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DISSERTATION

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Abstract:

This study examines the SERVQUAL model for measuring Service Quality, originally discussed and proposed by Parasuramen et al in 1984. It discusses its usefulness in terms of providing an assessment of the internal service quality of an internal maintenance department (The Property Section) within a large working historic building with a view to developing strategies for improvement. It therefore looks at this Maintenance Team's service quality, firstly in terms of expectation and secondly, in terms of perception of delivery through the eyes of the five different departments which together make up the organisation of this large historic building. Information has been gathered by means of a survey sent out to 50 people, 10 from each department. All 5 departments are of a similar size and they all work within the historical building. However, their requirements from the Property Section may vary and only one of the departments is a directly money making / profitable department. Although it must be stated clearly that none of the other four departments are supposed to be individually profit making; this is not their purpose. Their purpose is to support all the various activities and roles which go to make up the life of the historic building, i.e. administration, organisation of special events, catering provision. Analysis of the study shows that the internal departments expect better service from the Maintenance team than they perceive they receive in virtually all areas and that the Maintenance team staff themselves also perceive the service they provide to be lower than that which is expected. The worst area of discrepancy between the maintenance team's customer expectations and perceptions is in the area of reliability. The results by department are interesting in that there is a notable difference between the one department that is profitable / money making and the other four, in terms of the difference between their expectations and perceptions. Thus the study identifies and discusses the "gaps" in service quality (see Figure 1 on page 8) where attention will be required in order to bridge the gaps and improve perceptions. Thus it does seem that this SERVQUAL survey is capable of suggesting improvement strategies within this establishment.

Introduction

"Service is an activity or series of activities of a more or less intangible nature that normally, but not necessarily, takes place in interactions 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)

In terms of this definition, in this study, the Service will be that provided by a Property / Maintenance department (The Property Section) in a large working historic building. The human interactions are between the customers (working in other departments within the building) and the Property Section employees. The material interactions concern the physical state of the building which all departments use and the systems (the Helpdesk, the planned maintenance schedule for example) which the Property Section uses to keep everything running.

To help define a service, four major characteristics of a service are Intangibility, Simultaneity, Perishability and Heterogeneity. As identified by Fitzimmons and Fitzimmons (2004):

Intangibility: A service is not an object that you can touch. It is a "Fix it" service for example such as a repair man, or it is a window cleaner. The end result of their service is better (hopefully) than the previous state of affairs but it cannot really be measured, or counted.

Simultaneity: This is about the simultaneous production and consumption of the service. Unlike goods, which are produced, sold and then consumed, a service's production and consumption are inseparable,

Perishability: Services cannot be stored and used at a later date and this is because of the simultaneity of production and consumption.

<u>Heterogeneity:</u> This is about the variety in service. The fact that they are intangible and that customer involvement is high mean that the service can differ from day to day or customer to customer and producer to producer.

These four characteristics can tell us that the quality of a service is harder to measure than that of a physical good.

What is Service Quality? One web definition of service quality is, "the manner in which a service is provided as it influences the degree of satisfaction with a good or service."

Another is, "when something is what you expect it to be then it is perceived as quality. Thus quality is a fulfilment of expectation" <u>www.qualitydigest.com</u>

In Competitive markets, having high service quality is a way of distinguishing oneself from the competition. When Marks and Spencer was in its heyday in the late 80's and early 90's a large part of this success was based on their high quality customer service and on the fact that you could make returns to M&S with no trouble at all. This was a service element that gave them the competitive edge.

A Shahin defines service quality as "the extent to which a service meets customer needs / expectations." Therefore the difference between what a customer expects from the service and what they consider they actually get shows the perceived level of service quality. If what is expected is greater than performance then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and customer dissatisfaction occurs.

There have been plenty of efforts to study service quality, but there is little agreement in the literature on how to measure the concept. In contrast to measuring tangible and durable goods, services are intangible and have heterogeneity as mentioned above. It is difficult to separate the consumption of a service from the production, as these are normally simultaneous.

The majority of the work on Service Quality has attempted to use the SERVQUAL methodology (Parasuramen et al) as a tool for measuring service quality. The reasons for measuring service quality are to identify quality-related problems and then create sets of standards or goals for improved service delivery. Measurement of anything allows for comparisons so that when other variables in the service process are altered, the impact on service quality can be assessed.

Service Quality however is not just important to competitive service firms who have external customers. Nagers & Cilliers (1990) extended the Parasuramen et al 'gap model' to include internal customers. Research on internal service quality and internal service encounters is in no way as advanced as that on external customers and there are still limited agreements in the literature on how internal service quality should be measured. It is however much more prevalent in the marketing literature than anywhere else, although one must distinguish between internal marketing and the internal service encounter. (Internal marketing being generally Human Resources driven, marketing the company to employees and the internal service encounter being the interaction between individuals / departments within the organisation via which one receives a service from the other.)

The assumption made by many researchers is that there is a significant and positive correlation between the internal service encounter and external customer satisfaction. "Employees often depend on internal services provided by others in the organisation. The delivery of quality internal services is critical to employee satisfaction since improvements in internal service quality are expected to produce improved external service quality" (Hart 1995). If this is the case then this is a good reason for organisations to encourage all their internal service providing departments such as maintenance, IT, catering etc, to evaluate their own internal service quality. The problem that the Property Section (service provider in this study) faces is that there is no measurement of their service provision, in terms of how the department is perceived or really of what is expected of it, generally by staff in other

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departments. The question is how can such an internal organisation go about ensuring that its internal customers receive better service quality? Where no thought is given to how the work is carried out, procedures that have grown up over time are hard to justify. Without any formal measurement of the services, there can be no systematic way to compare and evaluate improvements arising from experimental changes. An understanding of customer expectations is essential for performance improvement.

This paper is an investigative study into the measurement of service quality of an internal maintenance department within a large working historic building, providing a property and maintenance service to other employees in 5 main departments in the building. Does the SERVQUAL instrument provide this large working Historic building's Maintenance / Property Services Department with a useful method for obtaining feedback from its internal customers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Attempts to develop models of quality that can be used on services have always seemed to encounter problems mainly due to the intangible nature of service provision as mentioned above. "The need to consider performances and experiences rather than the manufacture of tangible goods has created a research area that, while well documented, remains highly diverse and incomplete" (Robinson 1999). There are two main areas, these being 'Dis-confirmation' or 'Perception only.' Parasuramen et al's research has dominated the dis-confirmation literature with SERVQUAL being the predominant measurement method in all the service quality literature.

The SERVQUAL scale involves the notion of Perceived Quality. This is the Quality that customers believe they are getting in their service encounters. It is not what they want, or expect but what they believe they are getting relative to what they want or expect. In 1984 Parasuramen, Zeithmal and Berry explored service quality and attitude and discovered that customers used essentially the same criteria to evaluate service quality regardless of the type of service and the criteria they used covered nearly all aspects of the service in question. Service quality as perceived by customers' stems from a comparison of their expectations of the service they will receive with their perceptions of the performance of firms providing the services. Accordingly the direction and degree of the discrepancy between customer perceptions and expectations is the service quality. Expectations were influenced by factors such as word of mouth, what customers heard from other customers, personal needs, individuals' own varied needs, past experience, previous experiences with these services and external communications, in the form of direct and indirect messages provided to the customer, often in the form of advertising. The criteria used to evaluate services by customers led to Parasuramen et al coming up with 5 dimensions for judging service quality (perceptions): Tangibles, Reliability, Responsiveness, Assurance and Empathy, all being determining factors in the level of service quality.

Tangibles refer to the appearance of physical facilities, equipment, personnel and communications material that the service organisation has and with which it operates.

Reliability is about the ability of the service organisation to perform the promised service, dependably and accurately.

Responsiveness is about the willingness of the Service Organisation to help customers and provide prompt service.

Assurance: this is the knowledge and courtesy of employees of the service organisation and their ability to convey trust and confidence to their customers.

Empathy refers to the care and individualised attention the Service organisation devotes to each customer.

