

EFFECTIVE MUNICIPAL SERVICE DELIVERY A CONCEPTUAL MODEL

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Abstract

Whatever the challenges, municipalities must deliver on their mandate which is essential to improving the quality of life for all citizens, since the services provided by municipalities have a direct impact on the living standards of the people in the community. Poor service delivery remains an important challenge in South Africa, and there have been many violent service delivery protests in municipal areas, and these protests resulted from both the lack of service or from poor quality services rendered. In light of the aforementioned, this paper explores a conceptual model which could ensure effective service delivery, by focusing on the operations of a key service delivery unit within the largest municipality in South Africa. The study entailed an in-depth look at the systems and processes of the Revenue Customer Contact Centres and mapping this against the service delivery, leadership and employee work effort and performance literature. After interrogation of the literature, five relationships are proposed among the aforementioned variables, and this is depicted in a conceptual model. The theoretical model proposes that there is a direct relationship between leadership and employee work effort and employee performance, and between employee work effort and municipal service delivery, and between employee performance and service delivery.

Keywords: Service Delivery; Municipal Service; Leadership; Service Performance; Work Effort

INTRODUCTION

Poor service delivery remains an important challenge in South Africa, including the City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (CJMM) which is a cause for concern. These protests might have resulted from both the lack of service or from poor quality services rendered (Mathibane, 2010). Lately, there has been a rise in community-level protests against municipalities due to them not delivering essential services, being corrupt, and acting against the spirit of the constitution of South Africa, by victimizing those too poor to pay for municipal services (Pieterse et al., 2008: 51-52). These protests are an indication that service delivery is not in line with the expectations of the community.

Whilst some municipalities are managed very well and service delivery is excellent, the overall state of local government service delivery in South Africa is “precariously classified by increasing debtors, qualified audit reports, poor systems, poor performance, poor long-term planning, huge service delivery backlogs and queries, increasing salary bills, unfunded mandates, government debt, concerns about sustainability, and greater demands and expectations by all stakeholders” (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988).

Municipalities require resources like finances, well trained employees, systems and equipment to deliver on its constitutional mandate. One way to address the extent, to which limited resources affect the ability to deliver on its constitutional mandate, is to ensure that service excellence is maintained which affects query resolution, collections, performance and accuracy of data. The municipality can be seen as a vehicle with interrelated, interdependent, and interacting parts that work together to deliver the services required. Fitz-enz (2009: 8) stated that “humans are the only element with inherent power to generate value as all other variables (cash, assets, material, equipment and energy), add nothing until some individual leverages that potential to add value by putting it into play.”

The City of Johannesburg Metropolitan Municipality (CJMM) was selected for this conceptual study since it is one of the municipalities where constant allegations of mal-administration, wrong billing and poor service delivery are being published in various media (Atkinson, 2012); (Bingwa, Phirippides and Christoforou, 2010). This paper scrutinizes the operations of the Revenue Customer Contact Centers (RCCC) in the CJMM, which is a world class African city.

The primary purpose of this conceptual paper is to review relevant literature and explore and possible associations between empowering leadership and employee effort, performance and service delivery in a municipal context. In the next section we provide some details of the research context which informed the development of the conceptual model, where-after, the literature which contributed to the conceptualization of the model will be discussed.

The Research Context

The common vision for the future of the City of Johannesburg (CoJ) is “to be a World Class African City of the Future - a vibrant, equitable African city, strengthened through its diversity; a city that provides real quality of life; a city that provides sustainability for all its residents; a resilient and adaptive society.” (City of Johannesburg, 2012). The values which underpin the vision are to meet expectations by constantly contributing to the satisfaction and well-being of customers in a passionate, courteous and knowledgeable manner; to take pride in all the actions by providing the highest level of service and to consistently act honorably and above reproach, and keep promises made; and to maintain high regard for customers in daily engagements (CJMM - Marketing Department, 2013).

Being the largest municipality in South Africa, the CJMM services approximately R4 million people. The municipality has 1,443,591 account holders, whereof 1,032,652 account holders are billed on a monthly basis for services such as electricity, water, sewerage, refuse removal and taxes such as property rates. There were 640,891 properties registered in the CoJ and as at the end of June 2013, the CJMM's debtor's book was R 8,559,667,347.84 with domestic clients/consumers representing the highest percentage of outstanding debt (CJMM - Revenue & Customer Relations Department, 2013).

