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The effect of personality and culture in client/provider interactions and its effect on customer relationships

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The effect of personality and culture in client/provider interactions and its effect on customer relationships

Jennifer Anne Croll

A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Strategic Marketing

Johannesburg, 2014

ABSTRACT

Living as we do in a multicultural society, the potential for misinterpretation is significant.

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine whether culture and personality affect customer relations in a multi-cultural context. This study seeks to understand the way in which people respond to each other in business encounters in order to determine potential best practices relating to this interaction.

This research specifically looks at the contact between the student and support staff within a business school context. It is not designed to provide definitive answers to the questions, but should provide some guidelines which could be followed in the interaction between students and support staff to make relationships better and the experience of both parties satisfactory.

The research used mixed methods, comprising a survey delivered to all academic students at Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, and interviews with support staff. The survey contained both questions and free-text sections and was designed to disclose the personality and culture of the students, the free text sections looked at what the students expected from support services at the university and what they actually received. The interviews engaged the local faculty office, the library and the programme managers in order to discover what they felt the students wanted and the way in which student problems were addressed.

Results indicated that the majority of students were assertive and demanding, sometimes to the frustration of the support staff who fall back on the university policies and procedures when the students become too aggressive in their demands. There is a communication problem at the Business School, as the students feel their legitimate demands and not being met, and the support staff feel handicapped as policies do not allow them to meet these demands.

Suggestions are made to improve communication and also to encourage cultural sensitivity among the support staff as differing cultural problems may need to be addressed in the future.

DECLARATION

I, Jennifer Anne Croll, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.

Signed at Parktown

On the 1st March 2015

DEDICATION

For Kate, again…

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I should like to mention the following :

- ✓ Kate, for the laughter and the help in the technical and statistical details in this project
- ✓ My supervisor, Professor Gregory Lee, for his advice and for running the statistics for me
- ✓ Wits libraries, once again, for the superior databases to which all students have access
- ✓ My comrades-in-arms, both students and lecturers, who walked this path with me

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the study

Living as we do in a multicultural society, the potential for misinterpretation is significant.

The purpose of this research, therefore, is to examine whether culture and personality affect customer relations in a multi-cultural context. This study seeks to understand the way in which people respond to each other in business encounters in order to determine potential best practices relating to this interaction.

This research specifically looks at the contact between the student and support staff within a business school context. It is not designed to provide definitive answers to the questions, but should provide some guidelines which could be followed in the interaction between students and support staff to make relationships better and the experience of both parties satisfactory.

1.2 Context of the study

This research examines the interaction between the client and the service provider in an attempt to assess what constitutes good service and what is perceived as poor service within a multicultural country. The chance for misunderstandings to arise between different cultures is always there and can lead to poor service unintentionally because of the lack of understanding of the culture behind both the provider and the recipient of the service. Into this mix, one can consider the personality of both the recipient and the provider – complications develop when one considers whether the right personality type is delivering the service (introverts v. extroverts, for example) and the mood of both the recipient and the provider at that point of encounter. As noted by Ma and Deng (2012), quality service ensures the sustainability of the organisation and ensures that it becomes the preferred service

provider. Coetzee and Veldsman (2013) underline the importance of trust and co-operation in personal interactions and stress that this applies internationally, not just locally.

It is important to consider the consumer at all times since they make the difference to the organisation. As Clegg (2000, p. 3) mentions, the "difference between a successful business and an unsuccessful one is the level of satisfaction of the customers".

The specific focus of this research is the interaction between students and support staff at the Management campus of the University of the Witwatersrand. There are two focal points where students interact with support staff that directly affect the student appreciation of the institution, namely, the library and the administrative staff. Since the library is open for extended hours (at night and on Saturdays and Sundays), the staff often receive complaints about both the library stock and the administrative functions. People on duty at night are student assistants who are often unsure of the best way to handle angry and frustrated post-graduate students and deflect the problems to the permanent staff to handle the following day, often without providing full details of the complaint. The administrative staff are often not available when the students are on campus – this is a particular problem since many students attend evening classes and end up taking time off work to sort out administrative issues that cannot be resolved telephonically. Both library and administrative staff feel they are 'doing a good job', but student perception often differs. This research highlights where these perceptions occur and suggests remedies so that both parties feel satisfied.