When someone forms an overall perception of a service these are the dimensions they use to determine their perception. SERVQUAL enables an assessment of a service firm's quality along each of the 5 dimensions above. SERVQUAL can also provide an overall measure of quality in the form of an average score, across all the five dimensions.

The GAP Model that followed the establishment of these five SERVQUAL dimensions extended SERVQUAL, by helping to identify 5 main Gaps and the causes for shortfalls in each of the 5 dimensions, thus making SERVQUAL a more practical model. The GAP model is based on the fact that there are 5 Gaps that can exist that can affect Service quality.

GAP MODEL DIAGRAM
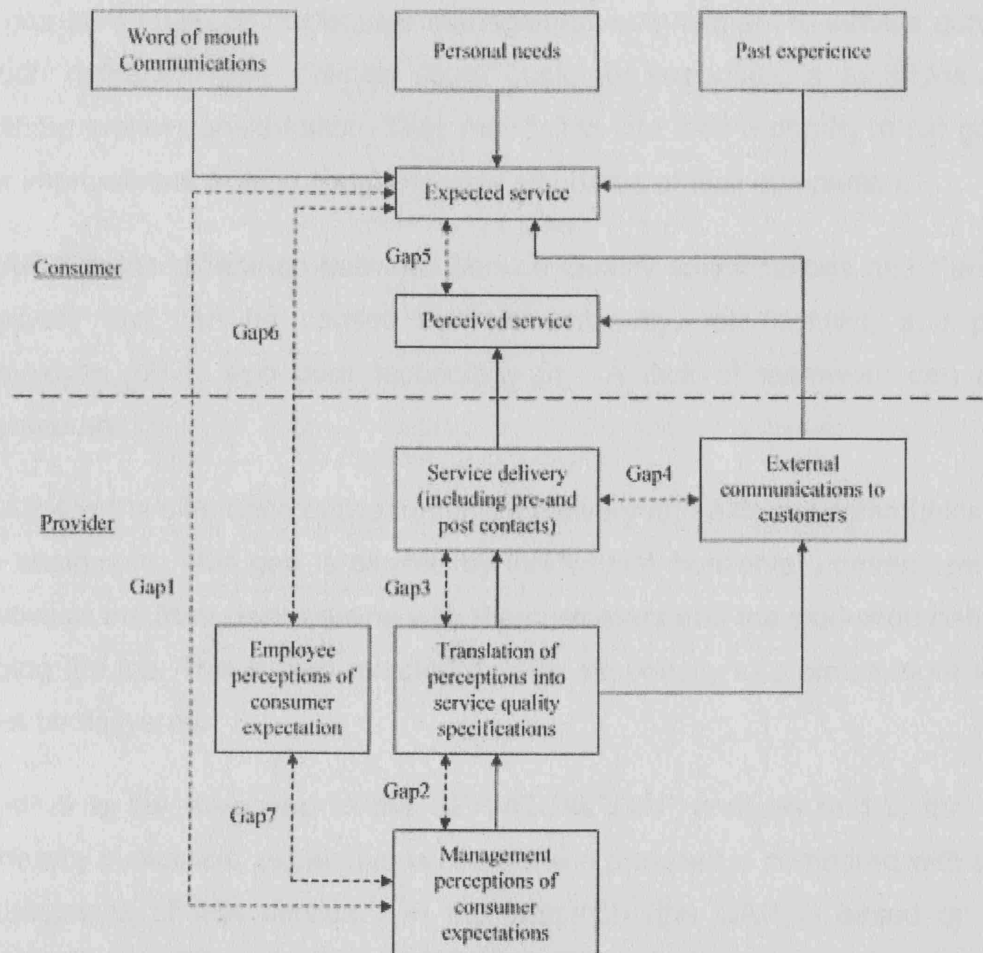
Figure 1. Model of service quality gaps (Parasuraman et al., 1985; Curry, 1999; Luk and Layton, 2002)

The original gap study introduced in 1988 identified 5 main gaps, whereas this model above has taken things further and added a 6th and 7th gap.

GAP 1 relates customer expectations with Management perceptions of customer expectations. The key issues or contributing factors surrounding this first potential gap are lack of market research, inadequate upward communication (between the frontline people dealing with the customers face to face and the remote managers who make decisions). Sometimes there may be just too many levels of management.

GAP 2 is the gap between Management perceptions of customer expectations and Service Quality Specifications. A main contributing factor to a gap here might be inadequate management commitment to service quality. Such managers may dismiss some customer expectations as unfeasible without proper consideration. They may fail to use their authority to set goals for improvement or high company-wide standards of task completion.

GAP 3 is the difference between Service Quality specifications and Service delivery and can be caused by role ambiguity, role conflict, and poor employee job fit and poor technology fit. A lack of teamwork can also contribute.

GAP 4 is the difference between service delivery and external communication to customers. This gap is caused by inadequate horizontal communication, between the front desk dealing with the customers and the workshop behind, doing the job. This is also affected by over propensity to promise more than can be delivered.

GAP 5 is the main gap in the SERVQUAL GAP analysis and is the gap whereby customers' expectations of a service provided is compared with their perceptions of that service. In this research, the GAP is based on the departments within a functioning Historic Building's expectations and on their perceptions of the service quality of the maintenance team that supports them. This is the Gap that we are really interested in here. Whatever might be done to minimise all the other gaps, the survey involved in this study focuses specifically on GAP 5. The results may well highlight other gaps however and these can be analysed also.

GAP 6 measures how far away from consumer expectation is the delivery of the service by the specific person (possibly a minor employee), who does the work.

GAP 7 is the possibly wider gap between consumer expectation and the service, which Management believes is being delivered by its minor employees.

Parasuraman et al. argue that with minor modification SERVQUAL can be adapted to any service organisation. Zeithaml in 1990 argued that departments and divisions within a company could use SERVQUAL, with appropriate adaptation to measure the quality of services provided to employees. SERVQUAL has been subject to a lot of criticism as well as praise over the years, but in spite of this criticism the 22 SERVQUAL items are generally thought of and agreed upon as being good predictors of service quality as a whole. Sureschandar et al. (2002) criticise SERVQUAL, saying that it appears to overlook some other important factors of service quality such as the service product (in this case maintenance). It is in fact true that out of the 22 items / Survey Questions, not one of them is about the service product i.e. the maintenance works, it is about the delivery of the works, i.e. on time / by polite staff but not about whether the actual works are good which would surely play a role in people's overall perceptions of the service quality. This will be discussed later in further detail but a question arises from this: " Is there any point in measuring service quality when the work / product of the service is of a low standard and when this fact is not accounted for in the measurement?"

Kang, James and Alexandris (2002) tried to apply SERVQUAL internally to a Korean company. They stated that the SERVQUAL instrument had not yet been proved by researchers to be reasonably modified / used to measure internal service quality due to the lack of empirical testing. They did however find reliability, assurance, tangibles, empathy and responsiveness as being appropriate and conceptually correct dimensions to use in the measurement of internal service quality. .

White and Rudall (1999) developed an alternative model to SERVQUAL, this being INTSERVQUAL in which they used 3 more dimensions: Flexibility, Communication and Relevance as well as the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions.

This is in contrast to what Kang, James and Alexandris (2002) found, in that they were satisfied with the original 5 dimensions alone. INTSERVQUAL was tested on the maintenance department of a Gaming Complex so although it was a different organisation, it had a similar department and its customers were four internal departments. The results were that INTSERVQUAL with its further dimensions was valuable but they concluded that SERVQUAL was superior in that it had a superior and better tested construct and predictive validity. In all the Internal Service quality studies, there is a lot of harking back to SERVQUAL. They all tend to find one or another small problem with SERVQUAL but none can come up with an overriding model to use on Internal Service Quality measurement and prove that it is better. Frost and Kumar (2000) using an INTSERVQUAL battery find that Responsiveness was the most influential dimension whereas Parasuramen found, with SERVQUAL, that Reliability was the most significant dimension and this is in line with a lot of other research studies. Did Frost and Kumar find differently simply because they used INTSERVQUAL or was it rather because of the nature of the service they were testing in the type of organisation? Their study considered the work of an airline, where the support staff were the service providers to their customer, the front of house staff. The above question remains unanswered in their paper, where it just says they found different results.

