependent on them and not *vice versa*". Such phenomena pose a challenge when a service employee is expected to produce a service that is consumed simultaneously, because unlike products, there is no room for rectifying the deficiencies of the system

127

prior to the consumption of the service. Heterogeneity is also a problem in that students find service to be inconsistent and not fair because of fluctuating levels of quality, and some students get what they want only when they go to management, as was reported by staff participants.

4.4.1.3 Strategic service management

As stated in Chapter Two, one of the objectives of the research was to establish how (in the real world) vision is understood, implemented, interpreted and filtered through every aspect of the organisation. The research found that there is no communication of the vision, no interpretation, and that staff have no shared vision. This poses a great challenge for service employees and ultimately customers.

4.4.1.4 Management paradigm

Even though research participants consistently reported that there is a lack of management support, this issue was not vigorously pursued. A conclusion however can be derived from the previous point, that is, there is poor, or no communication of vision, and this indicates what Felkins et al (1993) call "rational approach", where if change is implemented under this paradigm, "people are not always active and informed" (1993: 64). Systems philosophers call this phenomenon, mechanistic – where the organisation is seen as a machine that can be controlled or fixed. That is how, explains Jackson (2000: 27) the principles of planning, organising, command and control were developed. Gharajedachi (1999) likened the mechanistic metaphor to a mindless system.

4.4.1.5 Decision-making and information (and knowledge management)

Information and decision-making were described in the literature chapter as very closely related. Alavi & Nonaka (2002) describe knowledge as justified personal belief that increases an individual's capacity to take action. This is the very reason the research pursued these concepts of information and decision-making, because they are regarded as able to provide and enhance the capacity for a service employee to deal with the challenges of service simultaneity. Lake & Hickey (2002) emphasise the empowerment of service employees, explaining that the "organisation needs the right information system to support their decision-making and the right feedback systems..." (2002: 113). Research participants (students & staff) reported that there is a serious lack of information, thus confirming the importance of information in the service context.

4.4.1.6 Quality and customer satisfaction

Service quality was one of the main research questions for this study. In Chapter Two it was pointed out that quality in service is very difficult to evaluate and measure, especially if the service has high credence features. In recognising this challenge, Bitner, Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry (McColl-Kennedy, 2003) see service quality as an "elusive and abstract concept, similar in nature to an attitude, as it represents a general, overall appraisal of a product or service" (2003: 73). The research reveals that the quality of service in the context researched is very poor, and that there is no quality strategy. The service employees also do not know of, or have a quality feedback mechanism. This is a great challenge for service employees because such phenomena exacerbate customer dissatisfaction, and customers do not get value for their money.

4.4.1.7 Service employees

Service employees, explain Lovelock & Wirtz (2004: 309) are seen on the one side as uncaring and incompetent, and on the other hand, as heroes who go out of their way to help. Research participants (students) had the same views, but the majority of students evaluated service employees very negatively. Another question around the service employees related to corporate strategy – how employees understand the strategy or vision, and how this gets filtered throughout the organisational hierarchy. The findings on this point have already been discussed in point (c) above.

4.5 DID THE STUDY ANSWER THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS? (Reflecting on Research Questions)

4.5.1 Challenges of service management

This is the title of this whole study as discussed in Chapter One. The study sought an understanding of the challenges prevailing in a service context. The challenges were discussed in Chapter Two, and this chapter has discussed in great detail challenges that are prevalent in the real world. The findings are displayed in table 6 - 16. The research also met the objective of developing or generating a hybrid understanding of the challenges, from the customers' perspectives, and from the service employees' points of view. It is now up to the service practitioners to develop interventions that address both perspectives in order to have a systemic and sustainable improvement (see also service

own conclusions from these thick descriptions. The challenges do exist and they are complex. It is therefore concluded that the research did answer the main question of the study.

4.5.2 Can the quality of service be improved?

Yes and No. The quality of the student administrative service at UKZN can indeed improve. Table 11 provides a picture of the current problems with registration indicating a lack of quality, and specifically a long list of what represents quality in the eyes of students. These findings set the stage or a blueprint for the development of a comprehensive quality strategy. Russel Ackoff (2004), in his paper titled "transforming the systems movement", quoted Einstein as saying "without changing our patterns of thought we will not be able to solve the problems we created with our current patterns of thought". Gharajedaghi (1999) advocates the same doctrine of shifting one's paradigm. If the *status quo* remains as table 10 (relationships) displays, quality will not improve. The service management system model in figure18, provides a framework for the paradigm shift, and the overall service management approach which is conducive to service quality improvement.

4.6   RECOMMENDATIONS

As a phenomenological, interpretive inquiry, this study sought to uncover, through constructionism and constructivism methodology, the challenges prevalent in service management, and it would then be deviating from this paradigm to arbitrarily develop a recipe or a comprehensive list of recommendations. It is, however, not the intention to leave this study incomplete, and it is therefore necessary to demonstrate how systems approach is applied as an intervention mechanism. In the light of the latter argument, a few recommendations are thus discussed and a model suggested as an intervention strategy. These recommendations are for the context from which the findings of this study emanated. The diagram in figure 18 depicts a service management systems model as a framework for systemic improvement of service delivery.

