Synergy of administrative processes, procedures and service delivery in higher education.

SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the dissertation submitted for the degree Magister Technologiae: Office Management and Technology, at the Tshwane University of Technology, is my own original work and has not previously been submitted to any other institution. I further declare that all sources cited or quoted are specified and acknowledged by means of a comprehensive list of references.

M.J. Prinsloo

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ABSTRACT

SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Although most students are not aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period from choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of the administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that result in poor customer service. By the time students reach the graduation office and are confronted with administrative problems concerning their graduation, they become very disappointed. The problem therefore focuses on whether a graduation office can work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers: namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience.

In this study, applied research was conducted with geographical demarcation including universities in Gauteng and the social network consisting of staff and students as participants. The researcher made use of non-probability/convenience samples and both quantitative and qualitative statistics. The aim was to determine the underlying service delivery problems and to suggest improvements to the graduation offices. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used and the data collection instruments included questionnaires with statistical data analyses. The population consisted of graduating students who had already experienced interaction with administrative offices at these universities, and departmental staff that serviced these students. Triangulation of data was conducted to confirm the findings of the research. The non-experimental design included cohort studies with primary and secondary data which included semi-structured questionnaires, personal visits, telephone and email communication, and official statistics from archival resources.

In general there is a feeling among staff at administrative departments of universities that they wait constantly for other departments to complete their outputs which serve as their inputs. This process of departments not transferring their work in time and also sending incomplete or incorrect qualifications is the main reason for students not graduating. This could be one of the reasons for students then complaining that they have had to wait too long for an answer after applying to graduate, or received their communication too late.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

ADMINISTRATION	To run a business
BRANDING	Identifying trademark, a name of symbol with tangible and emotional attributes
CUSTOMER	Someone who uses a business. In the case of Higher Education the students and their parents are the customers
GAUTENG	One of the nine provinces of South Africa, formerly known as Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging
HIGHER EDUCATION	Institutions consisting of academic departments which are responsible for learning, education and research for people after secondary school, governed by the Department of Higher Education and subject to certain laws and rules and regulations
PERFORMANCE	To do something you have to do or ought to do
PROCEDURE	A fixed or special way of doing something
PROCESS	A series of actions for making or doing something
SERVICE	Helps people or supplies what they want
SUPPORT STAFF	Staff with a secondary function in support of staff with a primary function
SYNERGY	To work better together than each one separately
AOM	Administrative office manager
BMP	Business management processes
TQM	Total quality management

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. INTRODUCTION

Administrative problems do not concern students when they study at a university. The prospective students' primary interest is to obtain knowledge and prepare for employment in industry. According to Palmer (2008a:117), "successful accomplishment of many of the critical incidents identified can be dependent upon satisfactory performance by support staff that does not directly interact with customers". This argument is highly relevant to administrative procedures in the registration processes of students. Although students are often not aware of the administrative processes and procedures involved during the period from the point of choosing a university up to that of graduation, they are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and result in poor customer service. The departments responsible for administrative support at universities are numerous and vary from one university to the next. However, it is safe to say that a student's journey in Higher Education goes through several phases, such as finding the university of choice; selecting the vocational programme best suited to qualification; obtaining relevant information about finances, processes and procedures to be followed; the registration process; the years of study involving assessment results and finally, graduation. This process clearly depicts the different departments that have to interact synergistically in order to streamline administration, promote the university's image and consequently reflect positively on the standard of customer service.

Denove and Power (2006:182) argue that "encounters in which a problem is resolved quickly and efficiently receive higher satisfaction scores than situations in which there was no problem at all". Administrators plan, organise and take precautions, but there is always the risk that someone, somewhere, could make a mistake or miss a deadline and one has to acknowledge that electronic system failures also occur. Such things usually happen when one least expects them. Individuals differ in terms of patience and understanding and if a problem occurs repeatedly, frustration and conflict could result and, in turn, lead to counter productivity.

The background provided above also relates to the concept of globalisation that should be a serious consideration for every organisation. This inevitably results in the fact that competition becomes stronger and requires global standards. Therefore, universities need to be aware of the needs and circumstances of international students (Habate, 2005) and align levels of customer service accordingly. In terms of sections 20 to 24 of the Higher Education Act (1997), as amended, universities were merged to form larger institutions that, in terms of an analogy, added fuel to an already problematic fire. Universities had to deal

with the merge processes in terms of restructuring, relocation and a myriad of processes and procedures that consequently had to be integrated. To this effect, Palmer (2008b:60) asserts that an organisation has to restructure itself as it grows, otherwise detrimental discontinuity in economies of scale could result.

Against this background, the independent (*X*) and dependent (*Y*) variables are subsequently outlined as follows:

X=Administration
Y_1=Processes and procedures
Y_2=Branding
Y_3=Customer service/service delivery

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Although most students are not aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period from choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of the administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and result in poor customer service. By the time students reach the graduation office and are confronted with administrative problems concerning their graduation, they become very disappointed. The problem therefore focuses on determining the existing problem and deciding whether the graduation office could make a difference or not. Further investigation is conducted to establish the difference the graduation office could make and whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers: namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience (Palmer, 2008a:105).

3. OBJECTIVES

3.1 PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

To determine the effect that administrative processes have on students and on service delivery.

3.2 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- To determine how a graduation office, which is the last department in a student's study life, could make a difference

- To determine the influence of organisational culture in universities on service delivery, as it seems that universities do not always put their customers first

- To study the influence of administrative processes and procedures

- To analyse the influence of other departments on graduation offices

- To suggest possible proactive methods and processes that could be implemented at graduation offices

- To find solutions as to how proactive administrative processes could promote service delivery

4. GEOGRAPHICAL DEMARCATION

In terms of convenience and judgement approaches, the Province of Gauteng was targeted for this investigation and included three universities named University A, University B and University C for purposes of confidentiality.

N_1= 20 employees in graduation offices
N_2= 30 employees in support departments
N_3= 3000 students

The research method and design is described in the next section.

5. RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

The flow diagram in Figure 1.1 indicates the research framework on which the investigation was based according to the explanation given in the key.

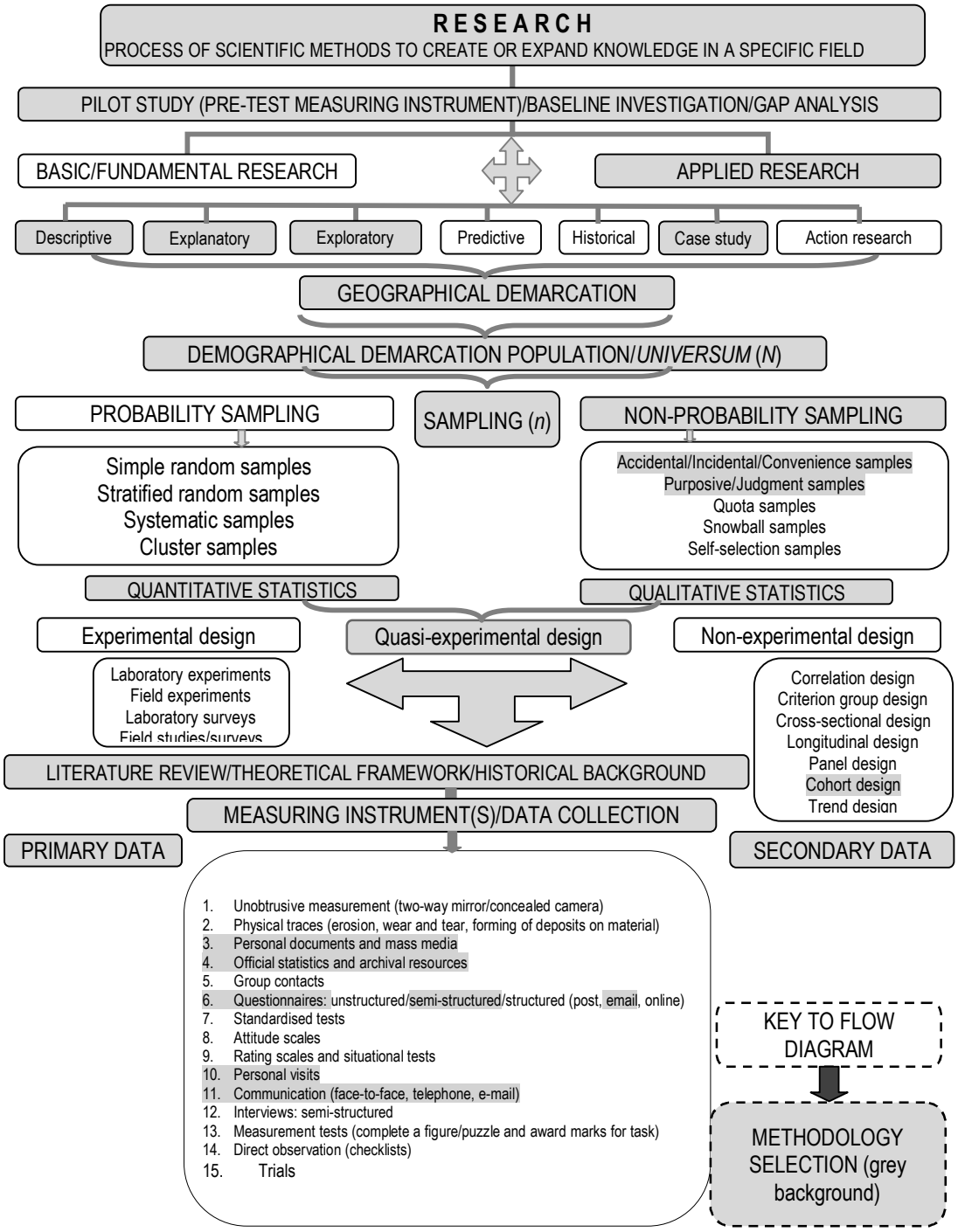

FIGURE 1.1: HOLISTIC RESEARCH FRAMEWORK WITH APPLICABLE METHODS INDICATED

5.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of this dissertation was on topics relating to the management of administrative processes and procedures, service delivery, performance management and productivity. Secondary statistics, news media, journal articles, books, reliable internet sources and current trends in Higher Education were used.

5.2 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

The term “population” refers to a set of entities in which the measurements of interest to the practitioner or researcher are represented. These entities can refer to people or things (Vos, 2002:127).

5.2.1 Primary data

Staff of the graduation offices and other academic administration departments at the three chosen universities, as well as students who complained during 2012, were included according to accidental/incidental/convenience and purposive/judgment sampling. Since numbers of employees working in these departments are limited, the population was restricted. Because a general survey was conducted with all the graduating students and the focus was on complaining students, the data of non-complaining students was used for positive inputs and assisted with methods of improvement. A complete picture about service delivery in general at administrative departments was seen.

Graduation staff..... $N = 20$
$n = 20$
Academic administration staff..... $N = 30$
$n = 30$
Students..... …$N = 3\ 000$
$n = 3\ 000$

N = population
n = the number of units in the sample (Leedy, 1993:205)

5.2.2 Secondary data

Secondary data from reliable sources in the investigation included

- Information and Communication Technology (ICT) – telephone statistics
- Strategic Management Systems (SMS) – electronic records statistics

- Secondary statistics, news media, journal articles, books, reliable internet sources and current trends in Higher Education were used.

5.2.3 Measuring instruments and data collection

A combined method including both qualitative and quantitative data collection was used. Semi-structured questionnaires were used for collecting data from students and staff. Additionally, documents, electronic statistics and archival resources were employed subject to ethical considerations in terms of permission and confidentiality.

5.2.4 Data capturing, processing and analysis

The assistance of a statistician at the Directorate of Research, Innovation and Partnerships (DRIP) of the Tshwane University of Technology was obtained. The statistical support assisted with the design of questionnaires and data processes. The statistician assisted with qualitative data but capturing of quantitative data was outsourced.

6. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY/TRUSTWORTHINESS

According to Leedy (1993:40), validity involves the soundness and effectiveness of the measuring instrument. The following questions are raised:

- What does the test measure?
- Does it, in fact, measure what it is supposed to measure?
- How well, how comprehensively and how accurately does it measure?

Reliability, on the other hand, deals with accuracy and the question raised is: How accurate is the instrument that is used for making the measurement?

Leedy (1993:42) avers that statistics is merely a tool of research and a means by which the researcher may view data more comprehensively. Data should always be viewed from as many angles as possible. The hybrid methods used in this investigation therefore answer to an approach of triangulation in terms of validity and reliability.

Primary data includes qualitative (staff and student reflection) and quantitative (structured questionnaires) data collected from personnel and students. Tables, graphs and reviews indicate findings.

Secondary data supports findings of primary data and is purely quantitative. Data indicates the relevance of telephone enquiries from students and the period during which communication was sent to students. A chart and tables in chapter 4 indicate findings from

secondary data. Secondary data confirmed primary quantitative data which facilitated triangulation.

7. LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS

7.1 Two universities from Gauteng had already indicated their willingness to participate. If the third university was not willing, other universities in Gauteng could be contacted.

7.2 Questionnaires were distributed by email and a link was provided for personnel to complete the questionnaires.

7.3 Questionnaires were placed on students' chairs before graduation ceremonies and collected after the graduation ceremonies, once the halls were vacated. Although for the purpose of this research, students who complained were of more interest and because it is difficult to determine which students had complaints, questionnaires were distributed to all graduating students until at least 1 000 questionnaires were collected or 100 students with complaints were identified, whichever came first, at each university.

8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

According to Leedy (1993:42), several ethical considerations are essential:

- fairness
- honesty
- openness of intent
- disclosure of methods
- the ends for which the research is executed
- a respect for the integrity of the individual
- the obligation of the researcher to guarantee unequivocal individual privacy and confidentiality and
- an informed willingness on the part of the subject to participate voluntarily in the research activity

Permission was obtained from the targeted universities to use documents, archival resources and statistics as previously determined. Since a graduation office is a secure environment, the ethical committee at these universities had to decide whether the results of the investigation are publishable.

9. CHAPTERS AND TIME SCHEDULE

Table 1.1 contains the proposed activities and time schedule

TABLE 1.1: PROPOSED ACTIVITIES AND TIME SCHEDULE

ACTIVITY	**TIME**		
	Start	**Completion**	**Duration**
1. Pre-reading for literature review	October 2009	February 2010	Five months
2. Pre-planning	March 2010	April 2010	Two months
3. Submission of proposal	August 2010	December 2010	Five months
4. Enrolment	January 2011		
5. Application for funding	Subsequent to acceptance of proposal	FRIC Application not granted; student will carry costs	
6. Chapter 1: Introduction	January 2011	February 2011	Two months
7. Chapter 2: Theoretical framework (literature review)	March 2011	August 2011	Six months
8. Chapter 3: Research framework	September 2011	February 2012	Six months
9. Distribution of questionnaires, interviews, personal visits, communication	June 2012	October 2012	Five months
10. Chapter 4: Empirical study and findings	October 2012	December 2012	Three months
11. Chapter 5: Conclusions and recommendations	January 2013	February 2013	Two months
12. Finalisation of title page, abstract, table of contents, references, other introductory lists, appendices	March 2013		One month
13. Final submission	April 2013		

10. BUDGET

Table 1.2 contains the proposed budget:

TABLE 1.2: PROPOSED BUDGET

ITEM	ESTIMATED COST
Data capturing and processing	R3 000
Language editing	R10 000
Printing and binding	R6 000
Travel and accommodation	R3 000
TOTAL	**R22 000**

11. RECORDS

Records are kept by the Department of Office Management and Technology of the Tshwane University of Technology for the recommended period.

12. DISSEMINATION

Depending on the decision taken by the Research Ethics Committee, results will be published in relevant subject journals and/or conference proceedings.

13. CONCLUSION

In this chapter, an overview was provided of the proposed research. The background was provided for this study with the problem statement and objectives. Some of the topics discussed were geographical demarcation, research methods and design, validity, limitations, ethical considerations and the planned chapters and time schedule. In the following chapter the theoretical framework will be discussed with topics including administration, service delivery, synergy, performance management and current trends in Higher Education. Chapter 3 presents the outline of the research framework. Chapter 4 describes the empirical study and findings with chapter 5 providing conclusions and recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the literature review and covers the topics relevant to this study: namely, administration, service delivery, synergy, performance management and Higher Education.

When office automation began, models for office systems were based on the fundamental elements and placed in four categories: namely, data-based, process-based, agent based and mixed models. The goal of the models was to describe office activities and elements such as forms, procedures, functions, process flow and hierarchical levels. Each element may be divided further; for example, office functions include word processing, querying, data processing, authorisations, communication and creation of documents (Bracchi & Pernici, 1984:163). Later only, efficiency became an important part of office procedures. *Transformed* is a good example of how office efficiency, improved by only a few minutes per day, leads to improved service delivery. Each morning all staff meet for a short meeting during which the daily work and challenges are discussed. It has been found that this allows the practice of planning for changes in the daily workflow, manages crises before they arise and makes adjustments as needed (Stewart & Johanson, 2007:27). According to Balderston (1984:1), little was done to change office functions and improve office efficiency before the sixties and seventies and only then when data processing and word processing were brought to life, did businesses start to realise the importance of improving office production.. Balderston (1984:16) also emphasises the importance of office function and support services.

Leaders are defined as complex, multidimensional personalities that have characters of great value; they know what they want and can distinguish between right and wrong (Bass & Bass, 2008:167). An administrative office can be managed successfully if a manager is a good leader and promotes office productivity by implementing management practices such as work standards, total quality management and value stream management (Quible, 2001:313). In an ever-growing competitive market, the use and correct application of information technology is an important necessity for any company. Data quality is very important, especially with customer relations systems. Inefficient use of machines and equipment is an example of the barriers in an office. This can lead to a lower level of productivity, which results in one of the problems in an office.

Customer service is the job of everyone in the enterprise, including people who do not interact directly with customers and all actions should be aimed at satisfying customer

needs and wants (Strydom, 1999:12). If a company wants to attract customers it needs to know what the customers' expectations are in order to be able to attract the right customers. Customers also need to have the assurance that they will receive value for their money otherwise they will not make use of the company. To assist a company in identifying the resources available for improved service delivery, the resources are grouped in three categories: namely, service employees, service technology and service tangibles (Bruhn and Georgi, 2006:325).

In an organisation with numerous different departments it is imperative that all departments work together as one team within each department as well as for the company in general. When the interrelated parts produce a total effect greater than the sum of each of the parts working independently it is referred to as synergism. Synergy also leads to groups and teams and their effectiveness.

Performance management is far more than just collecting and reporting data or just people management. Strategic performance management is about identifying, measuring and then managing what matters in order to improve the effectiveness, efficiency and overall performance of an organisation. Marr (2009:1) identifies easy-to-follow tools, techniques and templates to create a truly performance-driven organisation.

Higher Education institutions consist of two components: an academic and non-academic function. The latter can also be referred to as support services. "Support service is an extension of student experience and serves as a platform for personal growth and development" (Roland, 2009:21). Administration forms the biggest part of support services and is directly linked to service delivery. Higher Education is in a competitive market and as in any other business, the aim is to improve productivity and improve service delivery. In this chapter, processes in an administrative office, service delivery, synergy and performance management are discussed. Part of the discussion consists of the factors that influence Higher Education.

Figure 2.1 demonstrate the conceptual framework of this study.

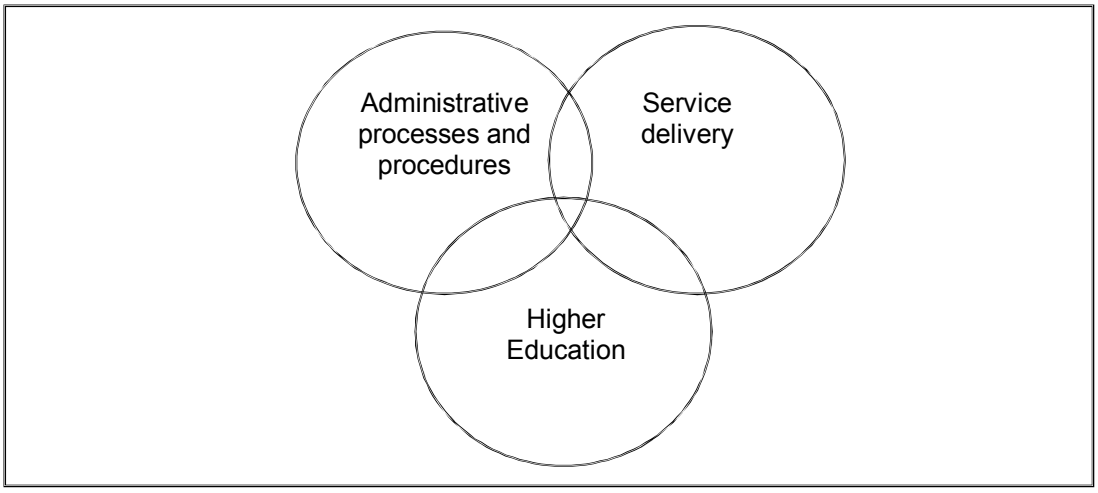

FIGURE 2.1: CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2. ADMINISTRATION

When the operation of an administrative office is explored, it is seen to be a system consisting of various components working together to attain a goal, such as lowering cost, improving quality and service as perceived by the customers in the market it serves (Keyte and Locher, 2004:1). Just as accounting is the main focus in a finance department, so are processes and procedures the main focus in an administrative office system. Processes may be described as grouped procedures. Procedures are detailed information on exactly how a task must be done. A process is an activity required to process information (Keyte & Locher, 2004:24). Procedures can include instructions for preparing various forms, explanations of several reports distributed, and university policy information (2011: www.wiu.edu/adminhandbook).

Although an administrative office manager does not have control over all the resources, a difference can be made. If all four management processes are utilised, such as planning, organising, leading and controlling, successful processes and procedures can be established, a motivated working team can perform well, and excellent service can be delivered.

An example of the processes and procedures of administration is summarised in Table 2.1.

TABLE 2.1: PROCESSES AND PROCEDURES

Process	**Receive application**	**Allocate application**
Procedure	Customer completes form	Compares form with database
	Reception confirms all information	Allocates candidate according to surname
	Places received stamp on form Enters in database	Forwards to correspondence department

An administrative office manager needs to be a good leader to enable him or her to make a success of an administrative office. He or she must be able to implement an effective office system and apply effective information technology. If effective problem-solving techniques are applied, office productivity is promoted. Factors influencing an effective administrative office include good leadership, effective office systems, office productivity, effective information technology and problem-solving solutions.

2.1 LEADERSHIP

The success with which the AOM (administrative office manager) applies the basic processes of management depends largely upon effective leadership. Leadership is a purely human process of influencing people to work willingly and enthusiastically to attain organisational objectives (Keeling & Kallaus, 1996:46). The public and private sectors are increasingly recognising the value of strategic leadership as a means of obtaining a competitive edge in a volatile and unpredictable environment. When supervisors accept that it is their duty to develop their subordinates in order to meet their full potential, and when organisation members at all levels strive to achieve the next level of responsibility, there is a culture of leadership (Grandstaff & Sorenson, 2009:4). Changing employees' mental models about service quality requires clear directions from management and the strategic influence of leadership (Roland, 2009:21).

Leaders are complex, multidimensional personalities, who have a character of great value, who know what they want and who can distinguish between right and wrong. Leaders differ from non-leaders in three general ways in traits and values. They see themselves as more talkative, aggressive, intelligent, committed and ambitious; they also aspire to be more sensitive, democratic, fair, committed, imaginative, confident, and self-assured. There is also more congruence between the leaders' aspirations and self-perceptions. In transformational leadership, leaders share their own values with their followers and move from their own needs to the needs of their group, organisation or society. "Administrators in

academic affairs and those located at different levels in the administrative hierarchy perceive themselves as having more ability to enact change" (Eddy & Van der Linden, 2008:39). This is an ability which leaders can apply successfully with continuous improvement in office systems.

2.2 OFFICE SYSTEMS

In searching for a proper system that works for a company, a proper systems study needs to be undertaken and all the elements of a good system must be visible in the system. "A system is a group of parts that are interrelated in such a manner that they form a unified whole and work together to meet a defined need". In other words, it can be a group of individual processes or departments working together to attain the same goal in a company (Odgers, 2005:110).

By studying the interrelationship of the components of a system, called a systems analysis, work processes can be simplified and a solid foundation for managerial decision making can be provided. Two of the advantages of using a systems concept are, first, that wasteful, unproductive, and uneconomical activities are eliminated and, second, operating efficiency is improved (Quible, 2001:334). A good system is flexible, adaptable, systematic, simple and resourceful and consists of the following elements:

- Input:

  The beginning/resources such as information

- Processing:

  Transformation into desired output and involves functions such as counting, computing or sorting

- Output:

  This is often the input for another system and is the result of the input processed

- Feedback:

  This enables the system to determine whether results are meeting expectations

- Controlling:

If a system is properly planned, less control is needed because the organisation's policies and procedures will be accounted for as well as state and federal rules and regulations (Quible, 2001:336).

2.2.1 Systems study

Staff in charge of an administrative office should be alert to internal problems throughout the system, as well as to those problems that involve the external environment (business community and customers). Continuous improvement is necessary and a systems study can assist the office to simplify the system processes and attain its goal. The following process can be used for a system study:

- Identify the work problem and all its components, noting the interrelationships of all parts and how each contributes to the total work system
- Clarify the objectives for which the system is designed
- Note the effect and synergism in the system. Interrelated parts produce a total effect greater than the sum of each of the parts working independently
- Consider all problems from a systems point of view

A perfect system does not exist but an effective system can be developed. Even if a system has limitations it must provide best possible service to the departments concerned (Keeling & Kallaus, 1996:94). An effective system in place probably has a positive influence on productivity.

2.2.2 Effective systems

System performance can be measured by efficiency, effectiveness, system performance standard and forecasting. Efficiency is a measure of what is produced divided by what is consumed; effectiveness is a measure of the extent to which a system achieves its goals. It can be computed by dividing the goals actually achieved by the total of the stated goals. A system performance standard is the specific objective of a system and forecasting is predicting future events in order to avoid problems (Stair & Reynolds, 2011:29).

2.3 OFFICE PRODUCTIVITY

Productivity is the result from the output divided by the input. The more output obtained from the input, the better the productivity is. The AOM plays an important role in productivity of staff but needs to be informed of new technology and various management practices such as work standards, total quality management and value stream management (Quible, 2001:313).

2.3.1 Work standards

Work should be measured to enable the office manager to set standards. The standards should be set in such a way that they provide a sufficient incentive for employees to perform well but also at a level at which the average employee can be reasonably successful. The employees will be able to increase their efficiency and less supervision will be needed (Quible, 2001:307).

2.3.2 Total quality management

Total quality management stresses continual improvement. It is designed to help an organisation improve the quality of its products and services as well as everything the organisation does to get the product or service into the hands of the customer. Teamwork and empowerment are the two critical ingredients of total quality management (Quible, 2001:329).

2.3.3 Value stream management

Tapping and Shuker (2003:8) describe value stream management as “a process for planning and linking lean initiatives through systematic data capture and analysis”. If value is produced for a customer it is called value stream. The whole purpose is to eliminate non-value-added work waste, work or processes that serve no real purpose.

Some of the benefits of value stream management are that a business becomes more competitive, the office setting improves and waste that causes fatigue, frustration and burn-out is eliminated. It results in more job satisfaction because employees are positively and actively involved and workers control the activities. This results in operations on the cost-reduction principle: by reducing internal cost and not increasing prices, zero defects produce the highest quality in a business sector; cost and delivery requirements are met and all non-value-added work from the customer’s value stream is eliminated.

Table 2.2 provides examples of how to eliminate unnecessary waste that uses unnecessary resources.

TABLE 2.2: RECOGNISING AND ELIMINATING OFFICE WASTE

Waste	**Example**	**How to eliminate**
Overproducing	Produce more than needed or too soon	Establish workflow sequence, norms and standards
Waiting	Waiting for something or someone	Review equipment, cross-train employees
Over processing	Do something the customer does not want	Review value-added steps and eliminate unnecessary work; take out signatures where possible
Inventory	Excess stock of anything	Do work on time; produce only enough to satisfy customer
Motion	Unnecessary movements	Standardise folders, drawers, cabinets. Arrange files for easy access, arrange office equipment centrally
Defects or correction	Mistakes which must be corrected	Establish standardised work procedures and forms; create and post job aids
Transport	Filing, stocking, moving materials and people	Eliminate temporary storage locations; reduce distances to which items are moved

2.4 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

It is increasingly difficult for human beings to live their lives without encountering information technology (IT). Modern IT has enabled us to organise our society, business, and live in new ways; it became global through inventions such as cell phones and the internet. The applications of IT have expanded from traditional automating such as process control, word processing, information systems and communicating applications to various entertainment applications such computer pets and computer games. Companies are forced to understand the users' needs and construct appropriate products and services so that they can develop a useful and usable system that creates surplus for the company (Livari, Imaki & Pekkola, 2010:109).

The benefits of an information system are vast for a company but it is also necessary to ensure good data quality and a proper customer relations system which is customer focused. In an ever-growing competitive market the use and correct application of IT is an important necessity for any company, whether small or big. Every company needs a computer system. Although costs are involved like purchasing and maintaining electronic hardware, software and programs, the benefits far outweigh the costs (Laudon & Laudon, 2004:417).

2.4.1 Benefits of information systems

"Strategic planning allows a company to examine its purpose, vision and values and develops a mission statement, which leads to goals, objectives, day to day operations, and business results that affect company stakeholders. Effective information systems help an organization support its business processes, carry out its mission, and serve its stakeholders" (Shelly, Cashman & Rosenblatt, 2009:10). Table 2.3 shows the tangible benefits as well as the intangible benefits of information systems.

TABLE 2.3: BENEFITS OF INFORMATION SYSTEMS
(Laudon & Laudon, 2004:417)

Tangible Benefits		**Intangible Benefits**	
Lower operational costs and increased cash flow	Increased productivity	More efficient customer service and advanced decision making	Improved asset utilisation
	Lower operational costs		Improved resource control
	Reduced workforce		Improved organisational planning
	Lower computer expenses		Increased organisational flexibility
	Lower outside vendor costs		More timely information
	Lower clerical and professional costs		More information
	Reduces rate of growth of expenses		Increased organisational learning
	Reduces facility costs		Enhanced employee goodwill
			Increased job satisfaction
			Improved decision making and operations
			Higher client satisfaction
			Better corporate image

2.4.2 Data quality

Quality problems can be caused by redundant and inconsistent data produced by multiple systems. Duplicate or inconsistent data elements should be minimal if a database is properly designed and enterprise-wide data standards are established. “Data which is inaccurate, untimely, or inconsistent with other sources of information creates serious operational and financial problems for business” (Laudon & Laudon, 2007:170). Inaccurate or untimely information can cause insufficiencies in the supply chain, such as incomplete records, untimely communication and incorrect information. Software is available for data cleansing, a process of activities for detecting and correcting data in a database that is incorrect, incomplete, improperly formatted or redundant. An example of a data cleansing system is the REBDCA. Previously inflexible hardcode or inefficient manual work was done to detect and repair data quality problems. REBDCA uses rules to describe data cleansing logic and then uses rules engine to execute it (Zhou & Dong, 2006:26).