Nagel & Cilliers (1990) defined the internal customer as any member of an organisation receiving products or services by any other members in the organisation. They also make a very important point that the internal customer can often only get the service they require from the internal supplier, they describe this as being "captive" to the internal supplier and this would certainly be the case in terms of the Property Section. They are the only suppliers of maintenance services in the building, other employees cannot get their light bulbs changed, toilets unblocked, offices refurbished by anyone else. This may be a very important point when measuring perceived / expected quality, because some departments supplying services to internal customers know that their services cannot be obtained elsewhere and hence

might be inclined to develop a nonchalant, don't care attitude, as they cannot lose custom, because of this monopoly. The internal customer is also generally not directly paying for internal services. Service Organisations have to balance the demands of providing excellent customer service with improving short term financial results, and this can be translated to internal departments, but are expectations of them lower as internal customers are not paying for the service? This leads to speculation that, if an internal department's service levels were poor, outsourcing could become for the organisation, an option worth paying for. This is a problem that the Property Section in this study might need to consider in deciding whether to measure Service Quality. If they don't measure their service quality they have no way of objectively evaluating changes to bring about improvements. Furthermore, if it came to a decision whether or not to outsource their service, they would have very little information or hard evidence to back up keeping them as an internal service provision.

Alexandros Paraskevas (2001) makes similar observations on internal service chains in hotels. He regards the fact that many hotels have gone out to tender for Contract Cleaners rather than employ an In-house team, as playing a major part in internal service quality that the Front desk receives from the Cleaning team.

In conclusion the literature on Service Quality and Internal Service Quality is highly dominated by Parasuramen et al's SERVQUAL model and where it has tried to be adapted has always come back to basic SERVQUAL designs. What can the SERQUAL Model tell the Management of the Property Section in question here about their internal Service Quality, will it sit / fit in with the current literature or not?

METHODOLOGY:

The data collection method for this study was completed by way of individual surveys. Postal surveys were sent to a sample of internal customers of the Property Section. The organisation is made up of 5 departments who are all the internal customers of the Property Sections maintenance / Property Service. The departments will be referred to as follows: MOH, LC, PP, PS and RC and the Maintenance team will be referred to at the Property Section. All departments are of a similar size and therefore were surveyed in the same numbers. Fifty surveys were sent out to ten individuals in each department of varying job position and grade. The sample was selected from the phone book which lists each department's employees by job status, this meant that getting an evenly spread sample of individuals was possible. As I am an employee of the Property Section I am in a position to encourage those receiving a survey to complete it. I am not surveying strangers in this study. All people surveyed are known to me or know of me / the Property Section well and so I had anticipated that the response rate to my surveys would be fairly high and I was hopeful that I would receive back 80 percent of the surveys I sent out. The survey sent out is in two parts, Part one is regarding the individual's Expectations of the Property Section and Part 2 their Perceptions of the property Section. They are asked to answer 22 questions and answer on a scale of 1 to 7. 1 being that they strongly disagree with the statement and 7 being that they strongly agree with the statement. Each of the statements is related to one of the 5 SERVQUAL dimensions and some of the questions are phrased negatively in order to try and pin point any Survey responses that may be inaccurate and therefore unusable. For example where people don't quite read the questions properly and just tick 5 for everything. Negative questions mixed in with positive questions will pick this up and therefore allow me to eliminate certain surveys that would unfairly distort the results. The Survey used was taken from Dr Arash Shahin's paper, SERVQUAL and Model of Service Quality Gaps: A framework for determining and Prioritising Critical Factors in delivering Quality Service. This paper was found on the Internet and has no date or publishing

name. http://www.qmconf.com/Docs/0077.pdf Dr Arash Shahin was part of the Department of Management at the University of Isfahan, Iran when this paper was written. Email: arashshahin@hotmail.com. The Survey follows the standard SERVQUAL rules of the 5 dimensions and was easily adaptable to apply to the Property Section. Please see Appendix 1 for the survey. Additionally the ten Managers/Supervisors of the Property Section were sent an adapted part 2 of the Survey regarding their Perceptions of the Property Sections service to the internal customers. See Appendix 2.

All surveys sent out were marked with a number. This identified the department of the individual receiving the survey. This was to enable comparisons between the expectations and perceptions of the Property Sections Service Quality between the 5 departments. Would one department have a perception higher than that of another department and if so what could the possible reasons or implications for or of this be and is it something that Property Section Management should take account of? Out of the 50 Surveys sent out 37 were returned 4 of which the number had been scrubbed out / cut off on the back and so I am unable to know which department these three individuals are from so they cannot be included in departmental comparisons. 37 out of 50 Surveys returned is a response rate of 74 percent, which is greater than any response rates I have read about in the literature and is certainly adequate for this study.

The results from all the Surveys were entered into Excel spreadsheets to allow for comparisons and analysis. The negative questions had to be reversed in scores to allow for the Perception and Expectation scores to match that of the Positive questions so as not to distort results.

RESULTS

Results Chart 1: SERVQUAL SCORE:

	Customer Expectations	Customer Perceptions	GAP SCORES
Tangibles	5.2	4.8	-0.4
Reliability	6.3	4.4	-1.9
Responsiveness	5.2	4.5	-0.7
Assurance	6.5	5.8	-0.7
Empathy	4.7	4.7	0
AVERAGE	5.58	4.84	-0.74

Overall average SERVQUAL SCORE = -0.7

This overall average SERVQUAL score indicates a shortfall in meeting customer expectations over all areas, except for Empathy where customer expectations are identical to their perceptions, even if the score is not very high, customers don't seem to expect it to be. The Highest Gap score is for Reliability followed much further behind by Responsiveness and Assurance. This is a cause for concern. The low score for tangibles could mean that customers are aware of budgetary constraints particularly as this organisation is a partly government funded area.

RESULTS CHART 1: OVERALL SURVEY RESULTS FOR ALL THE 5 DIMENSIONS

	Customer Expectations	Customer Perceptions	Property Section Perceptions
Tangibles	6.2	4.8	4.6
	4.5	4.5	4.7
	5.0	5.3	5.7
	5.1	4.7	5.1
Average	**5.2**	**4.8**	**5.0**
Reliability	6.5	3.9	4.4
	5.8	4.9	5.1
	6.5	4.9	5.0
	6.5	4.1	4.4
	6.4	4.3	4.3
Average	**6.3**	**4.4**	**4.7**
Responsiveness	3.1	4.5	4.3 neg
	3.0	3.5	3.3 neg
	2.0	2.5	3.3 neg
	3.1	3.5	3.7 neg
Average	**2.8**	**3.5**	**3.7**
Inverted	**5.2**	**4.5**	**4.3**
Assurance	6.7	5.8	5.9
	6.5	5.9	5.8
	6.3	6.2	6.1
	6.4	5.4	5.6
Average	**6.5**	**5.8**	**5.8**
Empathy	3.8	3.3	3.0 neg
	3.8	3.4	3.1 neg
	3.2	3.5	4.1 neg
	2.6	2.7	3.4 neg
	3.4	3.5	3.8 neg
Average	**3.3**	**3.3**	**3.5**
Inverted	**4.7**	**4.7**	**4.5**

These overall results, of all the 37 respondents split up over dimensions so the overall differences between Expectations and Perceptions for each of the 5 dimensions. 0.1 on this scale 1 – 7 = 1.43 %

Consumers' Expectations in terms of Tangibles is 5.72 % greater that Consumer perceptions which is 2.86% less than Property Section Perceptions.

Customers' Expectations of Reliability is 27% greater than their Perceptions which is 4.29 % less than Property Section Perceptions.

Customers Expectations of Responsiveness is 10.01 % greater than their perceptions of it which is greater than Property Section perceptions of Responsiveness by 2.86%. So here the Property Section does not think that they are more responsive than their customers think they are which does show the Property Section is fairly in tune with what is happening.