There are three points of interaction within a university environment, which are demonstrated in the following diagram which clearly shows that academic staff, support staff and students' interaction overlaps considerably:

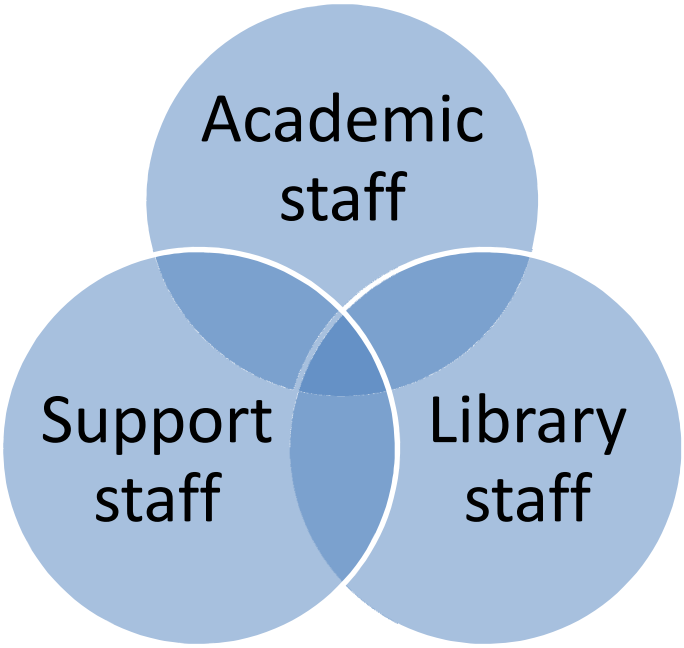

Figure 1: Researcher's own interpretation of the interconnected components

As can be deduced from the above figure, if one circle in the Venn diagram is removed, the whole project is weakened – neither the academic staff nor the students can function optimally without the support staff and their specialist services, yet this is one aspect that is often overlooked by both lecturers and students. This research highlights the importance of the support staff in the complete student experience, underlines the problems the support staff encounter and suggests solutions to these problems.

1.3 Problem statement

There are regular reports of 'bad' experiences in the retail/call centre environment and the perception is that South Africans are not customer-orientated.

From a library perspective, it is important that users feel their needs are being met by library staff. One bad experience can affect all future visits to the library and, in fact, may well prevent the users from ever returning to the library. Senior library managers need to ensure that junior staff approach all users with professional skills which will

enhance the library experience, regardless of the way in which the user addresses the staff member (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; McCaffrey, 2013; Saunders, 2013).

In an academic arena, the support services are vital to the educational goal of the student. If these services are seen as lacking, or inadequate in any way, the student is left with an impression of incompetence and the student experience is seen as faulty. This experience quickly spreads and affects the university brand as word-of-mouth marketing can be both negative and positive. Naturally, the institution would like a positive student experience with the concomitant positive marketing spin-off. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) posit that service quality at an academic institution is key to the competitive advantage each institution requires in order to attract new students. This, naturally, leads to increased international standing as reflected in the international university listings, such as that produced by the Financial Times.

A similar situation applies in the retail environment, where bad service actually drives patrons away and will ultimately affect the bottom line. It is important therefore, to get this interaction as good as possible. Bitner, Booms, and Mohr (1994) mention that the customer is not always right and that the service provider can be taught how to handle aggressive customers in such a way that the service encounter is satisfactorily handled.

An improved understanding of the personality traits exhibited by the consumer (student) and the provider (support staff), with appropriate action within the interaction should lead to a better student experience, and this will lead to the student returning for advanced degrees and advising his/her friends to also attend the institution because of the pleasant environment.

Moloto, Brink, and Nel (2014) have recently examined cultural diversity in the South African higher education context in an attempt to discern optimal ways in which support staff can address their concerns so that the institution functions well. They did not include students in their research, which is an aspect that this research highlights.

Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010) actively reflect on the demographics, culture, personality and situation in the consumer interaction – all areas which, they assert, modify the consumer/service provider interaction. They divide this into internal and external influences on the individual which lead to the purchase/service decision. They maintain that self-image and lifestyle also affect the service interaction.