2.4.3 Customer relations systems

If a company is service driven, it needs to look at a proper customer relations system to be able to be competitive. Laudon and Laudon (2007:274) confirm that competitive advantage is often short-lived if it is based on an innovative new product or service. Companies realise that their only enduring competitive strength may be their relationships with their customers. Customer relationships management systems are imperative, capture and integrate customer data from all over the organisation, consolidate the data, analyse the data and distribute the results to various systems and customer touch points across the enterprise. A touch point is a method of interaction with the customer such as telephone, email, customer service desk, Web site or retail store. Problems arise from time to time in an office and need to be dealt with efficiently.

2.5 PROBLEM SOLVING IN THE OFFICE ENVIRONMENT

Keeling & Kallaus (1996:56) assert that a problem is a question to be answered, or the difference between what is (the present condition) and what should be (the goal). The AOM has little control over some resources used in the office, for example, energy cost, furniture cost and salaries. However, he or she does have the power to solve low-productivity problems within the office and thus exert a positive effect on the costs of producing goods and services. Major efforts are needed to improve productivity (the ratio between the resources (inputs) used by a business firm (hours labour, capital, machinery, equipment,

raw material such as information, and energy) and what the firm realises from using those resources. The AOM needs to be aware of the types of problems in the office environment and make use of a proper problem solving model.

2.5.1 Problems in an administrative office

Problems in an administrative office can be divided into three categories: namely, the human factor, systems, and economics. Table 2.4 explains the typical problems and barriers in an administrative office.

TABLE 2.4: TYPES OF PROBLEMS IN AN ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
(Keeling & Kallaus, 1996:71)

Type of problem	**Barrier to solution**	**Examples of barriers**
Human	Subjective, intangible, emotional human nature	Misperceptions
		Negative attitudes
		Attitudes of personnel
		Interpersonal conflict
Systems	Inability to achieve higher levels of productivity	Poor working conditions
		Inefficient use of machines
		Weak procedures
		Inadequate training
Economic	Poor use of available funds and resources	Poor use of time by office workers
		Theft of company property
		Failure to develop a sense of cost cutting

2.5.2 Problem solving

According to Tapping and Shuker (2003:90), teams need to solve problems as a group in order to improve performance immediately and serve customer demand, and suggest the following steps:

- Defining the problem
- Analysing possible causes
- Identifying possible solutions
- Developing an action plan

- Evaluating and renewing the action plan
- Standardising effective ideas

Excellent companies take the time to train teams in problem solving and give them time to solve problems. Motivation can be one of the problems that need to be solved. Staff motivation can be negatively affected if a department happens to be the last department in a chain and staff find themselves struggling with lack of cooperation from other departments.

2.6 MOTIVATION

Nel, (2005:54) states that "quality assurance is a behaviour inclination of the organisation as a whole (organisational cultural dimension) and individual employee behaviour (motivation) as part of any process or sub-process used to pursue quality in the products or services of the organisation" as quality requires commitment from top management to fully manifest part of an organisation's culture. According to Nel (2005:326), organisations cannot compete successfully without a motivated workforce. Total Quality Management (TQM) implies continuous improvement in products and services through the active learning and participation of employees. An organisational culture of achievement, self-actualisation and continuous learning is conducive to quality products and service.

Should performance problems arise, one should not look at motivation as the first cause, because problems may be due to poor material, machinery or work processes. However, should a lack of motivation be evident, the inter-relatedness of the individual, the job characteristics, the job context and the organisational culture should be considered (Nel, 2005:310). One needs to have knowledge of the levels of motivation as well as the motivational theories. This is discussed in detail below.

2.6.1 Levels of Motivation

Employees function at three levels of motivation. Table 2.5 illustrates the three different levels of motivation.

TABLE 2.5: LEVELS OF MOTIVATION
(Nel, 2005:310)

Minimum level	**Expected level**	**Maximum level**
Doing less than is required	Doing what is required	Doing more than what is required (this is a motivated employee)
Employee makes more errors, is tardier, delivers poor quality work and is disciplined more often	Employee does what is expected not to get into trouble but nothing more	Employee is prepared to walk the extra mile, use their initiative, apply skills where needed and put in more effort to achieve goals

2.6.2 Motivational theories

It is important that a holistic perspective of motivation be taken rather than isolating one theory as the "best" one. Nel, (2005:327) summarise the different theories in two categories:

- Maslow and Herzberg attempt to explain specific things that motivate people at work. They identify the needs and goals people pursue in order to satisfy these needs.
- Process theories attempt to identify the variables that impact on motivation. It is concerned with how behaviour is initiated, directed and sustained. They emphasise the actual process of motivation.

In some cases, administrative offices are directly linked to service delivery which forms part of the same office. It also happens that an administrative office is indirectly linked to service delivery and staff are not always aware of the important role they play in service delivery. During the planning of a system for an administrative office, care is to be taken when customers are involved. Correct processes must be included when dealing with customers as service delivery is a method of service marketing and customers can be retained or lost due to the quality of service delivered (Lovelock Wirtz & Chew, 2009:23).

3. SERVICE DELIVERY

It is important to know how customers evaluate service. Customers make an application; their applications are processed; they are notified if they have been successfully accepted. What is most important for the customers? The actual interaction with the counter personnel? The way the application form is designed? Or the speed and method with which they receive an answer? What if you become aware of the needs and wants of the customer, but your department is at the end of the chain of activities for a customer? Can your department make a difference?

According to Kaynaka and Hartley (2008:468), it is most important to know that the implementation of quality management internally within each supply chain member's organisation is a prerequisite to supply chain quality. They also emphasise that communication, collaboration and integration among supply chain members with respect to quality are also important to performance as is customer focus. Downstream and upstream integration of processes appears to impact quality performance.

Stanley and Wisner (2009:62) support the fact that "there is a positive relationship between the level of service quality performance to its internal customers and an organisation's capability to satisfy its external customers".

Achieving organisational goals depends on determining the needs and wants of the target market and delivering the desired products or services more effectively and efficiently than competitors do (Strydom, 1999:13-22).

Service and marketing have evolved over the years, beginning with the Industrial Revolution, and then the production era during which businesses focused on the production of a few specific products in mass followed. Because stock began piling up, the era of sales orientation started. As consumers developed more sophisticated needs, and were in a better financial position to satisfy their needs, they could choose from competing products. Management then realised the importance of the marketing function.

The marketing concept means that a business aims all its efforts at satisfying customer needs and wants – at a profit. Achieving organisational goals depends on determining the needs and wants of the target market and delivering the desired products or services more effectively and efficiently than competitors do. Later on only, the markets became aware of relationship marketing. The focus shifted from one-time transactions to ongoing relationships. The focal points were integrating customer service, quality, and marketing. Some businesses defined customer service as quality product delivery and repair. The view has since changed and customer service has become the job of everyone in the enterprise, including people who do not interact directly with customers. Customer orientation, the first principle of the marketing concept, dictates that all actions should be aimed at satisfying customer needs and wants (Strydom, 1999:12).

The importance of the service value chain, the manner in which customers evaluate service and service resources will be further evaluated.

3.1 SERVICE VALUE CHAIN

The customers of a company bring value to the company by making use of that company. However, a customer will only make use of a company if he or she can get value from the company, whether it is a product or a service. The better the products or services provided by the company, the more customers will be attracted to make use of the company. This principle is called Service Value Chain.

According to Bruhn and Georgi (2006:9), competition within the respective industries became more severe because of the shrinking/stable services markets and they believe that service providers must ask themselves how they respond to these developments. For a long time it seemed to be enough for service providers to offer a certain range of services at a certain quality level and competitive prices in order to attract demand. However, owing to severe competition in the markets, a greater need arose for service providers to ensure and increase their firms' value. They needed to use money to attract customers but customers only use a service when the usage promises to create value for them. These promises represent the value the customer perceives to receive from the provider and its services. Thus, a firm's value depends on the value of the services perceived by the customer. It is important to understand the concept of a value process and that services are processes.

3.1.1 Services are processes

According to Akao (2004:27), a new product development can include applying new technology, combining existing and new technology or improving quality and performance. An accurate understanding of customer and market demand is the key to successful new product developments. The most important similarity between products and services is the fact that it is important to know the market for the specific product market.

The following characteristics of service can be used as a guideline to introduce the service to the correct market. Figure 2.1 illustrates the different characteristics of a service.

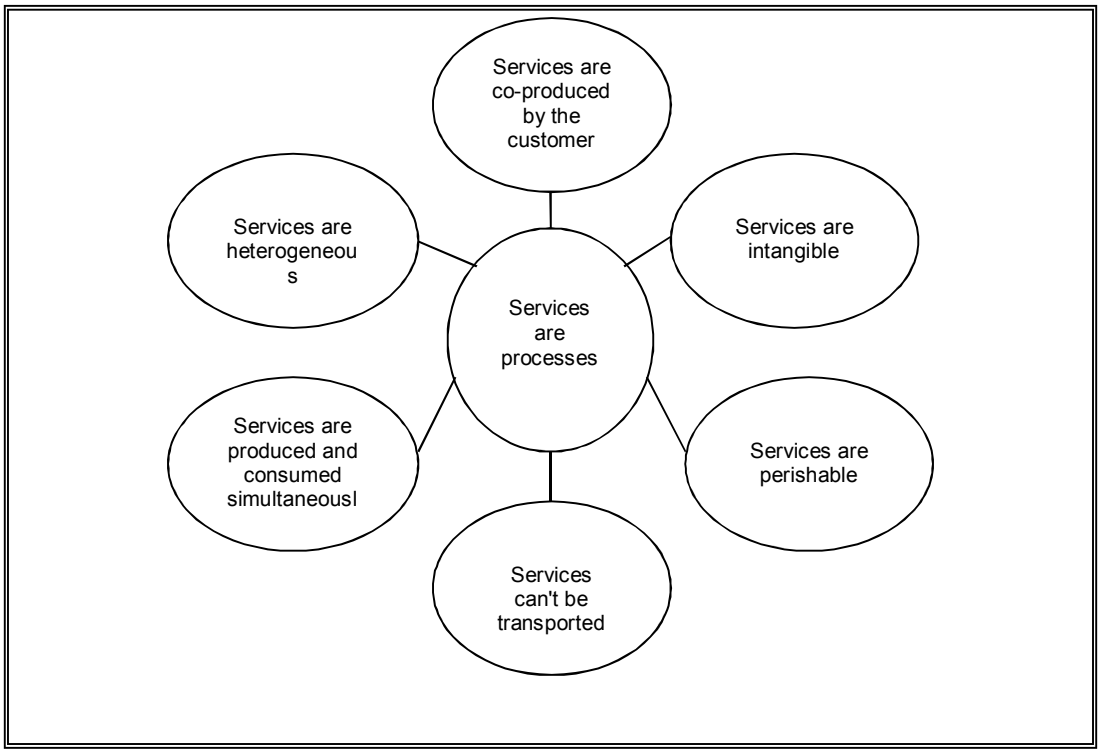

FIGURE 2.1: SERVICES ARE PROCESSES
(Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:13)

Following is a detailed explanation of the characteristics of a service and the reason why service can be considered a process.

- Services are intangible because of the intangible nature of the service process, its input (e.g. employees' abilities) and its outcome. When the differences between services and consumer goods are compared, you can interpret these differences as characteristics of service.The service itself is a process, e.g. haircutting or attending an university. Yes, the customer does benefit from the outcome, e.g. new hairstyle or university degree; however, each of these services itself is a process.
- Services are perishable because processes can only be conducted and not stored.
- Service capacities can decay because of their intangibility. Services cannot be stored, i.e. the seats of an aeroplane or cinema cannot be utilised at another point in time it they are not utilised at their scheduled time.
- If something is intangible it cannot be transported. As a consequence, services are not transportable.
- Services are produced and consumed simultaneously within the service process.
- Consumer goods can be bought and taken home for use later but services cannot be purchased and utilised later at home.

- Services are heterogeneous, because, for different customers, service processes might differ. If an instructor teaches two different persons, one willing and talented and the other one forced and not talented, the input and outcome will differ totally.
- Services are co-produced by customers; without the presence of customers in the service process, a service cannot be produced and delivered.

The co-production characteristic is valid because services are heterogeneous and are consumed and produced simultaneously. This is the most important characteristic of service. The service cannot be conducted without some customer involvement. Customers can benefit either from the service outcome, or the service itself. The provider benefits from the customer because the customer and their objects are production factors necessary for the service delivery. The garage needs the car at the garage to be able to repair the car and the customer must be at the hotel to be able to utilise the hotel room. On the other hand, customers spend their time when making use of a service. They cannot use their car when it is being repaired by the garage and must use their own time to be present at the hotel room. The customer takes a risk when using a service as the outcome can be good or bad; wasting time at the administrative building or gaining from it (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:13).

3.1.2 The value process

From the providers' perspective, the value concerns the value of the firm. Revenue increases value and cost reduces value, and all activities of the service provider lead to revenue. It costs money for firms to be able to attract customers by delivering excellent service. They can invest in more resources like more employees or better technology to minimise turnaround time (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:16).

There is a distinction between the primary and secondary value of a process: It is with the secondary value that problems arise as workers most often do not see the importance of their processes and service delivery. In a study about leadership in Higher Education institutions it was found that administrative staff do not see their role as academic staff as important. They feel that their area of responsibility is secondary to the primary mission of the institution (Eddy & Van der Linden, 2008:28).

- Primary Value Process

This is the activity that creates a direct value. In service, value is created by the throughput of the customer or his or her objects in the service production process. This throughput creates a direct value for the customer as well as for the provider. The first stage of this throughput can be attending classes at a university. The knowledge gained is the primary value of an education institution. When mistakes happen in industrial production, they can

be resolved without the customer perceiving the mistake. This is a very important aspect of service delivery because the customer is present during the service delivery process. Mistakes can happen but according to Bruhn and Georgi (2006:17) and confirmed by Denove and Power (2006:182), customers are even more satisfied after a successful service recovery than after an impeccable service delivery.

- Secondary Value Process

Primary processes that have a direct impact on value are influenced by the secondary value processes that affect value indirectly. In the case of a Higher Education institution, support services such as administration play an important role. Service excellence can also be a secondary value because it can retain the customer.

Value-oriented services marketing aims at managing service processes in such a way that the service profit chain is influenced positively and positive customer evaluations are induced, resulting in positive customer behaviours. Consequently, these evaluations and behaviours lead to more customer value and, therefore, more value to the firm.

3.2 HOW CUSTOMERS EVALUATE SERVICE

According to Pretorius (2007:45), a company's brand can be made or destroyed by the service delivery. Strong brands increase the customer's trust in an invisible purchase. They enable customers' perceived monetary, social, or safety risks in buying services, which are difficult to evaluate prior to purchase: "strong brands are surrogates when the company offers no fabric to touch, no trousers to try on, no watermelons or apples to scrutinise, no automobile on test-drive" (Berry, 2000:128, cited in Pretorius, 2007:45).

Bruhn and Georgi (2006:48) state: "Generally, service evaluation plays an important role as a driver of customer decisions. Therefore, in the generalised Service Profit Chain, service evaluations are the determinant of customer behaviour. A central construct regarding customers' service evaluations is the concept of perceived service value".

3.2.1 Perceived service value

Value to the customer leads to value to the firm. The more customers value a service the more likely it is that they will use the service. The perceived value is generally defined as the relationship between the customer's perceived benefit and effort (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:48). The following questions can be asked to determine the perceived value: Does service X have a good price-benefit ratio, a high quality for its price, a good buy and is it fairly priced? The perceived quality plays an important role in managing perceived value.

3.2.2 Perceived service quality

Consumer goods can easily be evaluated for value by comparing their attributes. Qualities are specific services characteristics like friendliness of staff, waiting times or modernity of facilities. Each service process can exhibit a different quality. Finally, the participation and the evaluation of customers in the process determine that the customer alone can define what he or she perceives as quality service. When customers' perceptions of a service exceed their expectations, they perceive a high service quality but when customers perceive that a service fails to meet expectations, they perceive bad service quality (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:49).

To illustrate how a customer perceives service value and quality, figure 2.2 is included.

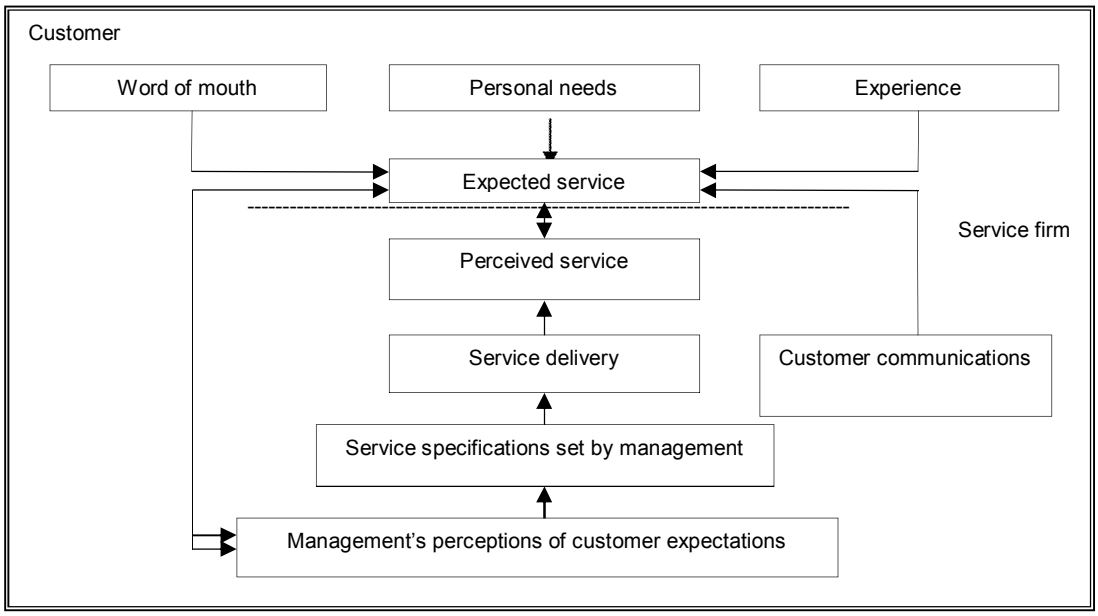

FIGURE 2.2: SERVICE QUALITY
(Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:51)

3.2.3 Customer expectations

There can still be different interpretations of what high or low service quality is due to customers' expectations. These expectations can concern different aspects of a service. One group of customers can evaluate service on price; others on friendliness. Bruhn and Georgi (2006:54) identify five dimensions in the different service industries.

- Tangibles: Outward appearance of seller like the room furniture or personnel appearance
- Reliability: The seller's capability of supplying the promised output at the stated level

- Responsiveness: The corporation's capability to respond to and satisfy the customer's wishes; that is, the willingness to react and the reaction speed of the company
- Assurance: The seller's capability of delivering the output, specifically in terms of the knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness of the employees
- Empathy: The seller's willingness and capability of responding to individual customer's desires

According to Bruhn and Georgi (2006:54), a psychological state that relates future behavioural consequences for a person represents an individual's expectations. Predictive expectations are a customer's expectations of a certain level of service or outcome in advance; the level of service that is taken for granted. A normative expectation is the customer's demand of a certain output level from the service provider.

3.2.4 Service encounters

The service encounter is the heart of the service process because this is where the service is produced. Customers perceive a service encounter as a row of incidents and notice especially the significantly positive or negative critical incidents. Service interactions are important to the customer, in many cases even more important than the core service, like the film seen or the fact that a customer eventually receives money from the ATM (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:76).

Figure 2.3 illustrates the meeting of the customer and service provider at the service encounter. What happens between the customer and service provider determines the service quality the customer perceives. The actual service encounter is the most important process that the customer experiences but the service provider can plan for this service encounter and thus increase service quality.

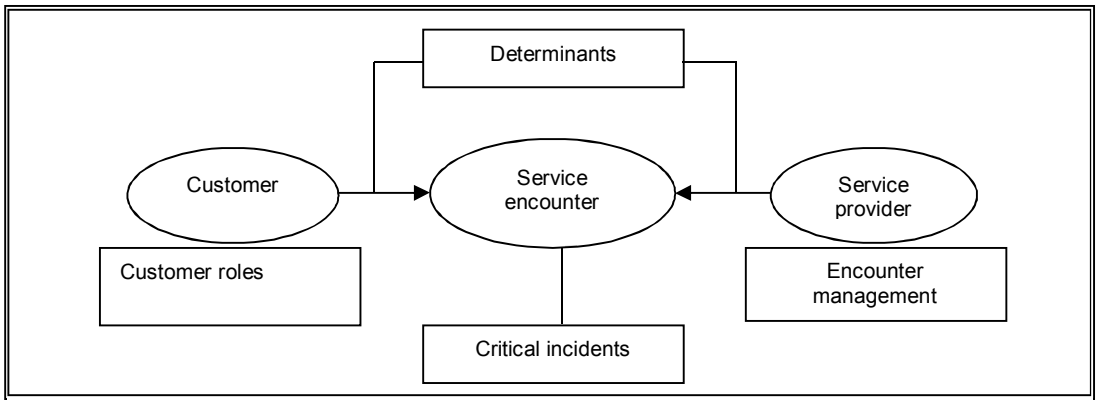

FIGURE 2.3: SERVICE ENCOUNTER ELEMENTS IN SERVICE PRODUCTION
(Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:77)

Although it is not so easy to plan service interactions such as those for the manufacturing of goods, service encounters can be planned systematically. Figure 2.4 demonstrates how planning can be done for service encounters and incorporate service recovery as part of the service processes, for example:

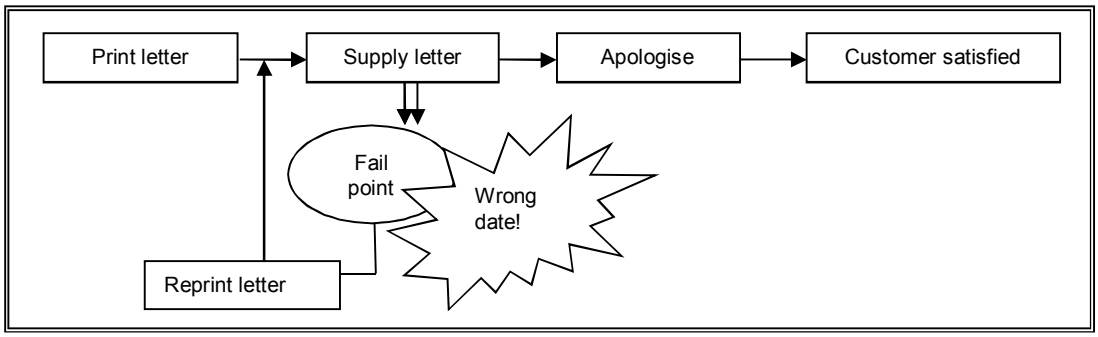

FIGURE 2.4: SERVICE ENCOUNTER PLANNING
(Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:89)

3.2.5 Service recovery

Failures can result in negative value because more costs are involved in re-doing an activity. The customer can be dissatisfied and reduce his or her business with the service provider, which reduces income for the service provider. Quality management is crucial to promote avoiding mistakes and doing the task correctly in the first place. Unfortunately this is not always possible in service delivery because of customer involvement in the service process and because a mistake cannot be made without the risk of the customer detecting the mistake. The effects of service failure can be detrimental to the company as it can lose customers by decreased loyalty or more customers by word of mouth which will then lead to revenue loss (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:91).

Successful service recovery can assist in the avoidance of consecutive failures by a service provider. Generally a successful service recovery leads to customer satisfaction and the impact of service failures, decreased loyalty and negative word-of-mouth statements are compensated for. The cost increases when a customer is redirected during service recovery and even more when the failure is not detected early and recovered quickly (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:95). Chebat and Slusarczyk (2005:665), in their study of the role of customers' emotions, assert that even if the problem which triggered the complaint can be fixed, the customers do not necessarily remain loyal if their emotions are not properly attended to.

Figure 2.5 demonstrates the effects of service recovery. Although the company can retain a customer, the costs involved can be very high.

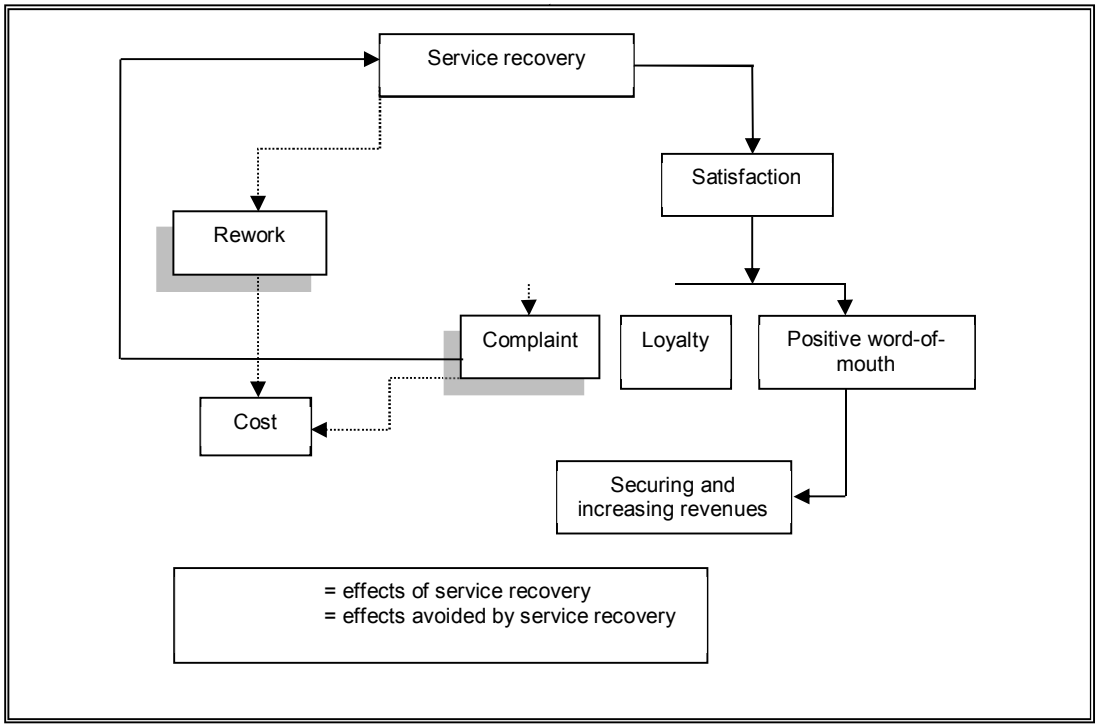

FIGURE 2.5: EFFECTS OF SERVICE RECOVERY
(Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:95)

3.3 SERVICE RESOURCES

Service resources are grouped in three categories: service employees, service technology and service tangibles.

3.3.1 Service employees

Service employees are the staff delivering the actual service.

- Value effects of service employee behaviour

The value contribution of human resources arises from service employees' behaviour. Employees' behaviour has an impact on revenues or cost. Employees deliver a service to the customer. These factors are valid for both internal customer and employee satisfaction (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:306).

Internal service quality – the service quality that is delivered from one department to another department of the organisation.

Internal customer satisfaction – satisfied employees are more motivated and more willing to act in a firm's interest in customer interaction.

Internal customer loyalty – loyal employees help to keep customers loyal, especially when customers are linked to employees, for instance, service banking (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:306).

- The impact of organisational culture on service delivery

According to Rampall (2010:262), shared service structures promote savings, efficiency and customer satisfaction. A shared service structure needs the whole organisation to be customer focused and often the culture of an organisation needs to be adapted to be service driven.

Culture refers to a system of shared beliefs, norms, values and backgrounds of members of a group in an organisation; the way things are done at the organisation, the policies, rules, regulations and operating procedures within formal structures. Individual employees daily interact with co-workers and clients. Their actions (behaviour) are controlled and guided by structural variables like communication channels, policies, procedures, and the bosses keeping strict supervision over job execution (Nel, 2005:55).

Change is required to create an inclination that is positive for quality-assured individual outputs. This is something that develops within the informal system of the organisation and the ability to cultivate quality mindedness and aggressive transformational leadership is required. Are universities really focused on marketing? According to Palmer (2008a:35), an organisation that is focused on marketing has the following characteristics:

- Opening hours to suit customers rather than employees; that is a common strategy in many public sector departments
- Administrative procedures that could make life easier for the organisation rather than for its customers, for example, "one-stop" facilities

- Logistical services such as reserving prime car parking spaces for staff members rather than customers
- Advertising that is aimed at the egos of company managers rather than the needs and aspirations of potential customers

3.3.2 Service technology

Service technology is composed of the technological components used in service delivery and includes all technological components such as computers (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:325).

- In the interaction process, technology has a direct effect on customers: internet services used by the customer such as on-line enquiries
- Employees are supported by technology – customer information is provided and it helps fulfil customers' needs

3.3.3 Service tangibles

Although tangibles are of low relevance, they play an important role in influencing customer perceptions and decisions, for instance, a banking client will see a well-dressed employee as different from one that is unshaven and dressed in jeans and sweatshirt. According to Bruhn and Georgi (2009:320), there are three distinguishable service tangibles:

- Servicecape

Servicecape includes the furniture and technical equipment, appearance of employees as well as the atmosphere of the place where the service is delivered.

- Service environment

Customers look at the environment such as the neighbourhood and surroundings.

- Service material

This has mostly a supportive function for the service encounter such as the menu at a restaurant, technology used or the appearance of the application form. If this irritates the customer, it will have a negative effect on the perceptions of the customer.

4. SYNERGY

Synergy means a working cooperative. When the interrelated parts produce a total effect greater than the sum of each of the parts working independently it is referred to as synergism. Synergy also leads to groups and teams and their effectiveness. Synergy is an

important element in the success or failure of administrative change and implementation (Chackerian & Mavima, 2001:353).

When customers go to administrative offices and experience excellent service from the moment they become aware of that department, until they walk away, does the difference between the good experience at this administrative department and the previous one where they had a bad experience even cross their minds? It often happens that customers do not even notice the excellent service they received at a particular service counter. They may not even be aware of all the processes their applications went through before they received the excellent service.

In an organisation with numerous different departments it is imperative that all the departments work together as one team within each department as well as for the organisation. Higher education institutions are in a competitive market and synergy is very important but can be very complicated because of the infrastructure of these institutions. Synergy between the public and private sectors with the emphasis on shifting from inward-looking systems to developing partnerships and from inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes has resulted in greater efficiency being delivered and more responsive and flexible public services (Kaul, 1998:1).

Nel (2005:367) emphasises that teamwork is one of the cornerstones of TQM. This increases performance levels and employee and customer satisfaction. It is important to achieve quality within the group otherwise quality in the organisation cannot be attained. In a very competitive environment, organisations can only achieve their goals through the combined efforts of everybody involved in the organisation. Today's tendency is team-based, flat, focused, flexible and adaptive, capable of rapid responses to change. Group- and teamwork allows for greater participation, increased performance, and it influences the motivation and satisfaction of employees (Nel, 2005:352).