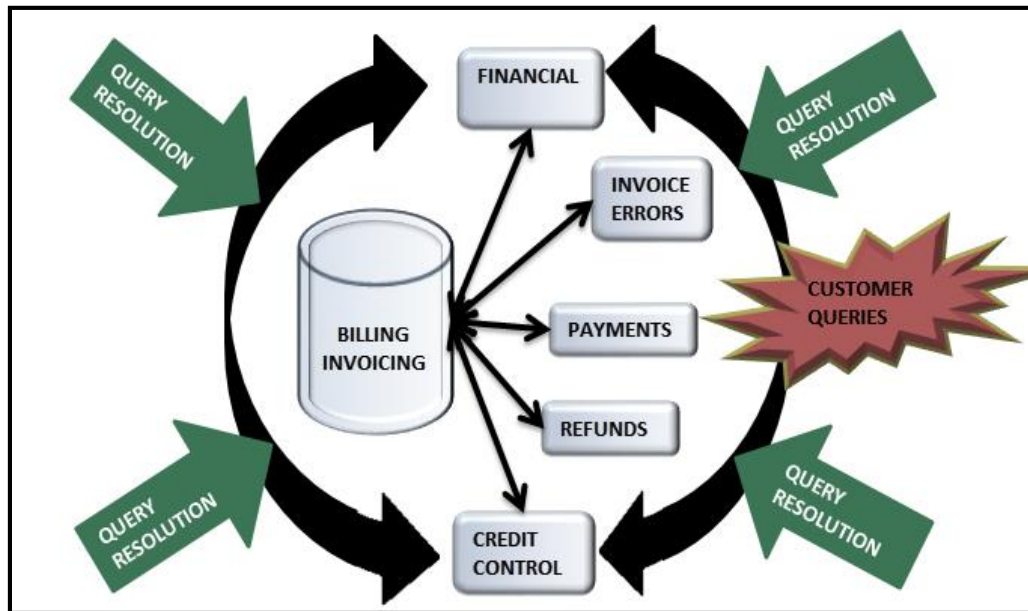
The CJMM has had long-standing difficulties with its revenue administration, query resolutions and service delivery by the Contact Centres, and continues to face several challenges, namely, incompetent and ineffective revenue administration systems, unresolved customer queries, increasing consumer debt, and increased failure to adhere to service excellence. An extract of Executive mayor's budget speech serves to highlight the state of affairs alluded to above. “We are all aware that the objectives of the Phakama Project were to redress historical anomalies in our revenue, billing and property value chain and to improve the customer experience. We recognise that although the system has stabilized, there were a number of challenges post-implementation. We intervened and are beginning to see some results in areas such as query resolution and revenue collection” (Councillor Tau, 2011).

Customers log queries via the Call and Contact Centres, which queries are forwarded to different departments and some are sometimes never resolved. Unresolved customer queries impact negatively on the image and service delivery levels of the CJMM.

It is important to explain the operations of the key service delivery unit within the CJMM since it provides a better context for the proposed model, which model if replicated by other municipalities may contribute to better service delivery and community development. The Systems Application Programming (SAP) billing system is the source where invoices are raised, payments received, address changes made and statements generated to provide customers

with their bills. The value chain includes uploading of meter readings, generation and issuing of statements and invoices, tracking of payments, credit management and credit control support and processes, finalization of accounts, refunds and reporting tools. The system is linked with various integrated systems to cater for the recording of customer queries and credit management actions, e.g. termination or 1st disconnection notices. It is also dependent on the data from the Municipal Owned Entities (MOE's) who read and upload meter readings for accurate billing. Figure 1 illustrates the dependence between the billing and customer queries departments and, highlights the processes that impact on the resolution of customer queries. Account payments can be received amongst others, through various channels, e.g. banks, electronic transfers, debit orders, cashiers at CJMM pay points and 3rd parties such as the Post Office. These payments are uploaded into the SAP system utilising the Metro Cash Router System to allocate the payments to the customers' accounts, using various payment allocation rules built into the system.

