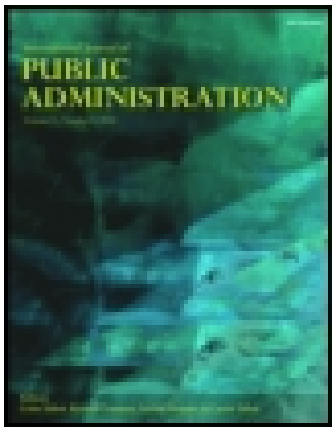

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Public Sector Reforms and Service Quality Issues From the Perspective of the Small Island Developing States in the Pacific: A Case of Fiji

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Public Sector Reforms and Service Quality Issues From the Perspective of the Small Island Developing States in the Pacific: A Case of Fiji

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The purpose of this article is to compare service quality of the Fiji Islands Maritime Safety Administration (FIMSA) and the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF). Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 200 Fiji maritime industry stakeholders. Research findings identified FIMSA and MSAF service delivery misalignment with customer expectations; customer' expectations exceeded perceived customer service experiences of FIMSA and MSAF; and, perceived customer service experiences of MSAF were noticeably better than those of FIMSA.

Keywords: public sector reforms, public services, customer expectations, service quality, state owned enterprises

INTRODUCTION

Whilst every organization faces a common challenge, namely meeting the increased expectations of their customers, their mode of operation in addressing these challenges and the results vary dramatically. The public service is no exception. The public service is challenged by unprecedented change in economic, technological and social conditions, and new demands for delivery of timely, quality services. The public service continues to grapple with being overhauled, in order to meet such current and future challenges.

However, some may see this as a wakeup call for the public service, traditionally known for its passive, policy and process centric, risk adverse approach, and "political and managerial systems based on a compliance culture that emphasizes controlling inputs and following rules" (OECD, 2008, p. 170). The public sector reform is being driven by customer expectations, fostered by private sector enhanced customer service delivery. In short, the public pays their taxes and understandably has an expectation of a level of service they are entitled to receive. The public sector must identify and implement strategies and tactics to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of its service delivery, provide value for money services, and reduce the cost of service delivery. Successful customer-centric models, derived from the private sector, are being adopted by the public sector, to address this situation, and to aid in improving service delivery to customers, and meeting their diverse requirements (Oosterom, 2007).

Customers have expectations of, and deserve good customer service experiences. For the public sector, this is a major challenge considering that expectations of public services are also influenced by public opinions of governments and politicians, and personal values or beliefs of the role of public services. Delivery of public services is influenced by financial and resource constraints, and mandates to improve customer service delivery against ever-increasing customer needs and expectations. The public sector, and in this case specifically the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF), is increasingly under pressure to demonstrate that its strategies and services are customer-centric, and that continuous performance improvement and service delivery are being delivered, so as to satisfy the actual needs of the public.

Considering that the current public service reform strategies in Fiji are focused on services being increasingly

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responsive to the needs and aspirations of their customers, to develop a strategy that is applicable to MSAF (and Fiji's maritime industry) requires a better understanding of customer expectations (what makes customers satisfied), how expectations are formed [previous experience, word of mouth communication, explicit service communication, implicit service communication, and personal needs (Accounts Commission for Scotland, 1999, p. 9)], gaps in service levels, and how these can be measured and achieved (Mori Social Research Institute, 2002). Whilst these statements may appear obvious, it is evident from the reforms undertaken by the entities leading up to the establishment of MSAF, that the research necessary to provide such understanding was not carried out. Hence, this research of MSAF is unique in that it acknowledges that the starting point in developing quality in services is analysis and measurement (Edvardsen, Tomasson & Ovretveit, 1994).

This research used a modified version of the SERVQUAL instrument, an instrument that has good reliability and validity (Kulasin & Fortuny-Santos, 2005, p. 139), to measure "the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions" (Zeithaml et al., 1990, p. 19), of FIMSA and MSAF; to rank the five customer service quality (expectations) dimensions by customer importance; and to aid MSAF with management of service quality (Buttle, 1996, p.8). The modified version of the SERVQUAL instrument comprised four sections – section A (demographic characteristics); section B (customer expectations); sections C and D (customer perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF, respectively); and adopted a 5-point Likert scale.