Groups consist of individuals who

- have a mutual goal or objective
- consciously work towards achieving this goal or objective
- relate to one another
- have behavioural expectations of one another

Characteristics of an effective group

- the reason for existence is clear
- guidelines or procedures for decision-making are in place

- communication exists among group members
- members receive and render mutual assistance
- members diagnose their processes and improve their own functioning

Each person has a role in the group, a set of expected behaviour patterns associated with someone in a given position in a group. Whether you are the machine operator or supervisor, you are expected to behave in a certain way in that specific role. Bensimon and Neumann (1992:13) believe that a team has elements such as conflict, does not only take instructions from the team leader, and is sometimes clumsy and creative. It does not only have manager-determined goals and is not machine-like.

A group always has a leader, even in the absence of the designated leader. An effective leader has a concern for the task as well as for the members of the group. An autocratic approach is more effective when team members are not ready to take part in the decision-making process or lack confidence in participating. If members are ready to participate in the decision-making process and can make a reasonable contribution, a democratic approach can be followed. One of the most important functions of a leader is to facilitate the developmental process of group members so that they can make a meaningful contribution to the attainment of group goals, and experience satisfaction (Nel, 2005:358).

The size of a group influences its overall performance. Larger groups are needed for ideas or alternatives as experience and ideas are combined. The risk in larger groups is social loafing: a person may lie back waiting for someone else to stand in for him or her. Smaller groups work faster and responsibility is more explicitly given to individuals; thus they are more effective with the execution of tasks (Nel, 2005:361).

Moderate conflict is healthy for a group as it is an energising force that spurs members to better alternatives and higher goals and stimulates creative thinking and innovation. When conflict is too low or too high, the performance is influenced negatively. Too high levels of cohesion and conformity tend to bring down performance. When members spend energy on highlighting or resolving interpersonal differences rather than on the goal attainment, performance is low because of the negative conflict (Nel, 2005:363).

If a company has all the components in place, such as administrative processes and procedures, a system designed to its needs, high service standards and there is synergy among all the components, the company can make use of performance management to ensure that performance is maintained.

5. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

If it is necessary to determine that a system is working the way it should be, performance management is a tool that can be used to establish a feasibility study. Performance management enables you to determine what the current situation is, what is desired and what to do to gain the desired results. You will be able to determine what is important, where the needs are and what must be improved or changed. The researcher provides a closer look at the importance of performance management and the steps which can be taken to manage performance.

“Managing and delivering performance is right at the centre of any government, public sector or not-for-profit organisation ... they all need to manage the effective and efficient delivery of their services” (Marr, 2009:1). Robbins and Decenzo (1998:183) state: “It is important for managers to get their employees to reach performance levels that the organization considers desirable”. According to Robbins and Coulter (1995:465), performance is the end result of an activity and organisational performance is the accumulated end result of all the organisation’s work processes and activities. The most frequently used organisational performance measures include:

- Organisational productivity: the overall output of goods or services produced divided by the inputs needed to generate that output
- Organisational effectiveness: a measure of how appropriate organisational goals are and how well an organisation is at achieving those goals
- Industry rankings: companies are ranked by employees and customers

Performance management is a human resources process which has become increasingly popular since the 1980s. It is designed to improve organisational, team and individual performance and is owned and driven by line managers. It is a process for getting the best performance from individuals, teams, and the organisation as a whole. Effective performance management is shared objectives achieved by individuals for the benefit of the company (Marr, 2009:271).

Performance management has never been more critical. Marr (2009:1) identifies easy-to-follow tools, techniques and templates to create a truly performance-driven organisation in which managing and measuring what matters becomes everyone’s everyday job and leads to real performance improvements. Performance management is far more than just collecting and reporting data or just people management. Strategic performance management is about identifying, measuring and then managing what matters in order to

improve the effectiveness, efficiency and overall performance of an organisation. Figure 2.6 illustrates the steps for managing performance.

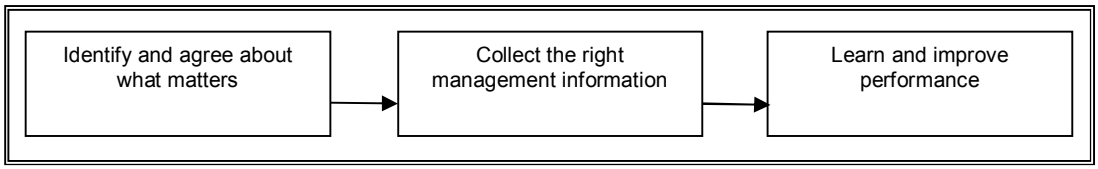

FIGURE 2.6: MANAGING PERFORMANCE
(Marr, 2009:1)

5.1 IDENTIFY AND AGREE ABOUT WHAT MATTERS

An organisation can only reach its goals if it knows what they are, so that everyone pulls in the same direction. If anybody in an organisation finds it difficult to answer a question about why the company exists, there is a problem. Organisations create value not only by understanding their outcome objectives, but also by having a deep understanding of the nature of their core activities and resources required to deliver them. A company needs to analyse information about its external markets (customers and competitors) and internal markets (personnel and resources). Now only can a strategy be formed and become the starting point for organisational alignment and for any performance indicators (Marr, 2009:4).

5.2 COLLECT THE RIGHT MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

Performance indicators must help us assess the things that matter the most, and not merely those that are easy to measure. They should assess what they value rather than value what is assessed. It is generally accepted that measurement is necessary for our civilisation to flourish but it is often felt in a public sector and not-for-profit organisational context that it reduces human and social complexities to inhuman or meaningless numbers. As a consequence, poor performance measurement practices in organisations can result in counter productivity or dysfunctional behaviours when the wrong things are done just to meet performance measures and targets. Marr (2009:7) asserts that there are three reasons for measuring performance within each department:

- Controlling behaviour: Measures are used to guide and control people's behaviours and actions; to set goals or rules; objectively access and provide feedback on the goals and rules
- External reporting and compliance: Inform external stakeholders and comply with external reporting regulations and information requests

- Learning and empowerment: Empower employees and equip them with the information they need to learn and make decisions that lead to improvements

5.3 LEARN AND IMPROVE PERFORMANCE

You need to use the information for evidence in decision making. This is the beginning point of an improvement journey. If you want learning to take place, the right culture and attitude towards performance improvement needs to be developed. With a performance-driven culture everyone is truly engaged in and in charge of performance management. Some of the key elements of a performance-driven culture are the appropriate leadership approach; the right reward and recognition system; appropriate reporting and communication processes and the right performance review routines (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:8).

"Performance measurement is the process of quantifying the effectiveness and efficiency of action. Effectiveness is the extent to which a customer's requirements are met and efficiency measures how economically a firm's resources are utilized when providing a pre-specified level of customer satisfaction". The challenge however is that the focus of performance management in the supply chain management is not customer focused but rather focused on the internal processes (Shephard & Gunter, 2006:242).

6. HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education institutions are available worldwide which makes the competition among them very high. These institutions consist of academic departments that are responsible for learning, education and research. Support structures consist of finance, logistics, academic administration and other departments, each one with a specific function for allowing the Higher Education institution to operate as an organisation. The finance department is involved in the student accounts as well as all other income and expenditure. Logistics includes the buying, maintenance of buildings and university vehicles. These are services of which the students are unaware, and of which they will most likely never be aware. Academic administration, on the other hand, is much closer to the students. This department does the paperwork for the university. The student enrols, registers and gets examination results from these departments. When a student completes his or her studies, he or she will also apply for a graduation qualification to be issued. The researcher's focus was the graduation office. The government determines that a Higher Education institution provide Higher Education and operate under the Higher Education Act, with provision for quality promotion by the The Further Education and Training Colleges Act (2006).

6.1 HIGHER EDUCATION IN CONTEXT

Although Higher Education institutions such as the University of Johannesburg, the University of Pretoria, UNISA and the Tshwane University of Technology are governed by the Department of Higher Education and are subject to certain laws and rules and regulations, studies in Higher Education show that the focus for marketing can be divided into three marketing roles: namely, product, price and service delivery. Faculties control the product, Finance controls the price and Administration controls the service delivery (Hayes, 2007:929). The research done on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The quality of service delivery in education is not limited to the classroom because support services form part of a student's needs and experience at a Higher Education institution (Roland, 2009:62).

Higher Education institutions are forced to use business improvement methodologies and quality models to survive in the increasingly global market. It becomes important that universities adopt business models such as TQM to improve the quality that is rendered to students and industry. Implementation of quality assurance is known to universities and they need to implement it as part of their culture. Customer satisfaction is still a matter of concern and departments that support the academic function do not have clearly defined procedures whereby academics can access information about procedures (Ramdass & Kruger, n.d.:4).

6.2 HIGHER EDUCATION

Academic administration departments such as enrolment, registration, student services and graduations forms part of the support staff at a Higher Education institution. If you look closely at the structure, the registrar plays an important role. Some of the functions of the registrar are to support the vice-chancellor in the management and administration of the university and ensure that the university complies with the applicable legislation and the Further Education and Training Colleges Act (2006). A balance is needed between implementing rules and delivering quality service. In the past, the focus was on rules rather than service delivery. (Roland, 2009:62) emphasises that non-academic personnel need to be service-oriented rather than merely administratively efficient. It was found that students were satisfied with service delivered by academic personnel but students were very concerned about the lack of communication with the administrative staff and this may be impacting strongly on their overall negative view of the university's administration (Soutar & McNeil, 1996:72).

According to a recent study (Rothman & Essenko, 2007:135) conducted at North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus, there is growing evidence that Higher Education

institutions no longer provide the low-stress environment they once did. Support staff play an important role in the creation and development of knowledge and innovation in Higher Education institutions and have been largely overlooked in recent literature when the issues of quality service, stress, and burnout have come under scrutiny.

The following are reasons for the role of support staff being overlooked:

- Higher Education institutions remain focused on teaching and research, with the administrative tasks existing to facilitate these aims
- Most published studies have been done by academics and focus on those areas that concern them most (Rothman & Essenko, 2007:135).

Although academic quality is the most important factor at Higher Education institutions, service delivery is one of the factors that influence the choice of university for international students, according to research done by Habate (2005). It may seem that the international market is not so much a problem currently but it could be in the future. There are two challenges in the international market:

- How to gain and maintain exports to other nations
- How to defend domestic markets against imported goods (David, 2007:337)

6.3 THE GRADUATION OFFICE

The graduation office forms part of the registrar's function and is responsible for enforcing the law and applying rules and regulations. It is imperative that Higher Education institutions adhere to these rules to keep the value and authenticity of a qualification. The Department of Education provides prescriptions of requirements for the courses which are presented and issued by a university, for example, Report 151 which is also known as the rules and regulations for each qualification of formal technikon instructional programmes in the Republic of South Africa. The issuing of qualifications is also subject to the rules and regulations of the university, for example, "Students will not be allowed to graduate if fees are outstanding" (2011: www.wits.ac.za).

Besides the rules the graduation office needs to adhere to, it also needs to deliver a service to the students, sometimes a determining factor for a student if the student intends to further his or her studies. This is very challenging for these offices as they are at the end of the chain of activities for students and sometimes these students have already had bad experiences with other departments, whether the registration or exams department, or any other department at the university. The graduation ceremonies are also a window for people who attend the ceremonies, visited by parents or other visitors to the university.

7. CONCLUSION

Staff in charge of an administrative office should be alert to internal problems throughout the system, as well as to those problems that involve the external environment (business community and customers). The AOM plays an important role in the productivity of staff but needs to be informed about new technology and various management practices such as work standards, TQM and value stream management. Some of the benefits of value stream management are that a business becomes more competitive; the office setting improves; waste that causes fatigue, frustration and burn-out is eliminated. It will result in more job satisfaction if the positive and active involvement of employees and activities is controlled by workers.

The benefits of an information system are vast for a company but one also needs to ensure good data quality and a proper customer relations system that is customer focused. In an ever-growing competitive market the use and correct application of information technology is an important necessity for any company, whether small or big.

The AOM has little control over some resources used in the office, for example, energy cost, furniture cost and salaries. However, he or she does have the power to solve low-productivity problems within the office and thus exert a positive effect on the costs of producing goods and services. Problems in the administrative office may be divided into three categories: namely, the human factor, system, and economics. It is most important to know that the implementation of quality management within each supply chain member's organisation is a prerequisite to supplying chain quality.

Achieving organisational goals depends on determining the needs and wants of the target market and delivering the desired products or services more effectively and efficiently than competitors do. A business needs to put all its efforts into satisfying customer needs and wants – at a profit. Achieving organisational goals depends on determining the needs and wants of the target market and delivering the desired products or services more effectively and efficiently than competitors do.

For a long time it seemed to be enough for service providers to offer a certain range of services at a certain quality level and competitive prices in order to attract demand. Because of the severe competition in the markets, it is increasingly difficult for service providers to increase and ensure their firms' value. Service can be considered a process because of its characteristics and a company's brand can be made or destroyed by service delivery. There are different interpretations of what high or low service quality is because of customers' expectations. The service encounter is the heart of the service process because this is

where service is produced. Customers perceive service as a row of incidents and notice especially the significantly positive or negative critical incidents. Service interactions are important to the customer, in many cases even more important than the core service.

Failures can result in negative value because more costs are involved in re-doing an activity and the customer can be dissatisfied and reduce his or her business with the service provider, which results in reduced income for the service provider. Quality management is crucial to promoting avoiding mistakes and doing the task correctly in the first place. Unfortunately this is not always possible in service delivery because of customers' involvement in the service process and mistakes cannot be made without the risk of customers detecting them. Successful service recovery can assist in the avoidance of consecutive failures by a service provider. Generally a successful service recovery leads to customer satisfaction and the impact of service failures on complaints, decreased loyalty and negative word of-mouth is compensated for. When customers are redirected during service recovery, the cost increases. It increases even more when the failure is not detected early and recovered quickly.

The three categories in which service resources are grouped are service employees, service technology and service tangibles. Service employees are the staff delivering the actual service; service technology includes the technological components used in service delivery. Although tangibles are of low relevance, they play an important role in influencing customer perceptions and decisions.

In an organisation with numerous different departments it is imperative that all departments work well within each department as well as together as one team for the company. Higher education institutions are in a competitive market and synergy is very important but can be very complicated because of the infrastructure of these institutions.

If you want to determine that a system is working the way it should be, performance management is a tool that can be used to establish a feasibility study. Performance management enables you to determine the current situation, what is desired and what to do to obtain the desired results. You will be able to determine what is important, where the needs are and what must be improved or changed. It is a human resources process which has become increasingly popular since the 1980s. It is designed to improve organisational, team and individual performance and is owned and driven by line managers. It is a process for getting the best performance from individuals, teams, and the organisation as a whole. Effective performance management involves shared objectives achieved by individuals for the benefit of the company

Although Higher Education institutions are governed by the Department of Higher Education and are subject to certain laws and rules and regulations, studies in Higher Education show that the focus for marketing can be divided into three marketing roles: namely, product, price and service delivery. The quality of service delivery in education is not limited to the classroom because support services form part of a student's needs and experience at a Higher Education institution. The research conducted on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The following chapter elaborates on the research conducted on the topics discussed in chapter 2.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH FRAMEWORK

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the research methodology used in this study. The research methodology encompasses the steps followed to conduct the research. Chapter 1 described the problem statement and the research design. The literature review was described and summarised in chapter 2.

To reiterate the aim of this research, the administrative processes and procedures have been examined and attempts have been made to try to find a solution to improve service delivery in the graduation offices of the three selected universities. The support staffs of the three universities were chosen because of the general feeling that there is room for improvement and it is a field that has not been researched and studied sufficiently. Applied research was conducted and narrowed to action research. The geographical demarcation included universities in Gauteng and probability samples as well as quantitative and qualitative statistics were used. A non-experimental design included longitudinal and cohort studies with primary and secondary data which include official statistics from archival resources and structured questionnaires, personal visits, telephone and email communication.

In this chapter the steps of the research process were discussed within a theoretical framework. Cross-references were made to the literature review in chapter 2, which highlighted some of the important points. For the social network, three Gauteng universities were chosen and staff as well as students were participants. The role of the researcher was discussed as well as the geographical demarcation of this study. For the purpose of this investigation, students who had complaints were of interest. The researcher wanted to determine the underlying service delivery problem as well as suggest improvements for the graduation office procedures. Qualitative and quantitative methods were used and the data collection instruments included questionnaires with a statistical data analysis. The population consisted of graduated students who had already experienced interaction with administrative offices at these universities and departmental staff who had serviced these students. The findings of the research were confirmed by triangulation of data. Ethical aspects were covered and compared with international guidelines. This chapter concluded with the validation of the research and recordkeeping.

As with any project, the foundation of a research project needs to be laid thoroughly in order for a strong and successful outcome to be assured.

2. RESEARCH FOUNDATION

Not only rules and procedures determine the type of research conducted. Different strategies also have an influence on the choice of knowledge about the social world, and form a crucial aspect of whether or not a natural science research process is suitable for the study. A research strategy determines the way in which the research model is formulated and the research is carried out. This determines the approach to research design and collection of data. Ontology and epistemology are often overlooked when research is conducted but it is important to know the basis on which the research is built. It is just as important to know that a specific tool has a specific purpose in order to choose the correct tools for the research. Figure 3.1 demonstrates research building blocks together with the interrelationships between the building blocks.

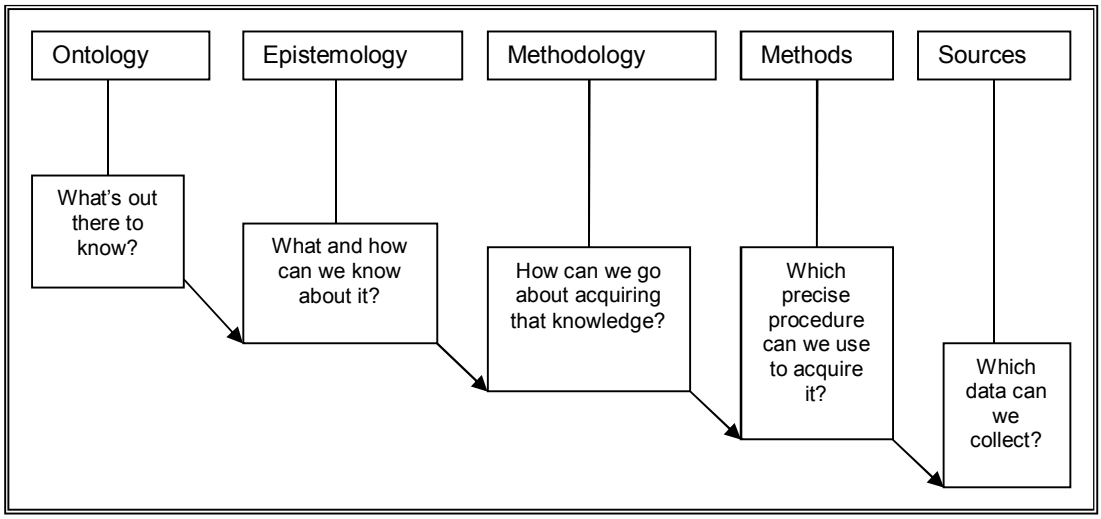

FIGURE 3.1: THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF RESEARCH
(Grix, 2010:68)

According to Grix (2010:170), it is important to understand how a particular view of the world affects the whole research process. The impact of a researcher's ontological position may be understood by setting out clearly the interrelationship between what he or she thinks can be researched (ontology), what he or she can know about it (epistemology) and how he or she goes about acquiring it (methodology).

2.1 ONTOLOGY

A researcher's ontological position is implicit even before a study topic is chosen; it is the way in which he or she sees the world. This is the starting point in research upon which the

rest of the process is based; epistemological and methodological positions logically follow (Grix, 2010:170).

Jepsen (2009:22) provides a practical definition for ontology: “an ontology is a method of representing items of knowledge (ideas, facts, things – whatever) in a way that defines the relationships and classifications of concepts within a specified domain of knowledge”. Can social entities be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or can they be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors? Objectivism and constructivism are two examples of ontological viewpoints which explain the influence of social actors.

2.1.1 Objectivism

Objectivism is a social phenomenon which confronts us as external facts that are beyond our reach of influence. Social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. An example is workers that perform because of pressure from the commands of the organisation. This indicates that a thing is as it is and what it is and one has no control over it.

2.1.2 Constructivism

Constructivism is a social phenomenon which is continually being accomplished by social factors. Social phenomena and categories are not only produced through social interaction but are also in a constant state of revision. One takes the previous example again but the workers now perform because of the expectations of the organisation and not the commands. There is a constant change and they understand why they do it (Bryman, 2001:16). Things can be changed by the influence of people and the social world around them.

Some personnel members follow the rules strictly and never bend any rules when service is delivered to customers. Other personnel members, however, bend rules just to be able to assist customers.

2.2 EPISTEMOLOGY

While ontology is about what one knows, epistemology is about how one comes to know what one knows. “Epistemological assumptions are assumptions about the nature of knowledge and science or on the content of ‘truth’ and related ideals” (Mouton, 2002:123). Epistemology is a way of looking at the world. Natural science research is done by testing variables by means of experiments in which the influence can be controlled. Social science

searches for ways to understand people's lived lives systematically (Rossman and Rallis, 2003:8). Although behavioural scientists are not the only people interested in human behaviour, they are the only ones who make statements which are empirical; they base their findings on systematic collecting and analysis of data in order to understand and improve social behaviour. Other people such as religious leaders, politicians and philosophers, for instance, rely on their own personal beliefs, faith or intuition (Stangor, 2011:4).

An important factor in deciding on research goals is the state of the existing knowledge of the phenomena. Tested existing theories are referred to as validational or confirmatory studies. One can ask questions such as how, what or why things are as they are. Descriptive statements explain how things are and what the state of the thing is. Explanatory descriptions explain why things are; how and what they are. Explanatory studies are conducted where little previous research has been conducted (Mouton, 2002:102).

Research can be conducted for two reasons: for the purpose of knowing something for the intellectual satisfaction or for gaining practical knowledge about a particular issue or problem. A fundamental question answered about behaviour is basic research, for example, which process does an administrative office use to complete a specific task? For the purpose of applied research, one wants to know how the administrative processes influence service delivery. Factors such as the availability of research participants, ethical principles, the researcher's own ideas and the strengths and weaknesses of the research design determine the research approach for the research to be conducted by the researcher (Stangor, 2011:11,20). This study involved applied research as a link was established between the administrative processes and service delivery. The aim was to determine whether service delivery would improve if the administrative processes were intact. The graduation office was the ideal office to investigate because it depends largely on the outputs of other offices and could already have disappointed students.

There are several epistemological positions and they will not all be complementary or equally consistent with one's own ontological position (Grix, 2010:66). There is more than one point of view when seeing and understanding things.

Should or can the social world be studied according to the same principles, procedures and ethos as the natural scientific world? According to Walter (2008:5), the same methods and techniques can be used for social research as for other research such as natural science research but social research is much more complicated. Social research involves real people and is done on and with real people in a real world. Figure 3.2 demonstrates the three approaches to gaining knowledge: positivism, realism and interpretivism. An

understanding of these approaches assists researchers to conduct research in a systematic and consequent manner.

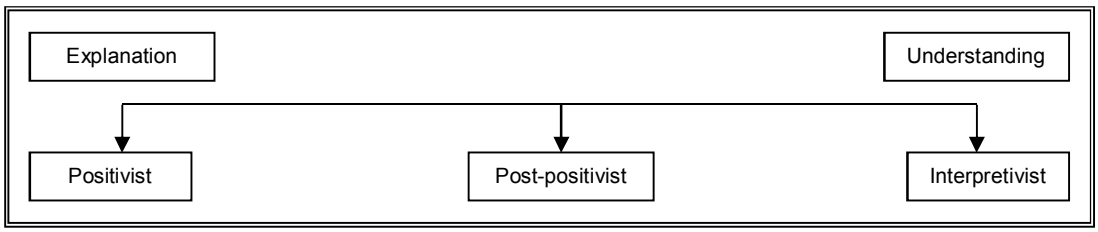

FIGURE 3.2: THE KEY RESEARCH PARADIGMS
(Grix, 2010:79)

2.2.1 Positivism

Positivism is an epistemological position that advocates the application of the methods of natural science to the study of social reality and beyond. Positivism is based on a realist or foundationalist view which implies that the world exists independently of our knowledge. Patterns, causes and consequences exist in the social world just as they do in the natural world. The focus is more on facts than on values.

2.2.2 Realism

Realism is a belief that natural science and social sciences can and should not only apply the same kinds of approach to the collection of data but also allow explanation. Realists understand and explain the social world and believe that there is more to understand than only what one can see.

2.2.3 Interpretivism

Interpretivism is the opposite of positivism. It is a viewpoint that a strategy is required that respects the differences between people and the objects of natural science (Bryman, 2001:12). Interpretivists believe that the world does not exist independently of our knowledge, but the world is constructed through the interaction of individuals and the separation of fact and value is not as clear-cut as the positivists claim. Interpretivists can often not analyse a problem objectively and their own opinion forms part of the outcome of the research.

2.2.4 Pragmatism

Positivism believes that inquiry is value free while interpretivism believes that enquiry is value bound. For pragmatists, values play an important role in conducting research and interpreting results, and the researcher is advised to accept external reality and choose explanations that best produce desired outcomes (Pansiri, 2005:198).

Companies need different resources to be able to succeed. Just as finance and stationery are resources, so are personnel that are used to do the work. Although people differ and have different approaches, if personnel are happy, they perform and complete their tasks successfully which in turn means that the resource: namely, the personnel, is utilised to its full potential. An approach to manage an administrative office depends on the viewpoint of the manager. Some managers work according to a set of rules but other types of managers use a more personal approach and gut feeling. A positivist applies certain rules when managing people and most often succeeds. The same as nature has its own rules, society also has rules to follow.

Throughout her career it was proven to the researcher that when following rules and applying rules to the work and processes, the quality of work improved. Mistakes were minimised. When in a working environment in which you have a responsibility for a certain task, it is your choice whether you will be successful or unsuccessful. It shouldn't be necessary for someone to motivate you all the time. Motivation comes from within you owing to your own values and sense of responsibility. A leader utilises various resources to complete a task and human resources are one of the resources used for the task. People differ from one another and their viewpoints also differ. It helps to manage people by personality type. As a team grows, the team members can be developed to be strong and productive workers by implementing and leading with the correct style.

2.3 METHODOLOGY

Although science is not the only method of generating and testing human experience, it is proposed as the most reliable because it represents an unbiased image of the world. Science provides a combined reliance on the observational effects and on the procedures/methods used to generate them. When rules of a procedure about matters such as a collection of data and its analysis are used it is referred to as methodology. The fundamental principle used in the social method is based on the principle that social facts must be studied as things (Reader, 2004:33).

Mixed methods have become an important part of social science research. By using both methods, the weaknesses of both methods are cancelled out. Qualitative and quantitative techniques are used and combined to gather different types of data which are analysed by using different techniques (Guthrie, 2010:45). In this study, quantitative as well as qualitative data was used and provided greater strength and reliability to the research.

Sources refer to the resources used to collect data. In the case of this research, data was collected by means of the distribution of questionnaires to students and staff from three universities in Gauteng.

3. THE LITERATURE STUDY

Through the study of previous research, the work of previous researchers is examined. A literature study guides one on one's topic. Various sources should be used and if a topic is researched which has had little attention, it is useful to study related fields, designs and methods used (Mouton, 2002:120). Most researchers review the literature to develop their own questions and hypotheses but some only review the literature after the data collection to enable the development of new concepts and not allow existing research to influence their work (Adler & Clark, 2011:90).

Literature is not only reviewed at the beginning of the study but continuously until the whole research process is finished (Grix, 2010:38). According to Creswell and Clark (2007:27), the literature review is used to provide evidence for the purpose of the study and does not guide the development of the research questions when qualitative research is conducted. Only in quantitative research does the literature review establish the importance of the purpose and the research problem. During quantitative research, the literature study takes longer than during qualitative research because of the multiple roles of the literature study.

The literature study was done at the beginning of this research and assisted with the formulation of the research questions. Textbooks obtained from the university's library covered the topics. Further, Proquest, ScienceDirect and various other electronic sources were used. The topics already covered in chapter 2 were discussed briefly in this chapter. These are: administration; service delivery; synergy, performance management and Higher Education.

3.1 ADMINISTRATION

When the literature review was completed on administration it was found that there were different components that could assist an office to be successful. The success of an office is determined by how successfully an administrative office manager can lead his or her team by applying the basic processes of management (chapter 2, paragraph1).

Office systems (chapter 2 paragraph 2) and information systems (chapter 2, paragraph 4) are a very high priority because business processes currently enjoy a very high profile: they must provide best possible service to the departments concerned. Business Management Processes (BPM) have been adopted by numerous organisations and the terms *Lean* and

Six Sigma are known by every business. Until recently, the processes were determined, and then followed by an information system, but this has changed. Organisations have always considered processes as highly important and have put a lot of time and resources into the redesign and implementation, with the information system to follow. Organisations now purchase an information system and adapt its processes to take the best advantage of it. Organisations realise how important business processes are because they are the mechanisms by which they deliver value, externally to the marketplace and their partners, and internally to their own organisations. They do realise that although there are numerous professionals from both business and information systems developing and implementing new processes, there is not enough practical guidance for the implementation of the business processes (Sharp & McDermott, 2009:1).

Daft and Marcic (2011:3) emphasise the importance of pro-active abilities in today's digital revolution to be able to anticipate problems before they happen and respond quickly when crises hit. According to Shermerhorn, Davidson, Poole, Simon, Woods, and Chau, (2011:70), a manager makes two types of decisions: namely, programmed decisions and non-programmed decisions. Programmed decisions are made during day-to-day activities and answers already exist. Non-programmed decisions are made during unique situations and extreme types of decisions are made during crises.

This emphasises the importance of the choice universities make when decisions are made regarding the purchasing of information systems, processes and procedures and the implementation thereof.

3.2 SERVICE DELIVERY

We live in an era in which resources and customers form two critical elements in the open-system view of organisations. To be able to perform well, resources must be put to good use and customers must be served well (Schermerhorn et al., 2011:12).

It is suggested that service businesses keep their service employees happy. If service employees are treated well by their internal service providers such as management, payroll and benefits, human resources and other departments, service personnel will deliver good service to their customers. Service employees also need to be empowered to be able to implement service recovery. It often happens that service employees need to walk the extra mile with a customer and exceed the customer's expectations, especially when mistakes have been made (Williams, 2012:535).

Although TQM came from the eighties and nineties, it is still true and valid with an emphasis on frontline workers. The four elements of quality management are employee involvement, customer focus, benchmarking and continuous improvement (Daft & Marcic, 2011:33). Internal service delivery and empowerment of service employees need to be promoted in universities. All departments need to work together to serve one another well, and the graduation department and all other departments need to be empowered to implement service recovery.

