

The 5 Gaps in City Management

Track: Quality/Process Improvement and Management

Abstract: This paper discusses the concepts of product and production processes, and the effect of their good understanding to the development of actions towards a better quality of life for the people in the municipalities. The gaps between the population's wishes and needs, and the products offered by local administrations may result, to some extent, from noise in the interfaces along the production process of the municipalities' services. The understanding of such gaps can lead to better administration and sustainable political development.

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Introduction

In former days, the production of goods and services was seen by the customer and the craftsman as one only thing. But during the Industrial Revolution, up to the current days, consumers and manufacturers broke apart. The industry wasn't capable of understanding that quality is not just the intrinsic quality of the product, or the technology, price, safety or customer support attributes. The customer's satisfaction also involves something that was totally forgotten by the Industrial Revolution: the customer's wishes. The Information Revolution, which brought with it the globalization of the economy and a much higher level of competition, has been forcing the organizations to pay more attention to that factor. The companies seem to have finally understood it, and are making a big effort, through their quality programs and the flexibilization of their production lines. Government agencies should also wake up for the situation, becoming more efficient in understanding the real needs of their populations and more effective in meeting such requirements.

Product Quality

The behavior of the voter after an election is similar to that of a consumer of any other product. He has expectations and needs that may or may not be satisfied, and there will be consequences to that. For the public administration, the customers are the population, but the population is also the work-force, the shareholder, the product and the process, to some extent. Society should participate in the public administration process as:

- the customer - demanding suitable, reliable and safe products (public services);
- the work-force - working to change the society into something better (collaborating with the improvement of the quality of life, following the citizenship commitments, respecting the laws etc.);
- a shareholder - demanding that processes are economically feasible, have good quality, are cost-effective and meet the population's needs, without wasting money;
- the product - cooperating with its own transformation, in order to have a fairer society;
- the process - participating in the maintenance and improvement of the quality of the products and ensuring the safety of the whole population from the beginning to the end of the transformations.

The city administrator, although not able of being close to the population all the time, should keep mechanisms of collecting information and, at the same time, advertising the developments and benefits to the community. Projects shouldn't divert from the population's needs and wishes, although, sometimes, there are inconsistencies in the population's aspirations. In those cases, the city administrator should try and explain such inconsistencies and generate new wishes and needs that could be addressed with the means available.

Process Quality

The effects of problems in city administration issues are usually emergencial, requiring that priorities are set and diligent action is taken, according to the severity of the situation and urgency of the intervention. Eliminating the causes of the problems is the second step to be carried out, after emergency is gone, and aims at avoiding the

reoccurrence of the same events or others originating from the same sources. In that stage, problems in the public process may result from the lack of qualification of those people involved or improper use of the available financial resources. The third step in order to improve the process is optimizing the use of labor, equipment and the systems and methodologies involved in the process.

The factors that ensure customer satisfaction and the quality of the product are interrelated and, whenever a stage of the production process or its interfaces has problems, the whole process and the final product are affected.

The 5 gaps model, developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1990) is an attempt to explain why, in many cases, the process changes the original concept in such a way that the final product ends up being something totally different to what the customer expected, as it is illustrated in Figure 1.

See Figure 1

The communication gaps that occur in the city administration process, from the population's wishes to what is finally delivered, are the following:

- 1st gap - interpretation of the population's requirements and their transformation in important criteria (differences between what the population thinks to be important and the public agency marketing's perception of it).
- 2nd gap - transformation of the important criteria in strategic criteria (differences between what has been specified and what the upper management of the government agency thinks it should be).
- 3rd gap - transformation of the project specification into a product (differences between what has been specified and what is actually produced).
- 4th gap - advertisement of the product to the population (differences between what is produced and what is announced).
- 5th gap - differences between what is perceived and what was expected (gap between perception and expectation).

Gaps in the interfaces are inevitable in any process. But it is important to lower down the intensity of systematic problems (through continuous improvement programs) and to decrease the possibility of random problems. Many operational problems in processes are a result of tactic and strategic faults. Therefore, it is important that even problems that seem small are taken into account, so that they are analyzed, prioritized and eliminated.

Some gaps in city administration are caused by:

- poor determination of the part of the population being affected or benefiting from the municipality's work;
- lack of reliable performance indicators that are easy to measure - poor indicators may lead to a wrong prioritization of investments;
- lack of multidisciplinary work teams that help finding out effective and low cost solutions for the population's demands;
- poor knowledge of the process and its limitations, by the team, making it impossible to improve the process;
- lack of participation of the society and other entities concerned with the population's needs (like churches, non-governmental organizations, universities, research centers and community representatives), that have contact with the