Figure 1: The Customer Query Resolution Chain



Source: Van Wyk, R. (2013)

Customer queries are recorded by the employees in the Call and Contact Centres of the CJMM. The query “call type” is a key identifier in the Customer Relations Management (CRM) system, which system will push the query to the correct department for resolution. The most critical fact is that a holistic approach is required within the CJMM to ensure that all areas are addressed in the value chain to eliminate departments working in silo's, initiating their own projects and

processes overlooking concerns which impact on service delivery. Customers develop perceptions due to negative media reports which state that service levels in the CJMM are unacceptable, slack and even non-existent. The CJMM had tried to introduce various interventions to improve data, service delivery, billing, revenue collection, and the query resolution rate. The interventions focused on addressing the customer service issues, revenue collection, and billing issues, each of which will be elaborated on briefly.

Customer Service

Programme Phakama was implemented on the 1st August 2010, and its main objectives were to have a single service utility or one-stop service centre for managing the revenue value chain to improve service delivery, and be responsible for the overall revenue and customer service consolidated into a single database and to use a single IT system which will enable the CJMM to run the integrated and complex operations in the value chain of the CJMM (Councillor Masondo, 2009). The CJMM further planned to implement a comprehensive strategy to deal with historically poor revenue management, billing errors and query resolutions and to establish a project office to lead a series of more targeted revenue improvement projects. These interventions resulted in some slight improvements, however, for various reasons like consolidating systems, lack in training, complexity of systems and inadequate human resource capacity, the CJMM experienced a large growth in customer queries. The CJMM implemented a variety of target initiatives to address query backlogs and by June 2005, the total number of monthly queries logged totaled 6,881 (CJMM: Business Planning Department (Revenue), 2005). The problem surfaced again, and as at 7 August 2013 the total outstanding queries were 114,198.

Revenue Collection

The Executive Mayor of the CJMM, Councilor Masondo, (2009), on the occasion of the media briefing on issues relating to customer service, billing and credit control stated: “The City of Johannesburg is aware of the fact that some residents and customers of the City have been experiencing problems relating to municipal accounts and incorrect billing. Some of these issues have been reflected in the print and electronic media,” (Councillor Masondo, 2009).

Billing issues, queries and factors impacting on service levels needed to be explored and improved by the CJMM as the revenue collections are declining. The rate of collection of billed income has decreased markedly over the last financial years, and the municipality moved from an average of 99.3% in 2007/8 to an average of 90.9% in 2011/12. In May 2013, the collection rate was 91.1% which is slightly higher than in June 2012. New strategies had to be explored once again to improve collections in the CJMM.

Billing Issues

The multiplicity of information technology systems, huge data information extracts and downloads which are used in the various business units of the CJMM, continue to place stress on the IT environment. These challenges specifically influence the interfaces in the billing system with meter reading systems and the CRM system. Various projects were launched to improve data and service delivery, for example, the Completeness of Revenue project (2008) and the Revenue Step Change Project (2011), but the endurance and commitment to fulfill the obligations and complete the projects, seems to be absent in the CJMM as observed by the researcher. These projects were commenced with energy, management support and sufficient information, but the expected end results were never achieved.

On the other hand, the Phakama project had as its objective the establishment of a single revenue management value chain with an integrated IT system, to improve billing, revenue collections, data management, reporting and service delivery by the end of June 2007. This was not realized, as the project was only implemented during September 2009, which again raises a concern of management issues (CJMM: Business Planning Department (Revenue), 2005).

In the Billing Maximization and Efficiency Report (2009), it was stated that “Revenue & Customer Relations Management Department, under the guidance of MMC Finance: Councilor Tau have upon careful analysis of revenue challenges came to a conclusion that major problems associated with revenue collection needed to be resolved immediately.” The conclusion and initiatives implemented was to analyse and improve the value chain, data quality, processes and procedures as well as customer services. (Shupping, 2009).

Although these many initiatives were implemented and some successes recorded, the questions that comes to mind is, why is the debtors’ book still growing, why the bad perceptions, why a decline in the collection rate, what went wrong?

