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SERVICE COMMITMENT AND EFFECTIVENESS OF EMERGENCY FIRST RESPONDERS AS PREDICTORS OF SERVICE QUALITY

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the predictive relationship between service commitment, effectiveness, and service quality among emergency first responders (EFR) in the municipality of Maco and Mabini, Province of Davao De Oro. The study utilized a quantitative, non-experimental research design utilizing correlational technique with regression analysis. A total of 199 emergency first responders from both municipalities participated in the study. Statistical tools, including Pearson R and mean score were used to analyze the data. The study revealed generally HIGH level of service commitment, Very High level of Effectiveness and generally HIGH level of service quality among emergency first responders. Significant correlation was identified between service commitment and service quality while the study revealed that effectiveness had no significant relationship with service quality. However, if effectiveness was taken out of the picture the results reveal that the domains of service commitment; affective commitment, continuance commitment and normative commitment have no significant relationship with service quality. The study emphasizes on the need to improve the overall service quality of responders while also ensuring that they will be properly motivated and satisfied with their work as a whole. The findings of this study may help the local government units of Maco and Mabini in improving the response mechanism they established over the years and help in local policy formulation as well as support system to emergency first responders.

KEYWORDS: Service quality, Service commitment, Effectiveness, Emergency First Responders, Disaster risk reduction and management, SGD #8 (Decent work and economic growth), #10 (Reduced inequalities)

1. INTRODUCTION

Poor service delivery by Emergency First Responders in times of calamity can stain the reputation of the Local Government Unit in an impacted community. Quality service during times of emergencies is all the more imperative given the seriousness of the situation with usually hundreds if not thousands of lives on the line. Government organizations both Local and National follow a series of protocols in addressing the need to deliver government services to affected communities by natural or man-made

hazards that affect a certain community. The public could easily scrutinize and critic the performance of emergency first responders especially if there is even a slight delay in the delivery of much-needed services to the constituents (Mata et al. 2023). Lack of Knowledge, vaguely defined responsibilities, and many other challenges plague the Philippine Disaster Response System even after various experiences with past disasters and incorporating the Incident Command System, a problem that persists until now, and a problem that seriously questions the quality of service being provided by emergency first responders (Miranda, 2020).

Service quality involves a very broad feature in life. In government, this usually means giving the constituents in the community satisfaction in every aspect ranging from social services, health care, utilities, job opportunities, education, and many others. Attempts to improve quality service in government not only stop in the delivery of aforementioned services but also require the enhancement of frontline service providers through capacity building and other relevant training at various levels. It is therefore not enough just to deliver services to be considered as giving quality service but most importantly the excellence of the services rendered by front liners is very essential as well (Munarko, 2022).

In recent literature entitled “Public Satisfaction with the Government's Disaster Response during Typhoon Oddete (Rai)” it is established that the Philippine government should deliver public satisfaction to the constituents to gain public trust which will, in turn, enhance the government image. Emergency first responders at all levels are expected to have the utmost commitment and improve their effectiveness in delivering quality services to give satisfaction to the community they ought to serve. Given the vulnerability of the Philippines to various hazards, both natural and human-induced, the quality service of emergency first responders must be determined and gauged, especially in the most vulnerable communities, and most specifically the link between service commitment and effectiveness of disaster responders as predictors of quality service should also be measured (Mata 2023).

Service commitment is one of the essential factors to consider if we are to measure quality service, in a study conducted in 2020 entitled “Employee empowerment and service quality delivery: Moderating role of organizational commitment among nursing staff of Nigerian public hospitals”, the connection of service commitment to quality service is substantiated. It states that frontline service employees are somewhat responsible for the delivery of quality service to their clients. Poor service delivery by frontline service providers would mean that the organization will also suffer and lose the confidence of its clients. Thus, frontline service providers must have the utmost commitment to their work to be able to provide quality service. Employee commitment is defined as “the strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organization and their willingness to exert more effort to work collaboratively and become members of the organization to achieve the organizational goals and deliver high service quality” (Kamselem et al., 2020).