3.3 SYNERGY

"A business process is a complete end-to-end set of activities that provide value, through the delivery of a product or service, to the customer of the process" (Sharp & McDermott, 2009:14). During the history of the development of businesses, changes came from multiskilled crafts workers, specialists, functional specialists, process re-engineers and until business processes. Process orientation followed service marketing and relationship marketing.

The question is whether universities have synergised their processes to be able to compete with other service suppliers.

3.4 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Teams that go through all four stages of team building: forming, storming, norming and performing, tend to be better performers. Should a team not be managed well, its performance can start to deteriorate (Williams, 2012:302). To add to point 5.3 mentioned in chapter 2, performance can be improved by the reinforce-theory. An employee is rewarded for positive performance and punished for poor performance. Positive performance is praised and negative performance receives negative attention (Daft & Marcic, 2011:425). According to Schermerhorn et al. (2011:299), the purpose of a performance management system is to set standards, assess results and plan for performance improvements.

If graduation personnel do not perform according to the standards expected of them, it is necessary to look at their team leader and the service they receive from other departments.

3.5 HIGHER EDUCATION

Khan & Marlay (2009: 679) state that service excellence is led by positive internal cultures of organisations that really care about their service quality. Clear and direct communication is the key to reinforcing quality service messages. Positive internal cultures and

communication are present in universities but the emphasis on internal customers' achievements appears to be limited and limiting. External customers remain more important even though they do establish the link between internal customers playing a key role as part of service excellence. To be able to deliver high quality services, it is important to refer to service excellence as a continuous journey and not as an approach. Employees become more motivated and committed to quality services if service excellence empowers them to take the initiative, value contribution and encourage team work. "…even though there are considerable challenges involved in delivering high quality services, there has been a gradual shift towards achieving internal customer satisfaction in universities" (Khan & Marlay, 2009:679).

A Toronto study determines that administrative processes are also important within the perception of service quality for students. Curriculum is still most important, staff responsiveness from administrative departments called Division of Examinations and Awards, is placed second, quality of libraries third and the number of recreational activities fourth. The model of education quality indicates that smooth and healthy internal processes together with fruitful learning determine the quality of output and achievement of goals. Lecturers are also able to deliver their teaching more effectively if the internal processes are smooth, which in turn enables students to absorb the learning process better (Kwek, Lau & Tan, 2010:154, 165).

A study done in South Africa concluded that the interaction between students and staff determines the service delivery and customer satisfaction in an education environment. Students expect all staff – academic, administrative and support – to work together in representing the service delivery of the institution. Previous experiences by acquaintances, mainly alumni, have an important influence on students' decisions regarding their choice of a university. Quality is one of the most important components of academic, administrative and support service delivery that influences students' perceptions of a Higher Education institution (De Jager & Gbadamosi, 2009:1).

A study on service delivery at the contact centre of the Tshwane University of Technology clearly reveals that customers are dissatisfied. The following factors are seen to be important for customers: assurance, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and communication. Assurance refers to the necessity for customers to feel that staff conveys trust and confidence. Reliability refers to the ability of staff to perform the promised service accurately, dependably and timely. Staff is responsive if they respond promptly to customers' queries. Customers feel the staff are empathetic if they provide personalised service. Finally, communication is one of the most important factors as customers need to

receive the correct information from the outset as this saves time and resources and ensures efficiency (Matsoso, 2010:114).

This research project could determine exactly what the needs of students are in terms of service delivery and that administrative departments are important as they form part of a Higher Education institution. Universities operate in the same way as any other organisation and processes and procedures need to be planned and implemented correctly to be able to contribute to positive service delivery. Internal service delivery needs to be studied but there is already a trend in universities to shift their approaches in order to improve internal service delivery.

4. SITE OR SOCIAL NETWORK SELECTION

Whether one is looking for an appropriate site or social network for the purpose of the literature review, or for the collection of data, various resources are available. However, it is imperative that the correct choices be made for the research to be successful.

Not only the bigger tasks are important but the finer details of the research also need to be planned properly. Asking who, where, when, how and what questions help to plan the finer details of the research. Who do you want to speak about? Where will this happen? When is the appropriate time? How do you to go about doing it and what will you ask? (O'Leary, 2007:95).

“The desire to produce knowledge is a social value. So is the desire to do accurate work and the belief that such work can ultimately benefit rather than harm humankind. It does happen that a researcher’s personal interests and experiences influence the research topic or question. The danger comes in when results of scientific investigation are distorted when scientists allow their values to introduce biases into their work”. (Adler & Clark, 2011:81).

For this research, three universities were chosen. The province of Gauteng was targeted in order to attain a balanced view from both students and universities. No specific universities were chosen for the research but the first three universities that indicated their willingness to participate in the research study were used. Universities are typically big companies that service students and have administrative processes in the various administrative departments. Students have contact with a chain of departments and if they do have problems in the stream, especially if the problems recur repetitively, the problems can be identified. The graduation office is at the end of the chain and it is the last department of contact for a student. If one looks at a topic such as service recovery, the graduation department can work proactively to improve service, especially if the network of

departments influences one another's processes. Therefore the units of analysis are the graduating students, administrative personnel involved with the graduation process and telephone statistics and communication.

5. RESEARCHER'S ROLE

Walter (2008:31) describes the key role of the researcher as an investigator of what is actually going on in the social world, rather than relying on tradition or accepting social assumptions or beliefs as a starting point to understanding social processes. Social research provides a clearer picture of what is going on in society and helps understand the political and ethical processes involved better.

A researcher can do participatory research or choose to be non-participatory. With non-participatory research, the researcher treats members of organizations and the community being studied as passive subjects and the researcher is often seen as being above others. Participatory research is done in partnership with those in the community and knowledge is gained to empower the community. In most cases the researcher is an outsider and the organisation or individual can be affected by the results of the assignment. Some of the challenges in evaluation research are the access to data or the evaluators are often not welcome. Participatory action researchers can often see the impact of their work but more conventional evaluators sometimes have difficulty in implementing change after their research (Adler & Clark, 2011:398).

Although this research is a non-participatory evaluation research, the universities will be able to gain from the outcome of the results. Suggestions will be made to all three universities and it will be left to them to decide whether the suggestions can feasibly be implemented. The universities will be contacted and application made to access statistical data to be able to compare incoming phone calls with the times that letters are sent to students. Permission to distribute questionnaires will be requested from their respective ethical committees. Once permission is granted, the registrars of the different universities will be contacted for permission to gain access to the graduation ceremonies for the distribution of questionnaires to students and administrative staff. The data will then be processed into charts and the relevance between the telephonic enquiries and letters sent indicated. Should enough data through this method of distribution not be collected, the alumni offices will be contacted and questionnaires distributed electronically. Applied research is done because a specific issue is targeted in order to add knowledge to the field. This can be narrowed down to action research because students and personnel become involved in this study (Olivier, 2010:4).

O'Leary (2004:91) emphasises the importance of the researcher knowing his or her own approach to knowledge because it can be invaluable in determining the right methodological path. A range of metaphors is used to describe the different roles of a researcher such as a theorist, scientist, change agent, bricoleur or choreographer. A theorist is a philosopher or thinker; a scientist, an objective expert. A change agent not only acknowledges subjectivities, but works to better a situation. A jack of all trades is called a bricoleur and a choreographer is a coordinator of a dance because he or she begins with a foundation of key principles, has vision, and tries not to have a limited view. In this study, the researcher aimed to be a change agent because a better solution was looked for.

5.1 GEOGRAPHICAL DEMARCATION

The Province of Gauteng was targeted for this investigation and included three universities called University A, University B and University C for purposes of confidentiality. One hundred employees in academic administration and three thousand students, one thousand students from each university, were targeted. According to Walter (2008:196), it is important to be precisely knowledgeable about who or what makes up the population from which the sample is drawn because the sample is drawn from the population of interest.

6. PARTICIPANT SELECTION

Students may have problems from time to time during their student cycle at a university. Not only students who actually had complaints at a graduation office were targeted. A general survey was conducted and the first one hundred students who actually had experienced administrative problems at a graduation office were used. This also gave an indication of the percentage of students that had experienced poor service delivery at universities. The personnel questionnaires were distributed to all administrative staff working directly with students at academic administration departments and gave an indication of whether students experienced the type of service administrative staff thought they provided. The exact problems experienced by academic administration departments were also determined.

7. DATA COLLECTION STRATEGIES

A researcher collects different kinds of data during data collection such as historical or statistical data. Researchers aim to produce reliable data by using the same measures and conditions during testing and by using various methods such as questionnaires, interviews and existing documents (Mouton, 2002:110).

Quality refers to the depth of something and how good or bad it is. Quantity refers to how much or how many there are. Qualitative research refers to words and includes data collection methods such as interviews or case studies to collect data. Quantitative research refers to the quantification in the collection and analysis of data and incorporates natural science models which include statistical data and questionnaires as data collection methods and analysis (Bryman, 2001:506). Figure 3.3 demonstrates a simple research model for putting the data collection into context.

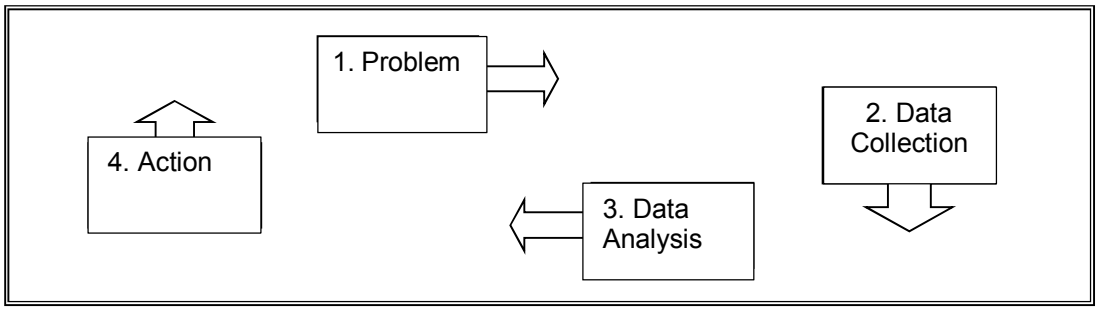

FIGURE 3.3: SIMPLE RESEARCH MODEL
(Guthrie, 2010:6)

The three steps in data collection are to define the universe, then determine the sample and lastly collect the data. It is necessary to determine the universe because it is the total number of people or things to be studied to be able to answer the question. By determining the sample, the exact part of the universe to be studied is specified as it is impossible in terms of time and effort to study the whole universe. The data will only be collected from the sample indicated.

This study is classified as quantitative and qualitative and data collection instruments include questionnaires and a statistical data analysis. Collection instruments are described in greater detail in paragraph ten in this chapter.

8. OBJECTIVES VERSUS QUESTIONS

Administrative issues are not very important to students and it is the responsibility of the universities to establish good practices and implement methods to promote good service delivery and maintain good relations with their students. This research focuses on whether it is possible for a graduation office to work proactively and improve customer service. This can be challenging because the graduation office is dependent on the output of other departments and therefore needs to have methods in place to implement service recovery as set out in chapter 2 paragraph 3.2.5. It does not have control over the type of service other departments offer to students before they reach the graduation office. Table 3.1 compares the objectives with the questions asked in the questionnaires.

TABLE 3.1: COMPARISON OF RESEARCH OBJECTIVES AND QUESTIONS

Primary objective of research question	**Questionnaires and statistical data**	
To determine the influence that administrative processes have on students and the impact on service delivery	Student questionnaires determine the accessibility to the university, students' perceptions of the university and communication effectiveness. Personnel questionnaires determine whether the universities make positive use of technology and the relationships among departments.	
Specific objective of question	**Student questionnaires**	**Personnel questionnaires**
To determine the influence of organisational culture in universities on service delivery	A student who lives far from the campus needs to travel long distances to attend to administrative issues and a part-time student who studies in the evening needs to take time off work to attend to administrative issues during office hours. Question 4 determines whether accessibility to a university does influence service delivery	In an ever-growing competitive market the use and correct application of information technology is an important necessity for any company. A computer system and data quality can influence work performance and service delivery. Question 7 determines whether the universities keep technology effective
To study the impact administrative processes and procedures have on service delivery to students	Although administrative functions are not very important to students, the successful accomplishment of many of the critical incidents identified can be dependent upon satisfactory performance by support staff. Question 5 determines the perceptions of students of administrative departments	
To analyse the influence of other departments on the graduation office		Question 5 determines the departments that are involved in administrative functions and question 6 addresses the relationships among departments
To suggest possible proactive methods and processes that could be implemented at a graduation office to improve service delivery	Question 7 determines students' perceptions of a graduation department and question 8 addresses communication effectiveness	Question 7 determines the effectiveness of the information systems at universities and question 8 touches on some of the functions of the graduation office

9. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher aimed to achieve valid results by using statistical techniques for the appropriate levels of measurement (Mouton, 2002:111). The research question was tested by analysing the data when the database was examined (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2007:131)

A researcher needs to plan in advance what to do with the collected data. A research question can only be answered if correct data is collected otherwise the research question remains unclear. The researcher can easily collect too little, too much, or inappropriate data (Terre Blanche, Durrheim & Painter, 2006:86). In this study, the focus was on students who had complaints. During the pilot study it was determined that the data was sufficient and appropriate for answering the research question.

9.1 PREPARING DATA

The first stage of data analysis is the preparation stage. Information obtained from questionnaires is called raw data, which is transformed into an electronic format by statistical analysis software. Raw data is unordered; contains errors and missing values which must be transformed into an ordered, error-free data set. Coding, entering and cleaning are used to prepare the data (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:189). First of all, the spoiled questionnaires must be eliminated by sorting the questionnaires by hand. The data is then coded and entered into an electronic format which enables cleaning and analysis of data.

9.2 CODING DATA

This involves a straightforward clerical task transforming information provided on a questionnaire into meaningful numerical format. Each score represents an answer to a question as a code, and columns are called scales which are added up to obtain a total score for each scale (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:190). The data on the questionnaires is referred to as V1, V2 and so forth. The personnel questionnaire consists of 9 questions and a total of 62 multiple choice answers. Each answer is linked to codes which range from V1 to V62. The student questionnaire consists of 14 questions and 62 multiple choice answers which are linked to codes ranging from V1 to V62. An example is question 1 which consists of 5 multiple choice answers numbered from V1 to V5. One answer is chosen and marked by a participant and then summed-up during the clerical process to enable easy capturing on the database. Students were asked where they stayed during their studies and they could choose any of the five answers supplied.

9.3 ENTERING DATA

The numerical codes on the questionnaires are then entered into a computer program compatible to a statistical program (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:191). Once all questionnaires have been coded and sorted, the information is captured on the statistical analysis software. Figure 3.4 demonstrates how the data is captured. One code for each question is captured and a data input sheet could look like the example in Figure 3.4:

Respondent	Question 1	Question 2	Question 3	Question 4	Question 5
1	x				
2		x			
3				x	
4			x		
5					x

FIGURE 3.4: EXAMPLE OF CAPTURED DATA

9.4 CLEANING DATA

This is the final stage in data preparation. The data is invalid if the data set contains errors. The data needs to be clear of any errors by taking a random sample of 10 to 15% of cases and recoding the data. Should there be many errors, all the data needs to be re-entered. If data is found to be correct, the researcher starts to look in the columns for impossible codes with the assistance of the “summary” function of the statistical package. Once the electronic database is clean, the data may be analysed statistically (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:192). A respondent is not supposed to have 62 answers; the maximum is 9 answers per personnel questionnaire and 14 answers per student questionnaire, when it is summed up in the data base. Before the data is loaded, spoiled questionnaires are removed.

9.5 ANALYSING DATA

Two methods can be used for analysing the data: namely, descriptive analysis and inferential analysis (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:193). The researcher exploited them first by means of an initial impression and then by relationships among variables in the real world.

9.5.1 Descriptive data analysis

This is done first to give the researcher an initial impression of the data that was collected. Raw data collected is presented in tables, charts or graphs to observe the pattern of relationships between two or more variables.

9.5.2 Inferential data analysis

With this measure the researcher determines whether relationships exist among variables in the real world. The researcher can draw conclusions about populations from sample data. Data is summarised by using statistical methods like calculating an average on a single variable.

Finding a link between data gained and understanding the data collected is part of the analysis process of quantitative data (David & Sutton, 2004:257). Comparing the number of telephone calls received over a period of time with the time taken by sending letters to students could provide an indication of the number of students satisfied with the service delivery. If a letter reaches a student in time he or she does not have a reason to phone the university and enquire about the graduation. The earlier letters are mailed, the fewer enquiries there should be.

10. POPULATION AND SAMPLE

A population is a collection of objects, events or individuals having the same common characteristics which a researcher is interested in studying. Populations may include individual human beings, organisations, institutions, collectives, social activities or events, cultural objects and interventions. A sample represents the population and the following steps can be followed: first the target population is defined, then the sampling frame is defined and lastly the sample is drawn (Mouton, 2002:134).

A sample frame should cover the whole universe to be studied, be as complete as possible and one member should not be included more than once (Guthrie, 2010:58).

A list of elements from which a probability sample is selected, is included in the sample frame. All members of the population need to be included in the sample frame for it to be representative of the population (Babbie, 2005:206). Table 3.2 demonstrates the sample frame of this research:

TABLE 3.2: SAMPLE FRAME

Elements	**Description**
Nature of population	Students and personnel from universities
Target population	Three universities in Gauteng
Range of variation	Only graduating students were targeted for student questionnaires Only administrative personnel were targeted for personnel questionnaires
Variations between the extremes	Students who experienced poor service delivery were separated from students who did not experience poor service delivery by separating the two types of responses after the questionnaires were collected
Sample error	Third (33%) of the questionnaires collected during the study could be used

10.1 POPULATION

A researcher needs to provide reasons for the choice of a certain population because it is necessary, after the study, to determine whether the outcome is applicable to only a specific population or a general finding (Olivier, 2010:76)

In this study, three universities in Gauteng indicated their willingness to participate. Students targeted had already received a qualification. These students had already graduated once and had experienced service delivery at the administrative offices of a university. The staff selected were staff deployed in the administrative departments of the universities. They were the people who had served the selected graduating students.

10.2 SAMPLE

A probability sample, also known as a random sample, is a sample in which each member of the population has a known probability of being selected. It is also acceptable to use a probability sample if the results from the sample are going to be generalised. In this study specific staff and students were targeted for the questionnaires: staff working in administrative departments servicing students and students who had graduated, thus students who would have made use of the university's administrative departments.

Staged sampling is done when a probability sample is taken and another sample taken from the first sample (Olivier, 2010:77) The researcher was interested in the students who had experienced poor service delivery at a graduation office. Once the questionnaires were

collected, the staged sample would be dealt with. Questionnaires in which respondents indicated that they had experienced problems at the administrative departments would then be the staged sample. The percentage of students with complaints would be extracted from the probability sample; the detail with regards to the complaints would be indicated in the staged sample (Olivier, 2010:77).

10.3 TRIANGULATION OF DATA

When more than one research method is used, a greater validity of the data findings can be confirmed by another batch of data (Olivier, 2010:78). In this study the viewpoints of administrative staff and students were determined. Third confirmation was gained when the telephone statistics from incoming calls to the graduation office and the time taken by letters sent to students were synchronized. The actual triangulation of data was done by the quantitative statistics from students and staff, compared with the qualitative data from students and staff. Closed ended questions supplied quantitative data from students as well as staff questionnaires. Remarks by students and staff were sufficient to enable triangulation.

Figure 3.5 represents the triangulation of the researcher's data. The four elements of quality management: employee involvement, customer focus, benchmarking and continuous improvement as emphasised by Daft & Marcic (2011:33) are also demonstrated. Service quality is described by Bruhn and Georgi (2006:51).

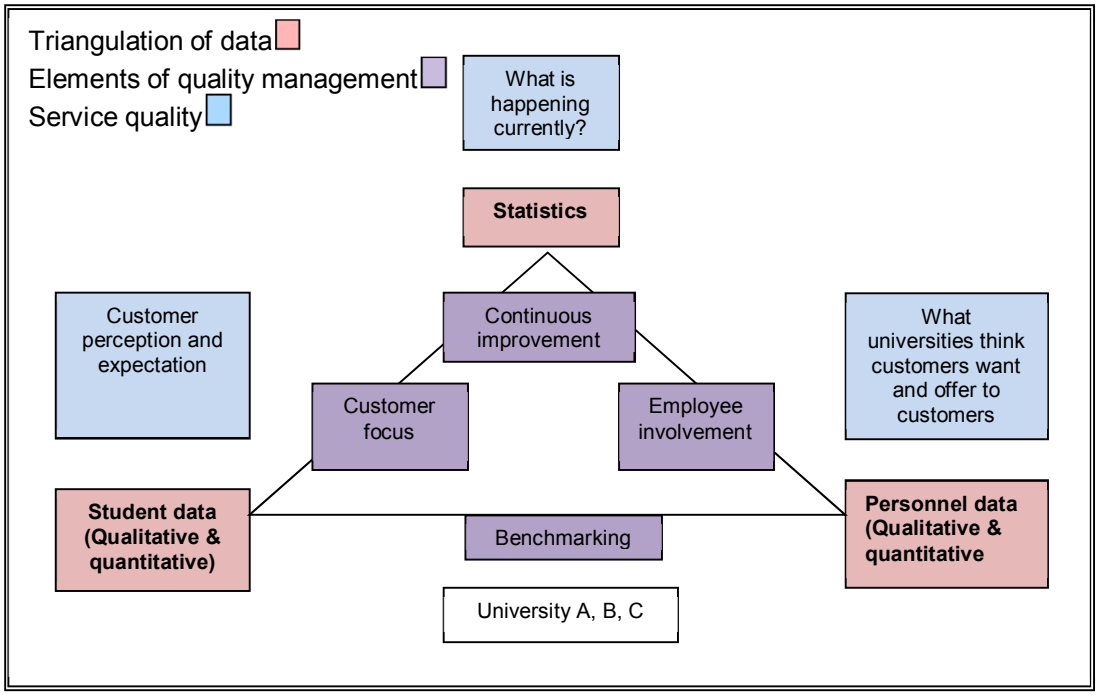

FIGURE 3.5: TRIANGULATION OF DATA, ELEMENTS OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND SERVICE QUALITY

11. MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

“Measurement refers to the process of systematically observing some feature or characteristic of the world and then recording it in the form of a number or category”. First one needs to know what one wants to measure, and then one can figure out how to measure it (carefully specified procedures). To be able to measure something, one needs instruments (questionnaire or interview) to be able to measure what one wants to measure (Remler & Van Ryzin, 2011:99).

In this study, questionnaires and existing data from a university’s telephone and data systems were used. Quantec, STRATA, was used to analyse the data collected. STRATA is fast, accurate and easy to use; it has a broad suite of statistical capabilities with complete data-management facilities. Publication-quality graphics can be generated with it. The data from the questionnaires was captured in an Excel spreadsheet and inserted into STRATA. The research and innovation office assisted in providing reliable and non-biased processing of statistics with outcomes which were trustworthy.

11.1 QUESTIONNAIRES

According to Denscombe (2007:153), a questionnaire should be designed to collect information which can be used subsequently as data for analysis. It must consist of a written list of questions and gather information by asking people directly about the points concerned. Questionnaires enable factual information as well as opinions to be determined. When a large number of correspondents is used, fairly straightforward information is required and the social climate opens enough to allow full and honest answers. It is appropriate to use questionnaires if standardised data is needed; respondents must also be able to read and understand the questions.

Denscombe (2007:169) highlights the advantages of questionnaires as economical and easy to arrange. They supply standardised answers, pre-coded answers and accurate data. The disadvantages of questionnaires are: pre-coded questions can be frustrating for respondents and, thus, hinder them from answering; they can bias the findings toward the researcher’s rather than the respondent’s way of seeing things and offer little opportunity for the researcher to check the truthfulness of the answers given by the respondents.

11.2 QUESTIONNAIRE DEVELOPMENT

There are a number of different response formats available to gather information but for this research open-ended questions were asked to enable the collection of standardised responses from all respondents. Multiple multi-choice questions were asked; thus, each

question provided a few answers with the proviso that only one must be chosen. This was necessary in order to be able to standardise the responses from the three different universities (Terre Blanche et al., 2006:486).

Self-completion questionnaires were distributed to students from the 3 universities. Questionnaires were gathered until there was a total of at least 100 students who had experienced problems with the graduation department. These were students who had completed their studies as the questionnaires were distributed during the graduation ceremonies. Universities A, B and C granted permission for the questionnaires to be placed on the chairs of students before the hall was entered and to be collected after the graduation ceremonies by field workers. The self-completion questionnaires for personnel would be distributed through the registrars' offices, which would reply using SurveyMonkey.com to complete the questionnaires. Surveymonkey.com is 100% anonymous as personnel access the same link electronically.

11.3 DOCUMENTS

Documents can be used as a source of data because they are objective and factual. The following factors should be considered: the extent to which the event or thing being measured is clear-cut and straightforward; whether there are vested interests in the statistics that are produced and the extent to which the statistics are the outcome of a series of decisions and judgements made by people. The advantages of documentary research are: access to documents is relatively easy and inexpensive, is cost-effective and results in permanent information. Care needs to be taken regarding the credibility of the source; it may be secondary data as it may have been used for another purpose and social construction. It may owe more to those who produce it than be an objective picture of reality (Denscombe, 2007:227).

The researcher used the statistics of received telephone calls at a graduation office during the period of one year and compared these statistics with the time span covering the period during which letters were sent to students. This information was electronically converted. With the use of a chart it was possible to establish whether there were any patterns in the time the letters were sent and the number of queries received from students. If a student did receive a timely letter with regard to the graduation ceremony, he or she would have no reason to contact the graduation office telephonically.

11.4 PILOT STUDY

To be able to minimise the risk of a research study failing and maximise the probability that a research study is successful, a pilot study can be done. It is done by manifesting a small

scale study of the actual study which will be conducted later. During the pilot study the researched instrument is tested. According to Van Teijlingen and Hundley (2001:1), this can provide warnings about where the main research project could fail, protocols not followed or whether methods or instruments are too complicated.

During the pilot study done for this research project at one of the universities, 55% of the completed questionnaires could be used. Although all the students did not indicate that they experienced poor service delivery, the questionnaires delivered more information than expected. Students, who were satisfied, also indicated areas in which service could be improved, which in turn assisted in determining where exactly the problems lay and recommendations could be made.

Other details during the pilot study were observed such as the success of supplying each student with a pen, the response of students finding the questionnaires on the chairs during the graduation ceremony and the way the questionnaires were printed; one-sided or two-sided printing made a difference. The pilot study was also used as a tool to assist the researcher in explaining the aims and procedures to the heads of departments when arrangements were made for the actual research project. The percentage of students with complaints was sufficient to give an indication of where the exact problems lay at the graduation office.

The data gathered was analysed in order to discover whether the questions asked were too complicated and whether they met the objectives of the research. This data did not form part of the actual research project but a brief discussion about the outcome did give an indication of the information supplied by the data gathered. Only the highest number of responses for each question was discussed.

Question 4: Accessibility to university – does it influence service to students?
Most of the students make use of private accommodation near the campus. All part-time students indicated it was difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours.

Question 5: Influence of administrative departments on students' studies
Most students normally received good service but some considered changing university owing to poor service received. With regard to service received from the different administrative departments, the graduation office scored the highest for delivering good service and the enrolment and registration office scored the highest for poor service delivered.

Question 6: Where exactly was the problem?
Staff attitude and unprofessionalism scored the highest. Students felt that the university was too process-driven with too many or too-difficult processes to follow.

Question 7: Student's perception of a graduation department
Students waited too long for a reply from the graduation office once they had applied to graduate, and many found it difficult to contact the relevant graduation office. Most of the students, however, indicated that they did not experience any problems at the graduation office.

Question 8: Communication effectiveness
Students received communication via traditional letters but preferred to be contacted by the university via email.

Question 9: Comments
Students commented about a wide variety of issues and different departments. One of the major issues was the communication between the students and university.

The pilot study was worth the time and effort put into it and improved the likelihood of the success of the research project. The research questions and objectives were answered successfully with the information gained from the questionnaires.

12. ETHICAL ASPECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Ethics are important because there have been many cases of abuse of people's rights in the name of social research. A power differential normally exists between an investigator and the participants, and although most researchers may be well-intentioned and honest, there is always the potential for the rights of research participants to be violated, either knowingly or unknowingly. An ethical code for research is recognised throughout the world. Research ethics emphasise the humane and sensitive treatment of research participants. It is the researcher's responsibility to ensure that the research is ethically conducted. Researchers have the right to search for truth and knowledge, but not at the expense of the rights of other individuals in society (Bless, Higson-Smith & Kagee, 2007:140).

Each university requires ethical clearance before questionnaires can be distributed to students and staff. The processes differ slightly but procedures were followed as required by each university. Together with the ethical clearance, permission to use Universities A, B and

C was also applied for. No questionnaire can be distributed before ethical clearance is granted by the relative research ethics committee. One of the universities (which will be referred to as University D) declined the application for ethical clearance even before the actual questionnaires were submitted for ethical clearance. Once the standard and the lay-out of the questionnaires were approved by the first committee of University A, they could be used by both the other universities as a set standard. This is very important as it is necessary to be able to benchmark and have consistency in the questionnaires and responses from the students and staff of the different universities.

The ethics in research do not only concern the participants but also involve honesty in conducting and reporting, giving appropriate credit for ideas and effort and considering how knowledge is gained through research by the researcher. The most important ethical principles to take into consideration are general principles, informed consent, deception and debriefing (Stangor, 2011:43). Table 3.3 demonstrates the ethical principles applied in this research:

TABLE 3.3: APPLIED ETHICAL PRINCIPLES

Ethical principle	**Meaning**	**Applied in this research**
General principles	Obtain appropriate approval prior to conducting research	Application for approval from the ethics committee of each university concerned submitted before questionnaires are distributed
Informed consent	Inform participants about purpose of research, voluntary participation, prospective benefits and contact persons for enquiries regarding the research	Information about purpose, participation, possible benefits and contact person must be printed on the introductory page of questionnaires
Deception	Do not harm	In this study no participant or university will be harmed
Debriefing	Explain nature, possible results and conclusion of research	The nature, possible results and conclusion of research will be explained and printed on the introductory page of questionnaires

12.1 PRINCIPLES OF ETHICAL RESEARCH

Bless et al. (2007:43) state that participants may not be harmed and the research must potentially contribute to the wellbeing of others. Individuals must have the freedom of choice to participate or not; all people must be treated equally and promises must be kept.