This article is organized as follows: "Literature Review" followed by the background; research problem, justification, and hypotheses of the study; research methodology; results and discussion; and finally conclusions and research implications.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Whilst researchers have developed different definitions and perspectives of service quality (Chang, 2008; Kumra, 2008; Ramsaran-Fowdar, 2007 and Zeithaml & Bitner, 2000), service quality is a concept that has aroused considerable interest and debate in the research literature because of the difficulties in both defining and measuring it, with no overall consensus emerging on either (Wisniewski, 2001). In this research, we have adopted the following definitions: according to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1990), service quality is "extrinsically perceived attribution based on the customer's experience about the service that the customer perceived through the service encounter." Zeithaml et al. (2006) stated that customer expectations are "beliefs about a service delivery that serve as a standard against which performance is done." Lovelock and Wirtz (2007, p. 420) defined customer perceptions of quality of service as the result of an evaluation process in which customers compare their perceptions of service delivery with the expected outcome. Oliver (1980) defined customer satisfaction as the discrepancy ("gap") between expectations and perceptions.

Service quality continues to have an immense impact on customer satisfaction and loyalty, and business profitability and performance (Chang & Chen, 1998; Cronin & Taylor, 1992; Guru, 2003; Hallowell, 1996; Leonard & Sasser, 1982; Newman, 2001; Silvestro & Cross, 2000 and Sureshchander, Rajendran & Anatharaman, 2002), hence, measurement of customer expectation and perception of service is becoming increasingly important (Accounts Commission for Scotland, 1999).

However, as a result of service quality's unique characteristics (intangibility, heterogeneity, inseparability, and perishability), it has been proven to be difficult to measure (Bateson, 1995). Service quality is linked to the concepts of perceptions and expectations (Lewis & Mitchell, 1990 and Parasuraman, Zeithaml & Berry, 1985, 1988). Customers' perceptions of service quality result from a comparison of their before-service expectations and their actual-service experience. Service will be considered to be excellent when customers' perceptions exceed expectations; it will be rated as adequate, if the service equals expectations; and the service will be classed as poor, if it does not meet customers' expectations (Vázquez, Bosque, Diaz & Ruiz, 2001).

Historically, many customer service surveys have focused on measuring customer perception of the service received, without allowing for customer expectations of service delivery. Without a balanced view of customer expectations and perceptions, feedback from customer surveys can be highly misleading from a strategic and operational perspective (Accounts Commission for Scotland, 1999).

While there have been efforts to study service quality, there has been no general agreement on the measurement of the concept. The majority of the work to date has attempted to use the SERVQUAL (Parasuraman et al., 1985; 1988) methodology in an effort to measure service quality (Brooks, Lings, & Botschen, 1999; Chaston, 1994; Edvardsson, Larsson & Setterlind, 1997; Lings & Brooks, 1998; Sahney, Banwet & Karunes, 2004).

Parasuraman et al. (1985) developed SERVQUAL, a technology for measuring and managing service quality (Buttle, 1996). The SERVQUAL "Gap Analysis Model" scale determines service quality by calculating the difference between expectations and perceptions, and evaluating both in relation to the 22 items that represent 5 service quality dimensions known as "tangibles", "reliability", "responsiveness", "assurance", and "empathy" (Krishna Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010, p. 232).

Buttle (1996) stated that the SERVQUAL methodology has been widely adopted to measure and manage service quality in diverse service industries, such as food and agribusiness (Wilson et al., 2011), tertiary education (Shekarchizadeh, Rasli & Hon-Tat, 2011), and e-learning

(Udo, Bagchi & Kirs, 2011). A limited number of studies have been undertaken using the SERVQUAL methodology to measure the quality of public services and public service customer satisfaction; however, the results have been encouraging (Donnelly, Kerr, Rimmer & Shiu, 2006; Orgeron & Goodman, 2011; Sargeant & Kaehler, 1998; Wisniewski & Donnelly, 1996 and Wisniewski, 2001a). In terms of public service safety organizations, the assessment of the quality of public services and public service customer satisfaction, utilizing the SERVQUAL methodology, is limited to the research undertaken by Donnelly et al. (2006) of one organization – Strathclyde Police Department in Scotland.

BACKGROUND

Public Sector Reform in Developing Countries, The South Pacific and Fiji

In developing countries, public sector reforms are common (Andrews, 2013), there is a heavy reliance on state owned enterprises (SOE's), and SOE's place a heavy financial burden on governments in developing countries (Karan, 2010). In the 1970s and 1980s, donors questioned the developing country SOE model, and offered funding contingent on reduction in the public sector. Since the 1990s, there has been a turnaround, and public sector development has been promoted and emerged (Schacter, 2000). South Pacific governments are also undergoing structural reform, and managing demand on their limited resources (Reddy, 1997) however, this has been a slow process (The Asian Development outlook, 2004). Fiji, like other Pacific postcolonial societies, relied heavily on its public sector for socioeconomic development and nation building (Sharma & Lawrence, 2009). The Department of Public Enterprises was established in Fiji under the Public Enterprise Act (1996). This act provided the basis for a dramatically different governance structure of SOE's, whereby the government remained the owner, and a government appointed board was tasked to provide strategic direction and commercial performance (Sharma & Lawrence, 2009).

