

Quality of Service and Client Satisfaction of the Department of Foreign Affairs - Butuan, Caraga Region

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ABSTRACT

The quality of service determines client satisfaction. The study aimed to determine the quality of service and client satisfaction of the Department of Foreign Affairs- Butuan. There were 221 or more than 70% respondents used in the study. There were those who personally claimed their passport in the releasing section within the five-working-day office transaction. In this study, the descriptive research was used. The researcher then employed the probability sampling design. The study revealed that there were more females than males who availed of the services of the Department of Foreign Affairs- Butuan with the intention to travel to a foreign land to work as contract workers. The study also disclosed the extent of service as to the issuance of Passport was rated Very Satisfactory by the respondents while some of them had an inadequate knowledge and awareness of the services on the Assistance to Nationals. The quality of service was all rated Very Satisfactory so as the level of client satisfaction in terms of frontline behavior, accessibility and efficiency in the delivery of service. There was a highly significant relationship between the services on issuance of passport

and the level of satisfaction of client. An increase in the services on issuance of passport by the Department of Foreign Affairs-Butuan resulted to the increase in the level of client satisfaction.

Keywords— Management, service quality, client satisfaction, Department of Foreign Affairs, descriptive design, Caraga, Philippines

INTRODUCTION

In Caraga region, the Regional Consular Office (RCO) of the Department of Foreign Affairs was first conceived in June 1993 when the creation of the same was still being proposed through House Bill No. 3638. The former representative and governor of Surigao del Norte Robert Ace S. Barbers authored House Bill No. 677 in 1999, and the Sangguniang Panlalawigan of Surigao del Norte introduced Resolution No. 010 also in 1999, urging the Department to establish a consular office in Surigao City.

During the deliberation of the DFA budget hearing at the House of Representatives in 2007, Congressman Jose S. Aquino II of Butuan City requested the House Appropriations Committee for the allocation of the amount of Eleven Million Pesos (Php 11,000,000.00) in the 2008 General Appropriations Act, as budget for the establishment of the RCO in Butuan City (Regional Consular Office – Butuan 2008 Annual Report).

Department of Foreign Affairs- Caraga was formally inaugurated on 21 May 2008 by the president herself Her Excellency Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, which was attended by DFA Undersecretary Esteban Conejos, as the representative of Secretary Alberto G. Romulo and other high government officials¹.

The functions and services of the Regional Consular Office of the Department of Foreign Affairs- Butuan are the issuance of Philippine Passports and the Assistance to Nationals. Accordingly, a Philippine passport is a travel document and is a Primary National ID issued to citizens of the Philippines. It is issued by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Philippine diplomatic missions abroad. Besides facilitating international travel and conferring diplomatic assistance to Filipinos overseas, a Philippine passport is considered a primary form of identification in the Philippines, particularly because there is no national

1 House Speaker Prospero Nograles, Representative Jose S. Aquino II, former Governor of Agusan del Norte Edelmiro Amante, Governor Maria Valentina G. Plaza of Agusan del Sur and Mayor Democrito D. Plaza II.

identity card system in the country². Another function of the consular office is the Assistance to Nationals (ATN). It is a mandate under RA 8042 or the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995. It stated in part that while recognizing the significant contribution of Filipino migrant workers to the national economy through their foreign exchange remittances, the State does not promote overseas employment as a means to sustain economic growth and achieve national development. The existence of the overseas employment program rests solely on the assurance that the dignity and fundamental human rights and freedom of the Filipino citizen shall not, at any time, be compromised or violated. The State, therefore, shall continuously create local employment opportunities and promote the equitable distribution of wealth and the benefits of development.

The assistance comprises of coordinating with the Philippine Embassies and consulates abroad regarding request for assistance made by relatives of OFWs in Caraga region, it serves as liaison between the Office of the Undersecretary for Migrant Workers Affairs (OUMWA) and the families of OFWs and gives legal advice and counseling to the families of OFWs regarding their problems (2008 Annual Report). The problems ranging from the request for legal assistance for detained or imprisoned overseas worker, early repatriation of human remains, assistance for finding the whereabouts of OFW, coordination with next-of-kin or relatives, financial support, death benefits, abandonment and the like comprise the scope of Assistance to Nationals.