Clearly, the current model for municipal service delivery has not kept pace with the expectations of the customers in terms of the quality of services and query resolution by the CJMM. In South Africa, municipalities are known to have huge outstanding debts, huge backlogs of queries and bad reputation due to ineffective and inefficient service delivery levels (Financial and Fiscal Commission, 2011: 81). This implies that there may be underlying elements that should be explored to understand these factors and the impact thereof on employee performance, and how it affects service delivery levels. The CJMM is no exception in this regard, hence the problem to be addressed in this study is the extent to which factors in the Revenue Customer Contact Centres of the CJMM affect employee performance, and what is the impact thereof on service delivery levels in the CJMM. The success of the Contact Centres

usually depends on a multitude of factors, with the efficiency and effectiveness of the Contact Centre agents being a major factor. Prior studies have shown that Contact Centres are high-pressure, stressful work environments, doing routine work, have little control over work, intense performance monitoring, meeting of performance targets, high turnover, and absenteeism (Kwok, 2005: 3).

The above has prompted interest in this research in order to find out what factors influence employee performance in the Contact Centers of the CJMM, and thus impact on service delivery. The researchers attributed the state of affairs, more specifically the billing/revenue collection and service issues in the CJMM to employee performance and leadership, and conceptualized a relationship among the aforementioned and service delivery.

PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL MODEL

Leadership

Robbins and Judge (2013: 402) define leadership as “the ability to influence a group in order to achieve a specific vision or set of goals.” Kotter (2007: 97) highlights the importance of leadership for driving successful change. Latham (2014: 11) commented that “perhaps too much credit is given to leaders for organisational success and failure, but also said that there is consensus amongst academics and practitioners that it is important to give credit to leaders and that it does make a difference.” However, to bring about change in an organisation, strategic leadership plays a fundamental role in shaping the organisation’s culture and style. Strategic leadership relates to the aptitude to shape the organisations’ decisions, inspiring and managing others in the organisation. Strategic leadership starts at the top, but is not only limited to the top management in the organisation (Lynch, 2012: 599 - 610). Randolph (2000: 95) described empowerment as “a process whereby managers must embrace their inner power - knowledge, experience, and internal motivation – and focus on ways to release the power within people to achieve amazing results.”

The main challenge for creating empowering workplaces might exist in in the role of effective leadership. Managers create the conditions for employees' work by determining the quality of support, information, and resources in work areas. “When employees notice that their leaders are authentic, open and honest, involving them in decision-making employees respond positively to their work, reporting increased performance, trust and commitment to management,” (Wong and Laschinger, 2012: 948).

It is evident from the above that a leader influences the behaviour and performance of employees, ultimately impacting on the goals and objectives of the organisation. This fact is fundamental to generating new ideas and developing new opportunities through identifying and

aligning leadership to empowerment. However, in a post-apartheid South Africa, the municipalities have had to adapt to the to the new service demands of the citizens, and what was required was a new kind of leadership. Thus, the literature on transformational leadership is deemed more appropriate in the context of the CJMM. The transformational leadership theory will provide a framework to examine the relationships between managers and teams in the Revenue and Customer Relations Management in the CJMM. Limited research has been done” to examine mechanisms that link empowering leadership and team performance” (Srivastava, Bartol and Locke, 2006: 1239). Srivastava, et al., (2006) showed that “empowering leadership was positively linked to both knowledge sharing and team efficiency and effectiveness, which, in turn, were both positively related to performance.” Srivastava, et al., (2006: 1240) stated that “several scholars reviewed empowerment as one of the aspects of the relational or power sharing view.”

“Leadership is multidimensional and contains transactional, transformational and laissez-faire behaviors which include the absence of leadership,” (Price and Weiss, 2013: 266). Transformational leadership is “more positively associated with the effectiveness of the organisation and the satisfaction of the customer.” (Avolio and Yammarino, 2013: 12). Transformational leadership has shown encouraging and positive effects on followers’ motivation, commitment, satisfaction, efficiency, performance and other outcomes; and can be applied to many domains including municipal environments. Thus, “managers and leaders who practice transformational leadership behavior can make a positive contribution and impact on individual outcomes, such as perceived competence, emotional responses, intrinsic motivation and team cohesion, goals and objectives,” (Price and Weiss, 2013: 266).

Transformational leadership theory highlights the leader-follower relationship, making it relevant to the study of employee performance in the R&CRM department (Price and Weiss, 2013: 266). Transformational leaders encourage and motivate followers to surpass performance expectations by influencing followers’ beliefs and attitudes. Generally, government organisations that hire managers who are also credible leaders are perceived to be more successful, more adaptive and more effective (McLean, 2013: 19). Avolio and Yammarino, (2013: 27) concluded that “transformational leaders are linked to organisational success, efficiency and effectiveness, customer satisfaction and improved performance.”