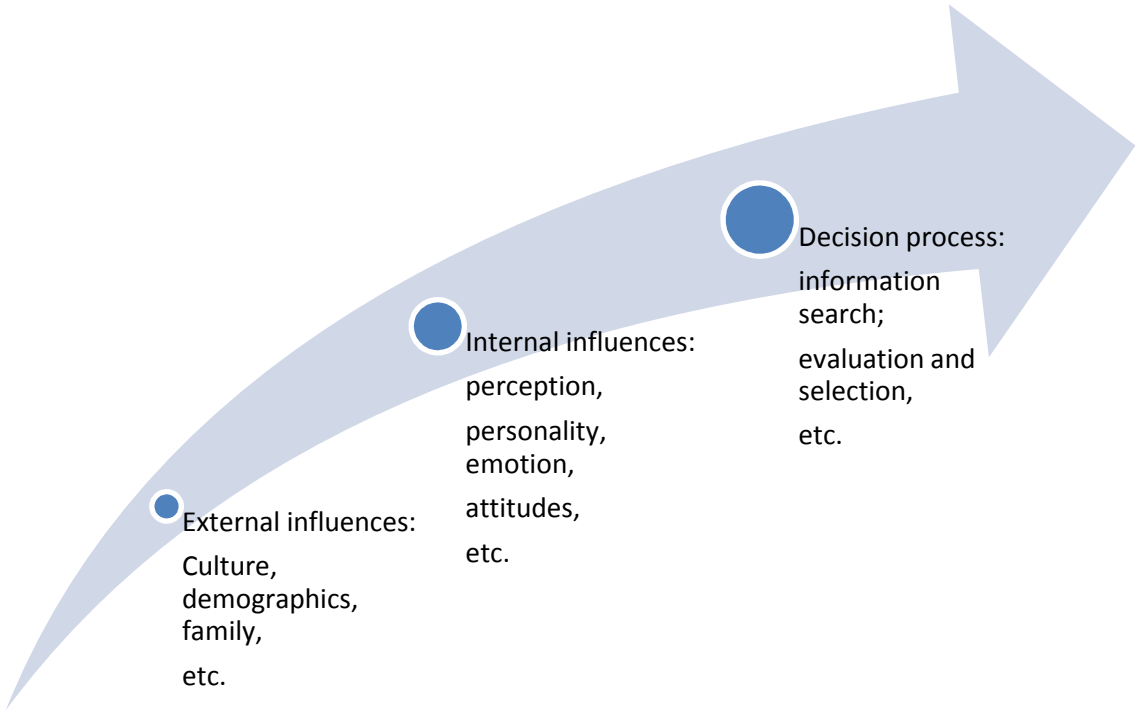

Figure 2: Diagrammatic representation of influences on service: based on Hawkins and Mothersbaugh (2010)

1.3.1 *Main problem statement*

Personality and culture affect service interaction in the academic support environment which alters the way in which the student perceives the institution and can change the whole student experience.

1.3.2 *Research objectives*

Three questions need to be considered in order to develop an understanding of the way in which personality and culture affect the service interaction in customer relationship management.

The primary research objective is:

i. What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Secondary research objectives are:

ii. What cultural factors affect the student/support staff interaction?

Iii What personality factors affect the student/support staff interaction?

1.4 Significance of the study

There seems to be little research in this area in an African context, where both personality and culture are considered in the consumer/provider interaction. There has been research on one aspect, either personality or culture, but not on both. In a multicultural context, both personality and culture should be considered as they both affect interpersonal relationships. If both parties to the interaction understand the person with whom they are interacting, an improved transaction will take place to the benefit of both. This will provide personal and job satisfaction to the provider and leave the consumer with feelings of pleasure – this will lead to improved word-of-mouth marketing and the maintenance or enhancement of the brand.

There has also been research into the quality of service provision in the higher education field, but this has largely been confined to the quality of the academic output (Browne, Kaldenberg, Browne, & Brown, 1998; Cuthbert, 1996; Mbise & Tuninga, 2013; Oldfield & Baron, 2000; Sayed, 2013; Sultan & Wong, 2010; Voss, Gruber, & Reppel, 2010). However, this research examines other aspects of the student experience. Previous research in higher education suggests that students see the support staff as there to enforce rules and not to provide assistance to the

student (Oldfield & Baron, 2000). Further research has examined the gap between student expectation and support staff service (Soutar & McNeil, 1996) in an attempt to determine quality of service.