Customers expect Property Section Assurance to be 10.01 % greater than they perceive it, which is identical to how the Property Section perceives it.

Customers expect a low amount of Empathy, and are seemingly indifferent really to how empathetic The Property Section is to them and they perceive that they receive the amount that they expect. Strangely, perhaps, the Property Section perceives their empathy to be lower by 2.86%.

The overall average SERVQUAL score above should really be weighted in terms of how important the 5 dimensions are deemed to be by the Customer. If the customer places Assurance as being massively more important than Empathy then the overall score would be worse. The idea of importance is discussed by Shaw and Haynes (2004). They discuss the fact that a service quality instrument can churn out a long list of areas to improve service quality, but they question whether this would always be practical in terms of resources. Following on from this, they observe that, in practical terms, the relative importance that customers place on different elements of the service needs to be taken into consideration. For example, where there is poor

service quality in an area of high importance to the customer, this would be an important area to which to apply resources in order to improve the service quality, but where there is low importance and high service quality, there is an indication that resources could be better applied and redirected to higher importance areas. The Management of the Property Section might choose to identify the importance of the 5 dimensions / highly important areas to pursue service quality changes from this study.
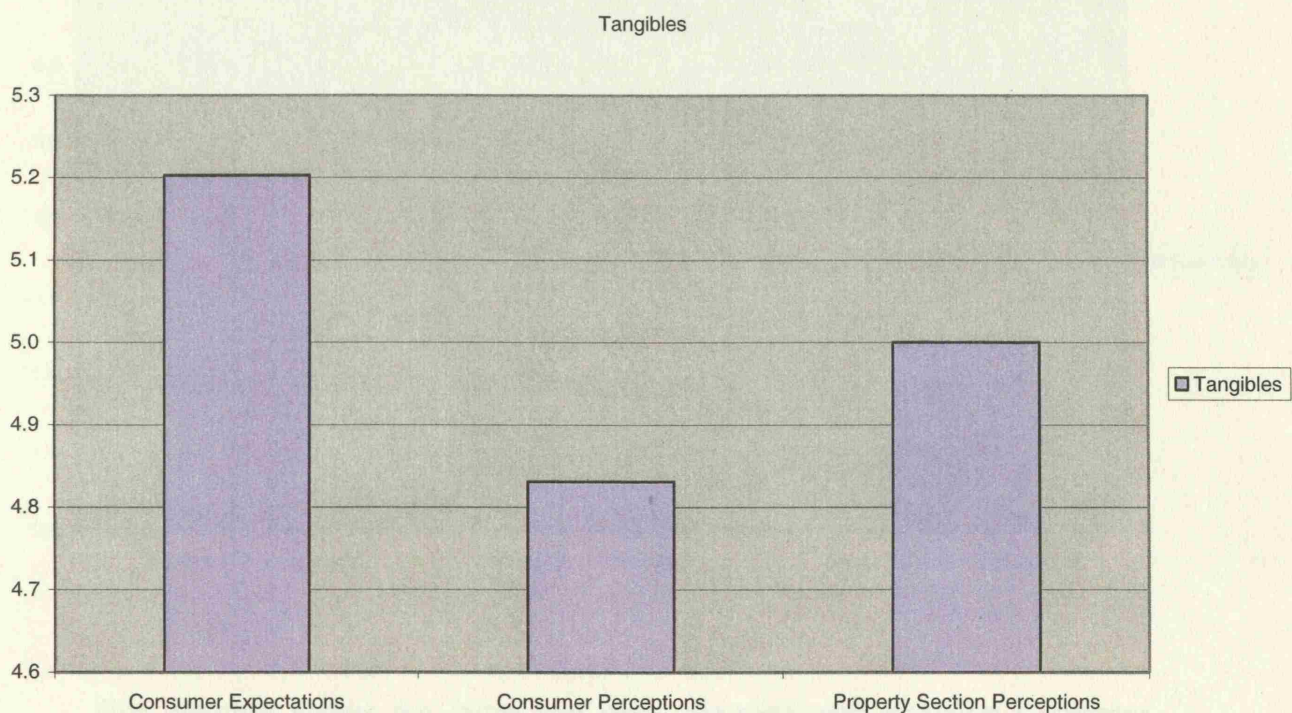
Tangibles

This diagram shows the scores of how customers expect and perceive the Property Section's Service to be in terms of Tangibles. There is a very small difference between the expectations and perceptions but they do expect more than they perceive. Interestingly, the Property Section's perception of their service quality in terms of tangibles, squeezes in between the two Customer results, but they are all very close. As mentioned above, it may be the fact that people acknowledge budgetary limits as they know the building is funded

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partly by Government. Therefore they may appreciate that certain areas are non essential in terms of tangible appearance or modern technology as the budget is not huge and they may know themselves that there are budgetary constraints on the organisation as they themselves may experience them in their own department.
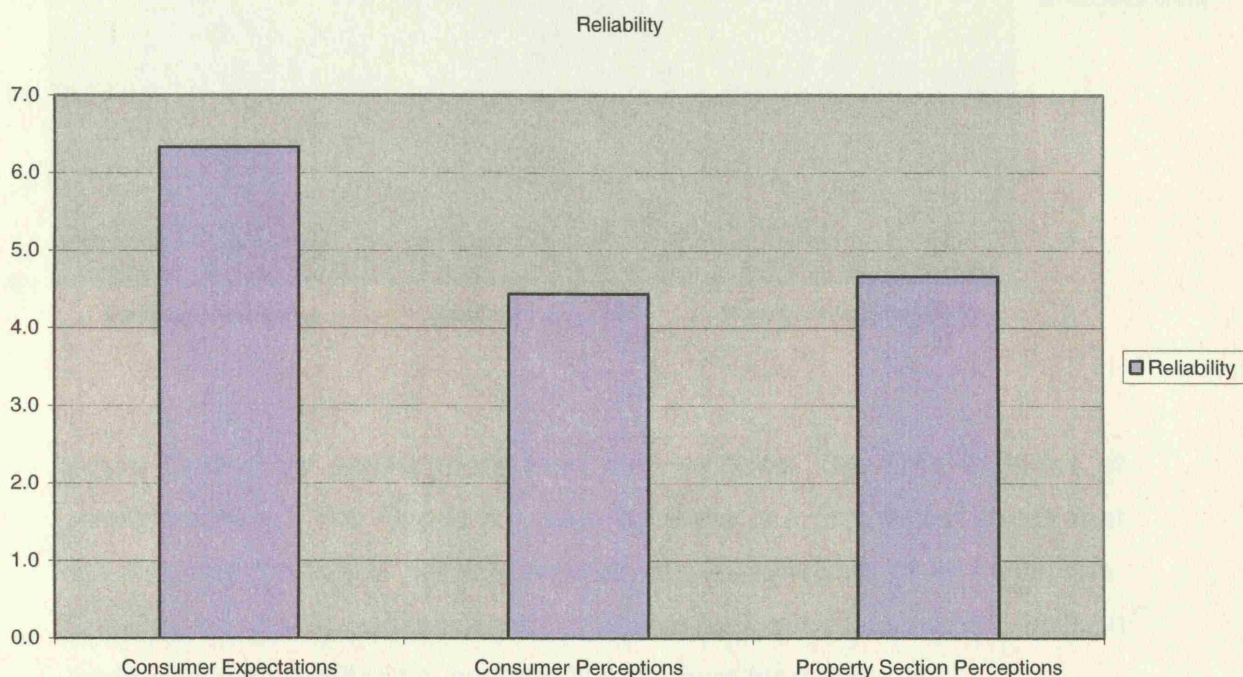
Reliability