Systemic service management model (SMS Model) diagram
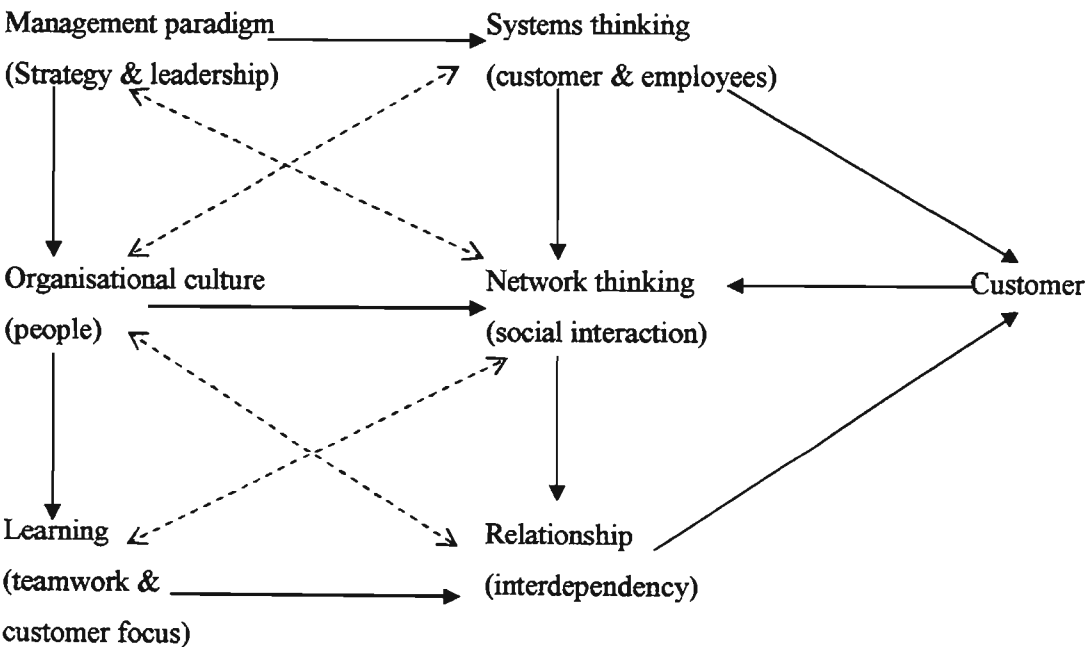
Figure 18

(Service Management Systems Model)

In developing visions and missions and a service strategy, it is important that soft systems thinking is adopted as a paradigm.

In implementing the strategy a systems approach must be used. Gharajedaghi (1999) advocated that paradigm shifts can range in shifting, from mindless to multi-minded thinking. He made a bold statement which most managers or leaders would refute as impractical when he said leadership is "defined as the ability to influence those whom we do not control" (1999: 32). Gharajedaghi believes that "we do not actually control much of anything, but do have the ability to influence many things" (1999: 32). Van der Heijden et al (2002) also stress that "while we may be able to exert influence over many issues, we cannot guarantee predetermined and calculable outcomes" (2002: 105). Stacey (1993) offers a simple answer as to why mechanistic thinking is a problem. He says "for efficiency reasons we divide up the tasks to be done, but as soon as we do that, we create the problem of integrating the divided tasks back into a whole again, we create the problem of control"(1993: 95).

What the SMS Model offers is holistic thinking, and the recognition of the fact, as explained by Gharajedaghi (1999) that a machine like a car can be driven straight to a solid wall and would not resist, but a horse cannot – the relationship between the rider and the horse counts. Senge's (1990, 1994) five disciplines are also useful in helping developing a new paradigm. These disciplines include personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, systems thinking and team learning.

Shifting paradigms is the first step towards a new management approach. The new thinking should be the basis for a new organisational culture which is guided by communitarian cannons, thus reinforcing and instilling an interdependency mindset. The organisational culture will develop new values and beliefs which are conducive to network thinking as advocated by Capra (1996). The new culture cannot exist without learning, – meaning learning from one another, building teams, and creating customer focus, because it does not help for one unit to adopt customer focus while others are doing something else. A new culture can also not evolve if there is a non-systemic approach of focusing only on what customers want, and neglecting the people who have to meet those needs. This was the advocacy of this study.

Learning should not merely be a sharing of expertise, it should also involve what Argyris (1999) calls double-loop learning, whereby members feel free to question their own thinking and worldviews, admit mistakes and correct them. Jackson (2000) supports the

social process where "worldviews are held up for examination and their implications...are made explicit..." (2000: 254). This kind of double-loop learning will facilitate the externalisation and sharing of tacit knowledge.

Relationships between people, departments (components of the SAS), relationships with customers, and with management and *vice versa*, are the catalysts for either a dysfunctional or cohesive and effective human activity system. The important thing in this model is to realise that all the components are interconnected, and should be adopted holistically. Lastly, another recommendation is that the student registration process as a very important process for the SAS and the overall university's purpose of existence, it should be coordinated as a project where there will be a project leader and a team converging from all relevant sections of the SAS, creating a well coordinated team. A team developed from this SMS Model will fit very well with a matrix structure.

4.7 <u>SUMMARY</u>

This chapter served as a report of research findings for this study. The overall research was conducted over a period of approximately ten months, intensifying over the last six months, with interviews and focus groups. Data analysis was concurrently carried out over this whole period of data collection.

The collection of data created overwhelming and voluminous data over the research period. Qualitative data is not easily manageable, because it does not get reduced purely to numbers, because the lived experiences will be diluted into objective statistics that will require fresh and further inquiry if a researcher is looking for thick descriptions of a phenomenon. The volumes of data are managed so that the data collection, data reduction, data display, and conclusion process is conducted systematically, and also for research rigour, so that the findings are traceable, verifiable, and credible. These kinds of data are contained in the form of field-notes, tapes and transcripts, memos or researcher's journals. This study followed these conventions.

The data was kept and analysed using the Nvivo computer program as well as by manual analysis using three methods of data analysis. The process of data collection and analysis also followed what Strauss (1987) calls inductive, deductive, and verification. Many authors such as Strauss (1987), Riley (1990), Miles & Huberman (1994), Robson (2002), and Patton (2002) admit that qualitative methods of analysing data are still under development. Miles & Huberman published a book on qualitative data analysis in 1994 which is very helpful as a primer. The work of Miles & Huberman (1994) was then used quite extensively in data analysis. The analysis process involved coding, looking for patterns and developing categories. The codes were created as a combination of data collection techniques and emerging categories. As in data collection as discussed in Chapter Three, a triangulation approach was used in data analysis.