Likewise, the relationship between effectiveness and quality service is highlighted in research conducted by Thevaranjan and Ragel (2016), entitled “Employee Performance, Service Quality and

Satisfaction in Higher Education Institutions” in 2023, where they state that the effectiveness of employees is one of the factors contributing to quality service and that employees need to elevate their respective performance and effectiveness to deliver the said quality service. They further argue about the concept of Commitment to Service Quality stating that it came from two perspectives; organizational commitment and service quality. Organizational commitment is the employee's dedication to his or her field of work, where he dedicates his entire effort to the betterment of the organization or company he or she works for. He will strive to improve his skills, knowledge, and attitude to help elevate his organization to new heights. Quality service on the other hand reflects the excellence demonstrated by the employee towards the clients he ought to serve, it allows the employee to elevate the services offered to the clients and would oftentimes go beyond the call of duty (Thevaranjan and Ragel, 2016).

Service Commitment by public employees apart from organizing interventions based on talent management must ensure that such employees possess an Affective Commitment to their work to attain greater productivity. Finding the right people who will provide organizational success is critical. To achieve this, internal reforms involving the improvement of services are required. As long as the affective commitment is generated, employees will seek distinction in the service they provide to the community. Two main goals are therefore achieved: first a more active role in the quality of service provided by employees and, secondly, effective employee involvement with the organization. Both aspects are critical in modernizing public administration and its expected results of improvement and success in organizations (Arocas & Lara, 2020).

In a study conducted by Lapuente and De Walle in 2020 entitled “The Effects of New Public Management on the Quality of Public Service”, they incorporated management ideas from the private sector into the public services, as usual in the literature, New Public Management has transformed how administrations work. Accordingly, all over the world, public organizations must adopt two central new public management goals: efficiency and effectiveness. And, no matter the extent of specific reforms, performance in the public sector is nowadays universally seen as output and outcome, instead of the previous view of performance as input and process. Likewise, administrations all over the globe have taken measures in the three main themes: competition between public and private providers, incentives to public employees, and the disaggregation of public organizations. Many public officials have been, for decades, obsessed with the private sector for inspiration on how to improve the performance of public organizations and thus raise the service quality in government service (Lapuente & De Walle, 2020).

In Ghana, a study is conducted to measure the “Public Service Motivation of Government Employees” by exploring the area of “commitment to the public interest” and its challenges. The study demonstrates that commitment to the public interest is influenced by leadership actions and the organizational culture developed in the institution. Leadership plays a crucial role in molding the commitment of employees simply by being a good example and role model, or someone that employees look up to. Organizational culture is also important since all the norms and practices inculcated in an organization would most

likely be absorbed by new employees and thus become part of their being. All this will greatly contribute to the development of commitment to serve the public interest (Amegavi & Mensah, 2020).

This study is anchored on the service quality theory as advocated by Parasuraman et al., (1985) entitled “A conceptual model of service quality and its implications for future research”. The theory suggests that service quality is the perception resulting from the comparison of consumer expectations to that of actual services delivered. If the performance of the frontline service providers is excellent then the service quality is high. However, if the performance is subpar then the perceived service quality is also low (Parasuraman 1985).

Subsequent studies have drawn their theories to that of Parasuraman. In 1986 in his reformulation of attitude theory, R. Bagozzi also suggest that the influence of management commitment to service quality on service recovery performance is mediated by frontline employees' affective commitment to their organization and job satisfaction.

Another literature advocating the Service Quality theory emphasizes that quality further be explained as “The totality of features and characteristics of a product or services which can satisfy the consumers' needs” (Kandampully 1998). Lastly, Babakus in 2003 cited both Parasuraman and Bagozzi in his study entitled “Effects of Management Commitment to Service Quality on Employees Performance Outcomes”, basically he argues that both service commitment by management and frontline service providers could elevate the service quality being provided. The performance and effectiveness of employees will also benefit the organization if given ample training, empowerment, rewards, effective organizational commitment, job satisfaction, and service recovery performance (Babakus, 2003).