Indeed, the assistance rendered and the services offered are fundamental to the applicants, the family of OFWs and OFWs themselves, thus, prompting the researcher to choose this study. The Department of Foreign Affairs- Butuan as a newly created office and still in its infant stage, has already insurmountable expectations from the constituent of Caraga to respond to their clamor in providing passport services and assistance. Situating the regional office in Butuan City which is the center of commerce in Caraga is strategic, thus it is projected that applicants for passport services and those who seek assistance will triple in the coming years.

With these, the employees themselves need to be guided on the kind of services rendered and to set a proper standard thereof as a frontline agency because delivering a quality of service tantamount to client satisfaction. This study is also a way of informing the public of the existence of the other services which are geared

2 R. A. 8239 Philippine Passport Act of 1996

towards the assistance of Overseas Filipino Workers and their respective families offered by the Department. Furthermore, this study specifically determined the efficiency of the delivery of service by the consular office.

FRAMEWORK

Government employees and personnel should treat customer service as integral part of the job and not as an extension of it because without customers there would be no job to speak of (Gore, 2008).

Rosenbloom (2005) asserts that government employees must be held accountable because there are aspects of their jobs that can lead to misconception of the public interest, corruption, and subversion. In general, public servants are held to higher standard of conduct than are private and nonprofit sector employees.

Oldfield (2002) furthermore implied that customer satisfaction had rooted in two ideas about quality. First, quality could be measured by the gap between customers' expectations and their perceptions. This gap-based view of quality states that if you beats customers' expectations, one has a good quality. The second view is that quality is about conformance to a standard or specification.

In addition, ISO 9001:2000 confirmed that customer satisfaction should be measured to monitor the effectiveness of the quality management system and to highlight areas where improvements should be made.

The citizen, the public, is the central focus of everything that government does. This means the citizen is central. If one is going to do anything, one has to start with the citizen's satisfaction (Jordan, 1998).

The independent variable was the respondents' profile which included age, gender, and purpose of travel. Age was considered because it was acknowledged with the presumption that it had a significant effect on the level of satisfaction basing on different age groups. In the study of Yamson (2008), age may have a significant effect because it can be viewed in terms of cognitive level, different types of biological maturity, and the duration and type of life experiences.

In this sense, age can presumably affect one's perception, observation and level of fulfillment to the service rendered.

Also, gender, in this study, was another independent variable because of the presumption based on psychological studies which presented the differences in perceptions between male and female (Yamson, 2008).

Moreover, purpose of travel was considered independent variable because with an estimated annual population growth of 88.57 Million Filipinos as of 2007 National Statistics Office, it was reported that there were over One (1) Million people or more travel each year. This research presupposed that since applicants officially worked with the Department of Foreign Affairs for passport services, it was assumed that travelling outside the country for whatever reasons was in mind.

To gratify client in the services of the government, various agencies were created to carry out the different functions of the same. One of these agencies was the establishment of the Department of Foreign Affairs – Butuan which was the subject of the study.

The main functions of the DFA – Regional Consular Office include the issuance of passport and the Assistance to Nationals which were also an independent variables in the study. Only those whose Filipino citizenship is established will be issued a Philippine passport. Further, with the implementation of the foreign policy on Assistance to Nationals, the focal point is for the protection and promotion of the welfare and dignity of overseas Filipinos.

On the other hand, the dependent variables were the frontline behavior of the staff and personnel, accessibility of the office location and the efficiency of the delivery of service. These were considered because customers more often than not expected the personnel of the service provider to be consistently professional in the dealing of the workplace and promote positive working environment. In addition, accessibility was another dependent variable considered since the customers varied according to different age range and physical competence; their convenience and comfort may make a significant impact in their satisfaction. Furthermore, efficiency in the delivery of service was also taken into account because customers expected that when they transacted business they would automatically be entertained. Therefore, clear, definite and expedite transaction might be what they are expected from government agency.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study assessed the quality of service and client satisfaction of the Department of Foreign Affairs-Butuan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study used the descriptive-correlational research design. It was descriptive because it assessed the quality of service and client satisfaction of the Department of Foreign Affairs-Butuan. It was also correlational because it determined the relationship between the quality of service and client satisfaction of the same.

Research Environment, Population and sample

The study was conducted at the Department of Foreign Affairs- Butuan in the year 2010 when the office was still located at Cesia Building, second floor of the Bank of Commerce, Montilla Blvd., Butuan City (DFA Butuan transferred to 3rd Level Robinsons Mall only in 2015). The office has been renting since the time of its establishment. It occupies the second and the third floors of the building. The second floor is the processing area with 207.88 square meters with approximately 150 sitting a capacity. The third floor is the storage area where documents of the applicants are kept in archive. Respondents are the clients who seek assistance and who applies for passport. Clients have official transactions involving 2 basic services namely the issuance of Philippine passport and the Assistance to nationals.