- population's problems;
- exaggerated centralization of benefits;
 - attempt to find isolated solutions for complex problems;
 - strategies focused on the effects, rather than the causes of the problems;
 - lack of instruments for mapping, correlation analysis and problem effect analysis;
 - lack of measurement methodologies, as well as methodologies for the maintenance and improvement of the administrative/managerial processes concerning city administration;
 - lack of efficient communication channels among internal clients - the lack of communication among government agencies causes waste of public money (it's quite common for facilities built by an agency to be damaged a little later for work by another agency; e.g. paving a street first and digging it to have electric or telephone cables expansions afterwards);
 - lack of full-proof devices (*poka-yoke*) - intelligent systems and processes and new technologies that can help controlling and avoiding accidents and infringements;
 - unsuitable choice of standards for controlling the process - the use of imported models and indicators, not well adapted to local particularities may disturb data collection and the quality of the strategic analysis;
 - lack of training of the work-force - the lack of qualifications and training of the work-force may turn down good strategies;
 - lack of participation of multidisciplinary teams and process engineers in supporting the marketing strategies - decreasing the gap between what is going to be produced and that which is advertised;
 - strategy based on pushing the product, instead of interpreting the requirements and supporting the demand and creating new requirements - the attempt to hook the customer through advertisement generates the risk of creating higher expectations than the product is able to cope with, creating disappointment;
 - lack of information for the formation of customer opinion and lack of suitable advertisement about the technology and the product and its limitations;
 - lack of efficient communication channels with external clients (teaching the population the proper use of water and electric energy has been a challenge for the Brazilian local governments, which lack on information and training, though the actual goods - water and power - are available).

Conclusion

Good will and honesty are not enough in order to ensure the improvement of the quality of life of the population, nor an efficient use of public financial resources. The discrepancy between what is required by the population and what the city administrators are able to provide is usually grand and is not only a result of the different perception of the problems by the specialists and the population, in general.

Apparently similar problems may have very distinct causes. The correlation analysis of the possible causes and their effects seems to be the simplest way of "doing the right thing", i.e., being effective, rather than "doing efficiently that which should not be done at all", quoting Drucker (1986). The use of strategic performance indicators in decision making relieves the administrator of having to try and guess what the future problems will be, decreasing the need for emergencial corrective solutions to the problems that show up. It allows for anticipation to the problems.

Figures

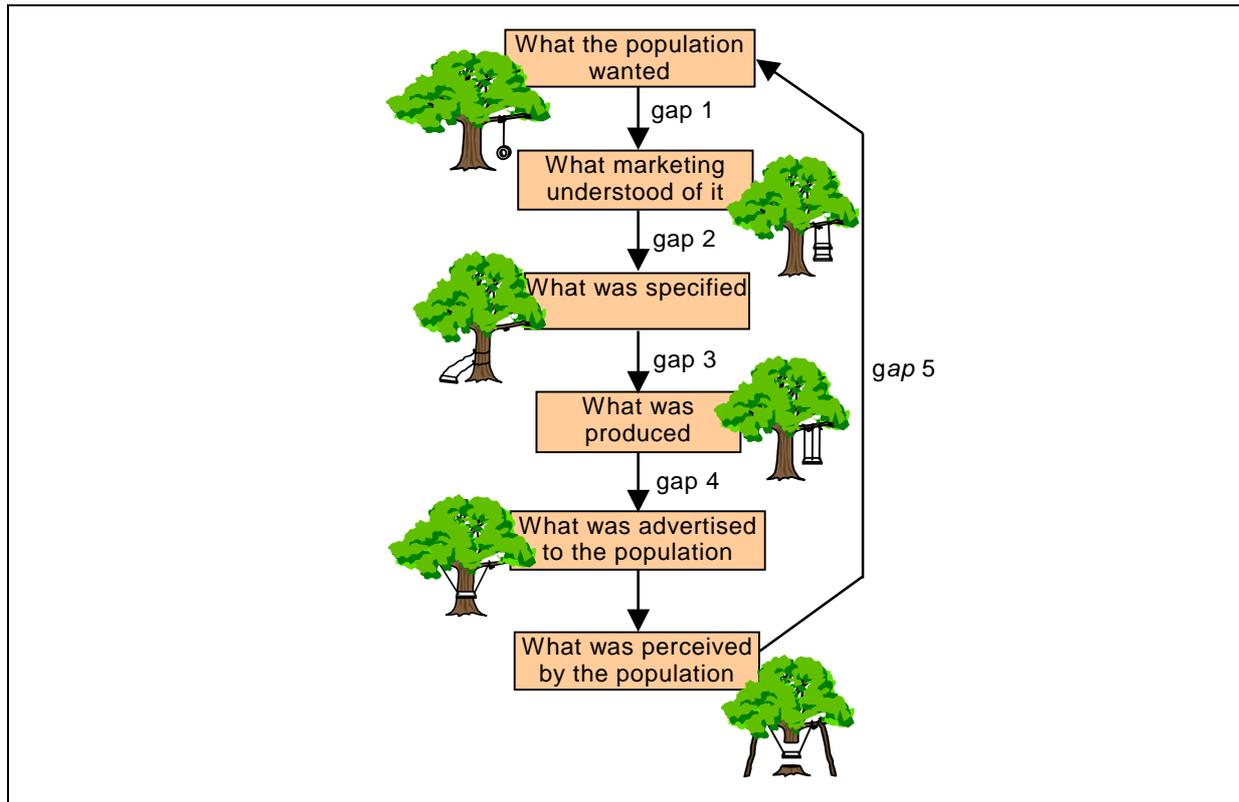


Figure 1 - Stages of a process and the communication gaps along it.

Source: Adapted from Graeml (2000, p.103).

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