The identified gap which this research fills is an improved understanding of the effect of personality and culture on interactions between support staff (both library and administrative staff) and students within an academic environment, since there does not seem to have been any research on this specific combination, either within the academic environment or in Africa. This research should fill this gap, identify possible problem contact points and offer tentative suggestions to address these problems.

1.5 Delimitations of the study

Delimitations are those items that the researcher deliberately excludes. This research, therefore, does not consider all business schools, or general undergraduate and post-graduate institutions, in South Africa. It also does not consider service within an industrial or commercial environment. There has been no attempt to cover all the literature on personality or culture. Only articles of direct use in the research have been considered.

1.6 Assumptions

- Library staff interviewed are assumed to have had significant interaction with students during the course of their employment
- Administrative staff are also assumed to have experience of students and their problems
- The students are willing to engage in the research and be frank and open about their experience on the campus

1.7 Introduction to the research report

This research report comprises six chapters – an introductory chapter which explains what the research is about, the reasons for the research, its significance and limitations. This is followed by an extensive literature review and a detailed examination of the methodology to be used, the type of research instrument and the target population. The results of the research are examined, followed by a discussion of these results. A concluding chapter considers the results within their context and offer recommendations for future research.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This is not intended as an exhaustive survey of all literature, but relevant articles and books have been considered which should provide guidance in developing research questions in order to answer the questions posed in Chapter 1. These articles consider the conceptual framework around services, specifically customer relationship management, personality traits and culture are also considered from the lay-person's point of view.

The chapter is structured as follows: the conceptual framework of the marketing literature is discussed, specifically services marketing; it continues by providing an overview of customer relationship management, with reference to consumer behaviour and the co-creation of service and service quality. It then considers personality and culture and derives questions which are used to find answers to the problem stated in Chapter 1.

2.2 Background to the study

Students are complainers, at least, in South Africa, at the University of the Witwatersrand, which is the perception that support staff have of the average student. They never seem happy, they complain about the food, the accounting systems, the library stock, the course packs, and the lack of parking. The lack of parking is not isolated to South Africa, but probably applies at many city centre universities that were built before the increase in personal motor cars and the decrease in public transport. There has been significant research into the lecturer/student interaction, but little has been researched on the support staff/student interaction which also plays a role in the way the student perceives the institution. This research uncovers whether personality and culture on both sides (support staff and students) affects the service delivery perceptions. Ideally, the

student perceptions should be favourable towards the institution so that the student returns, together with friends, for further qualifications. The student should be so delighted with his/her experience that s/he moves from a certificate course, through a diploma, to the Ph.D. level. The research examines why this is not happening by suggesting that personality and culture affect service delivery in an academic environment and modifies the perception of the institution in the mind of the student.

This is a user-centred approach to considering the student, who is the recipient of both an education and services from the university, as a student who is ignored or finds staff unhelpful, will quickly complain to friends and the negative word-of-mouth advertising will not be to the advantage of the university. On the other hand, if a student is helped quickly and to his/her satisfaction, the same word-of-mouth advertising will be favourable and the institution will benefit by an influx of new students who want to enjoy the same experience.

2.3 Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework, which is also called the theoretical framework, positions or locates the research within the specific discipline, marketing in this case, within which the research is being conducted and it assists in developing the connections or the relationships between aspects of the discipline and the way in which the current research develops these links – it 'frames' the research. "A conceptual framework … is an alignment of the key concepts of the study" and "anchors your research in the literature" (Henning, Van Rensburg, & Smit, 2004, p. 26). Brito (2011, p. 66) maintains that the conceptual framework is "aimed at understanding the nature and value of the relationship not only with customers but also with a number of other stakeholders". He continues by defining marketing as "a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers…in ways that benefit the organization…"

Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010, p. 52) maintain that the original definition of marketing as "the firm should base all its activities on the needs and wants of customers in

selected target markets" needs to be updated to reflect the relationship between company and client and that a better definition should be that "Marketing is to establish, develop and commercialise long-term customer relationships, so that the objectives of the parties are met. This is done by a mutual exchange and keeping of promises" (Chan et al., 2010, p. 57).