Adler and Clark (2011:40) are of the opinion that ethical principles in research are a set of values, standards and principles used to determine appropriate and acceptable conduct at all stages of the research process. These ethical norms only became a concern in the middle of the twentieth century with the result that most professional organisations have a code of ethics for research today. The goal is to limit harm to any one participant in research and the minimum standard rests on three principles: respect, beneficence and justice. A person's autonomy is protected if adequate information is provided about the research, possible risks are explained and participation is voluntary. The research must be designed to give maximum benefit and minimum risk to the research object and society. Should there be any potential harm, the harm should be balanced with its potential benefits.

12.2 ETHICAL GUIDELINES

Participants have the right to know what the research is about, how it will affect them, the risks and benefits of participation, and that they have the right to decline to participate (Bless

et al., 2007:145). Researchers have an obligation to develop a well-designed project and execute it with care. Information provided by participants for this research was protected and remained anonymous. Participants could discontinue their participation at any time. The researcher undertook not to alter or change any data and report the outcome of this research to the universities involved without deploying them. The different universities had to provide consent before the researcher began to make arrangements to distribute questionnaires.

No students would be exposed to any risks and no personnel members who would be interviewed would be expected to commit to any action or give any information which could lead to any unethical issues or publicity. The biggest risks lay with the three Gauteng universities involved: University A, University B and University C. The universities would remain anonymous as no name of any university would appear in any questionnaire or report finding. The researcher would be the only person to know the identities of the universities. The questionnaires and interviews would be kept separate to ensure that the researcher would be able to distinguish between them in order to report to the universities. The researcher undertook to supply each university with a report on her findings and to benchmark for them without involving the other two universities.

13. VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Although precision and accuracy do play a role in the measurement of quality, validity and reliability are far more important. It depends on the study and its needs whether the criteria set for participants are finely tuned or not. In this study, respondents were limited to graduating students and staff servicing these students. The possibility that the wrong students or staff would be targeted was ruled out (Babbie, 2005:144).

13.1 VALIDATION

“To reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation, researchers employ various procedures. Triangulation has been generally considered a process of using multiple perceptions to clarity meaning” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000:443). The researcher made use of questionnaires in order to determine the views of students about the service delivery of the various academic departments and the views of personnel working in these departments. A data analysis was done of the statistics of incoming phone calls compared with the time taken for letters to be sent to students.

“Validity indicates that your methods warrant your conclusions” (O'Leary, 2007:61). The researcher’s questionnaires were designed to be objective, neutral, transparent, reliable,

dependable, valid and authentic. That processes and procedures do make a difference in the service quality to students can be confirmed.

Validation also implies that prior research is validated by the findings of the research (Olivier, 2010:3).

13.2 RELIABILITY

When a technique is applied repeatedly and the results are the same, the technique is regarded as reliable, but it does not guarantee accuracy. One method to ensure reliability is to ask questions of respondents known to the researcher. As an example: asking graduating students about the service received from administrative departments is more reliable than asking non-students the same question. Methods such as the test-retest method, split-half method or established measures can assist in reliability. In this study an established measure was used: namely, questionnaires. Some of the questions were repeated to provide confirmation. Although interviews were considered, they were eliminated because of the risk of bias (Babbie, 2005:145).

14. RECORDS

The study data was coded so that it would not be linked to a respondent's name or any university's name. The respondents' identities and universities were not revealed while the study was being conducted nor would they be revealed when the study was reported in scientific journals. All the collected data sheets were stored in a secure place. Any information obtained in connection with this study that could be identified with any respondent or university would remain confidential and would be disclosed only with permission or as required by law. The information received during the project would be used only for research purposes and not released for any employment-related performance evaluation, promotion and/or disciplinary purposes. All data, including literature study material, data collection and reports as well as records and officially bound books would be safely kept by the researcher for three years as per the university's prescriptions.

15. CONCLUSION

Ontology and epistemology are often overlooked when research is conducted and it is important to know the basis on which research is built. Ontology is about what we know and epistemology is about how we come to know what we know. Existing studies could indicate the needs of students in terms of service delivery and that administrative departments are important as they form part of a university's structure. Internal service delivery needs to be explored but there is already a trend at universities to improve internal service delivery.

Although this research is a non-participatory evaluation research, the relevant universities will be able to gain from the outcome of the results.

A researcher needs to decide in advance the purpose of the collected data. A research question can only be answered if correct data is collected; otherwise the research question can remain unclear. The researcher can easily collect too little, too much, or inappropriate data. The procedures of preparing, coding and entering data are completed before the data is analysed. Triangulation of the data is demonstrated together with the four elements of quality management: employee involvement, customer focus, benchmarking and continuous improvement. Measuring instruments are self-completion questionnaires and the statistics of incoming calls at a graduation office over a period of three years compared with the time span taken for letters to be sent to students.

The ethics in research do not only concern the participants but also involve the honesty in conducting and reporting, giving appropriate credit for ideas and effort and considering how knowledge is gained through research by the researcher. The questionnaires were designed to be objective, neutral, transparent, reliable, dependable, valid and authentic.

In this chapter the questionnaire design was outlined and the methodology was described. The target population was described and data collection and analysis methods were discussed, including research ethics and validation of data. In chapter 4, data from the survey conducted will be analysed and interpreted.

CHAPTER 4: EMPIRICAL STUDY AND FINDINGS

1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 provided an introduction and described the theoretical framework, statement of the research problem, and purpose of the study. Chapter 2 presented the literature review and chapter 3 gave the research framework. This chapter reveals the empirical study and findings. Results from the data collected are tabled and are visually demonstrated to assist in the answering of the research question mentioned in chapter 1.

Personnel data provides the viewpoints of the administrative staff, employee involvement and how the administrative staff perceive the service they deliver to students. Data from the student questionnaires reveals the viewpoints of students and how they perceive service delivered by their university. The statistics gained from the incoming calls and letters sent to students are an indication of the status quo. Benchmarking is done by comparing results from the staff of the three universities. The analysis of the data includes the four elements of quality management: namely, employee involvement, customer focus, benchmarking and continuous improvement, combined with service quality**.** With TQM an emphasis is on the frontline workers and in this study it refers to the administrative staff that serve students. Results obtained from the data analysis are discussed in the next section.

2. DEMOGRAPHIC DESCRIPTION OF THE SAMPLE

Three universities in Gauteng that indicated their willingness to participate in this study were used to gather data. The data of personnel as well as that of students was gathered from June 2012 to October 2012 from all three universities. Questionnaires (Annexure C) were distributed to personnel by means of an email message through which staff were enabled to answer the questionnaire anonymously by using the link provided to access SurveyMonkey™. A total of 98 questionnaires was completed by the personnel of 3 universities: 64 for University A; 30 for University B and 4 for University C. Only administrative departments were targeted.

Student questionnaires (Annexure F) were delivered to a total of 9 graduation ceremonies, 3 graduations per university. Questionnaires were placed on the chairs of the graduates before the graduation ceremonies commenced and were collected directly after the hall was vacated by the students and guests. This was the case at all 3 universities. A total of 3 000 questionnaires was distributed of which 1 001 questionnaires were completed: 542 at University A, 253 at University B and 206 at University C. The results of the collected data are discussed in the following order: personnel data, student data and telephone and letter statistics. With percentages, benchmarking could also be achieved because the total

number of responses differed at each university. For various questions, the respondents could choose more than one option and this could result in some of the totals being greater than100%. Percentages were used to indicate the responses of personnel data as well as those of student data. The last section which employed statistics from telephone, fax, data and short message services (SMSs, which is a text messaging service component of phone, web, or mobile communication systems) shows the actual numbers and not percentages.

3. PERSONNEL DATA

3.1 INTRODUCTION TO PERSONNEL QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESULTS

The majority of personnel who were targeted and who participated in the study were managers, supervisors and administrators in administrative departments. A satisfactory response was received from University A and University B. As University C delivered only four responses, the viewpoints of the administrative staff at University C cannot be seen as representative. However, the results obtained from University C were included and for the purpose of this study should be accepted as the same as those from University A and University B

3.2 OCCUPATION OF STAFF WHO COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

What is your position? (*q1.1-q1.4*)

It is important that we are precisely knowledgeable about who or what makes up the population from which the sample is drawn because a sample is drawn from a population of interest. The purpose of the first question asked of respondents was to determine the occupations of the staff. The outcomes of the question about the occupation of staff confirm that the correct sample was targeted and data gathered as set out in chapter 3 paragraph 10.1. Respondents were asked to indicate their positions as managers, supervisors, administrators or any other occupation. Percentages were used to demonstrate the result of the responses in Figure 4.1.

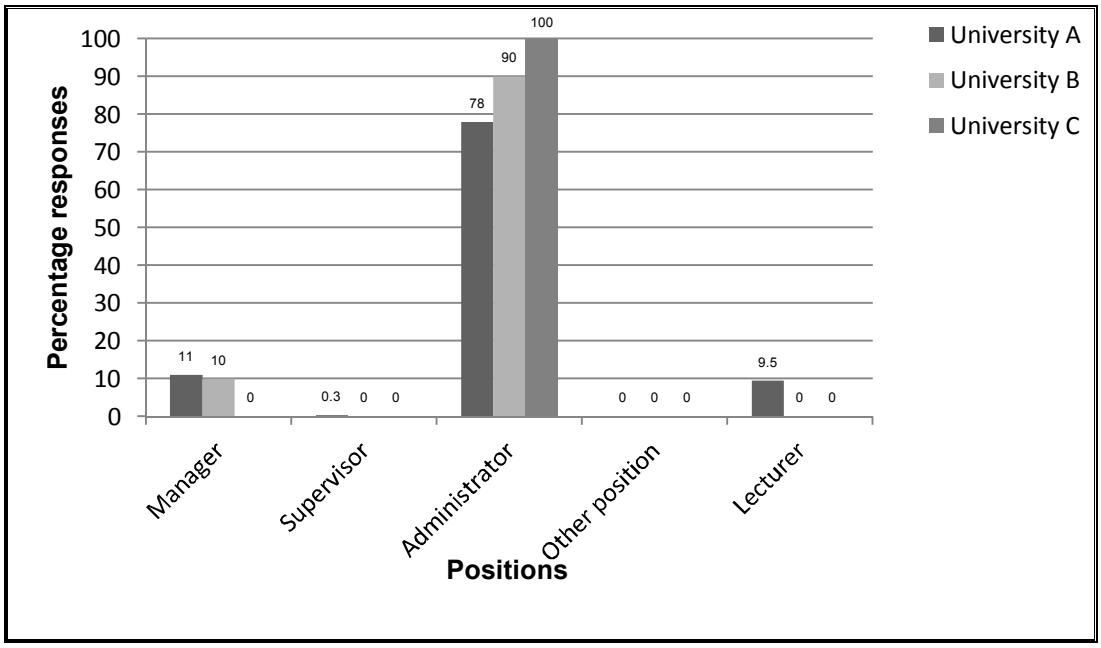

FIGURE 4.1: POSITION OF PERSONNEL WHO COMPLETED QUESTIONNAIRES

This study was targeted at administrators and it is clear from Figure 4.1 that the majority of respondents were administrators. The administrators are the staff who work directly with the students and deliver a service to students. No responses were received from supervisors or other positions and managers and lecturers formed a small percentage. With reference to chapter 3, paragraph 6, the correct audience for the personnel questionnaires was targeted successfully.

3.3 ACADEMIC ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS AT A UNIVERSITY

3.3.1 The different administrative departments

In which department do you work? (*v1-v7*)

Each university has different academic administration structures. Respondents were asked to indicate the department in which they worked in order for the researcher to determine the various departments in the academic administration section and to ascertain whether the respondents were involved in an administrative or support function. They were also requested to provide details about their departments. With reference to chapter 3 paragraph 4 universities are typically big service companies with students as their customers and carry out administrative processes in the various administrative departments. Students have contact with a chain of departments and if students do have problems in the stream, especially if the problem is repeated by more than one student, the problem can be identified. Respondents were given a choice of the following departments: enrolment; new

applications; registration; examinations; exemptions/recognitions; graduations; other, cns, student development; research; academic departments; other support departments and top management. Figure 4.2 demonstrates the different support departments in which respondents were involved.

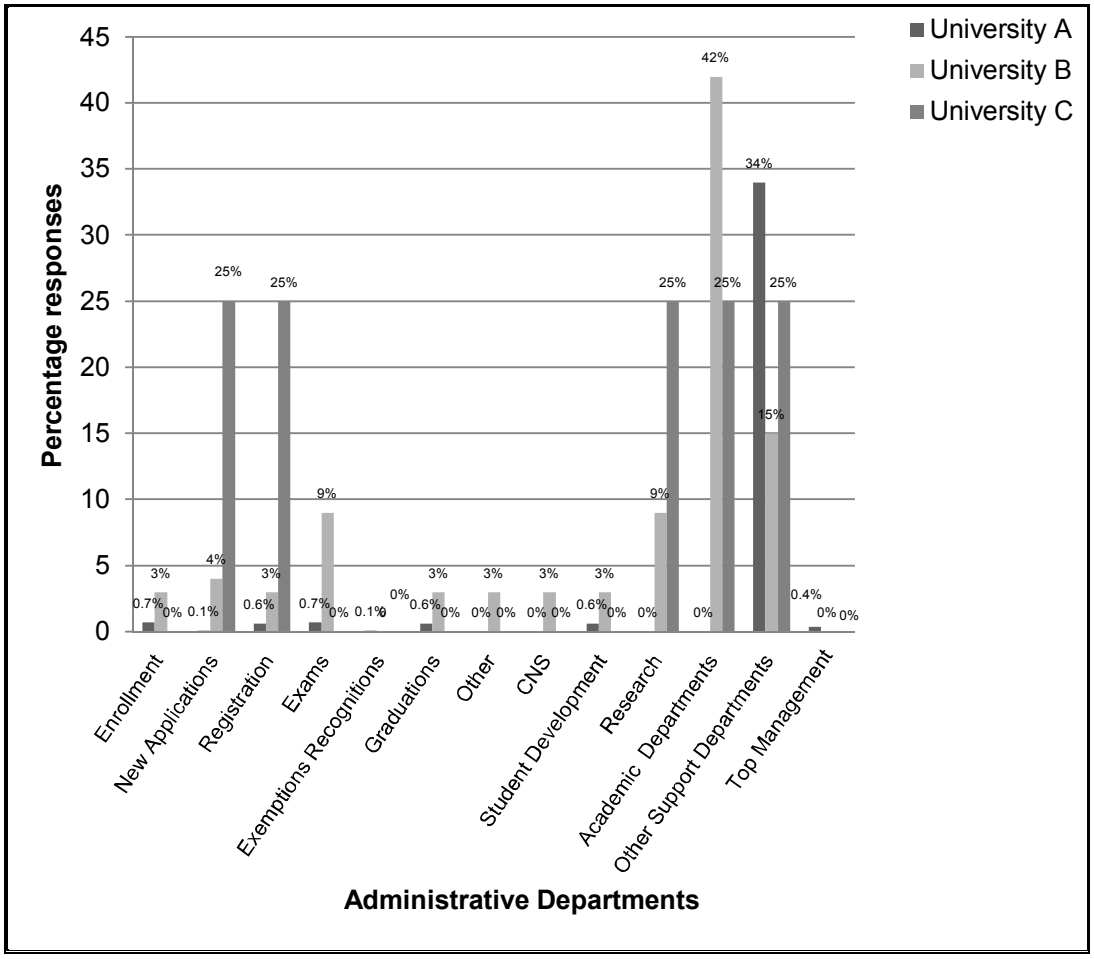

FIGURE 4.2: ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS

Figure 4.2 indicates that administrators not only came from academic administration departments but also from other departments and support units. Students had encounters with personnel from various departments when staff handled their administrative issues. It could easily be assumed that administrative departments are only part of academic administration but it is clear that the administrative departments involve more than only enrolment or examinations issues.

3.3.2 Centralisation and de-centralisation

Is academic administration centralised or de-centralised? (*v8-v14*)

The question about centralisation and de-centralisation assisted in determining whether administrative staff and students perceived the departments as centralised or de-centralised. The outcome of this question determined how informed administrative staff were about other departments and their duties. This question also provided an indication of whether centralisation or de-centralisation had an influence on service delivery.

The respondents were requested to indicate whether the academic departments were centralised or de-centralised by choosing one of the following options: all administrative departments/functions are centralised; all administrative departments/functions are de-centralised; administrative departments are centralised but divided into different sections; administrative departments are de-centralised but grouped to work together; administrative departments are divided into faculties; administrative departments are centralised and not divided into faculties or other. An example of how departments could be centralised and grouped is centralising all the administrative departments but dividing them into faculties such as science, human studies and engineering or functions such as examinations, graduations and registration. The results of this question are discussed after Figure 4.3.

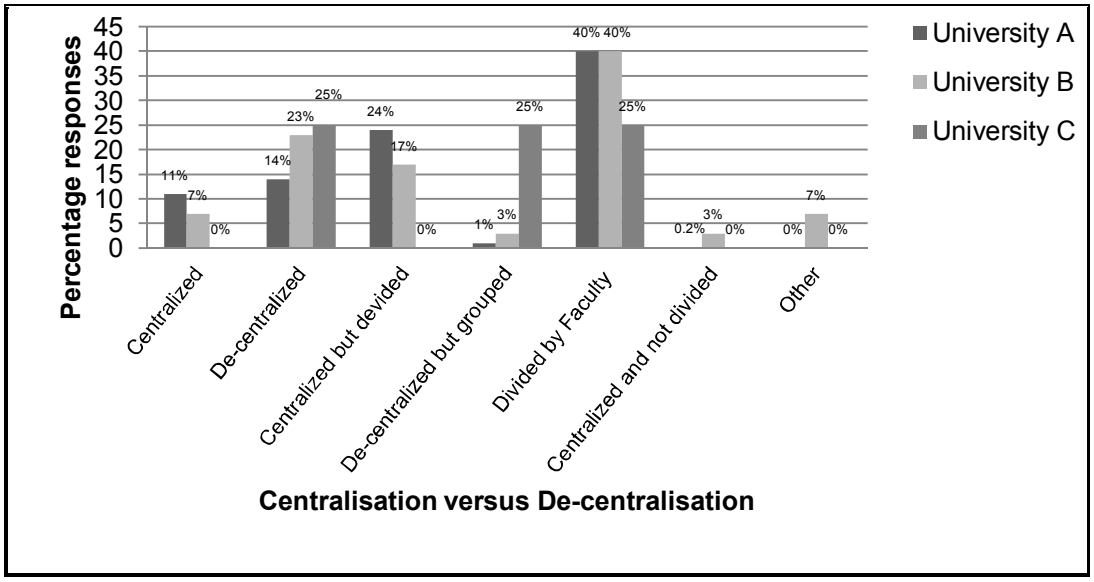

FIGURE 4.3: CENTRALISATION VERSUS DE-CENTRALISATION

According to Figure 4.3, the majority of the departments are divided per faculty; then centralised but divided into different sections and thirdly de-centralised. Only a few departments are centralised. The fact that the division of the departments is nearly the same indicates that centralisation and de-centralisation do not necessarily influence service delivery. Confirmation is gained from point 4.3.1 later in this chapter. Both University A and University B have a structure which is divided per faculty but students' perception about their service delivery differs substantially.

3.4 RELATIONSHIPS AMONG DEPARTMENTS

3.4.1 How dependent departments are on each other

How dependent are administrative departments on one another? (*v15-v17*)

With reference to chapter 1, paragraph 1, a student's journey in Higher Education goes through several phases, such as finding the university of choice and selecting the vocational programme best suited to the qualification; obtaining relevant information about finances, processes and procedures to be followed; the registration process; the years of study involving assessment results and finally, graduation. This process clearly depicts the different departments that need to interact synergistically in order to streamline administration, promote the university's image and consequently reflect positively on the standard of customer service.

Different service departments have different functions. One department's output may be another department's input and may have a negative or positive influence. For example: Department B cannot continue a function (output) unless Department A completes a certain function (input). In the analysed data below, respondents had to indicate whether their specific academic department was dependent on another department's output; whether another department was dependent on their department's inputs; or their department was independent and did not influence other departments; or other departments influenced them. Table 4.1 illustrates the responses about the dependency of departments on one another at the different universities.

TABLE 4.2: DEPARTMENTS' DEPENDENCE ON ONE ANOTHER

How dependent are departments on one another?	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
One department is dependent on another department's output	49	44	50
Another department is dependent on a specific academic department's inputs	36	39	33
The specific department where the respondent is involved is independent from other departments in the university	15	17	17

Table 4.1 clearly indicates that departments are not independent. According to Table 4.1, respondents consider the input for their own department which results from the output from

another department as more important than the output from their own department. The conclusion is that departments do not necessarily understand the importance of their own output. A minimal number of departments operate independently. All the departments at a university form part of a chain of processes from marketing, enrolment to graduation. In an organisation with many different departments, it is imperative that all staff work well together as one team within each department as well as for the company as a whole.

3.4.2 The influence of a department on another department in the chain of processes

Do the different academic departments have a positive or negative influence on one another? *(v18-v24*)

The following question was asked to determine the influence the different departments have on one another. With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 3, it is vital to understand that the implementation of quality management is a prerequisite to supply chain quality. Communication, collaboration, integration and customer focus are also important for providing quality service. Downstream and upstream integration of processes appears to impact on quality performance. The respondents were requested to indicate the influence that the different departments have on one another. Did they wait for work from other departments or did other departments wait for their work? Was the work delivered correctly or was it incomplete? Table 4.2 provides the tally of the respondents.

TABLE 4.2: DEPARTMENTAL DEPENDENCIES

How accurate and timely is the work of departments?	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Department has to wait for other departments for completion of tasks	29	28	27
Academic/service department does not receive incomplete work from other departments	0.4	12	27
Academic/service department receives incorrect work from other departments	13	12	27
Other departments do not need to wait for academic/service department for completion of tasks	0.8	5	18
Other departments receive incomplete work from service department (sometimes)	0.5	2	0
Other departments receive correct work from service department	26	16	0
Good relationships exist among administrative departments and each one delivers good work in good time. No problems are experienced	15	26	0

It is clear from Table 4.2 that departments regularly need to wait for one another to complete the work needed for their own department's input. University A and University B respectively feel that the various departments receive correct work and that there are good relationships among the different departments.

3.4.3 Process-driven versus service-driven perceptions

In your opinion, is this university process-driven or service-driven? (*v25-v30*)

With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 6.2, support staff at a Higher Education institution play an important role and some of the functions of the registrar are to support the vice-chancellor in the management and administration of the university and ensure that the university complies with the applicable legislation and the further education and training colleges act (2006). There needs to be a balance between implementing rules and delivering quality service.

Respondents were requested to indicate whether they regarded their university as being process-driven and/or service-driven to determine whether the university's rules and service delivery were balanced. If rules were more important than service, this could indicate that service delivery was not important enough and students' needs might be underestimated. On the other hand, a focus on service delivery to students could lead to neglect of legislation application. Respondents had to choose one of the following options: the university is service-driven and students are most important; the university is process-driven and has too many or too-difficult processes to follow; rules & regulations are more important than service to students; there is a good balance between service delivery, processes and rules & regulations; there is a lack of balance between service delivery, processes and rules & regulations; staff do not know and it does not matter. Figure 4.4 demonstrates the results of the responses regarding whether the three universities were process-driven or service driven.

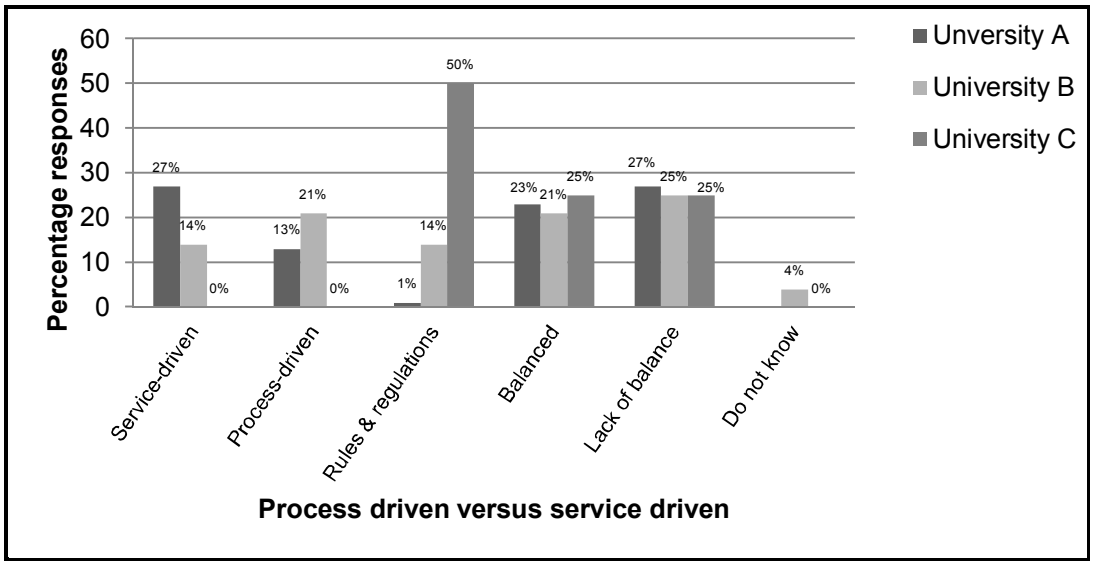

FIGURE 4.4: PROCESS- VERSUS SERVICE-DRIVEN PERCEPTION

Figure 4.4 demonstrates a balanced outcome. Although there is a perception that a service-driven approach is more important than processes, procedures and rules at a university, there is on the whole a balance in the viewpoint of the administrative staff about service delivery and their tasks. It is the duty of administrative staff to adhere to the rules and regulations of the university but also to deliver a good service to students. It can be fatal if staff do not adhere to the rules and regulations set out for them, for instance, they can issue a qualification erroneously or capture information such as exam marks incorrectly on the system.

3.5 INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Is your university's computer system effective? (*v31-v36*)

In an ever-growing competitive market the use and correct application of information technology is an important necessity for any company. Computer systems and data quality can influence work performance and service delivery. "Strategic planning allows a company to examine its purpose, vision, and values and develop a mission statement, which leads to goals, objectives, day to day operations, and business results that affect company stakeholders. Effective information systems help an organization support its business processes, carry out its mission, and serve its stakeholders" (Shelly et al., 2009:10). Organisations have always considered processes to be of high importance and have devoted a great deal of time and resources to the redesign and implementation of their information systems. Organisations now purchase information systems and adapt their processes to take the best advantage of the new systems (chapter 3, paragraph 3.1).

Respondents were requested to indicate the effectiveness of their university's computer systems and whether the computer systems promoted effective service delivery or not. Table 4.3 demonstrates the results of the perception of staff about information systems at their university.

TABLE 4.3: EFFECTIVENESS OF A UNIVERSITY'S COMPUTER SYSTEM

The university's computer system	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Is effective and promotes service delivery to students	27	26	28
Is not effective and influences service delivery negatively	27	7	0
Is effective but has shortcomings	19	56	75
Has been identified as having problems and needs attention	11	4	0
Is effective but personnel do not have enough training on the system	13	4	0
Is effective but data is corrupt owing to incorrect application	3	4	0

Although the three universities use computer systems supplied by the same company, the results from the three universities differ. Table 4.3 demonstrates that although 27% of University A's staff feel that the computer system promotes effective service delivery, confusingly, the same percentage of members believes that the system is not effective and influences service delivery negatively. University B and University C staff believe that the computer systems promote service delivery and are effective but have decided shortcomings. Corrupt data is the lowest factor at all three universities.

3.6 THE GRADUATION PROCESSES

The following two questions focus on the graduation offices. Respondents were requested to complete the questions if they were involved in the graduation process.

3.6.1 Identifying possible graduates

How does your office identify students who qualify for the issue of a qualification? (*v37-v45*)

With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 2.3.3, value stream management is described as "a process for planning and linking lean initiatives through systematic data capture and analysis". if value for a customer is produced, it is called value stream. The whole purpose is to eliminate non-value-added work waste, work or processes that serve no real purpose.

Some of the benefits of value stream management are that a business becomes more competitive; the office setting improves; waste that causes fatigue, frustration and burn-out is eliminated; more job satisfaction results through the positive and active involvement of employees; and workers control activities. This results in operations on the cost-reduction principle: reduces internal cost; does not increase prices, has zero defects, produces the highest quality in a business sector; meets cost and delivery requirements and eliminates all non-value-added work from the customer's value stream. With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 2.4.2, inaccurate or untimely information can cause insufficiencies in the supply chain, such as incomplete records, untimely communication and incorrect information.

Respondents were requested to indicate how they become aware of possible graduates, which is one of the main processes of a graduation office. Table 4.4 demonstrates the different methods the universities used to identify possible graduates.

TABLE 4.4: METHODS OF IDENTIFYING GRADUATES

How does the university identify graduates?	University A	University B	University C
Students apply and complete forms at graduation counter	32	8	0
Students apply and complete forms at faculty or department/other administrative departments	12	8	0
Students apply via WEB/electronically	10	16	0
Students apply and fax applications	10	8	0
Students apply and email applications	7	8	0
Students are identified by the faculty or department and names are given to graduation office	15	24	100
Students are identified by the graduation department by using a computer program	12	24	0
Students are identified by the graduation department by means of a manual action	2	0	0

Table 4.4 confirms that at University A the most-used method is that of students applying at the graduation counter. University B makes use of the faculties to identify students and send names through to the graduation office where they are identified with the assistance of a computer program. The least used method is a manual method or email applications.

Some of the universities duplicate processes as mentioned in point 5.6 later in this chapter where it is discussed in more detail. The graduation office identifies the students but students also apply for the issuing of their qualifications. This duplication of a process is needed owing to incomplete and incorrect student data. This is in contrast to the responses for question 3.5 about the effectiveness of the university's computer system. The computer system is felt to be effective, which indicates that universities' staff are not aware of the fact that the data is not always correct.

3.6.2 Reasons why students do not qualify to graduate

What are the possible reasons for students not qualifying for graduation? (*v46-v51*)
1=most occurred, 5=least occurred

Although different universities become aware of students who will graduate at the next graduation ceremony through following different processes, there could be students who qualify for the issuing of a qualification but still have outstanding issues such as unpaid fees, previous qualifications needed as a pre-requisite for the current qualification not yet on record, or various other reasons. Students often complain about poor service if they do not receive what they want. This question demonstrates that it is not only because of poor service delivery that a qualification is withheld but also that the university needs to adhere to rules and regulations.

Figure 4.5 indicates the possible reasons for students not qualifying once they have been identified as possible graduates. Respondents rated the reasons as follows: outstanding fees; outstanding pre-requisites such as senior certificates; qualifications incomplete; processes from other departments incomplete or incorrect; time constraints or other reasons. The results are visually demonstrated in Figure 4.5.