Reform Leading to the Maritime Safety Authority of Fiji (MSAF)

In 1998, the Marine Department was declared a "Reorganization Entity" under the Public Enterprise Act 1996, resulting in the formation of the Shipping Corporation Fiji Limited (SCFL). SCFL was later wound up in 1999. The Marine Fleet was renamed Government Shipping Services (GSS), and the Marine Department became the Fiji Islands Maritime Safety Administration (FIMSA). In spite of these name changes, limited structural and organizational reform of GSS and FIMSA resulted, and no noticeable improvement in service delivery. In 2005, the reorganization of Fiji Ports (Ports Terminal Ltd. and Maritime Ports Authority of Fiji) resulted in the establishment of the Fiji Ports Corporation Limited (FPCL) and transfer of all regulatory functions to FIMSA. FIMSA addressed only a small portion of Fiji government's international and national obligations and in 2006, FIMSA was declared a "Reorganization Entity", to enable the new entity to adopt a more customer focused and business oriented structure and philosophy (Secretariat of the Pacific Community, 2008). On 9th November 2011, with a retrospective commencement date of 1st January 2011, heralded in the commencement of the MSAF and the cessation of FIMSA. MSAF is not merely a structural reorganization of the old government department (FIMSA). MSAF is a newly established SOE, with a much wider set of responsibilities, and a customer-centric mandate.

RESEARCH PROBLEM, JUSTIFICATION, AND HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY

The main research problem is that since 1998 several efforts toward the public service reform of the precursor SOE's leading up to MSAF have failed to adequately achieve continuous performance improvement and service delivery, so as to satisfy the actual needs of the public. Research necessary to provide an understanding of customer expectations, gaps in and measurement of service levels, and the achievement of adequate service levels, was not previously carried out. This sets the stimulus for this research to examine customers' expectations of the kind of company with which they would be pleased to do business with; these customers' experiences in dealing with the FIMSA, and the MSAF; and, to compare customers' expectations with FIMSA and MSAF customer service experiences. This research acknowledges that the starting point in developing quality in services is analysis and measurement (Edvardsen et al., 1994).

Six specific hypotheses were identified in this research. The null hypothesis is simply a default position that there is no relationship or no difference existing between the variables.

$$H_0:\ \rho = 0 \text{ (No linear relationship exits)}$$

$$H_1:\ \rho \neq 0 \text{ (linear relationship exists)}$$

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant correlation between the customer service quality (expectations) dimensions.
Hypothesis 2: There is no significant correlation between the customer perceptions of FIMSA dimensions.
Hypothesis 3: There is no significant correlation between the customer perceptions of MSAF dimensions.
Hypothesis 4: There is no significant correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of FIMSA.

Hypothesis 5: There is no significant correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of MSAF.

Hypothesis 6: There is no significant correlation between the customer perceptions of FIMSA, and customer perceptions of MSAF.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sample

The data reported in this study were collected through a structured survey questionnaire. The survey instrument was personally administered to 200 Fiji maritime industry stakeholders who were randomly selected from the MSAF stakeholder database. MSAF confirmed that there was approximately 758 Fiji maritime industry stakeholders ("customers") catalogued in their database. The questionnaire was pretested on a sample size of 10 respondents, based in Suva Fiji, after which minor changes were made.

Data were collected from 8 locations across Fiji (Suva, Labasa, Savusavu, Taveuni, Levuka, Rakiraki, Nadi/Denarau, and Kadavu) during the months of December 2012, January 2013, and February 2013, by a University of the South Pacific appointed research assistant. The main reason for sampling these locations was because maritime stakeholders were widely dispersed across Fiji, these were known locations of customers, and to avoid sample bias.

Group meetings of customers were prearranged for each location, wherein stakeholders were asked to individually complete the questionnaire, in English, the national language of Fiji. One-on-one meetings were organized for Fiji maritime stakeholders unable to attend group meetings. The self-completion questionnaire approach was also used and this proved to be quicker and cheaper to administer, as many respondents were able to complete the questionnaire simultaneously (Bryman & Bell, 2007). The research assistant was present to administer the questionnaire, which took approximately 20 minutes to complete, and allowed for greater response rate – 200 questionnaires, and all parts of the questionnaire, were completed, by the respondents.