This diagram shows the large and more worrying gap between Customer Expectations of the Property Section in terms of Reliability. The Property Section Staff perceive themselves to be more reliable than their customers do, but there is still a large gap between Property Section Perceptions and Customer Expectations. This is clearly an area where more specific research into the perceived shortcomings might well lead to beneficial improvements.
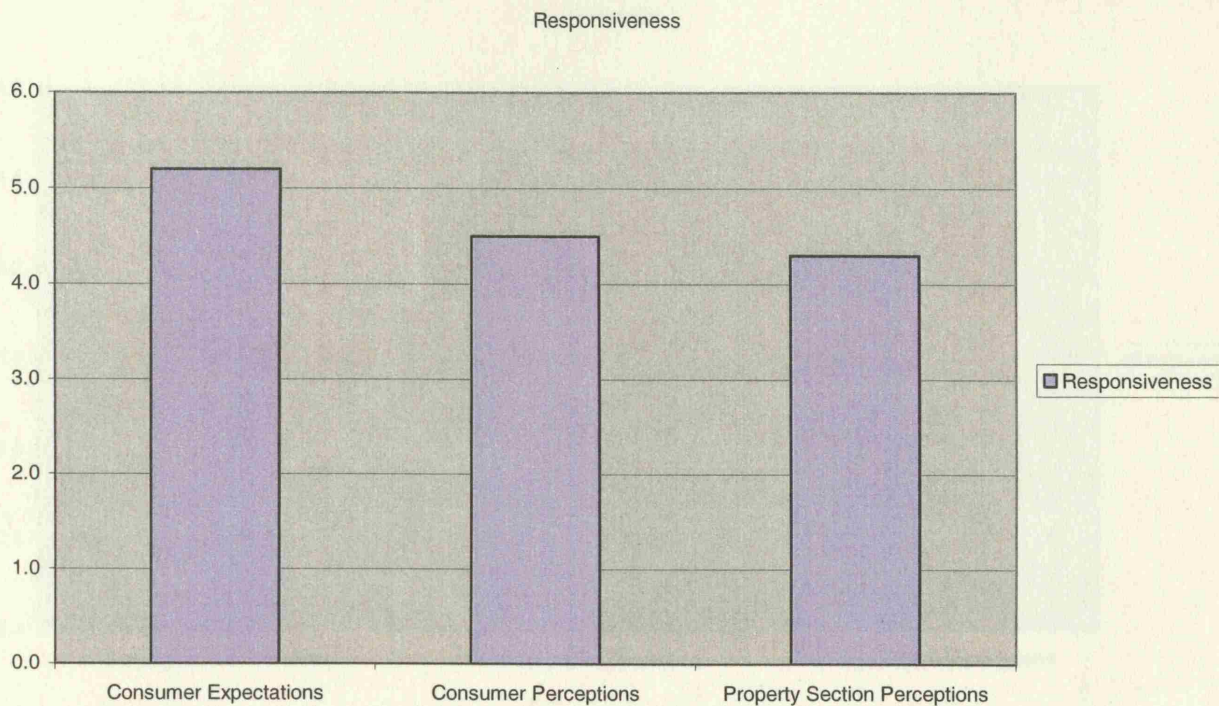
Responsiveness

Again Customers expect more than they perceive, this time in terms of responsiveness. The Gap is not huge but there is a gap, which shows that the Property Section is not fully meeting the expectations of its customers. The Property Section does however, perceive itself to be less responsive than customers perceive it to be, so there is room here for manoeuvre.
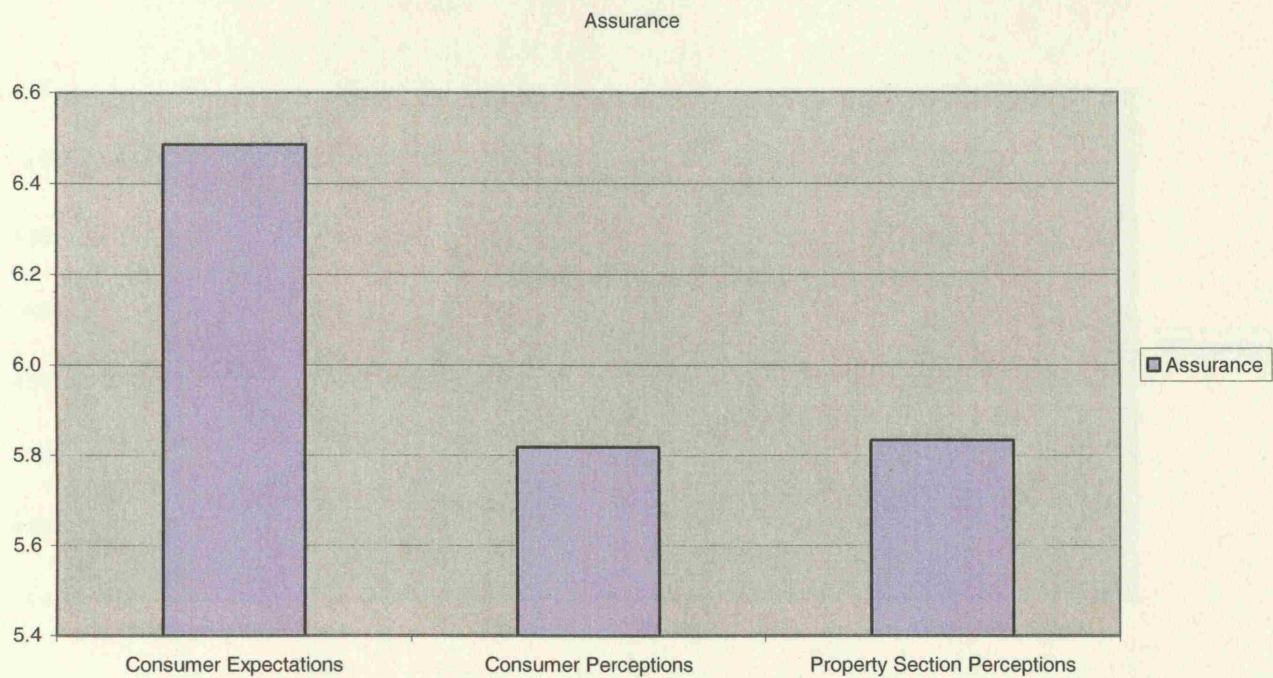
Assurance

Customers and Property Section Staff have a very close perception of the Service Quality in terms of Assurance, although again Customer Expectations are higher. It is important that people feel they can trust and feel safe with members of the Property Section and if they don't the reasons may be about individuals or the team as a whole and this should be addressed.
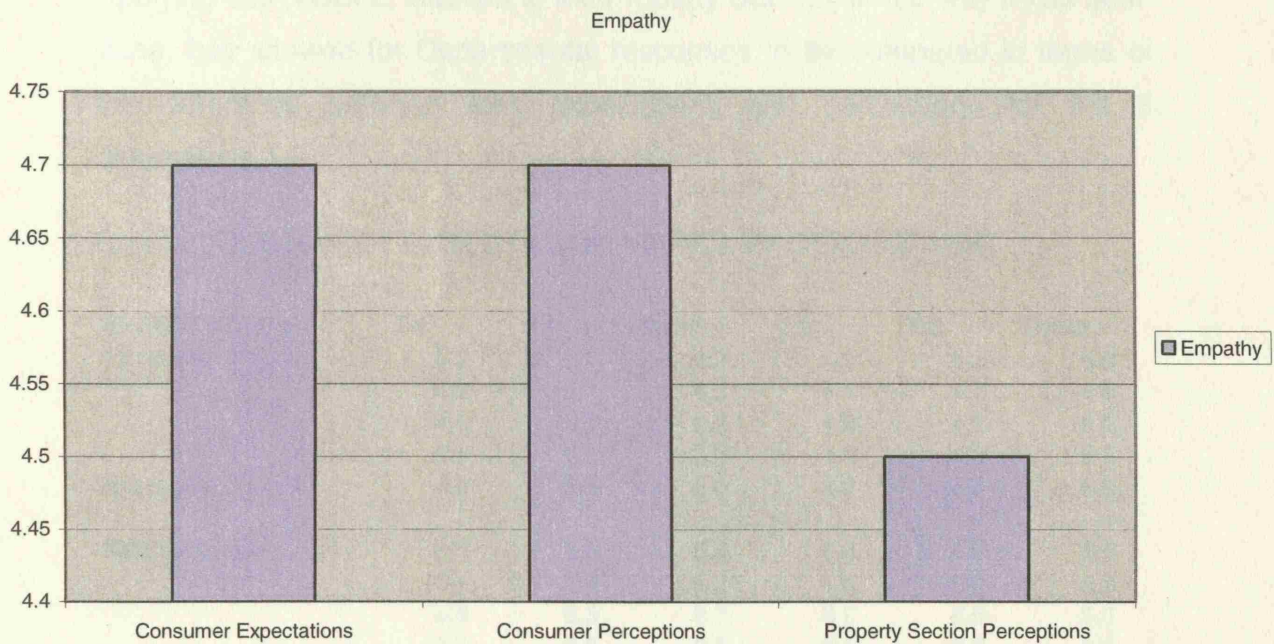
Empathy