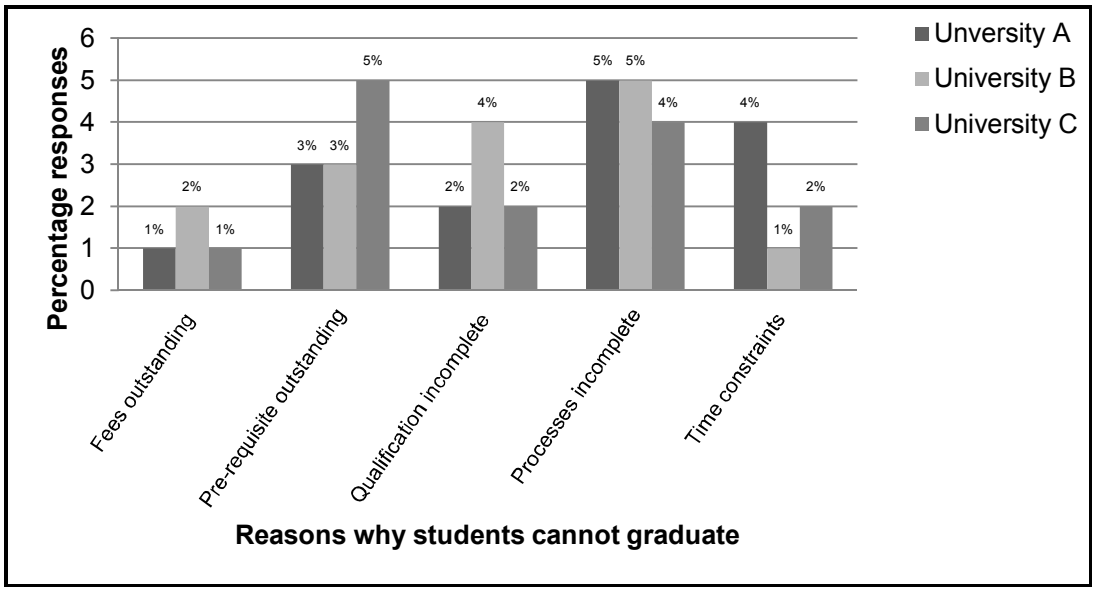

FIGURE 4.5: REASONS FOR STUDENTS NOT GRADUATING WHEN THEY ARE DUE FOR GRADUATION

According to Figure 4.5, the first important reason for students at the universities not graduating is that other departmental processes are incomplete or incorrect. The second most frequent reason is time constraints for University A and incomplete qualifications for University B. The third most frequent reason for non-graduation is outstanding pre-requisites. Outstanding fees are the least-important reason for withholding qualifications.

3.7 COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Should you wish to make any comments please write them in the space provided below (*v52*)

Comments from participants could be divided into four categories: namely, scattered departments; processes and data; telephonic communication and the importance of support staff.

3.7.1 Scattered departments

Most of the comments made by respondents were about scattered departments. Respondents felt that there was a definite need to consolidate departments and processes. Students often have to walk from one end of the university to the other end in order to handle one or two administrative issues. This can be confirmed by comments such as:

> *"Different departments/sections are not integrated and some departments request the same information from students over and over. This is extremely poor service delivery to the most important clients, the students."*

> *"Systems needs to be put in place so that students do not need to walk to different departments and miss classes to attend to matters."*

3.7.2 Processes and data

No effective link exists between departments and systems. Students submit the same documentation more than once for more than one purpose. A system is needed to consolidate this process so that various departments can make use of documentation handed in by students. The importance of accurate data in the graduation process cannot be underestimated and staff reveal their awareness of this matter with the following comment:

> *"Students don't think they need to apply for graduation. The graduation process should be automatically, students must be informed if documents/fees and/or certain subjects are still outstanding. This must be done automatically (client service). Without students there would not be university."*

3.7.3 Telephonic communication

University A has a clear problem with busy and unanswered telephones. Three of the comments were distinctly focused on the telephone communication to students. Comments from respondents:

> *"Too many calls go unanswered and nobody takes responsibility when questioned."*

> *"Graduation office is in shortage of staff members, especially for them to answer telephone enquiries."*

> *"Telephone should be answered at all times at the graduation office. It should be answered by a knowledgeable person."*

3.7.4 The importance of support staff

Staff members used the opportunity to speak out and make their voices count. Staff are aware of the importance of support staff. The following two comments confirm this statement:

> *"I think as administrators we do a good job and the university should acknowledge our efforts."*

> *"Excellent study, hope the university will benefit from the results."*

4. STUDENT DATA

4.1 INTRODUCTION TO STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES AND RESULTS

Good responses were received from all three universities and the sample can be considered as representative of the graduating students at the universities. Of the 3 000 questionnaires distributed, 1 001 were completed and are reflected in the next section. The different administrative departments were compared to one another but the focus remained on the graduation departments. Of the 1 001 students, 441 experienced a negative incident once or more often at the graduation departments. The information gained from the results of the student data will assist in a solution for the research problem as discussed in chapter 1.

4.2 ACCESSIBILITY TO UNIVERSITY – DOES IT INFLUENCE SERVICE TO STUDENTS?

4.2.1 Distance students live from campus

Where do you stay during your studies? (*v1-v5*)

This question was asked to determine the students' accessibility to the university. This question was used in conjunction with research question 5.2.2 on student questionnaire and assists with the results of question 5.2.3: namely, the accessibility of the campus and the availability of administrative services. One assumes that it would be more convenient for a student to attend to administrative issues if he or she lived in a residence on the university campus or lived relatively close to the administrative offices. Research question 5.2.3 on the student questionnaire confirms the truth of this assumption.

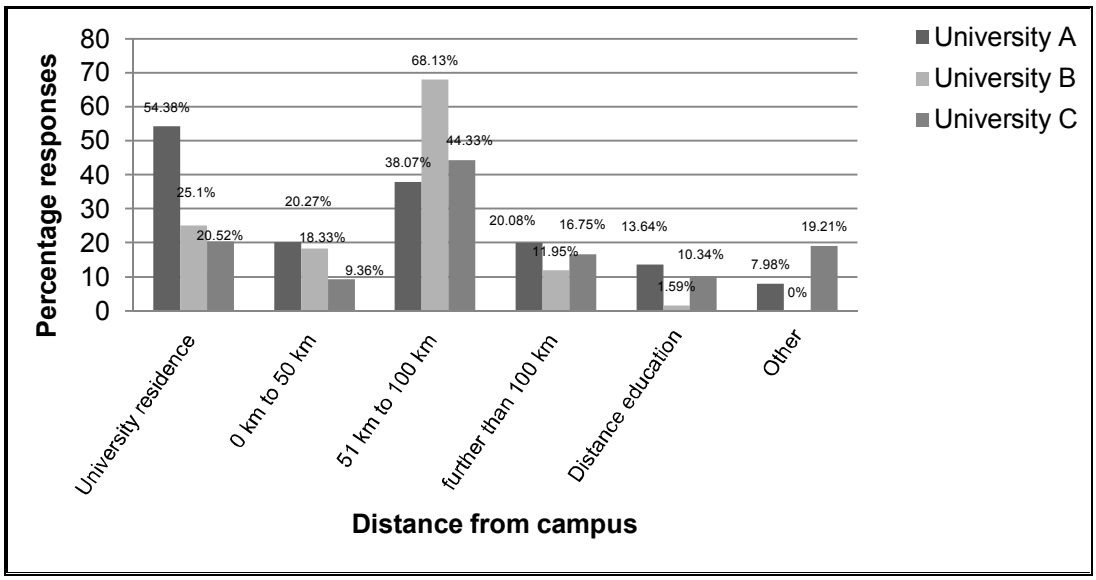

FIGURE 4.6: STUDENTS' ACCESSIBILITY TO CAMPUS

It is clear from Figure 4.6 that University A accommodates more students in residences on campus than University B and University C. Most of the students enrolled at University B and University C make use of private accommodation far from campus (51 km to 100 km from campus). According to the records of University A, it is the biggest residential university in Gauteng.

4.2.2 Part-time and full-time studies

Do you study part time or full time? (*v6-v7*)

If a student studies part time, he or she is not on the campus as frequently as a full-time student and often only during the evenings or on Saturdays when the traditional universities do not offer after hours administrative services. Figure 4.7 demonstrates whether participants are studying part time or full time.

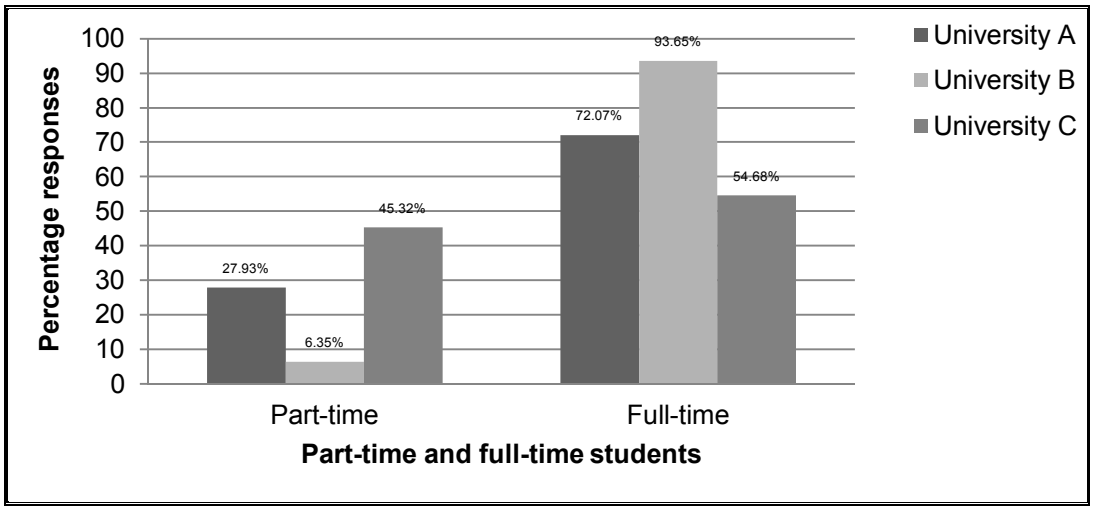

FIGURE 4.7: PART-TIME AND FULL-TIME STUDIES

It is clear from Figure 4.7 that University A, University B and University C have more full-time than part-time students. University C is the nearest to equal as it has a ratio 45/55 of part-time and full-time students.

4.2.3 Availability of administrative services

How does the distance you stay from the campus influence your studies? (*v8-v12*)

How do students experience availability of administrative services? Even full-time students find it difficult to attend to administrative issues during the day. In present times, technology can give access to a client at any time of the day. Respondents were asked to indicate their perceptions of the effectiveness and accessibility of administrative services at their university. The results of this question are recorded in Table 4.5.

TABLE 4.5: AVAILABILITY OF ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICE

The influence of distance	University A	University B	University C
Difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours	24.77	21.29	16.35
University offers extended administrative hours	11.56	11.24	13.46
University offers effective alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc.	34.31	9.54	19.82
University offers alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc. but they are not effective	35.74	18.07	13.65
Have had to travel unnecessarily long distances more than once to attend to administrative issues	39.9	8.17	22.12

Table 4.5 demonstrates that in general students enrolled at University A, University B and University C felt that their university offered effective alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc. Students enrolled at University A indicated that they found it difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours and had to travel unnecessarily long distances more than once to attend to administrative issues. Students at University B indicated that they found it difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours and that the university offered alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc. but they were not effective. Students from University C indicated that they had to travel unnecessarily long distances more than once to attend to administrative issues and that it was difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours.

To summarise the results, one can say that students find it difficult to attend to administrative issues but universities do make proper provision by means of effective alternatives such as web and email.

4.3 INFLUENCE OF ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS ON STUDENTS' STUDIES

4.3.1 Perception of service delivery at the university's administrative departments in general

How did you experience service delivery at the university's administrative departments? (*v13-v17*)

This question determines the perception of general service delivery at the administrative departments of universities. With reference to chapter 2 paragraph 3, the participation in and evaluation of customers in a process determine that the customers alone can define what they perceive as quality service. When customers' perceptions of a service exceed their expectations, they perceive high service quality but when customers perceive that service fails to meet expectations, they perceive bad service quality.

The respondents were requested to choose whether they received excellent, good or bad service delivery from administrative departments in general. Table 4.6 provides a summary of the responses.

TABLE 4.6: PERCEPTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY AT THE UNIVERSITY'S ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS IN GENERAL

Did you receive good or bad service?	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Received excellent service always	17.58	12.4	30.1
Received normally good service	55.49	46	49.03
Received bad service from time to time	19.6	33.6	13.11
Received bad service always	3.48	7.6	1.46
Not relevant/no influence/did not matter	3.85	0.4	6.31

Table 4.6 clearly indicates that students from all three universities in general received good service. University C was an exception as the students felt they always receive excellent service but students from University A and University B believed that they received poor service from time to time.

4.3.2 Influence of service received on future enrolment at university

How did the service you received from the university's administrative departments influence your enrolment for the next course/further studies? (*v18-v21*)

Students expect all university academic, administrative and support staff to cooperate in providing excellent service delivery. Previous experiences by acquaintances and alumni are the most important determinants in students' decisions on the choice of a university (chapter 3, paragraph 3). Bruhn and Georgi (2006:48) state: "Generally, service evaluation plays an important role as a driver of customer decisions. Therefore, in the generalised Service Profit Chain, service evaluations are the determinant of customer behaviour. A central construct regarding customers' service evaluations is the concept of perceived service value". The

way students experience service delivery influences their decision making regarding whether they will further their studies at the relevant university (chapter 2, paragraph 3). Respondents were requested to indicate the influence of service delivery on their enrolment for the next course or further study at the university in question. Table 4.7 provides a summary of responses.

TABLE 4.7: INFLUENCE OF SERVICE RECEIVED ON ENROLMENT AT UNIVERSITY

Influence on future enrolment	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Good service received was a factor in enrolling at the same university for my next course/further studies	54.03	34.66	60.49
Changed university because of poor service received	10.07	3.97	2.93
Considered changing university but stayed at current university because of other factors	19.6	17.9.	6.83
Not relevant/no influence/did not matter	16.3	43.43	29.76

Table 4.7 clearly demonstrates that good service received was a factor in enrolling at the same university for the next course or further studies for students from University A and University C. For University B it was not such an important factor. Poor service received was in general not enough reason to change to another university.

4.4 STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY

With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 3.2, consumer goods can easily be evaluated by comparing their attributes. Qualities are attributes of the specific service characteristics like friendliness of staff, waiting times, or modernity of facilities. Each service process can exhibit a different quality. Finally, the participation and the evaluation of customers determine that customers alone can define what they perceive as quality service. When customers' perceptions of a service exceed their expectations, they perceive a high quality of service but when customers perceive that a service fails to meet expectations, they perceive bad service quality (Bruhn & Georgi, 2006:49).

This research also focuses on whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service. This could be challenging because the graduation office is dependent on the output of other departments and therefore needs to have methods in place to be able to implement service recovery as set out in chapter 2, paragraph 3.2.5. With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 2.5, the graduation offices do not have control over

the type of service other departments offer to the students before they reach the graduation office. This forms part of the objectives of this study.

4.4.1 Perception of service delivery at the specific administrative departments

Please indicate whether you received good or poor service at the different academic departments (*v22-v28*)

With reference to chapter 3, paragraph 11.2, it is clear that university students do experience administrative problems from time to time at graduation offices as at least 100 student complaints were noted.

Table 4.8 reveals the results per department of respondents who were requested to indicate whether they received good or poor service at the different administrative departments. Respondents could choose the following departments: enrolment and application for course; registration; examinations; exemptions and recognitions; graduations; finances or other.

TABLE 4.8: PERCEPTION OF SERVICE DELIVERY BY DEPARTMENTS

Service per department	**Application**			**Registration**			**Examinations**		
	G	**P**	**N/A**	**G**	**P**	**N/A**	**G**	**P**	**N/A**
University A	66.3	23.26	10.44	55.86	34.25	9.89	82.9	5.33	11.76
University B	29.76	13.1	7.14	74.21	19.05	6.75	82.47	9.16	8.37
University C	78.64	3.88	17.48	80.58	7.28	12.14	83.01	1.46	15.53

Service per department	**Exemptions**			**Graduations**			**Finances**		
	G	**P**	**N/A**	**G**	**P**	**N/A**	**G**	**P**	**N/A**
University A	60.93	11.3	27.78	82.23	7.88	9.89	65.99	19.49	14.52
University B	48.81	13.49	37.7	85.32	8.33	6.35	57.14	28.57	14.29
University C	56.8	4.85	38.35	82.04	5.34	12.62	62.62	18.93	18.45
(G = Good Service P = Poor Service N/A = Not Applicable)									

It is clear from Table 4.8 that students experience more good service delivery than poor service delivery in all the departments at all three universities.

The same data from Table 4.8 was analysed for good or poor service received in order to compare the different departments as demonstrated in Table 4.9.

TABLE 4.9: GOOD SERVICE EXPERIENCED BY STUDENTS

Good service	**Application**	**Registration**	**Examinations**	**Exemptions**	**Graduations**	**Finances**
University A	66.3	55.86	82.9	60.93	82.23	65.99
University B	29.76	74.21	82.47	48.81	85.32	57.14
University C	78.64	80.58	83.01	56.8	82.04	62.62

TABLE 4.10: POOR SERVICE RECEIVED BY STUDENTS

Poor service	**Application**	**Registration**	**Examinations**	**Exemptions**	**Graduations**	**Finances**
University A	66.3	55.86	82.9	60.93	82.23	65.99
University B	29.76	74.21	82.47	48.81	85.32	57.14
University C	78.64	80.58	83.01	56.8	82.04	62.62

According to Figure 4.9, the two departments that were perceived as delivering the best were examinations and graduations. Registrations delivered the worst service for University A, whereas finance was the worst for University B and University C, according to table 4.10. The results for University C indicate that it was the only university in which all the departments delivered nearly equally good service. With reference to point 4.2 earlier in this chapter, it is confirmed that the distance students live from a university is not a guarantee of excellent service delivery. University C performed the best in this regard but had the most part-time students and students who lived more than 50km from campus.

4.4.2 Problems experienced during poor service delivery

Where exactly was the problem? (*v29-v36*)

This question gave some of the possible reasons for poor service delivery. With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 2.5.2, teams need to solve problems in order to improve performance immediately and serve customer demand. It is suggested that the following steps be followed: define the problem; analyse possible causes; identify possible solutions; develop an action plan; evaluate and renew the action plan and standardise effective ideas.

The following aspects emerged as problems experienced at the administrative offices. Staff: attitude/unfriendly/slow/reluctant/did not want to assist, really unprofessional; telephone service: lines too busy/not effective/not professional; counter service; email service/internet problems; written correspondence: incomplete/incorrect/slow; availability/completion of forms; processing of application; the graduation ceremony. Figure 4.8 demonstrates the results for this question.

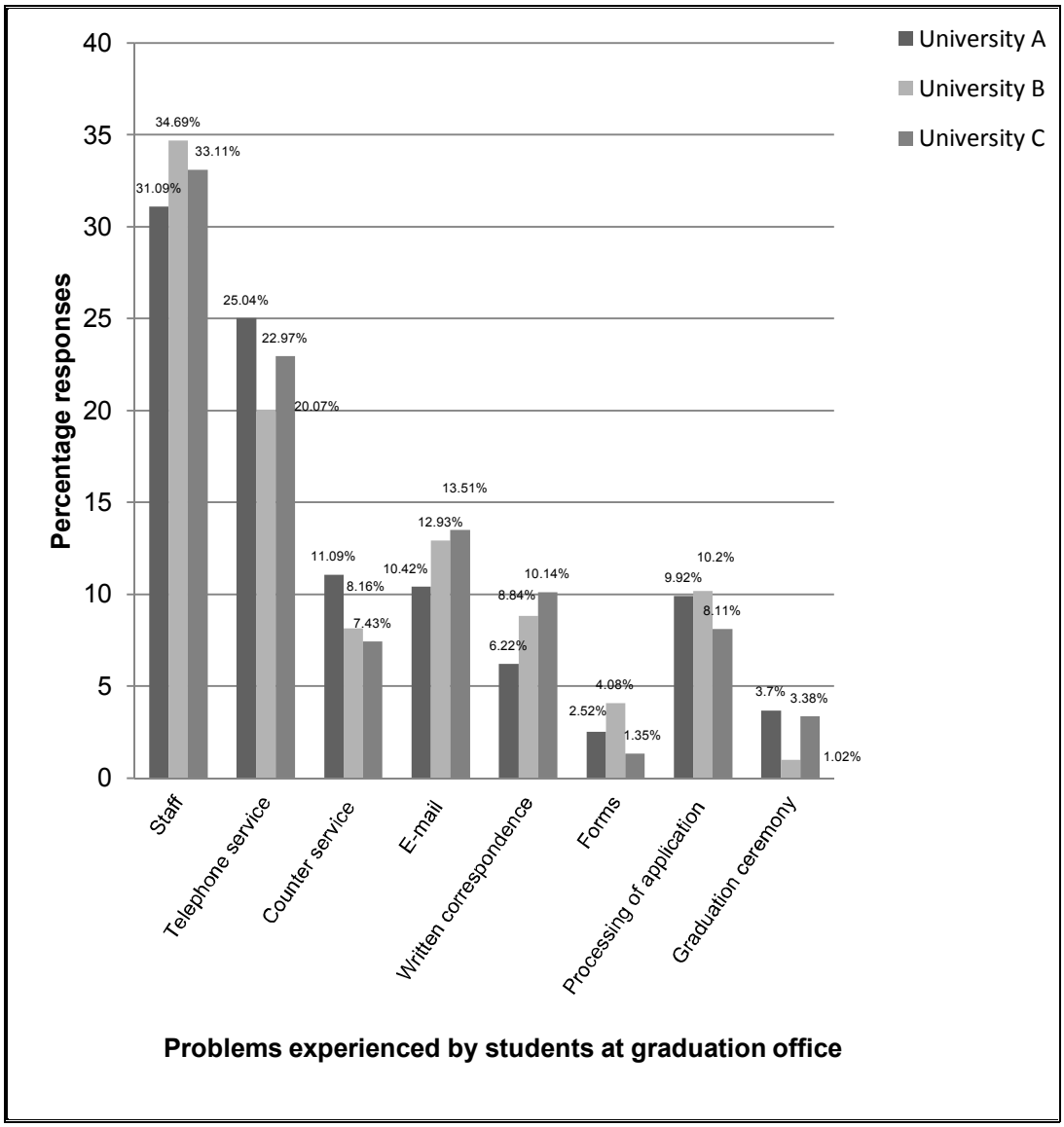

FIGURE 4.8: PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED DURING POOR SERVICE DELIVERY

It is very clear from Figure 4.8 that students from all three universities perceived staff attitude, unfriendliness, slow and reluctant responses, unwillingness to assist and unprofessionalism as the main problem. Telephone service was the second biggest problem. Counter service, email and the processing of applications were the third most problems experienced. The availability and completion of forms and the graduation ceremonies delivered the least problems.

4.4.3 Is this university process-driven or service-driven?

In your opinion, is this university process-driven or service-driven? (v37-v40)

A similar question was asked of the staff and the outcome was positive because there is a balance in the perception of the staff. Unfortunately students are not always aware of all the rules and legislation of a university but this question can determine whether the university where they study implements the rules and legislation correctly and conveys the message correctly to the students. Respondents were requested to indicate whether the university was service-driven: students were most important; process-driven: too many or difficult processes to follow; rules & regulations more important than service to students; do not know/it does not matter. The results are demonstrated in Figure 4.9.

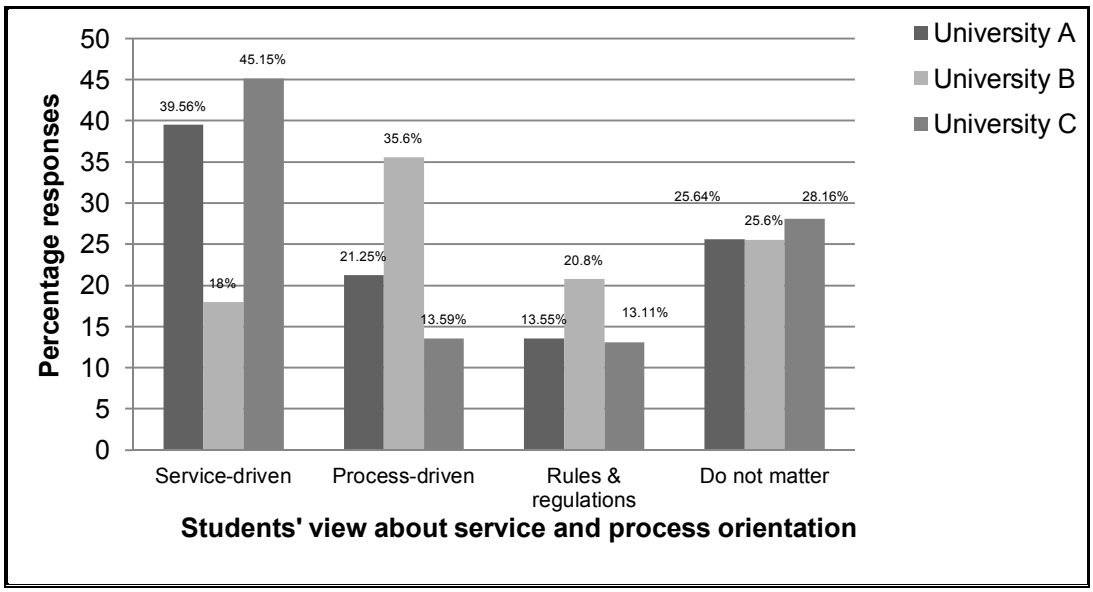

FIGURE 4.9: STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF WHETHER UNIVERSITY IS SERVICE DRIVEN OR PROCESS DRIVEN

According to Figure 4.9, the respondents from University A and University C indicated that the universities were service-driven and students were regarded as most important. The outcome of University B differed as respondents indicated that the university was process-driven and had too many or too-difficult processes to follow.

4.5 STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE GRADUATION OFFICE

Besides the rules graduation offices need to adhere to, they also need to deliver a service to the students, sometimes a determining factor if students intend to study further. This is very challenging for these offices as they are at the end of the chain of activities for students and sometimes these students have already had bad experiences in other departments, whether they were at the registration or exams department, or any other department at the university. The graduation ceremonies are also a window for people who attend the ceremonies, visited by parents or other visitors to the university.

4.5.1 Problems experienced at graduation department

Have you experienced the following? (*v41-v50*)

The following factors were found to be important for customers; assurance, reliability, responsiveness, empathy and communication. Assurance refers to customers' need for staff to convey trust and confidence. Reliability refers to the ability of staff to be able to perform the promised service accurately, dependably and timely. Staff is responsive if they respond promptly to customers' queries. Customers feel that staff is empathetic if they provide personalised service. Communication is one of the most important factors as customers need to receive the correct information from the outset in order to save time and resources to ensure efficiency (chapter 3 paragraph 3.1).

Participants were asked to indicate what type of problem they had experienced at a graduation office in the past by choosing one of the options mentioned in Table 4.11.

TABLE 4.11: PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED AT GRADUATION DEPARTMENTS

Problems experienced by students	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Missed a previous ceremony owing to office mistake	10.43	1.48	4.59
Had to apply more than once	17.13	10.37	9.17
Application process too long	12.01	17.04	12.84
Academic record was not correct	9.25	10.37	10.09
Waited too long for an answer once applied to graduate	17.91	5.93	15.6
Received communication too late	10.43	26.67	26.61
Communication was incorrect	3.74	14.81	9.17
Difficult to contact/reach the graduation office	13.98	11.11	10.09
Problem during graduation ceremony	2.17	1.48	1.83
Other problems	2.95	0.74	0

According to Table 4.11, the respondents from University A indicated they had to wait too long for an answer once they had applied to graduate and secondly they had to apply more than once. The respondents from University B indicated that they received communication too late from the university and the application process to graduate was too long. At University C the respondents indicated that they received communication too late and had to wait too long for an answer once they had applied to graduate. The smallest number of students experienced problems during the graduation ceremonies. Most of the problems experienced at graduation offices are covered in Table 4.10 as very few students indicated that they experienced other problems.

4.5.2 Results of problems received at graduation departments

If you had a problem at the graduation office and it was resolved, how did you feel?
(*v51-v55*)

This is an extremely important question to be able to establish whether universities implement service recovery successfully. Chapter 2, paragraph 3 explained the importance of successful service recovery as it can assist in the avoidance of consecutive failures by a service provider. Generally, successful service recovery leads to customer satisfaction and

the impact of service failures, complaints, decreased loyalty and negative word of-mouth is compensated for. It was also found that even if the problem, which triggered the complaint was fixed, the customers did not necessarily remain loyal if their emotions were not properly attended to.

Failures can result in negative value and be detrimental to the company because more costs are involved in redoing an activity and the customer may be dissatisfied and reduce his or her business with the service provider, which results in revenue loss (chapter 3, paragraph 3). Quality management is crucial in order to promote the avoidance of mistakes and do the task correctly in the first place. Unfortunately, this is not always possible in service delivery because of customer involvement; a mistake cannot be made without the risk of the customer detecting the mistake. Table 4.12 demonstrates the choices made by the participants about how they felt after a problem was resolved.

TABLE 4.12: RESULTS OF PROBLEMS EXPERIENCED AT GRADUATION DEPARTMENT

Results after incidents	**University A**	**University B**	**University C**
Did not experience any problems at graduation office	44.86	63.38	61.42
Satisfied – staff considered my problem	27.32	18.31	21.26
Satisfied – staff made me feel good as a person	18.8	6.34	14.17
Dissatisfied – problem not resolved satisfactorily	3.76	7.75	3.15
Dissatisfied – problem resolved, but still not satisfied	5.26	4.23	0

According to Table 4.12, most of the students did not experience any problems at the university's graduation departments. Respondents were requested to indicate how they felt after a problem was resolved and they indicated that they were satisfied as the university considered their situation or made them feel good as a person. Earlier in this chapter at point 4.3.2, the question was also asked of the respondents about their loyalty towards the university and if they considered changing to another university because of poor service delivery. The outcome indicated that good service was a factor in enrolling at the same university for the next course or further studies for students from University A and University C. For University B it was not such an important factor which indicates that students were not aware of administrative problems.

4.6 COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS

Customers feel the staff is empathetic if staff provide personalised service. Communication is one of the most important factors as customers need to receive the correct information from the outset as this saves time and resources and ensures efficiency (chapter 3 paragraph 3). This question assists in the current method of communication and the preferences of the students.

4.6.1 Current methods of student contact per university

In what way did the university contact you about your graduation ceremony? (*v56-v60*)

Respondents were requested to indicate how the university contacted them with regard to the graduation ceremony by choosing telephone; email; SMSs; letter or other method. Figure 4.10 indicates the methods currently used per university to contact students.