The methods used were content analysis, conversation analysis, and systems techniques. Figure 12 depicts the iterative process that was followed from data collection, coding, and memo-ing. Data were collected, coded, and memo-ed., and then coded data would serve as a basis for further data collection. The research context was entered in order to sense the phenomena, and once the data had been collected, it would be studied and

understood, and then a decision would be made (through systems boundary judgement) as to whether certain themes are salient or trivial/irrelevant.

The research provided quite interesting findings. The findings confirmed that the challenges in service management do indeed exist, and that there is a possibility of generalisation of findings because there is a great correspondence of issues identified in literature and in real world context.

The research provided the findings for two other research questions, namely, quality and systemic improvement. The research found that the quality of service is very poor, and that quality cannot improve if the *status quo* remains. It was concluded however, that quality of service can improve if there is a paradigm shift in the system, and hence a recommendation of a service management systems model (SMS Model) as depicted in figure18 of this chapter. It was also recommended that the student registration process should be coordinated as a project.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 CONCLUSION

This chapter aims to provide a summary of the whole study (dissertation), and points out or identifies some limitations and areas for future research. The chapter assists in offering the reader a synopsis of salient points and arguments of the study.

The main aim of this study was to gain an understanding of challenges prevailing in service management. Managing a service delivery system is viewed as a complex function. There are converging views from a lot of authors such as Gronroos (1990), Hope & Muhlemann (1997), Zeithaml & Bitner (2000), van Looy et al (2003), Lovelock & Wirtz (2004), and Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons (2004) that services are more intangible. That is one of the factors that contributes to the complexity of service.

The researcher has been involved in service management for a significant period as indicated in Chapter One through Schon's (1987) practitioner's approach. That discussion indicated the personal experience in service management, where there is a dilemma between policy decisions which are implemented to perpetuate the prevailing arbitrary standards on the one hand, and which attempt to meet varying and dynamic customer (students) needs. The University of KwaZulu-Natal was therefore chosen as a research context to explore the "real world" or "real life" (Robson, 2002), which focuses on an "investigation involving people...to draw attention to some of the issues and complexities involved..." (2002: 3). Real life investigation, according to Robson (2002) involves "the actual context where what we are interested in occurs..." (2002:. 3).

It was very important to conduct research in a constructionist/construstivist approach (involving people), because service is about people, as argued in Chapter Two and Three. Chapter One reflected a lot of the researcher's experiential knowledge, which had to be bracketed during the actual research. The experiential knowledge only served as an inspiration to undertake this study, and it highlighted what was called (in Chapter One) symptoms of the problems, such as staff low morale, lack of initiative in helping students, reactive management, staff conflicts, conflicting goals, slow and fragmented processes, workplace politics, long queues for students, and lack of teamwork. The study used a

systems approach as a meta-discipline and research methodology and method as a hybrid with a qualitative research approach.

A detailed discussion was conducted in Chapter Three as a report on issues and debates on service management literature. That discussion was very helpful in bringing academic and business perspective into the study. Chapter Two introduced the systems approach so that the reader could gain an understanding of this approach and then see its application as a meta-discipline. Systems approach is a philosophy popularized by Bertalanffy in his book titled "General Systems Theory" published in 1968. Other systems authors include Ackoff, Churchman, Checkland, Ulrich, Capra, Senge, Flood, Midley, Jackson, Mingers, and many others who advocated this systems philosophy, and developed different systems concepts and theories, such as Systems dynamics, Cybernetics, Soft Systems Methodology, Systems Heuristics, Chaos and Complexity theories, Total Systems Interventions, Critical Systems Theory, and Postmodern systems theories. Jackson (2000) wrote a book which evaluates many of these different theories.

Systems approach was advocated as a general approach that transcends many other disciplines. Churchman (1968) explains that "a system is made up of components that work together for the overall objectives of the whole" (1968: 11). He further provides a short and succinct definition where he says systems approach is simply a way of thinking about these total systems and their components. Systems approach was further defined as a collective of interrelated and interdependent parts that form a whole. Systems philosophers emphasized that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. When systems metaphors approach are used, living beings and entities are viewed as systems. A person is viewed as a complete system, and so is a group of people who gather for a certain purpose, and so is a university. What is important is that each system and or subsystem's parts have to work together synergistically in order for the system not to be dysfunctional.

A university as a whole, is a large and complex system which could not have been studied successfully in its entirety considering the time constraints, resources, and the main scope and focus of this study. This is where the concept of boundary judgement came into the picture. Drawing a boundary involved identifying a system on which an intervention or a study could focus. The reader could refer to figure 1 in Chapter One for

an example of a system identified in this study. The student administration system (SAS) was identified for this study. The components inside the boundary of this system constitute the system, and those that are outside the system represent the system environment or a supra-system which has direct or indirect influence on the identified system. Such boundary judgement is arbitrary, but the important thing is the ability, as Capra suggests, to shift one's attention back and forth between the systems levels.

In the literature review, the first debate was whether service is tangible or intangible. This issue is very important because it is linked to quality, as well as in terms of what can be 'seen' to represent quality features.

Most authors have converging views as to whether service is more intangible than tangible, and van Looy et al (2003: 12) explain that services are acts or deeds that we cannot take home, and what we can take home is the effect of service. Some authors such Zeithaml & Bitner (2000) draw a continuum, arguing that some services are positioned on the tangible side of the spectrum, and others are on the intangible end. This view created a bit of confusion and was argued in terms of categorizing products and services. The systems purpose and boundary was used in this study to contribute a new perspective, for instance, the argument was that the primary purpose of the system must be determined first, and then all the relevant parts should be 'swept in', and this would clear out the confusion of whether or not an offering is a service.