This chart shows empathy. It is interesting here that the Property Section perceives itself to be less empathetic than customers perceive and expect and it appears here that the maintenance team is meeting expectations. The score it not very high for Empathy though so it does also appear that Customers do not seem to require Property Section employees to be all that empathetic. I am surprised at this but perhaps to most people it is not as important an issue as others are.

Applying SERVQUAL theories to the Property Section, in the way it has been done, has allowed for Departmental responses to be compared in terms of the difference between their expectations and perceptions for the 5 dimensions.

Chart 2: CUSTOMER EXPECTATION MARKS BY DEPARTMENT

EXPECTATIONS	PP	PS	MOH	LC	RC	Other
Tangibles	6.2	6.1	6.3	6.0	6.3	6.0
	4.2	5.1	4.5	4.1	4.5	4.8
	4.8	4.9	6.2	4.6	4.7	5.0
	5.4	6.0	5.3	4.3	4.3	5.5
Average	**5.2**	**5.5**	**5.6**	**4.8**	**5.0**	**5.3**
Reliability	6.6	6.6	6.5	6.4	6.3	6.5
	6.4	5.6	5.2	5.6	6.0	6.3
	6.6	6.5	6.7	6.8	6.5	5.8
	6.4	6.3	6.5	6.8	6.7	6.5
	6.2	6.3	6.5	6.6	6.3	6.3
Average	**6.4**	**6.3**	**6.3**	**6.4**	**6.4**	**6.3**
Responsiveness	3.4	2.9	2.8	3.4	2.7	3.3
	3	2.9	3.2	3.1	2.7	3.5
	2	1.6	2.8	1.4	2.3	2.5
	2.8	3.4	3.2	3.3	1.8	4.0
Average	**2.8**	**2.7**	**3.0**	**2.8**	**2.4**	**3.3**
Inverted	**5.2**	**5.3**	**5.0**	**5.2**	**5.6**	**4.7**
Assurance	6.4	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.8	6.5
	6.4	6.4	6.3	6.8	7.0	6.3
	6.6	6.4	6.2	6.5	6.3	5.5
	6.6	6.5	5.8	6.6	6.8	6.0
Average	**6.5**	**6.5**	**6.3**	**6.7**	**6.8**	**6.1**
Empathy	4.2	2.4	3.7	4.1	4.2	4.8
	4	2.8	4.3	3.8	4.2	4.0
	3.4	2.9	2.5	3.6	3.3	3.3
	2.8	2.5	2.2	2.1	3.2	3.3
	3.8	3.9	3.0	3.1	2.0	5.0
Average	**3.6**	**2.9**	**3.1**	**3.4**	**3.4**	**4.1**
	4.4	**5.1**	**4.9**	**4.6**	**4.6**	**3.9**

Chart 3: CUSTOMER PERCEPTION MARKS BY DEPARTMENT

PERCEPTIONS	PP	PS	MOH	LC	RC	Other
Tangibles	4.8	4.3	5.3	5.0	4.7	5.3
	5.2	4.4	4.5	4.1	4.7	4.5
	5.4	5.8	5.3	4.6	5.3	5.3
	4.8	4.6	5.0	4.4	4.8	4.8
Average	**5.1**	**4.8**	**5.0**	**4.5**	**4.9**	**4.9**
Reliability	4.0	4.6	3.8	3.4	4.0	3.5
	5.4	4.9	4.0	5.5	5.2	4.5
	5.2	5.3	4.8	5.0	4.8	4.3
	4.4	4.8	4.2	3.5	4.0	3.5
	4.8	4.0	4.7	4.4	4.3	3.5
Average	**4.8**	**4.7**	**4.3**	**4.4**	**4.5**	**3.9**
Responsiveness	4.6	4.5	4.5	4.1	4.3	5.0
	4.4	3.0	3.7	3.8	3.5	2.3
	2.2	2.3	2.5	2.4	2.3	3.5
	3.2	2.8	3.7	3.8	4.2	3.5
Average	**3.6**	**3.1**	**3.6**	**3.5**	**3.6**	**3.6**
Inverted	**4.4**	**4.9**	**4.4**	**4.5**	**4.4**	**4.4**
Assurance	5.6	5.5	6.0	6.5	5.3	6.0
	5.8	5.8	5.7	6.5	5.5	5.8
	6.2	6.1	6.0	6.4	6.3	5.8
	5.4	5.4	5.2	5.6	5.2	5.8
Average	**5.8**	**5.7**	**5.7**	**6.3**	**5.6**	**5.8**
Empathy	3.6	2.9	3.8	3.0	3.3	3.5
	3.6	2.9	4.2	2.9	3.7	3.5
	3.4	3.6	4.0	3.4	3.0	3.8
	2.8	2.3	2.8	2.8	2.7	3.3
	3.2	2.4	3.5	3.6	4.8	3.8
Average	**3.3**	**2.8**	**3.7**	**3.1**	**3.5**	**3.6**
Inverted	**4.7**	**5.2**	**4.3**	**4.9**	**4.5**	**4.4**

Chart 4:Results for the Dimension TANGIBLES by department.

	Customer Expectations Tangibles	Customer Perceptions	Gap
PP	5.2	5.1	-0.1
PS	5.5	4.8	-0.7
MOH	5.6	5	-0.5
LC	4.8	4.5	-0.5
RC	5	4.9	0.1
Other	5.3	4.9	0-

Chart 5:Results for the Dimension RELIABILITY by department.

	Customer Expectations Reliability	Customer Perceptions	Gap
PP	6.4	4.8	-1.6
PS	6.3	4.7	-1.6
MOH	6.3	4.3	-2
LC	6.4	4.4	-2
RC	6.4	4.5	-1.9
Other	6.3	3.9	-2.4

Chart 6:Results for the Dimension RESPONSIVENESS by department.

	Customer Expectations Responsiveness	Customer Perceptions	Gap
PP	5.2	4.4	-0.8
PS	5.3	4.9	-0.4
MOH	5	4.4	-0.6
LC	5.2	4.5	-0.7
RC	5.6	4.4	-1.2
Other	4.7	4.4	-0.3

Chart 7:Results for the Dimension ASSURANCE by department.

	Customer Expectation Assurance	Customer Perceptions	Gap
PP	6.5	5.8	-0.7
PS	6.5	5.7	-0.8
MOH	6.3	5.7	-0.6
LC	6.7	6.3	-0.4
RC	6.8	5.6	-1.2
Other	6.1	5.8	-0.3

Chart 8:Results for the Dimension EMPATHY by department.