Service quality will increase if service commitment and effectiveness increase, and service quality decrease if the same variables are low. Emergency First Responders are frontline service providers of the local government units. They serve as the bulwark of the community against the adverse impacts of a hazard-causing disaster. The local government unit must provide the means for the responders to be highly effective in their job through training at various levels and other means. It is also partly their job to ensure that those selected as emergency first responders must have the utmost service commitment to the clients which are the people in the community. As mentioned, the constituents could easily scrutinize the work and performance of emergency first responders, especially in times of emergencies and it is up to every responder to answer the call to public service and the call to service quality.

2. METHODS

2.1 Research Participants.

The respondents of this study are Emergency First Responders from the municipality of Maco and Mabini, Province of Davao De Oro. Their main function during calamities is to conduct search, rescue, and retrieval operations and usually deployed directly to the impacted area to mitigate casualties.

The respondents were selected using a systematic random sampling from the overall population in the list provided by the concerned agencies. This sampling technique gives every emergency first responders equal chance in being selected to the study. The total number of respondents was determined using Slovin's formula set at 5% margin of error to get the sample size needed for the study.

Those agencies involved in disaster response operations, but the main function is not search, rescue, and retrieval operations was not included in the study. Responders in every concerned agency are given the free will to participate. They were not coerced into participating by implementing penalties or any de-merits for not joining. The rights of the respondents were thoroughly considered and adhered to even after this study is presented. The total population of emergency first responders of both municipalities combined were 435 in which 199 was chosen for the study.

2.2 Materials and Instruments.

Primary data was used to gather information about the study, which was consisted with three (3) parts: service commitment, effectiveness, and service quality. In collecting data for the study, the researcher used 3 adapted questionnaires as survey guide for the collected data for this analysis.

To measure the first independent variable service commitment, the researcher adapted and modified the survey by Meyer and Allen in 1997 with 15 items categorized in three different indicators; 1) Affective Commitment, 2) Continuance Commitment, and 3) Normative Commitment. All items used the 5-point Likert scale with response categories ranging from five (5) very high to one (1) very low.

In order to measure the second independent variable which is effectiveness, the research modified and adapted the questionnaire utilized in the study of Piluden and Belino in 2016 entitled "Effectiveness of ICS During the Onslaught of Super Typhoon Lawin in CAR". Again, the questionnaire may be answered using the Likert scale.

Lastly, in order to measure service quality or the dependent variable of the study, the survey in the study of Babakus in 2003 entitled "The Effects of Management Commitment to Service Quality on Employees' Affective and Performance Outcomes" was adapted, modified, and utilized. The same with the two independent variables the dependent variable also utilizes the Likert Scale for the questionnaire.

2.3 Design and Procedure:

The study used a quantitative non-experimental research design utilizing correlation with regression analysis. A correlational design was used by the researchers since the objective of the study sought to measure and describe the relationship between variables by determining the magnitude and direction of such a relationship, if any exists (Asuero et al., 2006; Gravetter & Wallnau, 2011).

This study employed the following statistical tools to interpret the data; First, Mean Score was used to determine the average responses of respondents in this study. The mean score was calculated by adding all individual respondent scores and dividing the number of total scores. Hence it can be referred to as an average. Second, Pearson R is the most common way of measuring linear correlation. It has a value

between -1 and 1 that measures the strength and direction of the relationship between two variables. When one variable changes, the other variable also changes.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section discusses the results gathered during the data gathering phase of the study. The study utilized textual, tabular, and graphical presentation of data after treating statistically.

Table 1.

Level of Service Commitment

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Affective Commitment	4.36	0.52	Very High
Continuance Commitment	3.95	0.73	High
Normative Commitment	4.06	0.67	High
Overall	4.12	0.53	High

Result reveals that respondents generally agree with the indicators for Service Commitment. With an average of 4.12, interpreted as Very High, was computed showing that respondents somewhat have a sense of commitment towards the job they ought to do. Among the Three (3) indicators, the respondents strongly agree on Affective Commitment with a mean score of 4.36 and SD of 0.52 while Continuance Commitment and Normative Commitment both have a High descriptive equivalent with a mean of 3.95 and 4.06 respectively. It can be observed in the descriptive table number 1 above that for the first specific objective of measuring the service commitment of emergency first responders, the highest indicator is affective commitment with a mean of 4.36 and a standard deviation of 0.52

Affective commitment is the tendency of individuals to stay in a certain organization because of emotional attachment. Both continuance commitment and normative commitment are in same category with a descriptive equivalent of High, meaning they are also willing to stay with their respective organization while also feeling obligated to stay in such job.