Survey Instrument

We utilized a modified version of the SERVQUAL survey instrument developed by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, & Berry, to measure service quality – "the extent of discrepancy between customers' expectations or desires and their perceptions" (Zeithaml et al., 1990, p. 19), of FIMSA and MSAF. The SERVQUAL instrument utilizes 2 sets of 22 statements to measure performance (expected and perceived services) across 5 dimensions (tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy), using a 7-point Likert scale (Gabbie & O'neill, 1996). The modified version of the SERVQUAL instrument was in four parts. Section A comprised demographic characteristics. Section B was composed of questions for determining the extent of customer expectations. Sections C and D were composed of questions for determining the extent of customer perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF, respectively. The modified version of the SERVQUAL instrument adopted a 5-point Likert scale. Considering the number of responses required per questionnaire (63), and the time taken to complete this questionnaire and the other questionnaire(s) in one sitting, it was concluded to be easier for the respondent to complete a 5-point Likert scale instrument.

Justification for using the SERVQUAL instrument was based on confirmation that it can be repeatedly and regularly administered (Brysland & Curry, 2001), after extensive modification and field-testing that it is a statistically valid tool (Stylianou, 2006), its reliability and validity (Dale, 2003), and researchers support its use (Akan, 1995; Avkiran, 1994; Babakus & Mangold, 1992; Carman, 1990; Finn & Lamb, 1991; Johns & Tyas, 1996; Johnson & Sirikit, 2002 and Saleh & Ryan, 1991). Khan (2003) stated that the SERVQUAL instrument was a reliable predictor of the overall service quality.

SURVEY RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The paper-based survey responses were statistically analyzed.

Demographic characteristics of the respondents in this study included 165 males and only 35 females. Indigenous Fijians were 145, Fijians of Indian origin were 29, and 26 others. The sample mostly consisted of ages from 31–40 years (66), 21–30 years (47), and 41–50 years (45); certificate (106) qualified respondents; and, in terms of maritime qualifications, no qualification (50) followed by boat master license (46). In the industry type of business, a greater proportion of respondents was from tourism (73), fishing (46), and cargo (45). For length of vessel registration, most were from one to five years (82), never registered (43), and six to ten years (23). The gross income of respondents mostly was in the range of less than 10,000 Fijian dollars (77), followed by 11,000 to 20,000 (56), and 21,000 to 30,000 (31).

Table 1 above presents the results of the Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal efficiency ("Cronbach's alpha values") for this modified SERVQUAL instrument. Cronbach's alpha values (reliability coefficient scores) were used to test the reliability of sections B, C, and D of the modified SERVQUAL instrument. Cronbach's alpha value for sections B, C, and D combined was 0.978, and was considered to be reliable. Individually, sections B, C, and D were also considered to be reliable, with alpha values of 0.931, 0.974, and 0.908, respectively. Cronbach's alpha values by dimension ranged between 0.954 and 0.883 and were considered to be reliable. Cronbach's alpha values if the item was deleted from the dimension ranged between

TABLE 1
Cronbach's Alpha Values for this Modified SERVQUAL Instrument

		Service Quality Dimensions (Section B)		*FIMSA – Service Quality (Section C)*		*MSAF – Service Quality (Section 4)*	
Dimension	*Items*	*Cronbach's Alpha for dimensions*	*Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted*	*Cronbach's Alpha for dimensions*	*Cronbach's Alpha if item deleted*	*Cronbach's Alpha for dimensions*	*Cronbach's Alpha Values if item deleted*
Tangibles (4)	1	0.912	0.882	0.916	0.885	0.883	0.821
	2		0.881		0.871		0.806
	3		0.890		0.905		0.901
	4		0.892		0.901		0.864
Reliability (5)	5	0.934	0.925	0.948	0.934	0.941	0.927
	6		0.918		0.934		0.927
	7		0.913		0.936		0.918
	8		0.917		0.927		0.918
	9		0.924		0.946		0.946
Responsiveness (4)	10	0.918	0.910	0.950	0.944	0.930	0.922
	11		0.883		0.926		0.902
	12		0.879		0.924		0.896
	13		0.900		0.943		0.913
Assurance (4)	14	0.923	0.911	0.946	0.930	0.947	0.929
	15		0.908		0.925		0.925
	16		0.884		0.925		0.933
	17		0.894		0.940		0.934
Empathy (5)	18	0.917	0.891	0.954	0.951	0.951	0.940
	19		0.890		0.942		0.943
	20		0.906		0.938		0.938
	21		0.909		0.944		0.938
	22		0.897		0.943		0.938

0.951 and 0.806 and were considered to be reliable. Based on the Cronbach's alpha values calculated for this modified SERVQUAL instrument, the instrument was considered to be reliable, with a high degree of internal consistency, thereby adding validity and accuracy to the interpretation of this research's data.