Service was defined as:

> an activity or series of more or less intangible nature that normally but not necessarily take place in interaction between the customer and service employees and or physical resources or goods and or systems of the service provider, which are provided as solutions to customer problem.
>
> (Gronroos, 1990, van Looy et 2003, Fitzsimmons & Fitzsimmons 2004).

What this discussion spawned was a new perspective that there are hard services (i.e. repairs, car rentals, cleaning, security, transportation and the like), and soft services (i.e. counseling, entertainment, teaching, legal services, and the like). The hard services were viewed as services that involve the physical part of a customer and or his/her property, and soft services are seen to involve the emotional, psychological, and intellectual part of the customer.

138

Service characteristics were also discussed, and these included:

a) Service simultaneity

This refers to the fact that services are generally provided and consumed simultaneously, and this involves service employees and customers. One of the most important facts that accompanies service simultaneity is quality. "The quality of service and customer satisfaction will be highly dependant on what happens in real time, including actions of employees and interaction between employees and customers (Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000: 14). Careful attention, recommends van Looy et al (2003), must be paid to service employees dealing with customers. This study followed this view as well, but it goes beyond this recommendation in that it focuses on the whole system (including management, not only frontline employees).

b) Service heterogeneity

Service heterogeneity refers to the difference in service employees and customers, as Zeithaml & Bitner (2000: 13) argued that because services are performed by humans no two services can be alike, as well as that because customers are also different, they will view and experience services uniquely. Figure 5 seeks to illuminate this challenge, and figure 6 depicts the complexity of customers' needs in terms of multiple influences.

c) Service intangibility

This refers to the fact that service, as already indicated in this study, is mainly intangible. Because service can be as intangible as ideas and concepts, there is a great challenge for customers to see quality, and for service providers to monitor and evaluate quality.

d) Service perishability

Because service cannot be produced and stored in a warehouse like products, it is difficult to manage the demand fluctuations. This factor poses challenges to service employees.

It was argued in Chapter Two that most businesses exist to make money, and that's it. There are however other secondary objectives that they meet in pursuit of their primary object (making money). South African Express Airways overtly state in their mission statement that they exist to "optimize profit" (Indwe Magazine, 2005: 100) see also www.flysax.com In order to achieve this ultimate goal, an organization has to develop a strategy. Developing a service strategy is very important since it seeks to answer the

139

above statement, and service employees, through a Michael Porter's balanced score card approach and Peter Senge's shared vision, would know what is expected in terms of organisational goals. This process is however not easy to implement because of the conventional management mechanistic paradigms. Knowledge management is another important aspect of service management because a lot of services are about information, and if knowledge is not managed systematically and systemically, service dwindles, and this contributes to customer dissatisfaction. One of the challenges is to externalize tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge, so that it can be shared throughout the entire organization.

As already stated earlier in this chapter, the research was conducted in order to get the real world or real life experience of people (service employees & customers) involved in the service delivery context. The context was the student administration system as depicted in figure 1 of Chapter One. A research meta-methodology was conducted, in order to discern the strengths and weaknesses of different research methodologies, and this prompted the use of triangulation, in terms of research methods, and data analysis. What was noteworthy from this meta-methodology discussion, was that positivism developed by Auguste Comte in the 19th century, was very dominant in research. Karl Popper is one of many staunch advocates of positivism philosophy, with a strong emphasis on the falsification kind of approach to knowledge generation. Popper's philosophy is sometimes called fallibalism.

Popper strongly argued that "if a theory is not open to falsification, it is not scientific" (Coldwell & Herbst, 2004: 4). This logical positivism as it is sometimes called works with hypotheses and follows a process called "hypothetico-deductive" (Brewerton & Millward, 2001: 11). The positivism paradigm uses quantitative methodologies which have a lot a conventions and rules, such as the objectivity of the investigator, validity and reliability of the research instruments and the findings. The analysis methods are usually statistical. The positivism methodology was reported to have been successful in natural sciences, and as a result was then imposed on social sciences.

In response to this imposition an interpretive paradigm was born, and subsequently, constructivism, constructionism, critical (emancipatory), cultural, and feminism approaches also came into being.

Alfred Schutz 1940 (Babbie & Mouton, 2001: 28) was one of the philosophers who argued that the fact that people are continuously constructing, developing and changing the every day interpretations of the world, should be taken into account in any conception of social sciences, "because human beings have evolved capacity to interpret and construct reality" (Guba and Lincoln 1990 in Patton, 2002: 27). The interpretive paradigm developed more soft and qualitative methods, which were felt to be relevant to social sciences. There is still no concrete and strict rules on qualitative methodologies, but those that advocate this paradigm say that subjectivity, trustworthiness, credibility and transferrability, are most relevant and should be guidelines to understanding social sciences. They refute the notion of clinical objectivity, and argue that the researcher must be the instrument himself/herself (See table 3) for the comparison of the two paradigms/methodologies).

This study adopted qualitative methods and techniques which included unobtrusive observations, semi-structured interviews, and focus groups. The research comprised of staff and student participants, who were selected using purposeful sampling. Staff was selected from all departments (including faculties) that deal with the student administrative service (see figure 1). Students were divided into three categories, namely, students in residences, those funded by the university financial aid, and any other students not in the first two categories.

Chapter Four of this dissertation displayed and discussed the data analysis process, and findings of the research. It was difficult to find an appropriate data analysis method. But systems approach was used as one of the methods, in addition to the conversational and content analysis methods. The work of Miles & Huberman (1994) was referred to more often for guidelines, even though some authors admitted that there are no rules or recipes in qualitative data analysis.