Within the marketing arena, there is a subsection known as 'Services marketing'. Services marketing has been defined as "an act of performance that creates benefits for customers by bringing about a desired change in - or on behalf of - the recipient" (Lovelock & Wright, 2001, p. 5). This is often recognised as comprising seven components: product, people, physical evidence, process, promotion, place, price (Goldsmith, 1999; Rafiq & Ahmed, 1995), and can be diagrammatised as:

Figure 3: Services marketing mix, based on Goldsmith (1999) and Rafiq and Ahmed (1995)

This research, however, only focuses on the 'people' segment. This segment is also known as customer relationship management (CRM). CRM has been defined as "a process that addresses all aspects of identifying customers, creating customer knowledge, building customer relationships, and shaping their perceptions of the organisation and its products" (Peelen, 2005, p. 4). Peelen (2005) and Tseng and Wu (2014) consider knowledge of the customer and communication with the customer as a vital business strategy which will affect the business, its profits and its future.

2.4 Customer Relationship Management

Customer relationship management (CRM) is regarded as extremely important when dealing with clients – no longer is it sufficient to just produce goods, companies have to interact with their clients in order to understand the real needs of the clients. A. Payne and Frow (2005, p. 158) suggest that this is a continuum from a narrow focus to a broad focus:

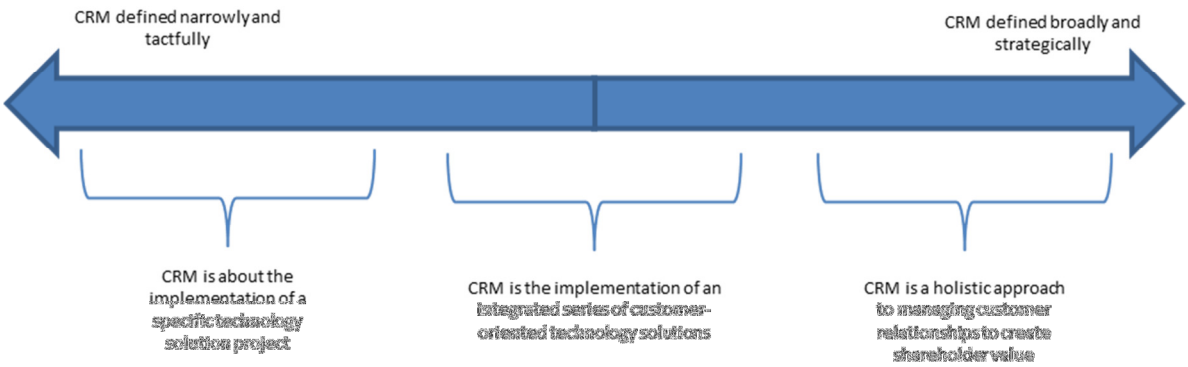

Figure 4: Customer relationship management (based on Payne & Frow, 2005)

They suggest that CRM links the value the customer receives with the value the organisation receives. This concept of co-creation is explored in more detail later in the literature review.

2.5 Consumer behaviour

There has been considerable research in the field of consumer behaviour in an attempt to understand why and how people behave in given circumstances (Buttle, 2009; Graves, 2013; Joubert, 2010; Kumar, 2010), but there are as many answers as there are people because the individual cannot always supply reasons for their behaviour since a great deal is spontaneous and not carefully pre-planned. Research has highlighted the creation and nurturing of a loyalty factor in consumer behaviour as this will ensure repeated use of the service (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; Chan et al., 2010; Kassim & Abdullah, 2010; Nunn & Ruane, 2011).

There is a psychological contract between the consumer and the provider. This contract has been defined as the mutual obligations between two parties as perceived by an individual (Vantilborgh et al., 2013) and any problem encountered during this interaction is seen as a breach of the psychological contract (Bal, Lange, Jansen, & Velde, 2013; Chen & Kao, 2012). The basis of this contract relies on trust and it needs to be carefully maintained, because the loss of trust affects the organisation and is difficult to re-establish once damaged (Wang & Lu, 2012). Trust also affects the way people work together and can affect interpersonal relationships in the consumer/provider interaction (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2013). O'dell and Pajunen (2000, p. xix), in discussing trust, point out that the “secret of building trust is to deliver what you promise, no more, no less, and to do it with integrity”.

This contract also exists between students and the academic institution. This is usually considered as the interaction between student and lecturer, but the enabling interaction between the library and the administrative staff is often neglected, yet this interaction affects the entire student experience on campus (Koskina, 2013).