In light of the above and with respect to the RCCC at the CJMM, it is postulated that (P1) empowering leadership will influence employee performance. Furthermore, it may be postulated (P2) that empowering leadership may influence employee work effort.

Employee Performance

Performance is defined as “the achievement of a specified task measured against predetermined known standards of accurateness, comprehensiveness, cost and swiftness,” (Business Dictionary, 2013). Dudley, (2010) describes performance as “factors, like culture, vision, mission, work-flow, goals and objectives, the environment and knowledge and skills, and further explains that all these factors work together to produce value for the consumer, thus performance is all about outputs and results.”

The Municipal Structures Act (Act No. 117) of 1998 determine that “councilors must establish methods and/or mechanisms for delivering services and developing criteria for evaluating performance in service delivery,” (Mathibane, 2010: 13). This raises question regarding the input or role that employees play towards accomplishing service excellence in the CJMM.

The enormity and variety of challenges which the R&CRM Department faces in the CJMM can include amongst others poor productivity, high levels of absenteeism, diversity management, poor leadership, corruption, unhappy staff, lack of transformation, informs the construction, classification and comprehending of applicable principal organisational behavioural concepts. Some of these major challenges and uncertainties facing local government could be “implicitly resolved only if management in the municipal environment comprised of people with proper qualifications and experience, excellent personal skills, general ability and the right attitude for the job,” (Opperman, 2007: 69).

Mc Lean (2013: 5) cites Abels (1996) who said that “whilst municipal employees are focused on establishing policy to benefit the community in the long term, local government representatives are preoccupied with satisfying the short term demands of a negative minority.” Abels (1996) continues by stating that “progressively, the reward and motivation for service as a local government elected legislator is power or ego gratification and not the satisfaction attained by assisting to construct a greater community” and “the new designated local official views their role as representing people who express a dominant view regarding an issue and to protect the minority interests from the oppression of arbitrary and seemingly foolish government rule,” (McLean, 2013: 5).

Based on these challenges, it will be mandatory for municipalities to increase performance and identify new and innovative ways to solve challenging problems. Should this happen, managers need to have essential skills to inspire and motivate high performance and innovation amongst employees. Managers will need to be champions and change agents, inspiring employees towards adaptability to ensure success. Managers must also create and construct cooperative and non-dysfunctional relationships with executive levels such as Group

Heads, Municipal Councils and Chief Administrative Officers (McLean, 2013: 5 - 6). This creates awareness that managers must be cognizant of methods to motivate and inspire employees to improve their performance in the CJMM by establishing factors that affect their performance.

In light of the discussion above, it is proposed (P3) that, employee performance will influence service delivery.

Employee Work Effort

Effort is seen as one of most significant concepts in motivation theory and defined as “the quantity or costs of energy put into a behavior series of behaviors,” (Iqbal, 2013: 5 - 6). It is expected that work effort will positively influence job satisfaction. Iqbal (2013: 6) cites Brown and Peterson (1994) who stated that “expenditure of effort have a habit to increase employee’s assessments of objects, outcomes, and feeling states by means of their efforts.” The apparent exertion of effort in the work permits individuals to fulfill their intrinsic needs to be competent, efficient, effective, and self-determining, and thus contributes to job satisfaction. Brown and Peterson (1994) and Walker et al. (1977) as cited by Iqbal (2013: 6) said that “effort is considered as a mediator between motivation and performance, or as a tool to change motivation into accomplished work and found a strong, positive influence of work effort on job satisfaction,” (Iqbal, 2013: 6).

Based on the above discussions, the researchers postulate that work effort has an impact on motivation and performance which ultimately influences service delivery. It is therefore proposed (P4) that may employee work effort will influence employee performance, and (P5) employee work effort may influence service delivery.

Service Delivery

Nealer (2007: 148) defined service delivery as “a provision for public activities, benefits or satisfaction.” Fox and Meyer (1996: 118) in Mathibane (2010: 10) argued that “services relate to the provision of both intangible goods and tangible services.” Mathibane (2010: 10) further stated that “service delivery is theorized as the implementation of exact policy objectives in the public sector with numerous grades of success and that public service is related with government and it is expected that government should be the provider of the public services.”