Table 1. Frequency and Percentage Distribution of Respondents

DAY	NUMBER OF CLIENTS CLAIMING IN PERSON	RESPONDENTS (F)	PERCENTAGE (%)
Day 1 (Monday)	61	43	70.49
Day 2 (Tuesday)	49	42	85.71
Day 3 (Wednesday)	44	39	92.85
Day 4 (Thursday)	50	43	86
Day 5 (Friday)	56	54	96.42
TOTAL	260	221	85

On the other hand, there were 221 respondents who were involved in this study in the span of five (5) working days transaction. The chosen respondents were those customers who claimed their passport at the releasing section with the complete required documents submitted. The difference in the number of clients claiming in person from the actual respondents used in the study was due to the fact that some customers lacked the documents required upon the release

of their passports while some customers were just claimed by their authorized representatives. Table 1 shows the percentage of the sample based on the number of respondents who were also based on the number of person who claimed personally.

Sampling Technique

The researcher used the probability sampling design employing the purposive-convenient sampling technique in the selection of client respondents. The respondents were those clients who processed passports and sought Assistance to Nationals.

Research Instrument

On the other hand, a research-made instrument was designed by the researcher to gather the data needed in the study. For content validation, it was submitted to the adviser and statistician. It consisted of three (3) parts. Part 1 contained items regarding the profile of the respondents in terms of age, gender and purpose of travel. Part 2 consisted of items on the extent of service in terms of issuance of passport and Assistance to Nationals and Part 3 included items on the level of client satisfaction in terms of frontline behavior, accessibility and efficiency in the delivery of service.

The research instrument was tried-out to selected respondents who were excluded as respondents of the study. It was then reproduced and distributed to the target respondents.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher asked permission from the OIC-Regional Director regarding the study and for the distribution of the research-made instrument. Upon its approval, the researcher personally distributed the instrument to the respondents. The data was then collated, analyzed and interpreted.

Data Analysis Procedure

The descriptive evaluation of the findings to measure the satisfaction of the clients was based on the following statistical parameters:

- 4.50 to 5.00 = Excellent
- 3.50 to 4.49 = Very Satisfactory
- 2.50 to 3.49 = Satisfactory
- 1.50 to 2.39 = Fair
- 1.00 to 1.49 = Poor

Statistical Techniques

The following statistical tools were used in the analysis of data: Frequency Count, Percentage, Mean, T-Test, ANOVA and Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (Pearson-r).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of Respondents

The profile of the respondents shows that out of the two hundred twenty one (221) respondents, 62.9% respondents were females and 37.1% of them were males. The result pointed out that there were more females who were transacting business in the Department of Foreign Affairs – Butuan to obtain passport. Respondents with ages from 18-30 years old ranked highest with 47.1%. This range of age was usually the workforce and at the prime of their lives while ages 65 above ranked the least with only .5%. More than half of the OFW's (55.2%) were below 35 years old, the largest number was observed in age group 25 to 29 years. Female OFW's were generally younger compared to their male counterparts (www.census.gov.ph).

In respondents' purpose of travel, contract worker ranked first with 50.7% while business ranks last with .05%. This result somehow proved the figure given by Ericta (2003) that an average of 3,000 Filipinos a day left for foreign jobs. Finance-Manila (2009) revealed in their research that production related workers and domestic servants were the two largest occupational categories each amounting to thirty one percent (31%) of the total and these lines of work were usually dominated by the female populace.

Extent of Service Rendered in Terms of Passport Issuance

The processing indicator "passport is released on scheduled date as to express processing" got the highest mean rating of 4.44. On the other hand, the indicator "the steps for processing are clear enough in terms of processing/evaluation of documents" got the least mean rating of 4.28 from the respondents. The issuance of passport as to the fast processing got an over-all mean rating of 4.35.

In processing/evaluation of documents, the identity of the applicant or client is established. Primary and secondary documents are presented to support and ascertain the consistency of their personal circumstances. The elements of identity are name, date of birth, gender, and place of birth. Citizenship and nationality

was also determined because Philippine passports were only issued to Filipinos. In this step, documents were evaluated and the applicants were interviewed thoroughly by the processors. This step was vital because it determined whether one can proceed to the next step or be denied of a passport. Thus, this may be the bottle-neck of every passport applicants but as according to Layton and Rose (1994), those who execute public service functions have a professional responsibility to do the highest standards of service possible, within the given level of resources.