Customer expectations, and customer perceptions of two organizations (FIMSA and MSAF), were measured using the modified version of the SERVQUAL instrument. We calculated the mean scores for customer expectations (including the importance/weighting of each of the five dimensions), and for customer perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF. Gap scores were determined between customer expectations and customer perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF. The higher mean scores indicated a higher level of customer expectation or perception or gap. We then used the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient to determine the strength of any association between the five dimensions, and customer expectations and perceptions (of FIMSA and MSAF).

Dimensions' Importance to Fiji Maritime Stakeholders

Table 2 (below) presents the results of the customer service quality (expectation), and customer importance (weighting) for the modified SERVQUAL instrument dimensions and Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (1991) customer importance (weighting).

The results reveal that the order of customer importance (weighting) of dimensions by the customer respondents did

TABLE 2
Dimension's Importance to Customers

Dimensions	*Service Quality (Expectation) Mean Scores*	*Customer Importance (Weighting)*	*Parasuraman et al. (1991) Customer Importance (Weighting)*
Tangibles	4.101	5	5
Reliability	4.166	4	1
Responsiveness	4.248	1	2
Assurance	4.233	2	3
Empathy	4.217	3	4
Average	4.193		

not fully comply with the research findings of Parasuraman et al. (1991). Responsiveness had the highest expectation mean score (4.248) and ranked first (1) in customer importance, followed by the assurance mean score (4.233) and ranked second (2). On the contrary, the customers considered reliability less significant (4.166) and ranked fourth (4). Tangibles scored the lowest (4.101), and in line with the findings of Parasuraman et al. (1991). The findings of Parasuraman et al. (1991) are not necessarily a norm, as customer expectations may vary, dependent on many factors such a demographics, type of service, type of industry, and the like (Stylianou, 2006). The service quality (expectation) mean scores were tightly clustered around the average of those scores (4.193), and ranged above 4.000 (4.248 to 4.101), indicating that customers had medium-high expectations.

From Table 3 (below), we see that FIMSA's and MSAF's prioritization of importance, by dimension, was misaligned with the customer service quality (expectations) and associated customer importance, by dimension. It would appear that both FIMSA and MSAF were either unaware of, or ambivalent toward, the customer's expectations.

Table 4 shows that the MSAF compared to FIMSA average customer perception gap score difference was 0.282 (22%), and customer's mean perceptions scores for MSAF were on average 10% higher when compared to FIMSA. It would appear that there was a marked improvement in customer's perception of MSAF, compared to FIMSA, however,

TABLE 3
Customer Service Quality (Expectations) and Customer Perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF, by Dimension

Dimension	*Service Quality (Expectation) Scores*	*Customer Importance*	*FIMSA Perception Scores*	*FIMSA Importance*	*MSAF Perception Scores*	*MSAF Importance*	*Parasuraman et al. (1991) Customer Importance (Weighting)*
Tangibles	4.101	5	2.980	2	3.246	1	5
Reliability	4.166	4	2.733	5	3.162	5	1
Responsiveness	4.248	1	2.943	4	3.183	3	2
Assurance	4.233	2	2.999	1	3.229	2	3
Empathy	4.217	3	2.949	3	3.169	4	4

TABLE 4
MSAF versus FIMSA Average Customer Perception Gap Scores

Dimension (No. of Items)	*Statements*	*Expectation Scores*	*FIMSA Perception Scores*	*FIMSA Gap Score*	*MSAF Perception Scores*	*MSAF Gap Scores*	*MSAF/FIMSA Gap Scores Difference*	*MSAF/FIMSA Gap Scores % Difference*	*MSAF/FIMSA Perception Scores % Difference*
Tangibles (4)	1	4.145	2.935	−1.210	3.225	−0.920	0.290	24	10
	2	4.010	3.015	−0.995	3.235	−0.775	0.220	22	7
	3	4.145	3.135	−1.010	3.445	−0.700	0.310	31	10
	4	4.105	2.835	−1.270	3.080	−1.025	0.245	19	9
Reliability (5)	5	4.110	2.660	−1.450	3.135	−0.975	0.475	33	18
	6	4.200	2.860	−1.340	3.300	−0.900	0.440	33	15
	7	4.235	2.720	−1.515	3.140	−1.095	0.420	28	15
	8	4.110	2.685	−1.425	3.135	−0.975	0.450	32	17
	9	4.175	2.740	−1.435	3.100	−1.075	0.360	25	13
Responsiveness (4)	10	4.265	2.850	−1.415	3.080	−1.185	0.230	16	8
	11	4.210	2.950	−1.260	3.145	−1.065	0.195	15	7
	12	4.310	3.025	−1.285	3.295	−1.015	0.270	21	9
	13	4.205	2.945	−1.260	3.210	−0.995	0.265	21	9
Assurance (4)	14	4.230	2.990	−1.240	3.230	−1.000	0.240	19	8
	15	4.295	2.985	−1.310	3.240	−1.055	0.255	19	9
	16	4.225	3.000	−1.225	3.205	−1.020	0.205	17	7
	17	4.180	3.020	−1.160	3.240	−0.940	0.220	19	7
Empathy (5)	18	4.245	3.000	−1.245	3.185	−1.060	0.185	15	6
	19	4.180	2.940	−1.240	3.110	−1.070	0.170	14	6
	20	4.105	2.915	−1.190	3.160	−0.945	0.245	21	8
	21	4.255	2.925	−1.330	3.230	−1.025	0.305	23	10
	22	4.300	2.965	−1.335	3.160	−1.140	0.195	15	7
Average		4.193	2.913	−1.279	3.195	−0.998	0.282	22	10