The result is reflective to a recent literature entitled “Affective commitment, normative commitment, and continuance commitment in reflecting organizational commitment” in which it was determined that employees with strong sense of belongingness to their respective organization tend to stay most especially if they felt strong attachment to said organization and are feeling obligated to perform their jobs truthfully. (Hadi & Tentama, 2020).

Table 2. *Level Of Effectiveness*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Knowledge	4.55	0.47	Very High
Responsibility	4.25	0.74	Very High
Challenges	4.21	0.71	Very High
Overall	4.34	0.52	Very High

The table above reveals that the overall level of Effectiveness of Emergency First Responders is very high. The average mean is at 4.34 with an SD of 0.52. Among the three (3) indicators; knowledge among respondents is the highest with a mean of 4.55 and SD of 0.47. With regards to responsibility, it is evident that respondents scored 4.25 and SD of 0.74, and lastly, Challenges scored 4.21 with an SD of 0.52. All three indicators have a descriptive equivalent score of Very High.

For the second objective which is to determine the effectiveness of emergency first responders by gauging their knowledge, responsibility, and challenges, it can be observed in table number 2 that generally, respondents scored very high in the descriptive equivalent, with a mean of 4.34 and an SD of 0.52. This can be explained because of the incessant capacity building of Local Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Offices of both municipalities which greatly benefitted the respondents in this category.

The training indicator for effectiveness scored the highest with a mean of 4.51 and SD of 0.63 which is actually consistent with the mandate of National Disaster Risk Reduction and Management Act or RA 10121 which allocates 70% of the local disaster risk reduction and management fund for disaster preparedness and disaster mitigation and only 30% for response and rehabilitation. Huge components of these aforementioned areas are capacity building interventions such as seminars, symposiums, trainings, and information education campaigns which enhance respondents' overall knowledge and technical knowhow.

In a study entitled "Effectiveness of Incident Command System during the onslaught of Typhoon Lawin in CAR" it was concluded that knowledge and being aware of one's responsibility affects the implementation of certain standard operating procedures such as the Incident Command System (Piluden and Belino, 2016). Another literature entitled "Employees performance: the effect of motivation and job satisfaction" also highlights the need to raise performance or employee's effectiveness by raising motivation and job satisfaction (Andreas, 2022).

Table 3. *Level of Service Quality*

Indicators	Mean	SD	Descriptive Equivalent
Training	4.51	0.63	Very High
Empowerment	3.99	0.88	High
Job Satisfaction	3.98	0.89	High
Overall	4.16	0.80	High

With regard to the independent variable Service quality, it can be seen that the overall mean is at 4.16 with an SD of 0.80 indicating a descriptive equivalent of High. The training indicator scored the highest with a mean of 4.51 and SD of 0.63 for a descriptive equivalent of Very High. The empowerment indicator receives a mean of 3.99 and SD of 0.88 indicating High in the descriptive indicator. Lastly, for Job Satisfaction, respondents mean scored 3.98 with an SD of 0.89. Both Job Satisfaction and Empowerment Indicator have a descriptive equivalent of High.

For the third specific objective, which is to determine the level of service quality based on the respondents training, empowerment and job satisfaction we can observe in table number 3 that training is the top indicator with a mean of 4.51, SD of 0.63 and a descriptive equivalent of very high. The table also shows that respondents also scored high in both empowerment and job satisfaction indicators with a descriptive equivalent of high. This indicates that although not as pronounced as their training, they are actually empowered to handle clients/victims on their own and are also somewhat satisfied in their respective jobs as emergency first responders.