	Customer Expectation Empathy	Customer Perception	Gap
PP	4.4	4.7	+0.3
PS	5.1	5.2	+0.1
MOH	4.9	4.3	-0.6
LC	4.6	4.9	+0.3
RC	4.6	4.5	-0.1
Other	3.9	4.4	+0.5

These departmental results for the various dimensions show that the department most concerned with Tangibles is the PS department. I can think of no real reason for this except for the fact that this department works very closely with the head of the organisation and people surrounding this head and perhaps this is a factor important at this level within the organisation. For Reliability the gap was highest for the group "Other", but if we disregard this the results from the RC show that the Property Section is far from meeting their expectations in terms of their reliability. The RC is the only department that is a money making department and this may be a significant factor in the fact that they expect more and perceive that the Property Section does less. Responsiveness again comes up worst for the RC department and similarly with Assurance. Can it be that this department has massively higher expectations or that the Property Section deals with their various demands in a different way? Perhaps they are more demanding because of the nature of their department and the Property Section has not responded to this differing

demand / expectation. The RC department could not outsource the Property Section maintenance of their building areas as the building is not theirs and the Property Section is responsible for it as a whole. They could however buy or purchase some of their own services, for minor jobs, such as the fitting of kitchen units, but this is probably not practical due to the economies of scale of using the Property Section and given the requirement for follow up maintenance. Having maintenance people on site is surely a massive benefit compared with calling in installation companies to come and maintain something on a small scale? The nature of the organisation as a whole would also mean that the RC Department is not really in a position to manage without the services of the Property Section, but in terms of their expectations and the fact that it is not meeting them in several areas, their dissatisfaction could have several implications. Does the Property Section need to communicate more effectively with the RC department on their requirements? (Gap 6 & 7). Does the Property Section also need to impress on the RC just what the resources and limitations of the Property Section are (Gap 4) in order to try and align both departments' expectations and perceptions, finding a compromise somewhere in the middle? I think this may well be the case, from an insider's point of view.

It is important to note that virtually all the scores are negative, which in turn itself could impact on the maintenance team's perceptions of itself.

The above results can all be linked back to the Gap Model on page 8 of this study where we can look at what gaps exist between desired levels and actual levels of performance. In this internal study, Gaps 6 & 7 can be lumped into one group as, together, they are the Property Section perceptions of their customers' expectations and the difference between that and the expected level of service, with no differentiation between the management and the employees. Although this study did not measure directly Property Section perceptions of customer expectations, it is apparent that there is either a lack of understanding of customer expectations or these expectations are being ignored. An inadequate understanding on the part of the Property

Section as to where expectations of them actually lie would seem to be the likely occurrence here. Other gaps to consider from these results are Gaps 2 & 3. Gap 2 refers to a mismatch between Property Section staff expectations of service quality and any service quality specifications that they may have. If the Property Section expects a high service level for Tangibles but the budget is not there to allow for this then there is a gap. Again if the Property Section staff expect to provide reliable service but they do not have enough staff on a regular basis to do so, then again there is a gap and either the expectations of their reliability need to be reduced or the staffing numbers increased accordingly. Gap 3 indicates poor delivery of service quality and although the specifications may all be in place, unhappy, overworked staff may not give good service delivery. Contractors that work on their behalf may not have had the same training. Specifications may be exemplary but the use of any individual, inadequately trained to deliver the service, would lead to there being a gap here that needs to be closed. The fact that all the scores are negative demonstrates that gaps do exist and the desire should be to identify exactly what causes the gaps, how these gaps can be closed and what management actions need to be taken to do so.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study is not to assess the reliability of SERVQUAL altogether, although it has briefly discussed the matter. This study is to experiment with SERVQUAL and its good and bad points on an internal maintenance department. The study assumes that SERVQUAL can be used internally and uses it as an instrument to see what it can say about an internal maintenance department of a working historic building. Things that it perhaps doesn't account for are the historic factors, and the impact that these might have on expectations. There are limitations imposed by English Heritage and these inevitably have an impact upon expectations. Some people are not fully aware that not all jobs can be done quickly or even at all, given the need to keep to strict guidelines or factors that must be adhered to. Is the Property Section failing to manage their expectations properly by not explaining this fully? (Gap 4).

It is interesting to see that over the 5 dimensions the Property Section comes out worst for meeting the expectations in terms of Reliability and in particular for the RC department which is the only department served by the Property Section that is a money making department.

The Gaps that show up from the results are Gaps 2, 3 and 6/7. Gap 2 can be highlighted as the results do seem to indicate that the Property Section's expectations of service quality and the service quality specifications do not match up. Gap 3 also can be highlighted in that there may also be poor delivery of service quality. These may be a problem of Reliability as the results highlight this but these gaps are the main problem that needs to be addressed. Gap 6/7 is the other highlighted gap here as the expected service of customers is clearly not understood by the Property Section.

So what are the implications / findings of interest to the Managers of the Property Section? Has this SERVQUAL based study told them anything that they didn't already know, believe or think? Are there any actions to be taken

which arise from the findings in this study or do SERVQUAL and this study not really fit, are the findings justified or real and to be seen as right or wrong?

The SERVQUAL model seems to fit when applied to the maintenance department in question. The survey was easily adapted with its 22 items to appear discussible and answerable to the customers of the Property Section from internal departments. However without any weighting of the relative importance of the 5 dimensions to the different individual internal departments, then an average weighted SERVQUAL score cannot be calculated. However, the simple gaps between expectations and perceptions can still be measured for each of the 5 dimensions and reported on separately, and this can be interesting, showing which department expects most from which dimension. There is no reason to say SERVQUAL has not worked here, as a measuring tool. It has certainly produced some useful and informative measurements and other factors now need to be considered along with these SERVQUAL results.

One factor to be considered is the impact of contractors. The Property Section employs a large number of different contractors to complete works and these contractors are representing the Property Section although not directly under the organisation's employment. What standards are in place for contractors to adhere to, to ensure that the perception of the Property Section's level of service is kept to the standard it wants? (Gap 7). Is the management and monitoring of outside contractors as effective as it could be? (Gap 2&3). Is there any requirement to see their training certificates, for a variety of skills? Do their own organisations send them on customer service training courses and should the Property Section encourage them to do so? Perhaps for general contractors this may not be so applicable but for Day-work contractors who are based in the building on a daily basis working alongside the Property Section, is such training possible or encouraged? When Property Section customers completed the survey how can we know if they associated all external contractors with the Property Section, were they basing their responses solely on Property Section employees, or did the

performance of contractors influence their responses for better or for worse? It would require follow up surveys to establish this. (Gap 4). It is safer to assume that when people complete these surveys they are basing their opinions on the overall Property Section service they receive which does include, day work and general contractors.

The main implications for Management, I think, arise from the fact that Reliability is the worst dimension. What steps can be taken to improve The Property Section's reliability? The other area for concern, on which I would focus, is in relation to RC department. The expectations and perceptions clearly do not match and there is one time of the year when the RC Department relies very heavily on the Property Section and this is the summer months. I think that, in order to try to align their expectations and perceptions better, a series of meetings could be held both before and during this period, so that both departments can achieve a better understanding of each other's needs. The Property Section does not solely serve the RC Department and it has finite resources in terms of people and time. Although the RC Department has the money to pay for more work, do they appreciate the time constraints on the Property Section over this time period? Are their expectations actually too high, has the Property Section not managed them correctly over the years or does it in fact simply not meet a reasonable expectation? This is an issue that has come out of this study and I think is one, which may resonate with a few staff.

The next worst dimensions were Responsiveness and Assurance. With Responsiveness I feel that in a maintenance department this is a double edged sword, especially when associated with expectations. If one always responds quickly and appropriately then this can lead to this response rate service always being expected. Then when there is a problem, e.g. time restraints, unexpected resource restraints and the response is slower, people then think that this is not good enough and a bad job has been done because they have been allowed to expect the best all the time. This is about managing people's expectations, a theme that has appeared throughout this

study. Aiming to close the gaps that have appeared should help improve perceptions of the 5 dimensions and it is now up to management to decide what tools they use to close such gaps. General Property Section Staff awareness of / promotion of our service processes could be a very good start. The Property Section Helpdesk could perhaps be an example of a response to Gap 3 or 4. It has been slow to be picked up fully by Property Section staff for perhaps a variety of reasons. Nevertheless, it is essentially the only formal item that the Property Section has in place, that allows service processes to be monitored / checked so that a constant service level or quality can gradually be developed. It allows time scales to be seen, information to be passed easily and at a glance, but it needs to be used properly. Without standards to adhere to, nothing can really be measured or checked and the Property Section has very few indicators of good or bad. Whether things measure up or not is simply a matter of opinion by us or by other departments. The building and maintenance trade has perhaps generally had a reputation for a fairly scruffy service over the years. Everyone has seen the rough and ready builder, a burly man in overalls and with dirty hands who turns up to plumb in your washing machine. However, as more and more professional service companies have developed and larger organisations have swallowed up more small firms in the industry, things have perhaps been changing and a good quality polite, smart, on time, reliable, quick organised service is now expected from the building and maintenance trade more than ever before and particularly so in the work place. These standard changes in the trade generally reflect a switch towards a more customer orientated, service quality in a competitive market but are also something that internal maintenance departments need to consider also.