The research found that there are a number of challenges that are prevalent in the student administration system, and some of those findings were generalisable to theoretical debates. Chapter Four provides these findings. The actual findings are not summarized in this concluding chapter, because there is a high risk of them getting diluted, if they are abridged. What can be reported here however, is that both staff and students reported a

number of reverberating challenges (see tables 6 - 16). It was concluded therefore that the research met the objectives of uncovering the challenges prevalent in service management, and that the researcher discovered that there is no quality strategy for the student administrative service system. It was also thus concluded that the university can improve the quality of service if there is a paradigm shift with regards to the overall student administrative system (SAS) as recommended through an SMS model in figure 18, but, if the change approach is rational and non-systemic, there is not likely to be any improvement. It was also recommended that the registration process be managed as a project, so that there will be synergy and a cohesive functioning of the system (SAS).

5.2 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The researcher obliviously undertook to do too much, and it became clear in the middle of the study that the scope was too big. The adoption of a hybrid approach (studying both service employees and customers) requires a much bigger team.

The application of Checkland's soft systems methodology (SSM) on an *adhoc* or sporadic and unsystematic basis, and the non-adherence to the 7 steps, compromised the methodology, and even also questions such used. Also, SSM is more of a practical approach, as can be noted from Checkland's (1981) book, where he discusses the methodology on the practical side (systems thinking, systems practice), and actually used the methodology practically.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- There should be more studies of this nature conducted by a bigger team of researchers, and the study should be longitudinal, covering the peak times of service delivery repeatedly.

- Another study should be carried out in a different sector of the service industry, in order to compare the challenges and develop new theories.

- Action research could be a better methodology for applying Checkland's SSM.

- Qualitative research will be better conducted if there are clear and coherent guidelines, so there is a need to consolidate this approach.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ackoff, R.L.   (2004) "Transforming the systems movement".

Alavi, M & Leidner, D.E.   (2002) "Knowledge Management System: Issues, challenges, benefits". In Barnes(2002), S. (ed) <u>Knowledge Management System: Theory & Practice</u>. London: Thomson Learning.

Appiah, K.   (2003) <u>Thinking it through: An introduction to contemporary philosophy</u>. New York: Oxford University Press.

Argyris, C.   (1999) <u>On organizational learning</u>. (2nd edition) Oxford: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.

Babbie, E.   (1999) The Basics of Social Research, California : Wadsworth Publishing.

Babbie, E. &
Mouton, J.   (2001) <u>The practice of social research</u>. (South African edition) Cape Town: Oxford University Press.

Bak, N.   (2004) <u>Completing your thesis: A practical guide.</u> Pretoria: can Schaik Publishers.

Barnes S. (ed)   (2002), Knowledge Management System : Theory & Practice. London : Thomson Learning

Bell, T.   (2005) "Research findings on call centres", The Mercury , June 24, 2005, In Webster E, University of Cape Town, and von Holdt K, National Labour and Economic Development Institute.

Brewerton, P.,
Millward, L.   (2001) Organisational Research Methods. London: Sage
                      Publications Ltd.

Burke, R.   (2003) Project Management: Planning and Control
                      Tecnhiques. (4th edition) Cape Town : Burke Publishing.

Capra, F.   (1996) The Web of Life: A Synthesis of Mind and Matter.
                      London : Plenum.

Checkland, P.   (1981) Systems Thinking, Systems Practice. Chichester :
                      John Wiley & Sons Ltd.

Churchman, C.W.   (1968) The Systems Approach. New York: Delta
                      Publishing Co.

Coghlan, D. &
Brannick, T.   (2001) Doing Action Research in your own Organization.
                      London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Coldwell, D. &
Herbst, F.   (2004) Business Research. Cape Town: Juta & Co. Ltd.

Cresswell, J.W.   (1994) Research Design: Qualitative and Quantitative
                      Approaches. California: Sage Publications Inc.

De Vaus, D.   (2001) Research Design in Social Research. London: Sage
                      Publications Ltd.

Denzin, N.K. &
Lincoln, Y.S. (eds) (1994) Handbook of Qualitative Research. California: Sage
                      Publications Inc.

Denzin, N.K. &
Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)

(2002) The Qualitative Inquiry Reader. California: Sage
Publications Inc.

Dove, C

(2004) "The Shared Service Centre: A Model for
University Efficiency". PhD Thesis.

Felkins, P.K, Chakiris, B.J.
& Chakiris, K.N.

(1993) Change Management: A Model for Effective
Organizational Performance. New York: Quality
Resources.

Fitzsimmons, J.A. &
Fitzsimmons, M.J.

(2004) Service Management: Operations, Strategy,
Information Technology. (4th edition) New York: McGraw-
Hill Irwin.

Flood, R.L. &
Carson, E.R.

(1988) Dealing with Complexity: An Introduction to the
Theory and Applications of Systems Science. New York:
Plenary Press.

Greenberg, J. &
Baron, A.B.

(1993) Behaviour in Organisations. (4th edition) Needham
Heights: Allyn & Bacon.

Greer, C.R.

(2001) Strategic Human Resources Management: A
General Managerial Approach. (2nd edition) New Jersey:
Prentice-Hall.

Henning, E,
Gravett, S,
van Rensberg, W

(2004) Finding your way in academic writing (2nd edition)
Pretoria: van Schaik Publishers,

Holstein J. A. &
Gubruim J. F. (1994) <u>Phenomenology, Ethnomethodology, and</u>
<u>Intepretive Practice.</u> In Denzin, N.K. &
Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)(1994<u>) Handbook of Qualitative</u>
<u>Research</u>. California: Sage Publications Inc.

Hope, C. &
Muhlemann, A. (1997) <u>Service Operations Management: Strategy, Design</u>
<u>and Delivery</u>. London: Prentice-Hall.

Huberman A. M. &
Miles M. B. (1994) <u>Data Management and Analysis</u>. In Denzin, N.K. &
Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)(1994<u>) Handbook of Qualitative</u>
<u>Research</u>. California: Sage Publications Inc.

Jackson, M.C. (2000) <u>Systems Approach to Management</u>. New York:
Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.