Employees training and empowerment can have significant impact on job satisfaction and thus elevate service quality of employees. This can be observed in establishments wherein employees are given ample budget to be fully capacitated. Another emerging variable is teamwork of employees which can substantially raise the service quality of employees if utilized properly (Alvi et. Al, 2020).

Table 4.

Significance on the relationship between Service Commitment and Effectiveness of Emergency First Responders to Service Quality

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable	r-value	r ²	p-value	Decision
Service Commitment	Service Quality	0.145*	0.0210	0.041	Reject Ho
Effectiveness		0.100	0.0100	0.161	Do not reject the Ho

* $p < 0.05$

The inferential table above indicates that between the two (2) independent variables; Service Commitment and Effectiveness only the former has a significant relationship to the Dependent variable Service Quality.

Service Commitment has an R-value of 0.145, r^2 of 0.0210, and p-value of 0.041 hence the decision to reject the null hypothesis since the relationship is determined.

Effectiveness as indicator however, has an R-value of 0.100, an r^2 of 0.0100, and p-value of 0.161. Therefore, the decision is not to reject the null hypothesis since there is no significant relationship between effectiveness and service quality.

In a recent literature “Effects on service quality and customer satisfaction on loyalty of bank customers”, it was concluded that like the finding above, only one of the independent variables which is customer satisfaction has significant relationship with service quality while the second variable which is customer loyalty does not have significant relationship. It is reflective on what table 4 indicated wherein only service commitment have significant relationship with service quality while effectiveness did not have significant relationship (Supriyanto et al., 2021; Elsharkawy et al., 2007).

Table 5.

Regression Analysis on Service Commitment and Effectiveness of Emergency First Responders as Predictors to Service Quality

Independent Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
(Constant)	2.745	0.562		4.881	0.001	
Service Commitment	0.195	0.091	0.151*	2.149	0.033	Reject Ho
Effectiveness	0.141	0.091	0.109	1.547	0.123	DO not Reject Ho

Dependent variable: Service Quality

* $p < 0.05$

R-value = 0.181

F – Value = 3.318

$R^2 = 0.033$

p-value = 0.038

In can be observed in the table above that in between service commitment and effectiveness, the former again is the only indicator in the independent variable that has an influence to the dependent variable

which is service quality. The indicator effectiveness based on the result indicated above do not fully influenced service quality or the dependent variable.

With a constant Unstandardized coefficient of 2.745, service commitment gained a score of 0.195 while effectiveness is at 0.141. In standard error, we can see above that the constant is 0.562 while both service commitment and effectiveness scored 0.091. The t-value on the other hand with a constant of 4.881 has service commitment scored 2.149 and effectiveness scored 1.547. The standard coefficient for service commitment is 0.151 while it is 0.109 for effectiveness. Hence the table above indicates that for service commitment the null hypothesis should be rejected while for effectiveness the decision should be not to rejected null hypothesis same result as in table 4.

Lastly, the p-value for service commitment is at 0.033 which is less than 0.05 which means that the null hypothesis will be rejected while for effectiveness it is at 0.123 meaning the null hypothesis will not be rejected.

As discussed in a recent literature certain variable like customer loyalty may have significant relationship with service quality. Some variables however like customer satisfaction only have moderate relationship to that of service quality (Fida et. Al, 2020).

The result of both studies can substantiate the result in the table above wherein service commitment has significant relationship with service quality, and effectiveness did not have that significant relationship with the dependent variable of service quality.

Table 6.