Municipalities are faced with numerous challenges. The White Paper on Local Government indicates that “due to the amalgamation of the earlier divided jurisdictions, the residents which municipalities must attend to have increased, without an equivalent increase in the tax base,” (Republic of South Africa, 2001). Resource challenges like capital and human resources also have a vital role in service provision.

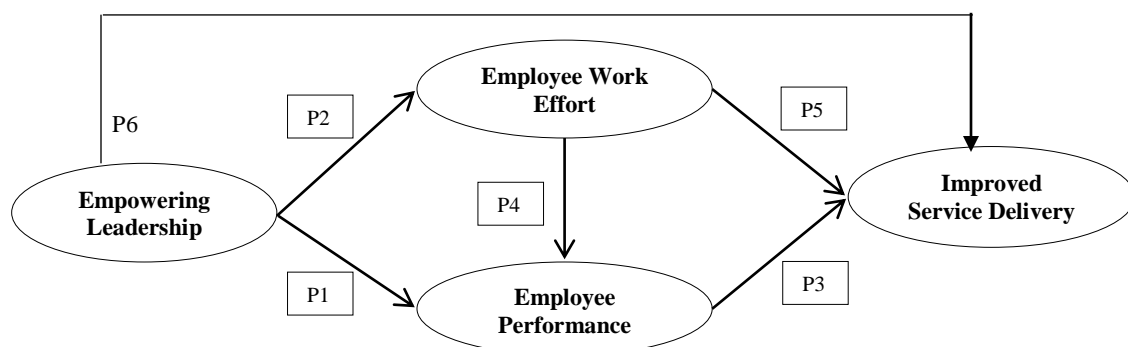
With regard to the issue of financial resource shortages, the White Paper on Local Government states that “a combination of service backlogs, weakening infrastructures, deteriorating creditworthiness and borrowing capacity, municipalities also experience financial stress and, in some instances, crisis.” The CJMM, for example, can improve its services by shortening operational processes to serve more customers in less time, through initiating a change project or process reengineering.

Municipalities are also experiencing upward pressure on salaries and loss of experienced personnel (Republic of South Africa, 1998b). The White Paper on Local Government also comments that “some municipalities have insufficient financial management capacity due to weak budget and accounting controls, a deficiency in credit control and financial reporting systems. The budget practices are often not aligned to the municipal business plans, nor open to public participation” (Republic of South Africa, 1998b). These risks contribute to the deterioration of service delivery in the municipality.

Service delivery within municipalities consists of a complex set of relationships among all three spheres of government, business and the community, and calls for new, original and innovative methods to enhance service delivery. Alternate service delivery involves a quest to identify and implement new, appropriate organisational forms and arrangements, as well as partnerships with the other levels of government and non-governmental sectors. The aim of service delivery must be primarily to provide satisfaction as an objective, and customers must be pleased and satisfied with the quality of the services that they receive. To guarantee the aforementioned, the CJMM must inspire customers to participate in the processes that lead to service delivery. Fox and Meyer (1996), in Minnie (2000: 89), argued that “service quality, satisfaction and value can be seen as indicators of levels of the service delivery.” In light of the above, it is proposed (P6) that employee leadership will influence service delivery.

The above propositions may be depicted schematically in a conceptual model (Figure 2), which model if understood by relevant and responsible people may contribute to improved municipal service delivery.

Figure 2: Conceptual Service Delivery Model



CONCLUSION

It is evident that service delivery is a major challenge in the RCCC at CJMM. The literature explored possible factors which may be either directly or indirectly related to the issue of service performance and service delivery. The key variable which emerged is leadership or more specifically empowering leadership, and the discussion panned out to include employee performance, and employee work effort. The aforementioned variables were alluded to be related with, and eventually impacting service delivery.

The aforementioned is in line with the objective of this paper, which was to develop a conceptual understanding of the factors that impact on service delivery by the Customer Contact Centers, and establish whether there is a theoretical relationship between employee performance levels and service delivery through for example, quicker query resolution rates. The model was developed by identifying factors affecting the service delivery levels to assist the CJMM to achieve optimal service delivery.

The next logical step would be to assess the conceptual model using a sample of employees from the relevant department at CJMM. If the model holds, then it should become a blueprint for service delivery improvement across all municipalities in South Africa.

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