Jackson, M.C. (1995) "Beyond the Fads: Systems Thinking for
Managers". In <u>Systems Research, Vol 12. No. 1</u>. 25-42.

Kvale S. (2002) <u>The Social Construction of Validaty,</u> In Barnes (ed)
(2002) (2002) <u>Knowledge Management Systems: Theory</u>
<u>and Practice.</u> London: Thomson Learning.

Komives, S.R. et al (1996) <u>Student Services: A Handbook for the Profession</u>.
(3rd edition) California: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Kuhn, T. (1996) <u>The Structure of Scientific Revolution</u>. (3rd edition)
Chicago: University of Chicago.

Lake, N. &
Hickey, K.   (2002) <u>The Customer Service Workbook</u>. London: Kogan
                                    Page Ltd.

Leedy, D.P. &
Ormond, J.E.   (2001) <u>Practical Research and Design</u> (7th edition) New
                                    Jersey: Prentice-Hall.

Lovelock, C. &
Wirtz, J.   (2004) <u>Services Marketing: People, Technology, Strategies</u>.
                                    (5th edition) New Jersey : Pearson-Prentice Hall.

Luckett, S.   (2004) <u>Soft Systems Methodology Handbook</u>. University
                                    of KwaZulu-Natal.

Luckett, S., Nugubane, S.
& Memela, B.   (2001) "Designing a Management System for Rural
                                    Community Development Organization using a Systemic
                                    Action Research Process". In <u>Journal of Systemic Practice
                                    and Action Research, Vol 14. No. 4</u>. (517-542).Plenum

Lynch, R.   (2000) <u>Corporate Strategy</u>. (2nd edition) England: Pearson
                                    Education Ltd.

Maylor H. &
Blackmon K.   (2003), <u>Researching Business and Management</u>. Hants :
                                    Palgrave MacMillan.

Mason, J.   (2002) <u>Qualitative Researching</u>. (2nd edition) London: Sage
                                    Publications.

McColl-Kennedy J. R.(ed.)   (2003), <u>Services Marketing : A managerial approach</u>,
                                    Milton : John Wiley & Sons.

McNiff, J. & Whitehead, J.	(2001) <u>Action Research in Organizations</u>. London: Routledge.
Midgely, G.	(1996) "What is the Thing called CST?" In Flood, R. and Romm, N. (eds) <u>Critical Thinking</u>. Chichester: Wiley.
Midgely, G.	(2000) <u>Systemic Intervention: Philosophy, Methodologies, and Practice</u>. New York: Kluwer/Plenum.
Miller W. L. & Crabtree B. F.	(1994) <u>Clinical Research.</u>, In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)(1994<u>) Handbook of Qualitative Research</u>. California: Sage Publications Inc.
Moonsamy, G.	(2002) "A Systems Approach and Application of Multimethodology to Quality Management". Dissertation. University of Natal.
Morse, J.M. & Richards, L.	(2002) <u>README First, for a User's Guide to Qualitative Methods.</u> California: Sage Publications Inc.
O'Connor, J. & McDermont, I.	(1997) <u>The Art of Systems Thinking: Essential Skills for Creativity and Problem Solving</u>. London: Thorsons.
Opara, J.M.	(2002) "Measuring Perceptions on Received Service Levels to improve Client Retention". Dissertation, University of Natal.
Patton, M.Q.	(2002<u>) Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods</u>. (3rd edition) California : Sage Publications Inc.

Pearce, J.A. & Robinson, R.B.

(2003) Strategic Management: Formulation, Implementation and Control. (8th edition). New York: McGraw-Hill Education.

Popper, K.

(2002) The Logic of Scientific Discovery. New York: Routledge Classics.

Riley J.

(1990) Getting the most from your data. : A Handbook of Practical ideas on how to Analyse Qualitative Data. London : Technical & Educational Service Ltd.

Robbins, S.P. & Decenzo, D.A.

(2001) Fundamentals of Management. (3rd edition) New Jersey: Prentice Hall.

Schiller, B.S.

(2000) The Economy Today (8th edition) New York : McGraw-Hill Education.

Schon, D.A.

(1987) Educating Reflective Practitioner. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Inc.

Senge et al

(1994) The Fifth Discipline Workbook: Strategies and Tools for building a Learning Organization. New York: Currency Double-Day.

Senge, P.

(1990) The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of a Learning Organization. New York: Double-Day Currency.

Sidgwick H.

(1892) The Methods of Ethics. London: Macmillan and Company

Silverman, D

(2000) Doing Qualitative Research : A Practical Handbook. London: Sage Publications Ltd.

Stacey R. D.,
Griffin D. & Shaw P.   (2000), <u>Complexity and Management : Fad or radical challenges to systems thinking</u>. London : Routledge

Stacey, R.D.   (1993) <u>Strategic Management and Organisational Dynamics</u>. London : Pitman Publishing.

Stemmies, J.   (2004) "Researching Students' Perceptions of Student Services in the Three Rural Community Colleges". PhD Thesis.

Strauss A. L.   (1987) <u>Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists.</u> New York: Cambridge University Press.

Strauss A. & Corbin J.   (1994) Grounded Theory Methodology : An Overview., In Denzin, N.K. & Lincoln, Y.S. (eds)(1994<u>) Handbook of Qualitative Research</u>. California: Sage Publications Inc.

T205   (2004) Course Material. "Systems Thinking". University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Terre Blance, M. &
Durrheim, K.   (1999) <u>Research in Practice: Applied Methods for Social Sciences. Cape Town</u> : University of Cape Town Press (Pty) Ltd.

Ulrich, W.   (1996) <u>A Primer to Critical Systems Heuristics for Action Research</u>. United Kingdom: The University of Hull.

Van Looy, B, Gemmel. P,

Van Dierdonck, R. (eds)   (2003) <u>Service Management: An Integrated Approach</u>. (2nd edition) England: Pearson Education Ltd.