2.6 Co-creation of the service encounter

Because two or more people are involved in any service encounter, the concept of co-creation has been developed – this implies that the interaction, both good and bad, has been developed because of the way in which the people have reacted to

each other. Ideally, this interaction should be positive. The person requesting service has a set of expectations in anticipation of the interaction and the resolution of the interaction often depends on the fulfilment of these expectations (Koenig-Lewis & Palmer, 2014). Koenig-Lewis and Palmer (2014) maintain that these expectations vary from anticipated service to desired service to the ideal service encounter. Lewis and Entwistle (1990) mention that, while service quality is intangible, the service provider is 'doing his job', but the results of the encounter have an impact on the recipient who has had his problem resolved satisfactorily. Lewis and Entwistle (1990) feel that the following characteristics are needed for a satisfactory service interaction: knowledge of the relevant processes, people skills, empathy and adaptability or the ability to be flexible in the responses to the enquirer in order to answer the questions posed. This customer service focus is the face of the organisation and on which it is judged. Salanova, Agut, and Peiró (2005) emphasise that this service focus provides a positive experience and that it is a collective endeavour on the part of all employees to satisfy customer needs and this satisfaction leads to a positive appraisal of the organisation on the part of the customer. They see this in the following way:

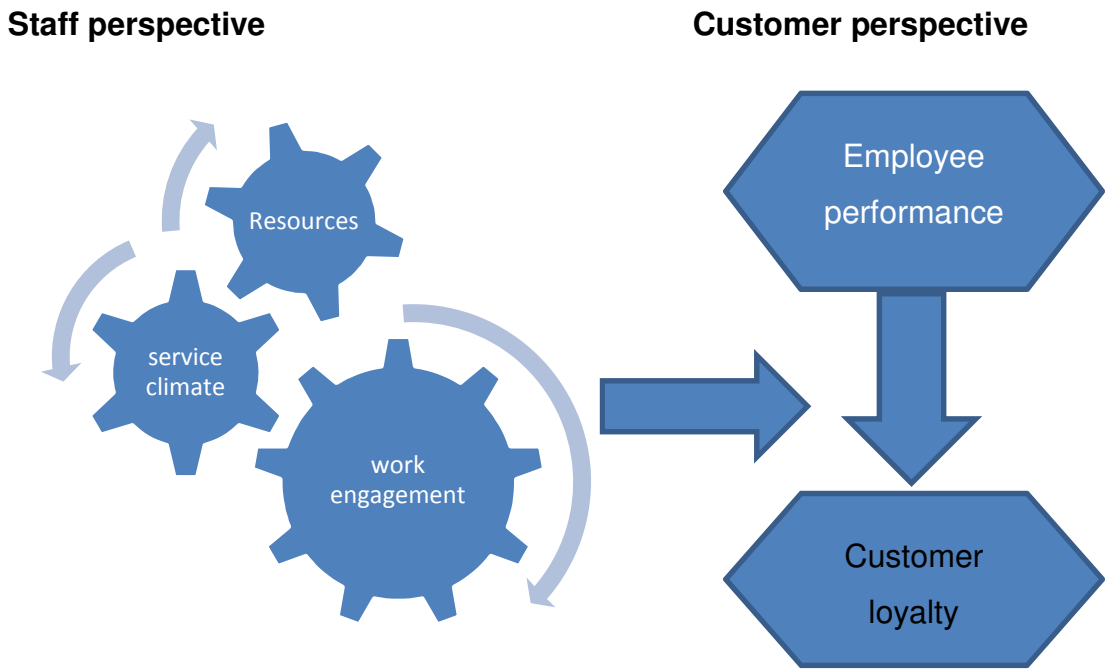

Figure 5: Staff/client relationship, adapted from Salanova et al. (2005)

This neatly indicates that if the support staff have the resources they need to do their job, they are encouraged to be consumer-focused and if they enjoy their work, this will be reflected as good performance which will lead to customer loyalty. Vargo, Maglio, and Akaka (2008) develop the idea of co-creation by pointing out the reciprocity and interdependence of service encounters. They underline the value received by both parties in an exchange and indicate that this value has to be perceived by both parties to actually be considered valuable, in other words, both giver and receiver of the encounter are in a position to appreciate the encounter and to achieve the desired outcome of the exchange. These perceptions apply in all service encounters, as Martensen and Grønholdt (2003) have pointed out in their discussion about library users, as people who feel they are ignored or mistreated in some way, will not be loyal users of the service on offer.

