

Perceived Quality of Port Services: The Case of the
Kenya Ports Authority.

by

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ABSTRACT

Service industries such as port industries, are rapidly dominating the economies of both the developed and of the Third World countries. Services have their unique characteristics which make their marketing very different from the routine marketing functions of products. Due to these characteristics, services are best marketed by bettering the facilities in which the services are housed and by improving on the actual provision of the services which, for the most part, are produced and consumed simultaneously. The variability in the quality of service provided should be minimised by the provider in order for him to establish a set standard acceptable to buyers of the service. In the final analysis, and in-keeping with the marketing concept, the quality of service as perceived by the users of the service will determine it's success and the ultimate survival of the organization rendering the service.

This study sought to investigate the perceived quality of port service at Kilindini Harbour, which is run by the Kenya Ports Authority, a state corporation under the ministerial jurisdiction of the Ministry of Transport and Communications of the Government of Kenya.

It was observed by the researcher that fewer ships have been visiting the port year by year, that there has been a decline in the transit cargo handled by the port, that there has been a decline in the rate of growth of tonnages handled

in each successive year, and that port performance projections have not been achieved for several years.

Whilst many reasons have been advanced for the above observations, little study has been done into the perceptions of port users of the services rendered to them at the port. Therefore, by use of a structured questionnaire the researcher obtained the prior expectations and current perceptions of the port users with regard to the services they receive. The questionnaire also solicited responses from the port users on the problems that they face in their interaction with the port. It was hoped that this would inform the relevant government officials of the problems being experienced at the port, highlight areas of dissatisfaction that port management could try to rectify, pinpoint avenues through which the marketing department of Kenya Ports Authority could enhance their marketing effort, and provide better quality of service to the benefit of the nation as a whole.

The study revealed that the quality of services rendered at the port as perceived by the port users generally falls below their expectations. It revealed many problems experienced by the port users which could be attributed to various departments within the port. The major area of criticism was in the Operations Division where the Marine Operations and Conventional Cargo Departments were found to perform well below the mean expectations of port users. The Container Operations Department was praised for its

performance and was said to compare well with container terminal operations in the developed world. The Kenya Ports Authority should strive to improve on the quality of services that come under heavy criticism and maintain the good image of the areas from which the port users derive satisfaction.