Van Maanen, J. (ed)   (1983) <u>Qualitative Methodology</u>. California: Sage Publications Inc.

Von Bertalanffy, L.   (1968) <u>General Systems Theory: Foundations, Development, Applications</u>. (Revised edition) New York: George Brizillier Inc.

Zeithaml, A.Z. &

Bitner, M.J.   (2000) <u>Services Marketing: Integrated Customer Focus across the Firm</u>. (2nd edition) New York : McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

http://sysdyn.clexchange.org/sdep/papers
www.ukzn.ac.za
www.flysax.com
www.southalabama.edu

Research Interview guide (Staff participants)

(University Mission Statement : a truly South African University that is academically excellent, innovative in research, critically engaged with society and demographically representative, redressing the disadvantages, inequalities and imbalances of the past).

_ * **These questions are aimed at acquiring staff members' experiences with regards to the service delivery, their expectations, understanding of service and quality, attitudes and opinions on the challenges of delivering service.**

Background Questions :

1. Name (optional)

2. Department

3. How long have you been employed by the University

4. How long have you been in your current position

5. Occupation

6. Brief description of your duties

Knowledge & Experience Questions :

7. What is your understanding of the University mission and other strategic policies

8. How does such policies relate to your job (Not your department)

10. What is the relationship between your job and those of your colleagues in your department.

11. What are the difficulties do you encounter in delivering service

Opinion & Values questions :

12. What do your understand about service (definition)

13. What do you understand about quality as it pertains to service

14. What is the difference between a student and a customer

15. What sort of decisions are you allowed to make

16. What do you need in order to provide a better service

17. How do your colleagues influence your service delivery process

18. How do your seniors influence your service delivery process

19. How do your seniors communicate their decisions to you

20. How do other departments communicate their decisions to you, and vice versa

21. How do you know students expectations in terms of service they receive

22. How do you know if you meet students expectations

Sensory and feeling questions :

23. How do you expect students to identify good quality in your service
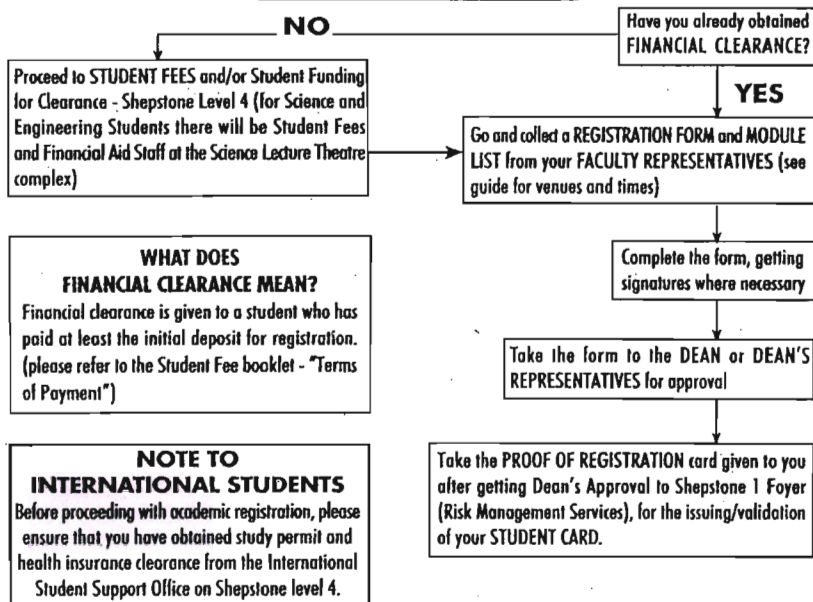
Opinion and values questions :

24. How does the fact that students are all different, affect your service delivery

25. What suggestions for improvement do you have

Proposed Research Interview Questions (Student participants)

*   These questions are aimed at acquiring students experiences with regards to the service delivery, their expectations, understanding of service, attitudes and opinions on the quality of service.

1)   Name of participant (optional)

2)   Degree/Field of study

3)   Level of study

4.   Do you stay in the University Residences

5.   Are you funded by a University loan or bursary

6.   How did you hear about this University

7.   How did you apply to study at this University

8.   How did you know that you had been selected

9.   What means of communication did the University use to communicate with you

10.   Which department communicated with you first

11.   Before you arrived for your registration, did you clearly understand what was the process you had to follow in order to get registered

12.   What are the steps that you had to follow during the registration

13.   What was your experience during registration

14.   What is your definition of service

15.   What is your understanding of quality as it pertains to service

16.   What kind of service does the University provide

17.   What is the difference between a student and a customer

18.   How does the administrative staff interact with students

REGISTRATION FLOW CHART

←——— NO ———	Have you already obtained **FINANCIAL CLEARANCE?**

Proceed to STUDENT FEES and/or Student Funding for Clearance - Shepstone Level 4 (for Science and Engineering Students there will be Student Fees and Financial Aid Staff at the Science Lecture Theatre complex)

YES
↓

Go and collect a REGISTRATION FORM and MODULE LIST from your FACULTY REPRESENTATIVES (see guide for venues and times)

↓

Complete the form, getting signatures where necessary

↓

Take the form to the DEAN or DEAN'S REPRESENTATIVES for approval

↓

Take the PROOF OF REGISTRATION card given to you after getting Dean's Approval to Shepstone 1 Foyer (Risk Management Services), for the issuing/validation of your STUDENT CARD.

WHAT DOES FINANCIAL CLEARANCE MEAN?
Financial clearance is given to a student who has paid at least the initial deposit for registration. (please refer to the Student Fee booklet - "Terms of Payment")

NOTE TO INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Before proceeding with academic registration, please ensure that you have obtained study permit and health insurance clearance from the International Student Support Office on Shepstone level 4.