MSAF's customer service levels were still below customer expectations.

Descriptive Statistics for Five Dimensions – FIMSA and MSAF

Tables 5 (below) presents the descriptive statistics, including measures of central tendency (mean, median, and mode), measures of variability (standard deviation, standard error of skewness, and kurtosis), and measures of the shape of the distribution (skewness and kurtosis) for the five dimensions of customer perception relating to FIMSA and MSAF.

The results reveal that the customers' perceptions (according to the five dimensions) of service quality offered by both FIMSA and MSAF did not meet their customers' expectations, as all mean gap scores for the dimensions were negative. Dimension median variance for MSAF was more consistent and smaller than for FIMSA, while the modal scores for all dimensions (FIMSA and MSAF) were zero. The standard deviation scores for FIMSA indicated that the spread of gaps away from the mean was more consistent and larger than for MSAF and suggested a wider range of opinions with regard FIMSA on service quality among the respondents surveyed. The skewness for all FIMSA dimensions was negatively skewed and indicated a left skewed, asymmetrical distribution; while for MSAF the skewness distribution for empathy was negatively skewed and indicated a left skewed, asymmetrical distribution, and for the other four dimensions, skewness distribution was positively skewed and indicated a right skewed asymmetrical distribution. The kurtosis values for all dimensions for FIMSA indicated that the distribution was more peaked than normal, and considered to be very good for most psychometric uses. The kurtosis values for all dimensions for MSAF indicate that the distribution was flatter than normal.

Table 6 (below) shows that the overall service quality (expectations) of respondents, with a mean score (4.193) and median (4.364), was medium-high.

The overall FIMSA and MSAF (perceptions) negative average gap scores indicated medium-low (–1.279) and medium (–0.998) perceptions, respectively. The median results reaffirm the medium-low (–1.091) and medium (–0.955) perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF. The modal scores for respondent's expectations and perceptions (FIMSA and MSAF) were zero. The standard deviation (.861) for the respondents' expectation indicated that the spread of average scores away from the mean was smaller than for both FIMSA (1.328) and MSAF (1.263), and

TABLE 5
Descriptive Statistics for FIMSA and MSAF

	Tangibles (Average Gap Scores)		*Reliability (Average Gap Scores)*		*Responsiveness (Average Gap Scores)*		*Assurance (Average Gap Scores)*		*Empathy (Average Gap Scores)*	
	FIMSA	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*
Mean Gap Scores	−1.121	−.855	−1.433	−1.004	−1.305	−1.065	−1.234	−1.004	−1.268	−1.048
Median	−1.000	−0.750	−1.400	−1.000	−1.125	−1.000	−1.000	−1.000	−1.200	−1.000
Mode	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Standard Deviation	1.403	1.303	1.421	1.446	1.491	1.433	1.458	1.402	1.415	1.313
Skewness	−0.218	0.008	−0.042	0.204	−0.096	0.229	−0.155	0.087	−0.222	−0.056
Standard Error of Skewness	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172	0.172
Kurtosis	−0.493	0.073	−0.690	0.242	−0.812	0.284	−0.727	0.017	−0.669	0.062
Standard Error of Kurtosis	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342	0.342