Grönroos (2008) views this slightly differently. He maintains that there are three aspects of service: service as activity, service from the customer's point of view and service from the company's point of view (Grönroos, 2008) and the individual's point of view affects the perception of the service given and received. This activity is bi-directional and participation from both customers and suppliers is necessary for co-creation to take place. Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) have undertaken significant research in this area. They suggest that the traditional way of considering this interaction was uni-directional and indicated that the consumer had little say in the interaction, and was a recipient of whatever the company chose to deliver:

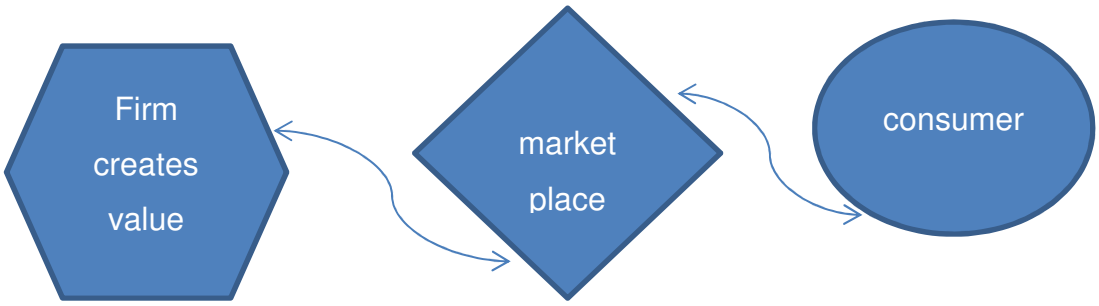

Figure 6: Company/client interaction (adapted from Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004b)

They maintain that co-creation is a joint venture and that the picture now looks very different. As shown in Figure 6, there is a distinct overlap between the company and its activities and the consumer or client and the client's desires. Co-creation occurs during this overlap and when both parties have obtained the expected resolution of the encounter – information has been given and any problems have been sorted out.

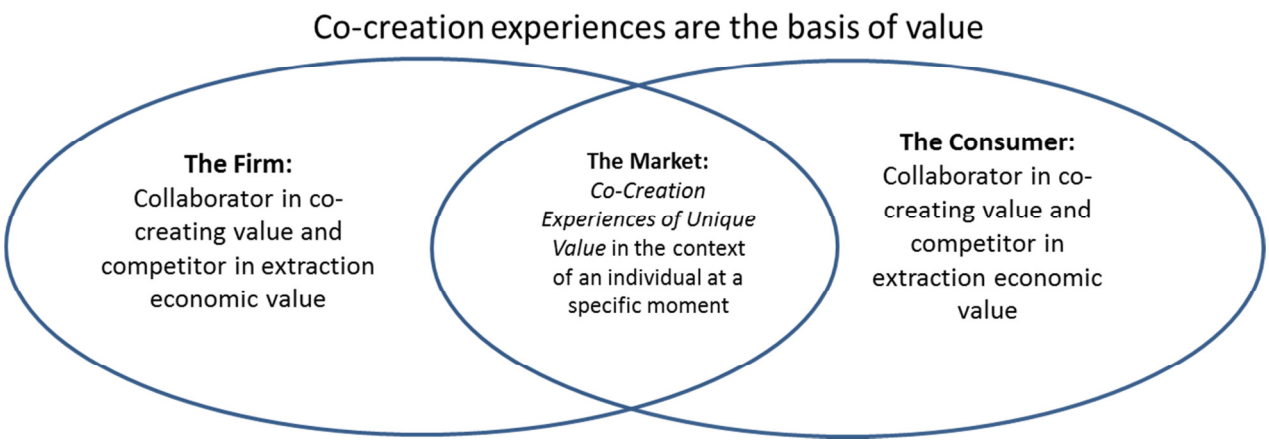

Figure 7: Co-creation of consumer experience (based on Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004a)

In support of the interaction between company and client leading to co-creation, A. F. Payne, Storbacka, and Frow (2008, p. 84) are categorical when they say "The customer is always a co-creator of value: There is no value until an offering is used – experience and perception are essential to value determination" which emphasises the point made earlier that perception is key and that both parties need to agree on the value of the experience. They conclude that, while this is a two-way process, it starts with the supplier understanding the client, in order to deliver superior service. Unsurprisingly, Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004a, p. 6) agree and maintain that "the roles of the company and the consumer converge toward a unique co-creation experience, or an 'experience of one'". Without the active participation of both parties, there is no co-creation.