Under facilities and physical environment, the indicator “office is well ventilation” got the highest mean rating of 4.34. On the other hand, the indicator “well-maintained toilet” got the least mean rating of 3.81 from the respondents. The issuance of passport as to facilities/physical environment got an over-all mean rating of 4.17. Most regional consular office of the Department of Foreign Affairs, with the exception to some, was renting office spaces. With a building sharing occupancy with other offices, comfort room was communal.

As to the extent of service of the staff/personnel of the Department, the indicator “effectively communicate with applicants” got the highest mean rating of 4.30 while indicator “competent and reliable in answering different queries from applicants” got the least mean rating of 4.23 from the respondents.

The indicators in the issuance of passport got a grand mean rating of 4.26 and a verbal description of **Very Satisfactory**.

With the result at hand, this can be supported by the study of Goodsell (1994) wherein he concluded that government actually worked. The views of government as inefficient and ineffective often come from unfounded stereotypes, the media, and biased authors. These unfounded stereotypes, media and biased authors depicted government and public employees solely in negative ways or focus on the exception rather than the rule.

In Terms of Assistance to Nationals

With a number of 221 respondents, 187 or 84.6% of them were aware that the Department coordinated with other agencies of government like Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) and Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE) on matters concerning assistance to nationals. The 177 or 80.1% of respondents know that DFA assisted in finding the whereabouts of Filipinos abroad, 172 out of 221 or 77.8% of them were conversant with the fact that aid was made in the repatriation of an OFW. The next in rank was the informed regarding assistance

in the repatriation of human remains with 167 or 75.6% of the respondent. Conversely, the indicator on death benefits only 148 respondents or 67.0% were informed of such services by the Department.

The primordial concern of the Department of Foreign Affairs was concretized in “Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995” (Republic Act 8042) which maintained the government’s commitment to protect the rights and promote the welfare of migrant workers, their families, and other overseas in distress. It also provided the framework for concerted government in dealing with difficulties faced by Filipinos abroad. Thus, Assistance to National was created in order to assist in the repatriation of human remains, repatriation of distressed and imprisoned OFW, assists in finding the whereabouts, help out in financial support and death benefits and assists abandoned family of an OFW, among others.

The level of Client Satisfaction

In Terms of Frontline Behavior

The frontline behavior indicator “Neat and Presentable Appearance” got the highest mean rating of 4.33. It is imperative that employees shall act as a role models by exemplifying the highest standard of professional appearance. Proper grooming is one of the most important things for personality development. It helps boost confidence and exudes professionalism, which in turn will lead to positive working environment tantamount to customer satisfaction. Contrast, the indicator “Employees are approachable and accommodating” got the least mean rating of 4.04 from the respondents. This result indicated that clients wanted their government to be client-centered for accommodation to their needs and queries was fundamental to satisfaction. Thus, according to Jordan (1998), the citizen is the central focus of everything that government does. If one is going to do anything, one really has to start with citizen’s satisfaction.

As a result, the level of client satisfaction in terms of frontline behavior got an overall mean rating of 4.16.

In Terms of Accessibility

The Accessibility indicator “Conveniently located in the heart of the City” got the highest mean rating of 4.33 while the indicator “Accessibility and convenient to differently-able, elderly and pregnant women” got the least mean rating of 4.03 from the respondents. Then again as deprived of its own building,

the Department was therefore renting on the second and third floor of the building without the benefit of ramp to cater physically challenged individuals, elderly and pregnant women.

The level of client satisfaction in terms of Accessibility got an overall mean rating of 4.22.

In Terms of Efficiency in the Delivery of Service

The efficiency indicators “Releasing of Passport” and “Processing flow is clear and definite” both got the same highest mean rating of 4.34. With the indicator “Accomplished the transaction without delay”, it got the least mean rating of 4.22 from the respondents.

Test of Significant Differences

Table 1. Test of Significant Difference on the Client Satisfaction when Respondents are Grouped According to their Profile Variables

PROFILE VARIABLES	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION		Decision on Ho	Conclusion
	F-value	P-value		
GENDER	0.163	0.817	Do not reject	Not Significant
AGE	0.621	0.538	Do not reject	Not Significant
PURPOSE OF TRAVEL	1.747	0.177	Do not reject	Not Significant

As indicated by their P-value all greater than 0.05, data could not provide a sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. This result revealed that the level of satisfaction of the clients or the services rendered by the DFA was the same among different age groups, gender and purpose of travel.