IMPORTANT GENERAL NOTES

Please note that Cashiers, Student Funding Centre, Student Fees, Student Housing, Student Academic Administration are all located on level 4 of the Denis Shepstone building. Cashiers, Student Funding Centre, Student Fees, Student Housing, Student Academic Administration will be open on Saturday, 5 February 2005 from 08h30 to 15h00, to assist you with financial and residence aspects of the registration procedures. Kindly note: the following sections will also be open on Saturday, 13 February 2005: Cashiers, Student Fees, Student Housing, and Student Academic Administration. (International Student Support Office and Student Housing will also be open on Sunday, 6 February 2005). **Please Note : No academic registration will take place on Parents' Day, 05 February 2005.**

REGISTRATION FORMS/MODULE CODE LISTS
You must collect your registration form and module code list from the Faculty Registration Venue on your allocated day for registration.

ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE STUDENTS
Please note that registration for Engineering and Science student will take place at the Science Lecture Theatre Complex. Student Fees, and Student Funding Centre will be located on the ground floor. All students will have to go to Shepstone 1 foyer to have their student cards issued or validated.

FINANCIAL AID CLEARANCE (LOANS AND BURSARIES)
A Financial Support Advisor and Student Fees Officer will be available in the following venues for financial clearance:
Science / Engineering   Science Lecture Theatre Foyer
All other Faculties   Shepstone Level 4

RISK MANAGEMENT SERVICES

STUDENT ID CARDS:
1ST year Student ALL Faculties
On completing your academic registration you will be issued with a Confirmation of Registration slip by the Faculty Officer, which together with your ID Document must be presented to Risk Management Services before a Student ID Card can be issued.

Returning Students ALL Faculties
On completing your academic registration present your Confirmation of Registration slip together with your Student ID Card to Risk Management Services for revalidation and updating.

During the official registration period Student ID Cards will be issued from the following venues.
- Howard College – Shepstone 1 Foyer, Shepstone Level 6
- Medical School – Examinations Room, 6th Floor, Nelson R Mandela Medical School
- Edgewood Campus – Main Administration Block

Please note that failure to complete the University's registration procedures by obtaining or validating your student ID Card by the close of the official registration period will attract a R240.00 penalty. A charge of R20 is levied for the replacement of any lost or damaged ID Card

PARKING:
Parking fees apply to all access controlled parking area. Students must be in possession of a valid UKZN Student ID Card before making an application for a parking disc.
Apply on-line for your student-parking disc and post the parking fee to your student fee account. (Available to Howard College, Medical School, and Edgewood students only)
Click on Student Parking Disc and follow the step-by-step instructions.

PAID STUDENT PARKING AREAS:
- Jubilee Car Park – Princess Alice Ave
  The Jubilee Car Park can be access from Princess Alice Avenue. A valid parking disc is required for vehicle access to this security-controlled car park. A pedestrian bridge takes students safely across the road and onto campus via a pedestrian turnstile. The Jubilee Car Park is reserved for use by 1st Year Students and all other vehicles displaying a valid UKZN student-parking disc.
- 75th Anniversary Avenue North and South
- Bio-Science Car Park
- Shepstone Student Car Park
  The above car parks can be access from Francios Road from the south/west and Queen Elizabeth Avenue/South Ridge Road from the north. These parking areas are reserved for use by 2nd year and more senior students who display on their vehicle a valid UKZN-DBN student parking disc.
- Old Mutual Sport Hall – Francios Road
  Reserved for use by vehicles displaying a valid UKZN parking disc.
- Umbilo Sports Club – Corner of Umbilo and Hannah Road
  The university has reserved a number of parking bays at the Umbilo Sports Club for use by students attending the Nelson R Mandela Medical School. Students who display on their vehicle a valid UKZN parking disc may make use of this car park. a car guard patrols the parking area.

RESIDENCE PARKING
Residence students can apply on line for their Residence parking disc. No charge is levied for a residence-parking disc however a valid student ID Card and a Confirmation of Residence slip from Student Housing is required before a disc may be issued. Please note that a Residence parking disc does not grant vehicle access to the PAID student parking areas.

INFORMATION
- It is an offence to procure a parking disc for a 1st year student so that they may gain vehicle access to the following parking areas.
  - 75th Anniversary Avenue North and South
  - Bio-Science Car Park
  - Shepstone Student Car Park
- Students may NOT be dropped off or collected within the main staff parking area unless special circumstances exist. Drop-off and collection points are available at the following locations.
  - GATE 3 – FRANCIOS ROAD
  - PRINCESS ALICE AVENUE (A pedestrian bridge takes students safely across the road and onto campus via a pedestrian turnstile)
- The dropping off and collecting of students at the main entrance to campus, King George V Avenue, GATE 1, is discouraged. Congestion created by vehicles stopping and turning at this busy entrance impedes staff and visitors vehicles from entering campus.
- Students may be granted vehicle access to main campus parking between the hours of 16h45 to 06h30, Monday to Friday, 24 hours over weekends and Public Holidays.
- The use of an illegally copied parking disc is constituted as fraud. Any student found in possession of a fraudulently copied or defaced parking disc will be reported to the University Proctor for disciplinary purposes.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS
Before proceeding with academic registration please ensure that you have obtained health insurance and study permit clearance from the International Student Support Office on Shepstone Level 4.

RESIDENCE STUDENTS
Residence students must obtain residence clearance from the Student Fees Offices, register academically with their Faculties, and then report to the Residence office which will be based at Student Union Building during Registration week (07-12 February 2005). It is rather important that all residence students arrive during the office hours (08h00-16h00).

SPORTS REGISTRATION
Keep an eye open for stands outside Shepstone building 7 - 11 February 2005. There will be lots of sports demos and fun happenings!
For further information contact:
Sports Administration, 3rd Floor Student Union Building, Durban or 031 - 260 2281 / 260 2197