Limitations:

There are a number of limitations to this study and things that I should have or would do differently if this survey were to be repeated, pursued or expanded on at all. I would measure Property Section Staff perceptions of customers' expectations (Gap 6 & 7), not just perceptions of themselves and I would also measure their expectations of the Service Quality level. This could lead to a fuller study. This would allow for an analysis of Gap 1. I have to assume here in this study that the Property Section staff expect a high level of service quality, but obviously this may not be the case. They may not think that we need to be Empathetic to other departments. Other changes would be to the methodology and so as to avoid the (Other) Group in the department I would send the surveys to departments on varying colours of paper to avoid the recipients cutting off the department numbers, in the mistaken belief that the numbers were there to identify individual respondents. I would also explain my methods better in the letter associated with the Survey, asking people to take the time to fill it out. The Weighting factor of dimensions would also be very useful to study and then glean departmental profiles, of the varying importance they attach to the 5 dimensions. Further investigations to follow up on this study could be to bring in the aspect of building performance, i.e. measuring the building performance of the premises for which the Property Section is essentially responsible, in terms of the perceptions of the people who inhabit it rather than products / performance specifications. David Flemming has previously looked at the importance of occupiers' views of the building they inhabit and this could be an interesting follow up study, particularly in such a historic building. It would link into the Property Section Service as they are responsible for the building to a certain degree but are limited as mentioned earlier by Listed Consent and English Heritage.

In conclusion, I think the SERVQUAL model can be applied internally but may bring up different results as so much other internal knowledge exists that can be associated with the results. I think to survey internally can bring about

greater response rates as there is the ability to chase but conversely the results may be skewed by how people view the Surveyor personally. The relatively limited size of the sample and the fact that some respondents have more to do with the department than others, are also limiting factors. The results that this study has brought to light certainly show up a number of issues to think about although further investigation may need to follow. The results are not bad or a bad reflection on the Property Section. They just highlight some issues that Management of the Property Section may or may not choose to pursue depending on how they deem them to be relevant, if at all. If nothing else this study does at least give the Property Section some food for thought.

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Appendix 1: Survey of Property Section Customers (2 parts)

PART 1: EXPECTATIONS OF THE PROPERTY SECTION

This Survey deals with your opinions of the Property Sections Services. Please indicate the extent to which you think the Property Section SHOULD possess the features described by each statement. Do so by picking one of the seven numbers next to each statement. If you strongly agree that the Property Section should possess a feature, circle number 7. If you strongly disagree that the Property Section should possess such a feature circle 1. If your feelings are not strong circle one of the numbers in the middle. There are no right or wrong answers. All I am interested in is a number that best shows your expectations about the Property Sections services.

	Strongly disagree	Strongly Agree

They should have up to date equipment.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Their Physical facilities should be visually appealing.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

They should be well dressed and appear neat.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The appearance of the physical facilities of the Property Section should be in keeping with the services they provide.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When the Property Section promises to do something by a certain time, they should do so.
                                                   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When you and other staff have problems the Property Section should be sympathetic and reassuring.
                                                   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should be dependable.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should provide their services at the time they promise to do so.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should keep accurate records.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section shouldn't be expected to tell customers exactly when services will be performed.
                                                   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

It is not realistic for customers to expect prompt service from members of the Property Section.
                                                   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff do not always have to be willing to help staff.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

It is ok if the Property Section are too busy to respond to requests promptly.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You and other employees should be able to trust members of the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You and other employees should feel safe in any dealings with the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Members of the Property Section should be polite.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should get adequate support to do their jobs well   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should not be expected to give you or other employees individual attention.
                                                          1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff should not be expected to give you or other employees personal attention.
                                                          1...2...3...4...5...6...7

It is unrealistic to expect employees to know what the needs of their customers are.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

It is unrealistic to expect the Property Section to have your or other employees best interests at heart.
                                                          1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section should not be expected to have operating hours convenient to all their customers.
                                                          1...2...3...4...5...6...7

PART 2: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROPERTY SECTION

The Following set of statements relate to your feelings about the Property Section. For each statement please show the extent to which you believe The Property Section HAS the feature described by the statement. Once again circling a 7 means that you strongly agree that the Property Section has that feature and circling a 1 means that you strongly disagree. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle indicating how strong your feelings are. There are no right or wrong answers. All I am interested in is a number that best shows your perception of the Property Section.

	Strongly disagree	Strongly Agree
The Property Section has up to date equipment.	1...2...3...4...5...6...7	
The Property Sections physical facilities are visually appealing.	1...2...3...4...5...6...7	
Property Section Staff are well dressed and appear neat.	1...2...3...4...5...6...7	

The appearance of the Property Sections physical facilities is in keeping with the type of services provided.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When the Property Section promises to do something by a certain time, they do.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When you have problems the Property Section is sympathetic and reassuring. 1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section is dependable.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section provides it's services at the time it promises to do so.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section keeps records accurately.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section does not tell customers exactly when services will be performed.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You do not receive prompt service from the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Employees of the Property Section are not always willing to help you or other employees.
                                                                                1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff are too busy to respond to customer requests promptly.
                                                                                1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You can trust employees of the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You feel safe with your dealings with members of the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff are polite.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

You and other employees get adequate support from the Property Section to do your job well.
                                                                                1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section does not give you individual attention.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff do not give you personal attention.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff do not know what your needs are.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section does not have your best interests at heart.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section does not have operating hours convenient to their customers.
                                                                                1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Appendix 2: Survey sent to Property Section Staff. (Part 2 Only)

PART 2: PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROPERTY SECTION

The Following set of statements relate to your feelings about the Property Section (Our department). For each statement please show the extent to which you believe The Property Section (we) HAVE the feature described by the statement. Once again circling a 7 means that you strongly agree that the Property Section has that feature and circling a 1 means that you strongly disagree. You may circle any of the numbers in the middle indicating how strong your feelings are. There are no right or wrong answers. All I am interested in is a number that best shows your perception of us, the Property Section as a department as a whole.

                                            Strongly disagree   Strongly Agree

The Property Section (we) have up to date equipment.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Sections (our) physical facilities are visually appealing.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section Staff are well dressed and appear neat.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The appearance of the Property Sections physical facilities is in keeping with the type of services provided.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When the Property Section (we) promise to do something by a certain time, we do.
                                              1...2...3...4...5...6...7

When Household Staff have problems the Property Section (we) are sympathetic and reassuring.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (we) are dependable.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (we) provide our services at the time it promises to do so.
                                              1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (we) keep records accurately.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (we) do not tell customers exactly when services will be performed.
                                              1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Household Staff / Departments do not receive prompt service from the Property Section.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Members of the Property Section are not always willing to help other employees.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff (we) are too busy to respond to customer requests promptly.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Household Staff can trust employees of the Property Section.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Household Staff feel safe with your dealings with members of the Property Section.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff (we) are polite.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Household Staff get adequate support from the Property Section (us) to do their job well.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (we) do not give other staff individual attention.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff do not give Household Staff personal attention.   1...2...3...4...5...6...7

Property Section staff do not know what other employee needs are in the Household.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (We) do not have other employees best interests at heart.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7

The Property Section (We) do not have operating hours convenient to our customers.

1...2...3...4...5...6...7