The profile variable gender had no significance as to the level of client's satisfaction because in the study of Glover (2000), he stressed that looking at gender through a Foucauldian lens, gender difference was merely a construct of society used to enforce the distinctions made between that which was assumed to be male and female. It could be assumed that gender was the acquisition and internalization of social norms which were flaunted within institutions such as the family, state and the media.

The age group variable did not also affect the level of client’s satisfaction because the chosen respondents were all in their majority age. This means that respondents were already matured to accumulate certain stability and personal balance in a sense of understanding the kind of service that was being rendered to them by the Department of Foreign Affairs.

Test of Significant Relationship

Table 2. Test of Significant Relationship between the Quality of Service and Client Satisfaction

SERVICES RENDERED	LEVEL OF SATISFACTION		Decision on Ho	Conclusion
	r-value	P-value		
Issuance of Passport	0.883	0.000	Reject	Highly Significant
Assistance to Nationals	0.065	0.336	Do not reject	Not Significant

Data showed a highly significant relationship between services on issuance of passport and the level of satisfaction of the clients. As indicated by the P-value less than 0.01, the null hypothesis was rejected of the 0.05 level of significance. The relationship was high positive as indicated by the Pearson-r correlation coefficient of 0.883 (positive, close to 1.0). This only showed that an increase in the services on issuance of passport by the Department of Foreign Affairs would result to the increase in the level of client satisfaction. As shown in the study of Oldfield (2002), quality can be measured by the gap between customers’ expectations and their perceptions. This gap-based view of quality points out that if you beat customers’ expectations, you have a good quality. This view is obviously present in the level of satisfaction that the clients met from the service rendered to them. In this current study of the Department of Foreign Affairs, the clients’ expectations and perceptions were met, thus, satisfaction was at hand.

However, the data showed no significant relationship between the Assistance to Nationals of the Department of Foreign Affairs and the level of satisfaction of the clients. As indicated by the P-value of 0.0336, greater than 0.05, data could not provide sufficient evidence to reject the null hypothesis at the 0.05 level of significance. This result illustrated that the level of satisfaction was independent with the services rendered by the DFA in terms of Assistance to Nationals.

It was evident in the 2000 Census of Filipino Workers in each household that Caraga Region has 8,468 number of households with a family member

who worked abroad. Therefore, only this number, were concerned and informed of the Assistance to Nationals. Therefore, awareness and unawareness had no significant bearing to the level of satisfaction of the client.

Based on the findings of the study which revealed the weaker aspect of the services of the department that needed further enhancement, intervention program will be undertaken. The intervention program was proposed for the enhancement of the services rendered by the Department of Foreign Affairs-Butuan. It included short-term plan with activities such that of seminar/workshop and information dissemination. The long-term plan comprised the project of putting up a courtesy lane for elderly, differently-abled and pregnant women; conducting quarterly seminar workshop for the staff and personnel; supplying additional number of employees and constructing of DFA-Regional Consular Office Butuan own building.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn.

1. In Caraga Region, there were more females than males who considered and intended to work abroad evidenced by the influx of female passport applicants with the deliberate objective and purpose of travel as contract worker. They were within the age range of 18 to 30 years old which is the prime age of their lives and employment.
2. The quality of service executed by the Department as to the issuance of passport and the Assistance to Nationals was worthy of commendation because it was rated well by the respondents. Although there were still some rooms for improvement, it had somehow answer to the clamor of the people of Caraga for efficient and effective passport service provider.
3. In frontline behavior of the staff and personnel, accessibility of the location and the efficiency in the delivery of service of the Department, the clients evidently were satisfied with the services provided.
4. Gender of the clients, whether male or female, age groups and purpose of travel had no bearing in the level of satisfaction attained by the clients.
5. People of Caraga Region put a high significance on the quality service as to the issuance of passport which was the main service provided by the Department. Clients valued such services that non awareness of other services such that of Assistance to National does not affect their satisfaction.

TRANSLATIONAL RESEARCH

The findings of the study will provide additional information to the OFWs, their families and their next of kin of their rights and privileges to seek assistance from various government agencies and such assistance sought and the expectations made will be met by the respective agencies. It will also be a basis for program planning to improve the services of the agency and enhance the work efficiency of the staff and personnel.

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