Regression Analysis on the domains of Service Commitment that significantly predict Service Quality

Indicators	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient	t-value	p-value	Decision
(Constant)	3.181	0.416		7.640	0.001	
Affective Commitment	0.209	0.109	0.161	1.921	0.056	Do not Reject Ho
Continuance Commitment	0.081	0.082	0.087	0.996	0.321	Do not Reject Ho
Normative Commitment	-0.062	0.088	-0.062	-0.711	0.478	Do not Reject Ho

Dependent Variable: Service Quality

* $p < 0.05$

R-Value = 0.189

$R^2 = 0.036$

F-value = 2.406

p-value = 0.069

The table above shows the regression analysis of service commitment that significantly predicts service quality. As indicated, all three (3) indicators in service commitment, namely, Affective Commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment have an unstandardized coefficient of 0.209, 0.081, and -0.062 respectively against a constant of 3.181. The standard error, which have a constant of 0.416 are 0.109 for affective commitment, 0.082 for continuance commitment, and 0.088 for normative commitment. The standardized coefficient is 0.161 for affective commitment, 0.087 for continuance commitment, and -0.062 for normative commitment.

The table above also indicated that the t-value with a constant of 7.640 is at 1.921, 0.996, and -0.711 for affective, continuance and normative commitment, respectively. The p-value with a constant of 0.001 is 0.056 for affective commitment, 0.321 for continuance commitment, and 0.478 for normative commitment.

All three indicators have a decision to not reject the null hypothesis indicating that there is no significant relationship between the indicators of the independent variable of Service commitment towards the dependent variable service quality. The relationship could only be established if it is correlated with the second independent variable effectiveness, as we can observe in both table 4 and 5 above.

This means that the three indicators under service commitment, namely; affective commitment, continuance commitment, and normative commitment vis-à-vis service quality do not have direct relationship or no significant relationship if the other independent variable which is Effectiveness is not taken into the equation thus, the null hypothesis is therefore accepted.

The results reveal that while the respondents scored above average in all variables, both with the independent variables and the single dependent variable, it is obvious the relationship to each other is not that sufficient and pronounced. This does not mean however that it is not present but rather not that significant.

There are many potential variables that may become predictors to service quality. The result as indicated in the table above wherein domains in service commitment has no significant relationship with service quality was also reflected in recent study wherein it was determined that some indicators like product quality and price fairness may not have significant relationship with service quality while other indicators like brand loyalty and customer engagement have established relationship with service quality (Dhasan & Aryupong, 2019).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The descriptive findings conclude that with regards to service commitment and effectiveness the respondents scored between high to very high. This can be observed thru various incidents where both municipalities manage to handle the situation and eventually stabilized it albeit with difficulty. With regards to service quality being provided the score is high but still needs improvement thru various trainings and other interventions and there should be room for continuity and sustainability of skills upgrading.

The inferential findings however conclude that among the two independent variables, service commitment and effectiveness, it is only service commitment that have a significant relationship to that of service quality. Although effectiveness and service quality have an R-value of 0.100 indicating some relationship being established it is not that significant as the result have shown.

Generally, the result of the study can be concluded by looking at the bigger picture. It was established that there is connection between variables but only one have significant relationship with service quality. It can therefore be concluded that although service quality and effectiveness can be predictors to service quality it might not be the only variables that can truly predict service quality. Perhaps, security of tenure, compensation packages, and welfare benefits might also be predictors, and it shall be interesting to look at in future studies whether a relationship can be established to service quality.

Recommendations: Based on the result of the study, the following are recommended:

Both municipalities may consider giving responders better compensation and incentives if giving permanent positions are not yet feasible, since almost all local responders are job order employees. As shown the service commitment of responders especially their normative and continuance commitment only scored High while affective commitment scored very high. This means that Emergency first responders are emotionally attached to the organization they serve but may still look for job elsewhere since there is no security of tenure and very few permanent job openings. This is evident in the result of table 1 where continuance commitment received the lowest mean score among indicators of 3.95. This can be addressed thru giving competitive salary and giving of other enticing incentives to ensure their continued service in their respective offices.

The municipalities may also consider the empowerment of responders thru various leadership and management lectures aside from the usual search, rescue and retrieval trainings, this will ensure that their interaction with clients and their team mates be more professional. Annual recognition and awarding for top performing responders may also raise additional job satisfaction raising their overall effectiveness in times of emergencies.

In the findings above the following activities may be sustained or enhanced further by both municipalities; the re training of responders to maintain efficiency, the introduction of new doctrines for better response, and more integrated training packages to further enhance the service quality of emergency first responders in the future.

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