TABLE 6
Overall Perceived Service Quality

	Overall Service Quality (Expectations) Average Scores	*Overall FIMSA (Perceptions) Average Gap Scores*	*Overall MSAF (Perceptions) Average Gap Scores*
Mean Gap Scores	4.193	−1.279	−0.998
Median	4.364	−1.091	−0.955
Mode	0.000	0.000	0.000
Standard Deviation	0.861	1.328	1.263
Skewness	−1.363	−0.318	0.042
Standard Error of Skewness	0.172	0.172	0.172
Kurtosis	1.368	−0.884	0.284
Standard Error of Kurtosis	0.342	0.342	0.342
Minimum	1.000	1.000	1.000
Maximum	5.000	5.000	5.000

suggested a narrower range of opinions of expectations of service quality among the respondents surveyed. The respondents' expectation distribution negatively skewed and indicated a left skewed distribution, was highly skewed (–1.363), and far from symmetrical. The skewness for FIMSA was less negatively skewed when compared to respondents' expectations, and indicated a left skewed, asymmetrical distribution; while for MSAF the skewness distribution was positively skewed and indicated a right skewed asymmetrical distribution. The respondent's expectation kurtosis value (1.368) indicated that the distribution was flatter than normal. The FIMSA result (–0.884) indicated a result more peaked than a Gaussian distribution, and the MSAF results (0.284) indicated a result more peaked than a Gaussian distribution however less peaked than the FIMSA result.

Correlation Between Customer Service Quality (Expectations) and Perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF

In order to determine whether correlations existed between the five dimensions (customer service quality [expectations] dimensions, customer perceptions of FIMSA, and customer perceptions of MSAF); between customer service quality (expectations), customer perceptions of FIMSA, and customer perceptions of MSAF; to determine the strength of the correlations; and, to test this research's hypotheses; and there was no attempt to manipulate the variables (random variables); the Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was utilized in this research, as it is a commonly used method for determining a correlation coefficient between variables that are linearly related.

Analyzing data from Table 7 (above) indicates that the correlations between the customer service quality (expectation) dimensions were larger than 0.50, represented strong or large positive correlations at the 0.01 level, and were statistically significant. The *p*-values for the correlations (0.000) were ≤0.05, which suggests the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H1, it can be said that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the customer service quality (expectation) dimensions.

The results relating to this hypothesis are further justified by Gržinić (2007, p. 92) that "there is a high degree of intercorrelation between RATER dimensions. RATER is a mnemonic acronym where R = reliability, A = assurance, T = tangibles, E = empathy and R = responsiveness."

According to Aspfors (2010), the concept of perceived quality can be explained by taking into consideration the quality dimensions. On each occasion, an interaction between a customer and a seller occurs, and the outcome of the interaction will affect the customer's perceptions (Aspfors, 2010).

Analyzing data from Table 8 (above) indicate that the correlations between the customer perceptions of FIMSA dimensions were larger than 0.50, represented a strong or large positive correlation at the 0.01 level, and were statistically significant. The *p*-values for the correlations (0.000) were ≤0.05, which suggests that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H2, it can be said that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the customer perceptions of FIMSA dimensions.

Analyzing data from Table 8 indicates that the correlations between the customer perceptions of MSAF dimensions were larger than 0.50, represented a strong or large positive correlation at the 0.01 level, and were statistically significant. The *p*-values for the correlations

TABLE 7
Correlation Between Customer Service Quality (Expectations) Dimensions

Dimensions		*Tangibles*	*Reliability*	*Responsiveness*	*Assurance*	*Empathy*
Tangibles	Pearson Correlation	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)					
	N					
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	0.799**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*				
	N	200				
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.745**	0.879**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*			
	N	200	200			
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	0.768**	0.859**	0.880**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*		
	N	200	200	200		
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	0.716**	0.749**	0.737**	0.843**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	
	N	200	200	200	200	

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 8
Correlation Between Customer Perceptions of FIMSA and MSAF Dimensions

		Tangibles		*Reliability*		*Responsiveness*		*Assurance*		*Empathy*	
Dimensions		*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*	*FIMSA*	*MSAF*
Tangibles	Pearson Correlation	1	1								
	Sig. (2-tailed)										
	N										
Reliability	Pearson Correlation	0.779**	0.759**	1	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*								
	N	200	200								
Responsiveness	Pearson Correlation	0.802**	0.726**	0.882**	0.887**	1	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*						
	N	200	200	200	200						
Assurance	Pearson Correlation	0.797**	0.770**	0.844**	0.832**	0.911**	0.877**	1	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*				
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200				
Empathy	Pearson Correlation	0.783**	0.733**	0.833**	0.775**	0.917**	0.829**	0.916**	0.906**	1	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*	0.000*		
	N	200	200	200	200	200	200	200	200		

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

TABLE 9
Correlation Between Customer Service Quality (Expectations), Customer Perceptions of FIMSA, and Customer Perceptions of MSAF

		FIMSA (Perceptions)	*MSAF (Perceptions)*	*Service Quality (Expectations)*
FIMSA (Perceptions)	Pearson Correlation	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)			
	N			
MSAF (Perceptions)	Pearson Correlation	0.751**	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000*		
	N	200		
Service Quality (Expectations)	Pearson Correlation	0.164**	0.126**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.020*	0.075	
	N	200	200	

Notes: **Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
*Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

(0.000) were ≤0.05, which suggests that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H3, it can be said that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the customer perceptions of MSAF dimensions.