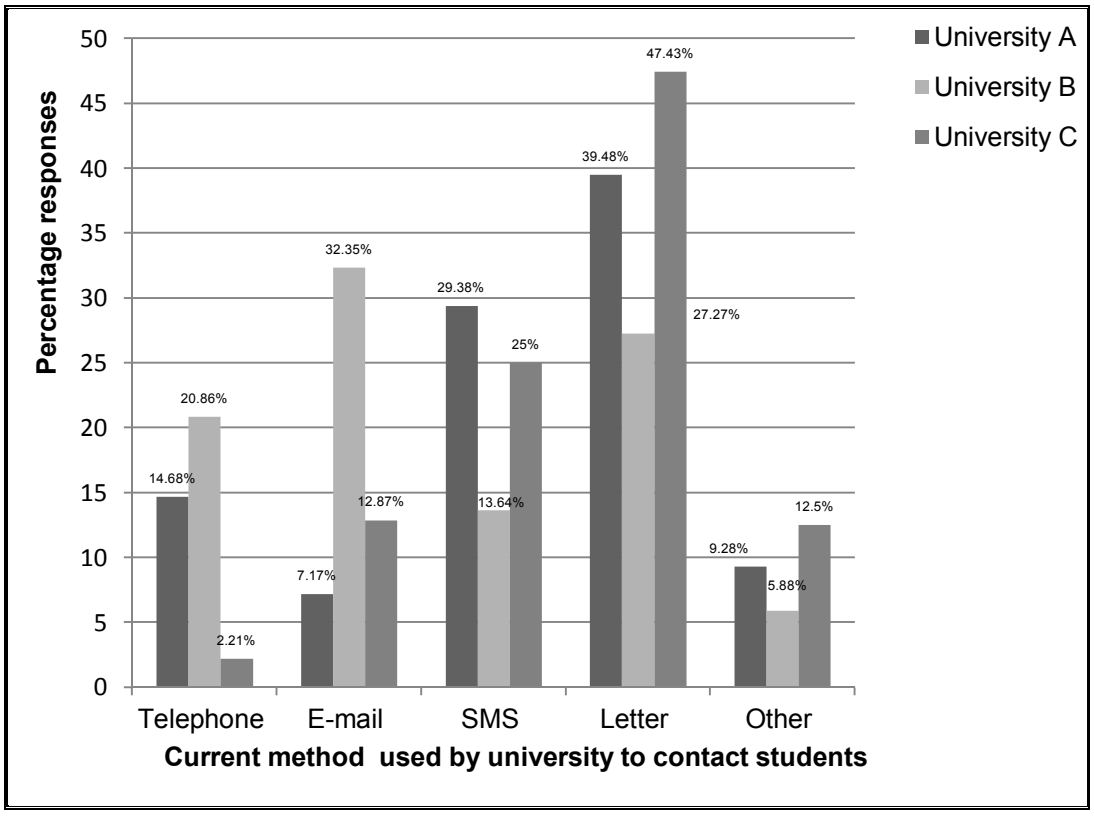

FIGURE 4.10: HOW THE UNIVERSITY CONTACTED STUDENTS WITH REGARD TO GRADUATION CEREMONIES

Figure 4.10 indicates that respondents from University A and University C were contacted with regard to the graduation ceremony by means of letters and SMSs. University B contacted students via email and letters.

4.6.2 Preferred method of student contact per university

Which method would you prefer to be contacted by the university? (*v61-v65*)

Respondents could indicate how they preferred to be contacted by the university by choosing an option: telephone, email; SMS or letter. The preferred method for students to be contacted by the university is demonstrated in Figure 4.11.

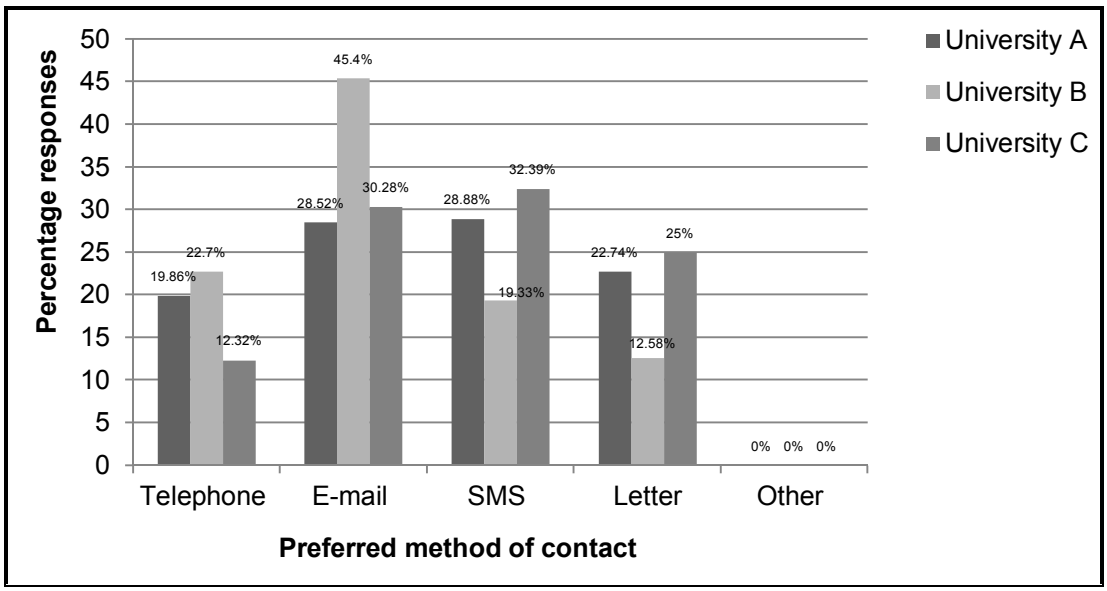

FIGURE 4.11: STUDENTS' PREFERRED METHOD OF CONTACT BY UNIVERSITY

Figure 4.11 demonstrates that respondents from University A and University C preferred to be contacted by the university by means of SMSs and secondly by email. Respondents from University B preferred to be contacted by means of email and secondly by telephone. From the comments by the respondents from University B it is clear that an incorrect graduation date was communicated by letter but was corrected by SMS. Although there were complaints about the incorrect communication, some of the students were satisfied about how the university handled the situation and corrected the information. Most of the comments from students from all three universities were about university communication. It was either late, incorrect or was not received by the participants at all.

4.6.3 Preferred method for contacting a university

How do you prefer to contact the university? (*v66-v71*)

Participants indicated the manner in which they wanted to contact the university: telephone; email; in writing (letters); completing forms to enquire; SMSs or other methods. Figure 4.12 demonstrates the summarised results for this question.

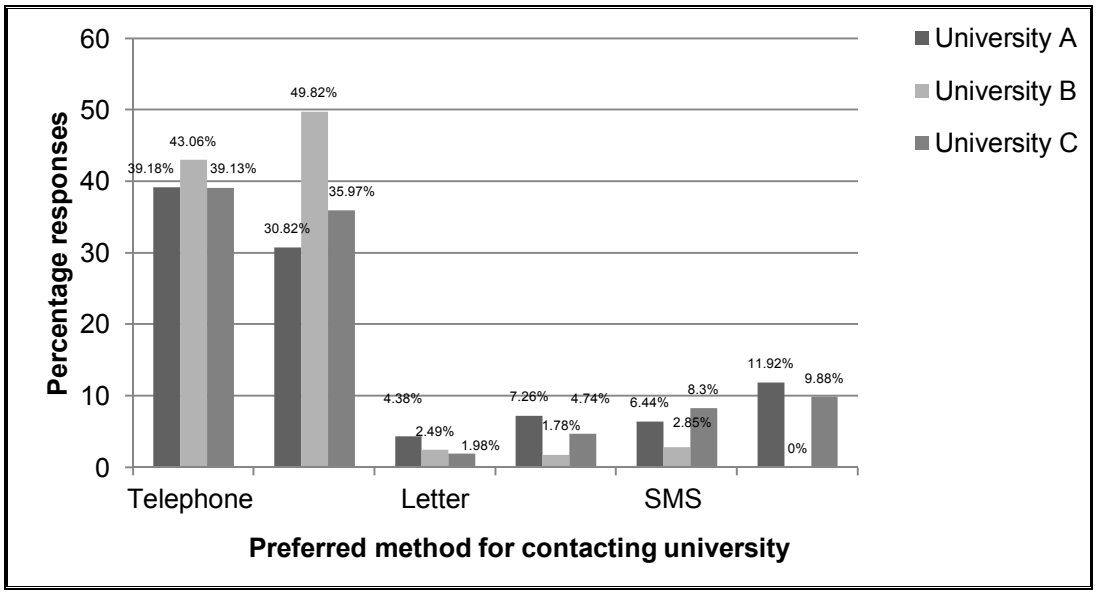

FIGURE 4.12: PREFERRED METHOD FOR CONTACTING UNIVERSITY

Figure 4.12 indicates that students from University A, University B and University C preferred to contact the university by telephone or email. Students did not want to write letters, complete forms or enquire by sending SMSs to the university.

4.7 COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS

Should you wish to make any comments please write them in the space below (v72)

Comments were not compulsory but there were positive and negative responses. Respondents who gave positive comments praised the universities for good service received. Respondents with negative comments had specific problems and the majority complained about communication, long queues and long processes. The comments were categorised as follows: communication, service delivery, processes and positive comments.

4.7.1 Communication

Students already had a negative perception about communication at universities and certain methods of communication were also not their preferred methods as evident in results of point 4.6 earlier in this chapter. The first step for universities is to identify the needs of students and change their communication approaches. The main problems with communication were identified as personnel attitude, unanswered telephone calls and not receiving communication at all. The following comments are representative of students in general:

"Attitude of the registration personnel is very bad."

"Graduation does not answer telephone."

"I did not get an invitation for the graduation. For my application I had to call to enquire."

"I did not receive any communication from the graduation office, my dad had to go personally and get information."

"I would like to get correct information on the first call. The telephonist should be given current and relevant information."

4.7.2 Service delivery

Service in general is perceived as negative by some students. This includes service received from all departments from enrolment through to the graduation department. The following comments confirm that students found it difficult to attend to administrative issues.

"Service is too slow, too many queues."

"The students find it difficult to enquire at the campus."

"The university has to improve the service, because it's not convenient."

4.7.3 Processes

Improved processes are a necessity at universities as students perceive the current processes negatively and this results in a negative perception of a university. Administrative processes are a crucial part of a student's path at a university but are not meant to be a burden. If processes improve, the service improves and students develop a more positive perception of the administrative departments. A few of the comments about the processes are given:

"Being sent from post to pillar for administrative side at graduation."

"A re-look at the registration process is needed. This is an issue that is in everybody's lip."

"Graduated one year later due to my fees outstanding. I am glad I could graduate."

4.7.4 Positive comments

Not everything is bad at a university and many students enjoy their time studying and feel that they received such excellent service that they would return; they would also recommend the university to all their friends and family. Word of mouth is one of the best methods of marketing and can promote a university. All the negative comments clearly reveal what students do not want but the positive comments prove that universities are able to provide the service students expect. Only a few of the many positive comments are listed.

> *"I am so grateful to be graduating with this university. May it continue to have a sustainable service delivery."*

> *"I am very happy with the service delivery that i'm getting in the university."*
> *"I applied for my graduation and the university didn't take long to answer my application and it was approved. I never had any difficulties since I've been in the university."*

> *"The service they provided me was excellent."*

And a comment all the universities would like to hear is:

> *"This is a great university with great service, will definitely continue my studies here."*

5. GRADUATION COMMUNICATION COMPARISON

The personnel data provided the viewpoints of the administrative staff, employee involvement and how the administrative staff perceived the service they delivered to students. The data from the student questionnaires revealed the viewpoints of the students and how they perceived service delivered by the university. The following section is an indication of what is really happening.

To be able to demonstrate the current situation, telephone statistics from incoming calls to a graduation department were compared with periods when letters of invitation to the graduation ceremony were sent to students, to be able to have a broader overview of what is really happening in a graduation office. Together with the telephone and letter statistics, faxes received by the graduation office as well as SMSs were included in this comparison. One of the methods to apply for graduation is by faxing an application to the graduation office. SMSs are sent to students to confirm the approval status of a student's graduation. These communication methods form part of the processes of a graduation office which in turn form part of the functioning of an administrative office and are used by the graduation

office to assist in service delivery. These statistics also assist in identifying the exact problem and finding a possible solution for improving service delivery.

According to the head of department at the graduation office of University A, graduation ceremonies are held during May and September each year. The preparation for the May graduation ceremony starts in October of the previous year when staff identify possible graduates with the assistance of a computer program and wait until December for the exam results to be captured by the exams department. Then only, once the results and qualifications are confirmed, can staff begin to send invitation letters to students. Once students have been approved, SMSs are also sent to confirm the approval of the qualification. A total of 10 000 students graduate per year of whom 8 000 graduate during the May period. Six personnel members identify and approve graduating students and five personnel members print and send letters handle the telephone enquiries, counter and SMSs (Tshwane University of Technology, 1 September 2011–31 August 2012a, Tshwane University of Technology, 2012b).

Statistics were gathered from University A for the period September 2011 to August 2012. This represents a one-year cycle at a graduation office:

- Incoming calls to the graduation office
- Faxes received by the graduation office
- Letters of invitation sent to graduating students
- SMSs sent to students by the graduation office

For the purpose of this question, the results are demonstrated in Table 4.13 as well as Figure 4.14 to give a better overview.

TABLE 4.13: INCOMING CALLS, FAXES RECEIVED, LETTERS AND SMSS SENT BY GRADUATION OFFICE

	Total Calls	**Faxes received**	**Letters sent**	**SMSs sent**
September 2011	1732	24	158	26
October 2011	2034	84	3	275
November 2011	2955	154	5	0
December 2011	1136	45	725	713
January 2012	11042	449	2833	3564
February 2012	12784	150	2713	5455
March 2012	12509	89	1830	6330
April 2012	2895	31	396	0
May 2012	6232	59	96	0
June 2012	2068	87	151	0
July 2012	4196	96	726	0
August 2012	11434	77	1664	0

One of the biggest challenges the graduation office of University A faces is the telephone system the university implemented. With reference to the information from the telephone data, more than 50% of the calls received (indicated in Table 4.13) go unanswered because of the type of telephone system that is used.

Another challenge is that the graduation office identifies the students from October but students also apply for the issuing of their qualifications. This duplication of a process is needed because of incomplete and incorrect student data. Figure 4.13 provides a visual demonstration of the four different processes at the graduation office.

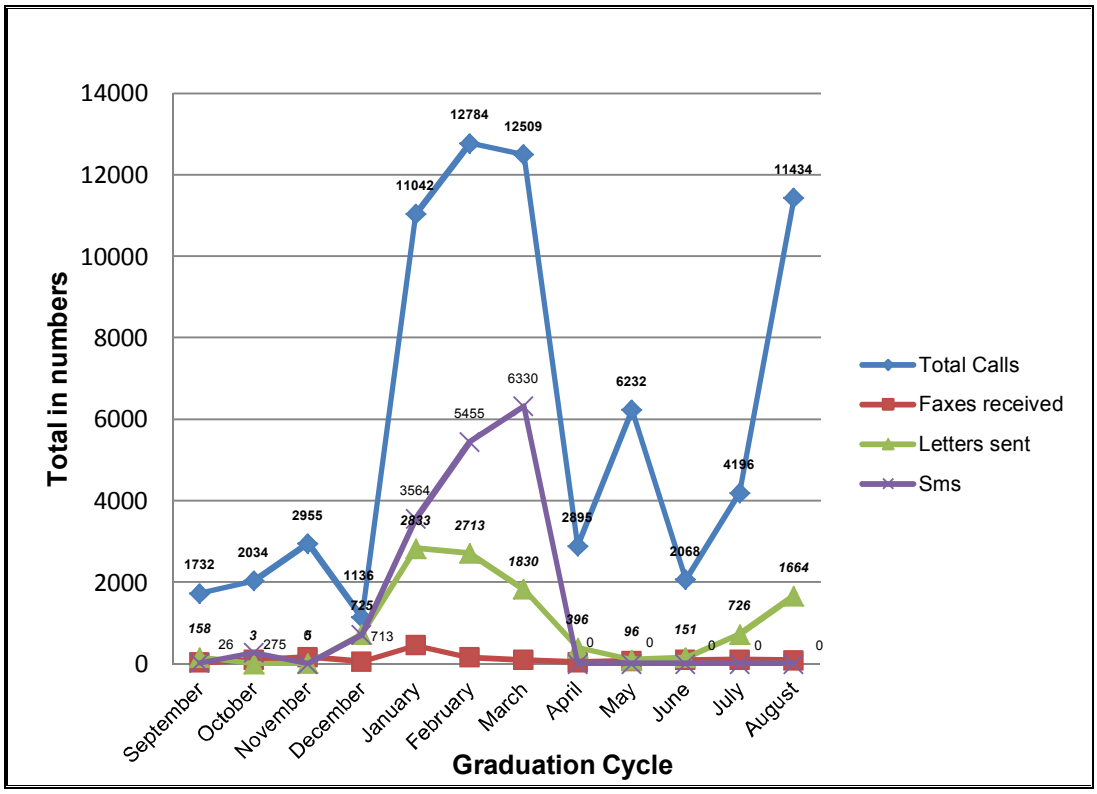

FIGURE 4.13: INCOMING CALLS, FAXES RECEIVED, LETTERS AND SMSs SENT BY GRADUATION OFFICE

Figure 4.13 clearly reveals that the graduation office reaches a peak enquiry time from December to March and again in August. The figure also indicates that once the largest number of letters has been sent during January, February and March, the telephone calls decrease drastically, only to increase again in August for the next range of graduation ceremonies to be held during September.

6. SUMMARY

In general there is a feeling among administrative departmental university staff that their department has to wait constantly for other departments to complete their outputs before they can begin their work. This is the main reason for students not graduating. This could also be one of the reasons for students' complaints that they have to wait too long for an answer once they have applied to graduate, or receive their communication too late. This factor is confirmed by the answers to question 5.4.1 earlier in the chapter. In the comparison of the different departments, it was found that the graduation and exams departments delivered the best service. Enrolment, Registration and Finance delivered the worst service. The computer system promotes service delivery and there is a definite balance with regard to service delivery and processes and procedures.

Although students feel that universities offer effective alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/emails etc, they still experience difficulty in attending to administrative issues and often need to travel unnecessarily long distances in order to attend to administrative issues. The majority of students, however, feel that they receive good service. Taking the above facts into consideration, the researcher feels that students in general have negative perceptions of service delivery at universities. Student perceptions also influence customer retention as students will enrol for further studies at the same university if they have received good service there.

Another factor to take into consideration when poor service delivery is investigated is the human factor. Students from all three universities perceive the main problems to be unfriendly and unprofessional staff attitudes, and slow and reluctant responses. Telephone service was the second biggest problem. In general students either did not experience graduation department problems or they were satisfied after a problem was resolved. There is a definite problem with communication effectiveness if one looks at the students' comments and the results of the question asked about communication. The students' needs are not met.

The information from the telephone and letter statistics reveals that communication throughout the universities is not effective. An example: a graduation office identifies students by means of a computer program but it seems that staff from other departments are not aware of this. Communication as a problem is also confirmed by the fact that one department constantly has to wait for input from another department before being able to complete work.

7. CONCLUSION

This chapter has clearly outlined the results and findings of the study. The results confirmed that the correct sample from the population was targeted and that universities would be able to make use of the results of this study. Personnel as well as student questionnaires were analysed and discussed. Tables were used to summarise results and visual views were provided by graphics. Telephone statistics from incoming calls were compared to periods when letters of invitation were sent to students in order to have a broader overview of what was really happening at a typical graduation office. These statistics could also assist in identifying the exact problems and finding possible solutions for improving service delivery. All the data was summarised and some of the problems were identified; for example, a department's outputs which serve as inputs for other departments; the importance of the human factor during service delivery; and communication. Comments from participants were very helpful in identifying possible problems and also assisted in solutions. The purpose and

aim of the research was successfully reached with the collection and analysis of the data. On the basis of these results and findings, conclusions and recommendations are presented in chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. INTRODUCTION

The quality of service delivery in education is not limited to the classroom. Support services form part of a student's needs and experience at all levels including those of Higher Education institutions. Higher education institutions are competitive companies and retain their students, that is, their customers, though not only learning and innovation but also through quality service delivered by support staff such as administrative staff.

The conclusions and recommendations for this research study are based on the analysis of the results analysis provided in the previous chapter. This chapter integrates the literature review and the interpretation of the research findings. The research questions as well as the contributions and limitations of this study are discussed and answered.

2. SYNOPSIS OF MAIN FINDINGS

The primary objective was to determine the effect that administrative processes have on students and on service delivery. Through her findings the researcher confirmed that universities can retain their students' loyalty through good service delivery. The surprising finding was that students experienced the examinations and graduation departments – departments that they encounter at the end of their studies – as departments that delivered excellent service. Despite the perception of students that universities generally delivered poor service, when they did experience average or poor service from a department, they tended to regard it as good. This view is verified by students that experienced negative service from the graduation departments, but felt that they had received good service as they did not know what excellent service really was.

The primary objective was met by feedback in student questionnaires which determined the accessibility to the universities, students' perception of the universities and communication effectiveness. Personnel questionnaires determined the relationships among departments.

The next section provides an outline of the objectives aligned with the findings.

3. SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

3.1 OBJECTIVE 1

The first specific objective was to determine how a graduation office, the last department in a student's study life might make a difference in a student's life and improve service delivery.

The first step in making a difference was to re-examine the processes in a graduation department by means of a system analysis. Once a graduation office had implemented the best possible practices, it would be able to deliver better service and thus set a precedent for other departments.

Furthermore, graduation offices should learn from management processes, such as planning, organising, leading and controlling and be more alert regarding preventative actions and changes in unforeseen challenges. With proper planning and controlling, time constraints could be eliminated. By now the graduation offices should be aware of the incomplete and incorrect records of students and make proper provision for corrective action. They could implement pre-audit reports and actions as a process before graduates are identified. According to the findings in chapter 4.paragraph 3.6, the first important reason for students not graduating is incomplete and incorrect processes from other departments. A graduation office cannot complete the processes for other departments but they can make other departments aware of the influence the incomplete and incorrect records have on the processes of a graduation office. A graduation office can develop reports to identify students that have information such as marks, fees or pre-requisites outstanding (chapter 4, paragraph 2.1).

Although computer systems can be re-examined, it is more valuable to train staff to improve data capturing and correctness of records. Two of the three universities indicated that their computer system promoted service delivery but the third felt that it did not do this. This is an indication that the computer systems might not be necessarily utilised properly because the same system was used by all three universities.

Question 4 from the student questionnaires and question 7 from the personnel questionnaire were used to answer research objective 1.

3.2 OBJECTIVE 2

The second specific objective was to determine the influence of organisational culture in universities regarding service delivery, as it seemed that universities did not always put their customers first.

External as well as internal customers should be regarded as important in order to deliver quality service (chapter 2, paragraph 3.1.1). It is clear that there is a lack of excellent service in the different departments at the universities (chapter 4, paragraph 3.4.3). Because administrative departments constantly have to wait for others to complete the work needed for their own departmental input, it is clear that the different departments are not aware of the importance of the completion of work in a certain timeframe. Often staff feel frustrated because other departments do not deliver the work as required but are themselves not committed to completing their own work in time. It is suggested that staff be made aware of the importance of their work and that the underlying causes of the problems be investigated.

Question 5 was important in order to answer objective 2 and determined students' perceptions of administrative departments.

3.3 OBJECTIVE 3

The third specific objective was to study the influence of administrative processes and procedures on service delivery.

During the literature study it was already evident that students regarded administrative departments as second in importance to learning and research. It was also found that administrative departments formed part of the process of service delivery and students needed to experience them positively. If processes were improved and pro-active actions taken, students would be happier. One of the processes could include the communication process. Numerous concerns were raised about communication and the communicating preferences of students. The development and utilisation of SMSs and emails would have an immediate and positive effect on service delivery. Processes such as pro-active communication should be put in place to ensure that students received the correct communication even before they expected the communication from graduation offices.

In the personnel questionnaire, question 5 determined the departments involved in administrative functions and question 6 addressed the relationships among these departments.

3.4 OBJECTIVE 4

The fourth specific objective was to analyse the influence of work delivered by other departments on the processes of the graduation offices.

The findings from both the personnel and student data confirmed that the study records of students were often incomplete or incorrect, which in turn influenced negative perceptions of students about the graduation offices. The problem always returns to departments throughout the universities being dependent on output from other departments and thus often having to wait for work to be completed by other departments. Unfortunately all the administrative departments are involved in this process and a project to improve this situation will involve all the departments. Immediate remedial action graduation offices can take is to refer all incomplete and incorrect work back to the relevant departments to complete or correct. Over time the other departments will hopefully begin to deliver correct and complete work.

3.5 OBJECTIVE 5

The fifth specific objective was to suggest possible proactive methods and processes that could be implemented at graduation offices to enhance productivity and promote service delivery.

Currently the duplication of processes is evident in graduation offices as confirmed by the results in the last paragraph of chapter 4, paragraph 5. Although this is a result of incomplete work from other departments, graduation departments can eliminate one of the processes. At present, graduation departments are aware of students by means of more than one method. Students apply for graduation and the graduation office identifies possible graduates by means of a computer program. If the staff continue with the pro-active identification of possible graduates, they can communicate with graduates via SMS or email. Therefore students should not need to apply for graduation. The moment a student is identified electronically, an SMS message should be sent to the student. This message would prevent the student from applying for graduation. This single message sent to students in advance would enable the graduation office staff to implement the lean principle as mentioned in chapter 2, paragraph 2.3.3. This would also reduce enquiries to the offices and bring relief during the peak periods before graduation ceremonies, which in turn would give the graduation offices more time to spend on other important tasks.

Universities should communicate with students regarding graduation ceremonies by means of emails and SMSs, as these are their preferred methods. The information would reach the

students in a shorter period than the traditional letters which are sent currently. Universities should develop these methods as far as possible to satisfy students' needs.

3.6 OBJECTIVE 6

This objective aimed to find solutions for proactive administrative processes to promote service delivery.

Although the three universities differed in the details of their processes and procedures, the basic principles and objectives were the same. The aim of the graduation offices was to identify nearly 8 000 students in advance before the ceremonies to be able to organise the ceremonies professionally and use them as advertisements to encourage more students to study at universities. Universities also need to adhere to their specific laws and rules and regulations. This could make their work more challenging. Following the rules and regulations would prevent the issuing of incorrect qualifications and ensure the minimising of mistakes.

The graduation departments could take pro-active actions such as the identification of students before they wrote exams. By communicating with students about the progress of their graduation statuses at the right time and using the right methods, students would be better informed and have no reason to contact the offices unnecessarily. This would reduce the office workload which in turn would give staff time to concentrate on more important tasks and deliver more personal service to students. This was confirmed by the students' complaints about communication, long queues and long processes. If students received effective communication about processes before they attempted to stand in long queues or apply for graduation, they would be much more positive about the service of administrative departments and thus have a more positive perception of the university. The literature study, student questionnaires and personnel questionnaires as well as the telephone data comparison assisted not only in meeting the objectives but also in making recommendations.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

"Complaints should be welcome, as without them we cannot improve" state De Beer and Erasmus (2010:85). A complaining customer is one in need and a response should be one that indicates a willingness to satisfy that need. The reaction a customer receives from a service consultant determines whether the customer is satisfied and will return or move on to the next company where he or she can receive better service. Staff that service students need to be trained properly and need to understand and be able to attend to customers,

especially difficult customers. For a department to be able to deliver excellent service, the staff need to set goals for the type of service to be delivered and every member must be compliant. The customer service goals need to be an integral part of the business's overall customer service vision, be realistic and achievable and the staff need to be committed to achieving the goals. If the goals are observable and measurable and satisfy customer requirements, customers are generally appreciative.

The following section is divided into general recommendations, specific recommendations which include communication, relationship marketing and processes that are applicable to all three universities. The last part of the section deals with each university separately.

4.1 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

- It is recommended that a department such as a graduation department begin with a few small goals and as the staff improve, set higher goals until the department meets the desired service standard. In order to deal with difficult customers, staff should be polite and patient, never lose their tempers, not blame other departments or employees, empathise with the customers and offer assistance to solve the problem.
- With reference to chapter 2, paragraph 2.5, AOMs have little control over some resources used in offices, for example, energy costs, furniture costs and salaries. However, they do have the power to solve low-productivity problems within the office and thus exert a positive effect on the cost of producing goods and services. Combined with lean activities, graduation office administrators will not be able to change the whole university but by pro-actively taking the lead in delivering excellent service they should be able to make a difference.
- When respondents were asked how they felt after a problem was resolved by the staff of a graduation office, they indicated that they were satisfied as the university had considered their needs and made them feel good as a person. This proves that staff are able to implement actions such as service recovery. If customers do not feel satisfied that problems have been resolved, it is an indication that their emotions were not properly dealt with.
- Synergy among the different departments and processes may be developed with the emphasis on shifting from inward-looking systems to developing partnerships and from inputs and processes to outputs and outcomes. Improving service delivery to internal customers results in delivering greater efficiency and more responsive and flexible services to students. To be able to make a difference, graduation office staff need to start with themselves and improve their own service to other

departments. The other departments will soon follow and reflect good service back to them.

4.2 SPECIFIC RECOMMENDATIONS

4.2.1 Communication

As with other companies, a university has internal and external customers. The various departments are internal customers and the students and their parents are external customers. Communication plays an important role in service delivery, not only with regard to the external customers but also to the internal customers. A university should adhere to students' requests and fully develop students' preferred methods of communication. A customer's first need is met if students receive communication through the students' preferred methods. Communication should also be timely and service staff should be able to speak well, listen carefully, and use professional language and positive non-verbal gestures when in face-to-face interviews. According to the students' feedback on the open- ended questionnaires, there are major problems with face-to-face communication. Negative staff attitudes – unfriendliness, slow and reluctant responses, unprofessionalism and staff that do not really want to assist – cause major problems.

Telephone etiquette also needs attention as it is the second major complaint from customers. A large percentage of customer-service interaction occurs over the telephone. The greeting process is essential and determines whether customers want to do business with your company or not. The following three elements are important during telephone service: pleasantness, sincerity and brevity. Pleasantness sets the stage emotionally and it is important to ensure that your voice tone portrays a pleasant and positive emotional state. The key element in sincerity is to greet the caller and then state the name of the department to let the customer know they are in the right place. Then stating your name implies your willingness to be accountable and creates a personal touch. Asking the caller "How may I help you today?" indicates your desire to assist. Internal customers, alias personnel from other departments, need to be treated with the same respect and desire to serve them. Staff need to remember that they are serving a customer, whether internal or external. Staff that answer phones need to state their department and name slowly and clearly in order to be audible. Very often they speak so fast that their words are indistinct. (Ferreira, 2011:104).

4.2.2 Relationship marketing

The current tendency is for businesses to shift to relationship marketing. This contrasts with the outcome of the student questionnaire. Students often feel that they are a number and if principles of relationship-marketing are implemented, they should not feel unimportant but

as if they have a personal relationship with the university. According to Pride and Ferrell (2010:455), relationship marketing or selling is also known as solution selling. A business finds solutions for customers' needs by listening to them and understanding and caring about their needs and challenges. The findings in this research study give the three universities involved indications of students' needs and requests such as communication methods and staff attitudes. These are issues that can be resolved by the universities and improve their relationships with their students.