Analyzing data from Table 9 indicates that the correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of FIMSA was a weak or small positive correlation (0.164) at the 0.01 level, and was statistically significant. The *p*-value for the correlation (0.020) was ≤0.05, which suggests that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H4, it can be said that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of FIMSA.

The results relating to this hypothesis are further justified by the findings of Zeithaml et al., (2009) that perceptions are always considered in relation to expectations; and, the service quality gaps analysis model (Curry, 1999; Luk & Layton, 2002; Parasuraman et al., 1985) that identified seven gaps relating to perceptions of service quality, and specifically gap 5 (between customer expectations and their perceptions of the service delivered) (Shahin, 2006).

Similarly, data indicate that the correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of MSAF was a weak or small positive significant correlation (0.164) at the 0.01 level, but was not statistically significant as the *p*-value (.075) was ≥0.05, which suggests that we failed to reject the null hypothesis (H0) and the correlation was not statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H5, it can be said that there was not a statistically significant correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of MSAF.

The results relating to this hypothesis are further justified by the findings of Lovelock and Wright (2002,

pp. 265–266) that "many researchers believe that customers' perceptions about quality are based on long-term, cognitive evaluations of an organisation's service delivery." It can be deduced that MSAF had only been in existence for approximately 15 months when this research was undertaken, was undergoing wide-range reform, and this would have considerably affected customer perceptions and expectations. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate this result.

The results also indicate that the correlation between customer perceptions of FIMSA and customer perceptions of MSAF was a strong or large positive significant correlation (0.751) at the 0.01 level. The *p*-value for the correlation (0.000) was ≤ 0.05, which suggests that the null hypothesis (H0) is rejected, and the correlation was statistically significant at the 0.05 level. Based on the findings of H6, it can be said that there was a statistically significant positive correlation between the customer perceptions of FIMSA, and customer perceptions of MSAF.

The results relating to this hypothesis are further justified by the findings of Edvardsson (2005) that customer experiences from service encounters create customer's responses in customer's memories, stay with customers for a long time, and have a strong impact on customers' perceptions of service quality.

CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

Considering Cronbach's alpha coefficient for internal consistency values, calculated for the modified SERVQUAL instrument utilized in this research, to be all >0.800, the instrument was considered to be reliable, with a high degree of internal consistency, thereby adding validity and accuracy to the interpretation of this research's data. The research problem centered on the fact that since 1998 several efforts toward the public service reform of the precursor SOE's leading up to MSAF had failed to adequately achieve continuous performance improvement and service delivery, so as to satisfy the actual needs of the public. In this research, we set out to investigate FIMSA and MSAF customers' expectations; these customers' experiences in dealing with FIMSA, and MSAF; and, to compare customers' expectations of FIMSA and MSAF customer service experiences. We found that the order of customer importance of dimensions by the customer respondents did not fully comply with the research findings of Parasuraman et al. (1991); that FIMSA's and MSAF's prioritization of importance, by dimension, was misaligned with the customer service quality (expectations) and associated customer importance, and it appeared that both FIMSA and MSAF were either unaware of, or ambivalent toward, the customer's expectations. It can also be said that there was a marked improvement in customer's perception of MSAF compared to FIMSA customer service levels; however, MSAF's customer service level was still well below customer expectations. In line with previous research findings, a positive correlation existed between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of FIMSA, which was significant. However, the positive correlation between the customer expectations and customer perceptions of MSAF was not significant. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate this result. As expected, a positive correlation existed between the customer perceptions of FIMSA and customer perceptions of MSAF, considering MSAF was a reformation of FIMSA. This article forms an integral part of a larger research – change management challenges in the reform of the MSAF. A major outcome of this research is its contribution towards a policy article that can be a vital resource for government policy planners, and MSAF board and management, for the ongoing reform of MSAF and the maritime industry of Fiji. Considering the ongoing reform of MSAF, and that it is preferred to utilize the SERVQUAL instrument on a recurrent basis, future research should be undertaken to periodically analyze and measure MSAF customer service quality trends.

Future research should also examine the demographic characteristics of MSAF customers, when evaluating service quality in the customer population; and, in order to enhance the understanding of the concepts of service quality and customer satisfaction and how they are measured, because they are very important for service providers such as MSAF, in terms of overall performance of the organization, profitability, and growth.

In conclusion, this study makes its theoretical contribution primarily to the literature on the assessment of the quality of public services and public service customer satisfaction, utilizing the SERVQUAL methodology, and to the scarce theoretical strands relating to public service safety organizations.

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