4.2.3 Processes

Universities should consider re-engineering structures and administrative processes at macro level. The fact that graduation offices are at the end of the chain of departments can be a challenge but staff can use this as an opportunity to improve service. With methods in place to identify problems before they occur, time can be spent on more important tasks and students will not have to waste time trying to solve problems as only a few will occur. One of the suggestions is to send bulk SMSs to students to inform them of their graduation status. This is pro-active and means that students will not need to contact the graduation department; service points will be less busy which in turn will give the service staff the opportunity to deliver a more personal service to students. An appropriate analysis of the processes themselves needs to be undertaken to provide a good understanding of the effectiveness and efficiency of the administrative processes. There are many causes for inefficient and ineffective processes such as backlogs in data processing or frequent use of backup procedures. Computerisation can provide office assistance but does not necessarily define the causes of the non-conformance to expectation (Harrington et al., 1997:118). The same principle is still true today and universities should not blame computer systems for ineffectiveness.

The three universities investigated are specifically referred to in the following section.

4.3 UNIVERSITY A

University A has the biggest residential community of students and could utilise the opportunity better as they achieved the highest score regarding students that found it difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours. To have more students on campus during office hours should be an opportunity to deliver more efficient face-to-face service. The university did, however, achieve the best score in offering students efficient alternatives such as internet-based services for administrative issues. The university should not neglect personal service and rely too much on electronic services. The overall service rendered to students can be improved. Although University A achieved the highest score

regarding normally good service, the aim must be to score excellent service in all respects. During the graduation process, students indicated they had to apply for graduation more than once and had to wait too long for answers. It does not reflect well for 9% of the students to complain about poor service delivery at the graduation office. The department should use this opportunity to change into a customer focused department by acknowledging student complaints and changing processes. Replacing letters with emails already makes a tremendous difference.

4.4 UNIVERSITY B

University B should re-examine alternatives offered to students that cannot attend to administrative issues during working hours. With a score of 46% for normally good service and 12% for excellent service, University B achieved the lowest score regarding service received by students. The score for receiving bad service from time to time was the highest at 33%. This university, however, had the highest number of students that indicated that bad service received was not a factor and did not influence their decision to change to another university. University B should take care and not be too confident that factors other than administrative service delivery could influence students to change their university because students feel that the university is too process driven. The graduation office should consider communicating earlier regarding the graduation process as students indicated that they were notified too late. This university achieved the highest score regarding graduation office problems as students indicated they did not encounter any difficulties. Students were contacted by the university by means of their preference: emails.

4.5 UNIVERSITY C

In comparison with the two other universities, University C achieved the best score (30%) regarding excellent service. With a score of nearly 80% combined for excellent and good service received and only 1% for bad service, this university delivered the best service to students. It also achieved the highest score (60%) for the question indicating that good service was a major factor in remaining at the university. Students also indicated that they received good service at all the departments with scores higher than 80% and only at the finance and exemptions department was the score just over 60%. A major complaint with the graduation office was that of communication that was received too late (26%). Although none of the students felt dissatisfied about their experience at the graduation office, University C did not meet the students' needs regarding methods of communication, however. Students were contacted by means of letters and a very low percentage of SMSs although students preferred to be contacted by means of SMSs and emails. The fact that University C was perceived as the university that delivered the best service is surprising as it

has the largest number of part-time students that are not normally on campus during office hours.

There is currently a negative perception of service delivery at universities and for the graduation offices to make a visible difference they need to deliver exceptional service to students. They need to make it their goal to deliver better service than any other of the other departments at the universities.

5. VALIDITY, TRIANGULATION AND RELIABILITY

When more than one method is used for research, a greater validity of the data findings can be confirmed by another batch of data (chapter 3 paragraph 10.3). Quantitative data was used by means of telephone and letter statistics and closed-ended questionnaires for staff and students. As part of the questionnaires, provision was made for comments enabling students and staff to give qualitative data. The comments from staff and students confirmed their answers to the closed-ended questions as well as the information gained from the telephone and letter statistics. It was also clear during the data analysis and conclusions that the literature study was applicable to this study and strengthened the findings. An example is the necessity of lean activities, to use time on more important tasks and not spend time on unnecessary or duplication of tasks. Service recovery and customer perceptions are also very clear in the literature study as well as the findings of the study. Reliability for this study is confirmed by the method used to collect and analyse data. A scientific method was used and presented an unbiased image of the world (chapter 3, paragraph 2.2).

6. CONTRIBUTION OF THIS STUDY

Improvement of administrative processes and service delivery in general only became important in the 1960s and 70s, when it started to evolve into one of the most important instruments to enable a business to keep a competitive edge. The research conducted on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that improvement is needed. The three universities involved in this study should make use of this research on the processes, procedures and service delivery in Higher Education. This is a starting point for the identification of the problems in administrative departments and with information such as the communication preferences of students, the universities can make an immediate difference in service delivery by meeting students' needs.

Although this research is a non-participatory evaluation research, universities should be able to benefit from the results. Problems are identified and suggestions offered to all three universities but they can decide whether they wish to implement the suggestions or not.

7. LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

A limitation of this study is the response received from the staff of University C. As University C delivered only four responses, the viewpoint of the administrative staff at this university cannot be seen as representative. However, the results of University C are included and, for the purpose of this study, should be accepted as the same as those from University A and University B as the universities exhibit the same or similar results.

A second limitation of this study was the telephone and letter statistics. The original purpose was to study three years of data and look for an indication of whether the time letters were sent to students had an influence on the number of telephone calls received. Originally it was indicated that three years of data would be available but by the time the data was requested with the ethical clearance, the university could only supply telephone statistics for one year. The data could still used, but only to demonstrate the processes and cycle in a graduation office.

8. PERSONAL REFLECTION

Although observation was not part of the research method planned for this research project, I observed the service provided by the different universities I contacted. Administrative procedures were often not properly laid down and it was necessary to search for the correct procedures and departments. Universities have complex structures and as all three universities have different structures and procedures, the task was very challenging. The service received from the universities that responded without hesitation to requests was perceived as excellent. These universities made me feel important and good as a person.

During the fieldwork, one of the universities impressed me as it delivered very personal and professional service. This could be the result of de-centralised departments. The challenge it faces is the coordination of functions and the validity of processes. Universities with centralised functions have better control over the functions and policies of the departments.

I discovered that most of the problems in the graduation office could be referred back to the basics of administrative offices and service delivery. Universities have access to all the expertise they need but do not utilise it properly. The comments from staff and students indicated that they wanted to be heard and if staff and students have the opportunity to express their needs and desires, the solution to problems can come from within the university. Management just needs to begin to listen.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

From the conclusions and recommendations, it is possible to suggest opportunities for future research. Re-engineering of graduation processes is necessary to assist the graduation offices to determine and implement proper processes to improve service delivery. Benchmarking will assist with the investigation and implementation of best practices and proper processes can be implemented. An in-depth study will be necessary.

A second major problem is the study records of students. An investigation needs to be conducted in order to determine the causes of problems, and corrective actions need to be suggested and implemented. Causes such as staff attitude, incomplete processes and procedures or something small such as uninformed staff are numerous. A lack of synergy among the different departments can be a cause of incomplete records and if this is the case, all the administrative processes of all the different departments need improvement. If performance management is the main cause, the assistance of management or the human resource department needs to be incorporated.

10. OVERVIEW

In chapter 1 the introduction to this study was given together with the problem statement and objectives. The literature study was conducted in chapter 2 and focused on the following topics: administration, service delivery, synergy, performance management and the current trend in service delivery in Higher Education. In chapter 3 the research method was discussed in detail. The empirical study and findings were part of chapter 4. In this chapter, staff and student questionnaires as well as telephone statistics were investigated as quantitative data and the comments from staff and students as qualitative data. The qualitative data confirmed the quantitative data, assisted in the validation of data and guaranteed the reliability of the study. In the conclusions and recommendations section, each objective was discussed and general recommendations valid for all three universities as well as separate recommendations for each university were provided. Recommendations for future studies were also discussed together with the contribution and limitations of this study.

11. CONCLUSION

Higher education institutions are forced to use business improvement methodologies and quality models to survive in the increasingly global market. It becomes important for universities to adopt business models such as total quality management in order to improve the quality of service that is rendered to students and industry. Universities should

implement quality administrative management as part of their culture. Customer satisfaction is still a matter of concern as departments that support the academic function do not have clearly defined procedures by which academics can access information about administrative procedures and procedures, specifically in graduation offices.

If a company has all the components in place, such as administrative processes and procedures, a system designed to its needs, high service standards and synergy among all components, it will retain its customers and be known as a company everyone wants to do business with.

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ANNEXURE A: **PERSONNEL COVERING LETTER**

Tshwane University of Technology
Staatsartillery Road
PRETORIA WEST
0001

22 May 2012

The Registrar
Academic Administration Personnel

Ref no: REC2012/06/011(2)

Dear Sir/Madam

ACADEMIC RESEARCH: **MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE**: **OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY**

I am conducting research to establish whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers; namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience. Although students are not aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period from choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of the administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and result in poor customer service. When a student reaches the graduation office and is confronted by administrative problems concerning graduation, he or she feels very disappointed.

The research done on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The results from this study are expected to add value to service delivery in support services in Higher Education.

Participants' identity will be protected by their names and departments not appearing on the questionnaire. The universities selected will not be identified in the report, but will be referred to as University A, B, C etc.

Should poor service delivery at the graduation offices at universities be a reality, the information obtained will not be used as legal evidence, any action or disclosure that may harm the participant, the universities or employees.

A letter of consent to conduct the investigation has been obtained from the relevant university and information provided will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality. I would appreciate it if you would voluntarily participate and honestly complete the on-line questionnaire in order to ascertain the highest level of scientific validity and reliability of results.

You are requested to answer the questionnaire available on the following link:

http://www.surveymonkey.com. (Press ctrl and click with mouse on the link)

The survey system will report the results to the researcher automatically without revealing identity. In this way there will be no threat to the anonymity of the respondents.

For any concerns regarding the completion of the questionnaire, please contact Dr W.A. Hoffmann, Chair: Research Ethics Committee, Tel (012) 3826265 (office hours) email: Hoffmannwa@tut.ac.za

Thank you

Yours faithfully

M.J. Prinsloo

Senior Administrator: Certification

Endorsed by

Prof. E.J. Ferreira
(Supervisor)

Mrs D.M. van Vuuren
(Co-supervisor)

ANNEXURE B: PERSONNEL INFORMED CONSENT

INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH TITLE:
SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Primary investigator: Mrs M.J. Prinsloo, BTech (Management)
Study leader: Prof. E. Ferreira, Department of Business Management, UNISA, Pretoria
Co-study leader: Mrs D.M. van Vuuren, Department of Office Management and Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria

Dear research participant

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of my formal M Tech-studies. This information leaflet will help you to decide whether you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what is involved. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the study.

WHAT IS THE STUDY ALL ABOUT?

I am conducting research to establish whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers; namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience. Although students are not aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period from choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of the administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and result in poor customer service. When a student reaches the graduation office and is confronted with administrative problems concerning graduation, he or she feels very disappointed.

The research done on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The results from this study are expected to add value to service delivery in support services in Higher Education.

Participants will not add their names or departments to the questionnaire in order to protect their identity. The universities selected will not be identified in the report, but will be referred to as University A, B, C etc.

Should poor service delivery at the graduation offices at universities be a reality, the information obtained will not be used as legal evidence, any action or disclosure that may harm the participant, the Universities or employees.

WHAT WILL YOU BE REQUIRED TO DO IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

Complete the online survey.

ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS THAT MAY EXCLUDE YOU FROM THE STUDY?

None

CAN ANY OF THE STUDY PROCEDURES RESULT IN PERSONAL RISK, DISCOMFORT OR INCONVENIENCE?

The study involves no foreseeable risk or discomfort.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS THAT MAY COME FROM THE STUDY?

The benefits of participating in this study are:

- You could assist the relevant universities to identify their shortcomings and help improve service delivery to students.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

Please note that you **will not** be paid to participate in the study.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever. You don't even have to provide the reason/s for your decision. Your withdrawal will in no way influence your relationship with your university. Note that you are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this research study.

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY BE ENSURED IN THE STUDY?

All information obtained during the course of this study is strictly confidential. The study data will be coded so that it will not be linked to your name or your university's name. Your identity and your university's identity will not be revealed while the study is being conducted or when the study is reported in scientific journals. All the data sheets that have been collected will be stored in a secure place. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or your university will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The information received during the project will only be used for research purposes and not released for any employment-related performance evaluation, promotion and/or disciplinary purposes.

IS THE RESEARCHER QUALIFIED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY?

The researcher has conducted ample research on the topic and is employed in an administrative department at a university.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

Yes. The Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Committee of the Tshwane University of Technology have approved the formal study proposal. All parts of the study will be conducted according to internationally accepted ethical principles.

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE STUDY?

The primary investigator, Mrs M.J. Prinsloo, can be contacted during office hours on her cellular phone at 082 908 2380. The study leader, Prof. E. Ferreira, can be contacted at Eferreir@unisa.ac.za. Should you have any questions regarding the ethical aspects of the study, contact the chairperson of the TUT Research Ethics Committee, Dr W.A. Hoffmann, during office hours at Tel (012) 382-6265/46, Email: hoffmannwa@tut.ac.za

DECLARATION: **CONFLICT OF INTEREST**

The final results of the study will only be published after the director of Company Z has given written approval of the research report.

A FINAL WORD

Your cooperation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated.

CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I participate in the study of my own free will and by completing the questionnaire I am giving consent.

ANNEXURE C: PERSONNEL QUESTIONNAIRE

QUESTIONNAIRE: **SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES**, **PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary
Information supplied will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality.
Please mark with an **X** the appropriate box ❒.
Kindly provide other information on dotted lines.

1. What is your position?
1.1 Manager ❒
1.2 Supervisor ❒
1.3 Administrator ❒
1.4 Other position ……. ❒

2. Higher education institutions remain focused on teaching and research, with the administrative tasks existing to facilitate these aims.

3. This investigation focuses on aspects involving administrative personnel and their experience of service delivery at a university specifically focused on students and other departments at the university.

4. Consider all the statements below and mark the statement with which you agree. You may mark more than one answer of a question if needed.

5. Academic administrative departments
Academic administration consists of different departments and the different universities have differently divided and constructed departments. The purpose of this question is to determine which departments academic administration consists of at your university.

Please mark with an <u>X</u> the appropriate box.

5.1 In which department do you work?

V1	Enrolment	
V2	New applications	
V3	Registration	
V4	Examinations	
V5	Exemptions/Recognitions	
V6	Graduations	
V7	Other department (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

5.2 Are academic administration departments centralised or de-centralised?

V8	All administrative departments/functions are centralised	
V9	All administrative departments/functions are de-centralised	
V10	Administrative departments are centralised but divided into different sections	
V11	Administrative departments are de-centralised but grouped to work together	
V12	Administrative departments are divided by faculty	
V13	Administrative departments are centralised and not divided by faculty	
V14	Other (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

6. Relationships among departments

Different departments have different functions. One department's output can be another department's input and can have a negative or positive influence. For example: Department B cannot continue a function unless Department A completes a certain function.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

6.1 How dependent are administrative departments on one another?

V15	My department is dependent on another department's output	
V16	Another department is dependent on my department's input	
V17	My department is independent and does not influence other departments nor do other departments influence my department	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

6.2 Do the different academic departments have a positive or negative influence on one another?

V18	My department has to wait for other departments to complete their tasks (sometimes)	
V19	My department does not receive incomplete work from other departments (normally)	
V20	My department receives incorrect work from other departments (sometimes)	
V21	Other departments do not need to wait for my department for completion of our tasks	
V22	Other departments receive incomplete work from my department (sometimes)	
V23	Other departments receive correct work from my department (normally)	
V24	There are good relations among staff in administrative departments and each department delivers good work in good time. No problems are experienced	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

6.3 In your opinion, is this university process-driven or service-driven?

V25	Service-driven: students are most important	
V26	Process-driven: too many or too-difficult processes to follow	
V27	Rules & regulations are more important than service to students	
V28	There is a good balance between service delivery, processes and rules & regulations	
V29	There is a lack of balance between service delivery, processes and rules & regulations	
V30	Do not know/it does not matter	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

7. Information technology

In an ever-growing competitive market, the use and correct application of information technology is an important necessity for any company. A computer system and data quality can influence work performance and service delivery.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

7.1 Is your university's computer system effective?

V31	The computer system is effective and promotes service delivery to students	
V32	The computer system is not effective and influences service delivery negatively	
V33	The computer system is effective but has shortcomings	
V34	The computer system is problematic and needs attention	
V35	The computer system is effective but personnel do not have enough training on the system	
V36	The computer system is effective but data is corrupt owing to incorrect application	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

8. The graduation office

The following questions are focused on the graduation office. Please complete if you are involved in a graduation office.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

8.1 How does your office identify students who qualify for the issue of a qualification?

V37	Students apply and complete forms at graduation counter	
V38	Students apply and complete forms at faculty/department/other administrative departments	
V39	Students apply via WEB/electronically	
V40	Students apply and fax application	
V41	Students apply and email application	
V42	Students are identified by the faculty/department and names are given to the graduation office	
V43	Students are identified by the graduation department by using a computer program	
V44	Students are identified by the graduation department by means of manual action	
V45	Other (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

8.2 What are the possible reasons for students not qualifying for graduation?
1=most occurred, 5=least occurred

V46	Fees outstanding	
V47	Pre-requisite outstanding such as senior certificate	
V48	Qualification incomplete	
V49	Processes from other departments incomplete or incorrect	
V40	Time constraints	
V51	Other (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

9. Comments
Should you wish to make any comments please write them in the space provided below.

V52		
	FOR OFFICE USE	

ANNEXURE D: STUDENT COVERING LETTER

Tshwane University of Technology
Staatsartillery Road
PRETORIA WEST
0001
10 January 2012

The Registrar
Academic Administration Personnel
Graduation Personnel
Graduating Students

Ref no: _____

Dear Sir/Madam

ACADEMIC RESEARCH: **MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE**: **OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY**

I am conducting research to establish whether it is possible for a graduation office to work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers; namely, you the students and your guardians, have a satisfying experience. Although students are not usually aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period of choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted by administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and which result in poor customer service. When students reach the graduation office and are confronted by administrative problems concerning their graduation, they experience disappointment.

The research to date on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The results from this study are expected to add value to service delivery in Higher Education support services.

The names and departments of participants will not be added to the questionnaire in order to protect your identity. The universities selected will not be identified in the report, but will be referred to as University A, B, C.

Should poor service delivery in graduation offices at universities be a reality, the information obtained will not be used as legal evidence, any action or disclosure that may harm the participant, the universities or employees.

A letter of consent to conduct the investigation has been obtained from the relevant universities and information provided will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality. I would appreciate it if you would voluntarily participate and honestly complete the attached questionnaire in order to ascertain the highest level of scientific validity and reliability of results.

You are requested to leave the completed student questionnaire on the chair as it will be collected when the hall is vacated after the graduation ceremony.

For any concerns regarding the completion of the questionnaire, please contact Dr W.A. Hoffmann, Chair: Research Ethics Committee, Tel (012) 3826265 (office hours) email: Hoffmannwa@tut.ac.za

Thank you

Yours faithfully

M.J. Prinsloo
Senior Administrator: Certification
Endorsed by

Prof. E.J. Ferreira
(Supervisor)

Mrs D.M. van Vuuren
(Co-supervisor)

ANNEXURE E: **STUDENT INFORMED CONSENT**

INFORMATION LEAFLET AND INFORMED CONSENT

RESEARCH TITLE:
SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Primary investigator: Mrs M.J. Prinsloo, B Tech (Management)
Study leader: Prof. E. Ferreira, Department of Business Management, UNISA, Pretoria
Co-study leader: Mrs D.M. van Vuuren, Department of Office Management and Technology, Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria

Dear research participant

You are invited to participate in a research study that forms part of my formal M Tech studies. This information leaflet will help you decide whether you would like to participate. Before you agree to take part, you should fully understand what is involved. You should not agree to take part unless you are completely satisfied with all aspects of the study.

WHAT THE STUDY IS ALL ABOUT

I am conducting research to establish whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers; namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience.

Although students are not usually aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes during the period of choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and which result in poor customer service. When students reach the graduation office and are confronted with administrative problems concerning their graduation, they experience disappointment.

The research to date on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The results from this study are expected to add value to service delivery in Higher Education support services.

The names and departments of participants will not be added to the questionnaire in order to protect their identity. The universities selected will not be identified in the report, but will be referred to as University A, B, C.

Should poor service delivery in graduation offices at universities be a reality, the information obtained will not be used as legal evidence, any action or disclosure that may harm the participant, the universities or employees.

WHAT WILL YOU BE REQUIRED TO DO IN THE STUDY?

If you decide to take part in the study, you will be required to do the following:

Complete the attached questionnaire,
Do **NOT** write your name, student number/staff number, university name, course name or any other identification on the questionnaire or information letter attached.

ARE THERE ANY CONDITIONS THAT MAY EXCLUDE YOU FROM THE STUDY?

None

CAN ANY OF THE STUDY PROCEDURES RESULT IN PERSONAL RISK, DISCOMFORT OR INCONVENIENCE?

The study involves no foreseeable risk or discomfort.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS THAT MAY COME FROM THE STUDY?

The benefits of participating in this study are:

You could assist the university to identify its shortcomings and help improve service delivery to students.

WILL YOU RECEIVE ANY FINANCIAL COMPENSATION OR INCENTIVE FOR PARTICIPATING IN THE STUDY?

Please note that you **will not** be paid to participate in the study.

WHAT ARE YOUR RIGHTS AS A PARTICIPANT IN THIS STUDY?

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any stage without any penalty or future disadvantage whatsoever. You don't even have to provide the reason/s for your decision. Your withdrawal will in no way influence your relationship with your university. Note that you are not waiving any legal claims or rights because of your participation in this research study.

HOW WILL CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY BE ENSURED IN THE STUDY?

All information obtained during the course of this study is strictly confidential. The study data will be coded so that it will not be linked to your name or your university's name. Your identity and your university's identity will not be revealed while the study is being conducted or when the study is reported in scientific journals. All the data sheets that have been collected will be stored in a secure place. Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or your university will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. The information received during the project will only be used for research purposes and not released for any employment-related performance evaluation, promotion and/or disciplinary purposes.

IS THE RESEARCHER QUALIFIED TO CARRY OUT THE STUDY?

The researcher has conducted ample research on the topic and is employed in an administrative department at a university.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

Yes. The Faculty Higher Degrees Committee and the Research Ethics Committee have approved the formal study proposal. All parts of the study will be conducted according to internationally accepted ethical principles.

WHO CAN YOU CONTACT FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THE STUDY?

The primary investigator, Mrs M.J. Prinsloo, can be contacted during office hours on her cellular phone at 082 908 2380. The study leader, Prof. E. Ferreira, can be contacted at ferreiraE@UNISA ac.za.

DECLARATION: CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The final results of the study will only be published after the director of Company Z has given written approval of the research report.

A FINAL WORD

Your cooperation and participation in the study will be greatly appreciated.

CONSENT

I hereby confirm that I have been adequately informed by the researcher about the nature, conduct, benefits and risks of the study. I have also received, read and understood the above written information. I am aware that the results of the study will be anonymously processed into a research report. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may, at any stage, without prejudice, withdraw my consent and participation in the study. I participate in the study of my own free will and by completing the questionnaire I am giving consent.

ANNEXURE F: **STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE**

QUESTIONNAIRE: **SYNERGY OF ADMINISTRATIVE PROCESSES**, **PROCEDURES AND SERVICE DELIVERY IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Participation in this study is voluntary.
Information supplied will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality.
Please mark with an **X** the appropriate box❒.
Kindly provide other information in the spaces provided.

2. Higher education institutions remain focused on teaching and research, with the administrative tasks existing to facilitate these aims.

3. This investigation focuses on aspects involving students and their experience of service delivery at a university specifically focused on administrative functions.

4. Please mark the applicable block. You may mark more than one answer of a question if necessary.

5. Accessibility to university – does it influence service to students?
A student who lives far from the campus needs to travel long distances to attend to administrative issues and a part-time student who studies in the evening needs to take time off work to attend to administrative issues during office hours.

Please mark with an <u>X</u> the appropriate box.

5.1 Where do you stay during your studies?

V1	University residence on campus	
V2	Private accommodation near campus (0 km to 50 km from campus)	
V3	Private accommodation far from campus (51 km to 100 km from campus)	
V4	Private accommodation far from campus (further than 100 km from campus)	
V5	Distance/correspondence education	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

4.2 Do you study part time or full time?

V6	Part-time student	
V7	Full-time student	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

4.3 How does the distance you stay from the campus influence your studies?

V8	Difficult to attend to administrative issues during office hours	
V9	University offers extended administrative hours	
V10	University offers **effective** alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc.	
V11	University offers alternatives for administrative issues such as web applications/email etc. but they are **not effective**	
V12	Had to travel unnecessarily long distances more than once to attend to administrative issues	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

6. Influence of administrative departments on students' studies.

Although administrative functions are not very important to students, the successful accomplishment of many of the critical incidents identified can be dependent upon the satisfactory performance of support staff.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

6.1 How did you experience service delivery at the university's administrative departments?

V13	Received excellent service always	
V14	Received normal good service	
V15	Received bad service from time to time	
V16	Received bad service always	
V17	Not relevant/no influence/did not matter	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

5.2 How did the service you received at the university's administrative departments influence your enrolment for the next course/your further studies?

V18	Good service received was a factor in enrolling at the same university for my next course/further studies	
V19	Changed university because of poor service received	
V20	Considered changing university but stayed at current university because of other factors	
V21	Not relevant/no influence/did not matter	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

7. Perception of students about service delivery at different administrative departments.

Support structures consist of finance, logistics, academic administration and other departments. Each one plays a specific role in enabling the Higher Education institution to obtain optimum results. The following questions focus on the different administrative departments at the university.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

6.1 Please indicate whether you received good or poor service at the different academic departments.

V22	Enrolment Application for course	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V23	Registration	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V24	Examinations	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V25	Exemptions Recognitions	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V26	Graduations	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V27	Finances	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	
V28	Other (specify)	Good service		Poor service		Not applicable	

FOR OFFICE USE	V22	V23	V24	V25	V26	V27	V28

6.2 What exactly was the problem?

V29	Staff: attitude/unfriendly/slow/reluctant/did not want to assist; really unprofessional	
V30	Telephone service: lines too busy/not effective/not professional	
V31	Counter service	
V32	Email service/internet problems	
V33	Written correspondence: incomplete/incorrect/slow	
V34	Availability/completion of forms	
V35	Processing of application	
V36	Graduation ceremony	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

6.3 In your opinion, is this university process driven or service driven?

V37	Service driven: students are most important	
V38	Process driven: too many or difficult processes to follow	
V39	Rules & regulations are more important than service to students	
V40	Do not know/it does not matter	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

8. Students' perception of a graduation department

The following questions focus on the graduation department at the university.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

8.1 Have you experienced the following?

V41	Missed a previous ceremony because of office mistakes	
V42	Had to apply more than once	
V43	Application process too long	
V44	Academic record was not correct	
V45	Waited too long for an answer once applied to graduate	
V46	Received communication too late	
V47	Communication was incorrect	
V48	Difficult to contact/reach the graduation office	
V49	Problem during graduation ceremony	
V50	Other (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

7.2 If you had a problem at the graduation office and it was resolved, how did you feel?

V51	Did not experience any problems at graduation office	
V52	Satisfied – they considered my situation	
V53	Satisfied – they made me feel good as a person	
V54	Dissatisfied – problem not resolved satisfactorily	
V55	Dissatisfied – problem resolved, but still not satisfied	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

9. Communication effectiveness

Effective communication forms part of service delivery and the method and effectiveness of communication can improve service delivery.

Please mark with an X the appropriate box.

9.1 In what way did the university contact you about your graduation ceremony?

V56	Telephone	
V57	Email	
V58	SMS	
V59	Letter	
V60	Other method (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

8.2 Which method would you prefer to be contacted by the university?

V61	Telephone	
V62	Email	
V63	SMS	
V64	Letter	
V65	Other method (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

8.3 How do you prefer to contact the university?

V66	Telephone	
V67	Email	
V68	In writing (letters)	
V69	Completing forms to enquire	
V70	SMS	
V71	Other (specify)	
	FOR OFFICE USE	

10. Comments

Should you wish to make any comments, please write them in the space provided below.

V72		
	FOR OFFICE USE	

ANNEXURE G: STATISTICS COVERING LETTER

Tshwane University of Technology
Staatsartillery Road
PRETORIA WEST
0001

10 January 2012

The Registrar
Academic Administration Personnel
Graduation Personnel
Graduating Students

Ref no: REC2012/06/011(2)

Dear Sir/Madam

ACADEMIC RESEARCH: **MAGISTER TECHNOLOGIAE**: **OFFICE MANAGEMENT AND TECHNOLOGY**

I am conducting research to establish whether a graduation office could work proactively and improve customer service to such an extent that the customers; namely, the students and their guardians, have a satisfying experience. Although students are not usually aware of all the administrative tasks involved in the processes covering the period from choosing a university to graduation, they become aware of administrative processes as soon as problems arise. They are often confronted with administrative problems that do not reflect positively on the university's branding and which result in poor customer service. When students reach the graduation office and are confronted with administrative problems concerning their graduation, they experience disappointment.

The research to date on service delivery and support services in Higher Education is limited but the overall view is that there is a need for improvement. The results from this study are expected to add value to service delivery in Higher Education support services..

Should poor service delivery at the graduation offices at universities be a reality, the information obtained will not be used as legal evidence, any action or disclosure that may harm the participant, the universities or employees.

A letter of consent to conduct the investigation has been obtained from the relevant university and information provided will be treated anonymously and with confidentiality. I would appreciate it if you would voluntarily participate and honestly supply me with the statistics of the relevant letters sent to students for the purpose of graduation ceremonies and statistics of incoming calls to the graduation office. The statistics should be monthly only and for the period 2009, 2010 and 2011.

The purpose of the statistics is to compare the number of telephone calls received with the time taken by the letters sent to students during the pre-graduation period up to the actual graduation ceremony. If my theory is correct, there should be a decrease in the number of telephone calls if the letters are sent early.

For any concerns regarding the completion of the questionnaire, please contact Dr W.A. Hoffmann, Chair: Research Ethics Committee, Tel (012) 3826265 (office hours) email: Hoffmannwa@tut.ac.za

Thank you

Yours faithfully

M.J. Prinsloo
Senior Administrator: Certification

Endorsed by

Prof. E.J. Ferreira
(Supervisor)

Mrs D.M. van Vuuren
(Co-supervisor)