Morgan, Rapp, and Richey (2014) stress the need for organisations to differentiate themselves from the competition through the value they offer to the customer. They have considered the staff member offering the service and have determined that the flexibility of this staff member is crucial to a satisfactory service interaction.

Russell-Bennett, Wood, and Previte (2013) underline the centrality of the service experience which, they suggest, comprises workers, the setting, the clients and the process and the effectiveness of each part will determine whether the client keeps on using the service.

Grönroos (2011b) however, maintains the customer determines the value attached to the interaction, thus implying that the customer drives the co-creation process, but he does mention that reciprocity underpins all business transactions. He underlines this by defining co-creation as “Value for customers means that they, after having been assisted by the provision of resources or interactive process, are, or feel better off than before” (Grönroos, 2011a, p. 282). There has to be a motivation on the part of the organisation to deliver superior service. Schneider, White, and Paul (1998) call this the service ‘climate’ and feel without the right ‘climate’ in place, the quality of delivered service will be lacking.

Fecikova (2004) explores the way in which customer satisfaction can be measured, since, in her view, there is an obvious connection between the product, the client and company profit. She has developed a model, and suggests that if all factors within this model are working optimally, everyone will be satisfied and the company will flourish:

Figure 8: Consumer satisfaction cycle, based on Fecikova (2004)

2.7 Service quality

Grönroos (2001) has pointed out that service is a process and not a product, so it is very difficult to determine what constitutes 'good service', except inasmuch as the perception of the receiver can be measured. Oldfield and Baron (2000) consider that service quality has three parts: the process, the physical evidence and the interpersonal communication between provider and recipient. They also mention that even if the 'product' is not physical, there is always some physical evidence of the receipt of service, in education, for example, this could be prompt delivery of marked assignments. F. M. Hill (1995) points out that the student is the *de facto* primary consumer of service in an institution of higher learning, and thus, the student's perception is key to the delivery of quality service. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) concur, and since their research took place in the field of business education, it is directly relevant to this research.

The search for what constitutes good service is continuous, but was theoretically formalised by Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry (1990) as an urgent need to discover what the customer really wants so that the customer is satisfied and will return to do further business with the company. N. Hill and Alexander (2000) suggest there is a direct correlation between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, which they delineate as

"Employee satisfaction = customer value package = customer satisfaction = customer commitment = customer retention = PROFIT" (Hill et al 2006, p. 22),

which indicates clearly the link between employee, customer and the continued existence of the organisation. Buttle (2004) suggests that service can be a core component of the business and that companies need to find out what the clients expect of them so that they can deliver an appropriate level of service. He alludes to the ServQUAL model developed by Zeithaml et al. (1990), several of which components are relevant here: reliability, assurance, empathy, responsiveness. Zeithaml, Bitner, and Gremler (2006) and Chan et al. (2010) exposed the cultural aspects of services marketing, by considering the aspect of culture on consumer expectations. Lake (2009) explores these aspects further.

Brochado (2009) modified the ServQUAL model to fit more effectively into an academic environment as she felt that the focus of service in a university is not exactly comparable to that of an industrial or retail environment. This version is known as SERVPERF and is used in this research. Cronin Jr and Taylor (1994) discuss the difference between SERVQUAL and SERVPERF and, *inter alia,* mention that quality is a long-term attitude whereas satisfaction is an immediate resolution of a situation.

The values espoused by the recipient of a service affects the perception of the service and determines the loyalty of the consumer towards the product or service that is under consideration (Bolton, Gustafsson, McColl-Kennedy, Sirianni, & David, 2014; Hau & Thuy, 2012). This will lead to a commitment on the part of the recipient

and will prove profitable to the providing organisation (Cater & Zabkar, 2009; Fan & Ku, 2010; Hau & Thuy, 2012).

Grönroos (2008) concludes that there are different levels of service – it is an activity; it is part of the customers' value creation; it is part of the providers' activities – this underlines the dyadic relationship between the provider and the client.

Spreng and Mackoy (1996) have created a model which strives to link satisfaction with quality, since they feel that both concepts need to be considered together and not as separate ideas or constructs. De Ruyter, Bloemer, and Peeters (1997) hold a similar point of view.

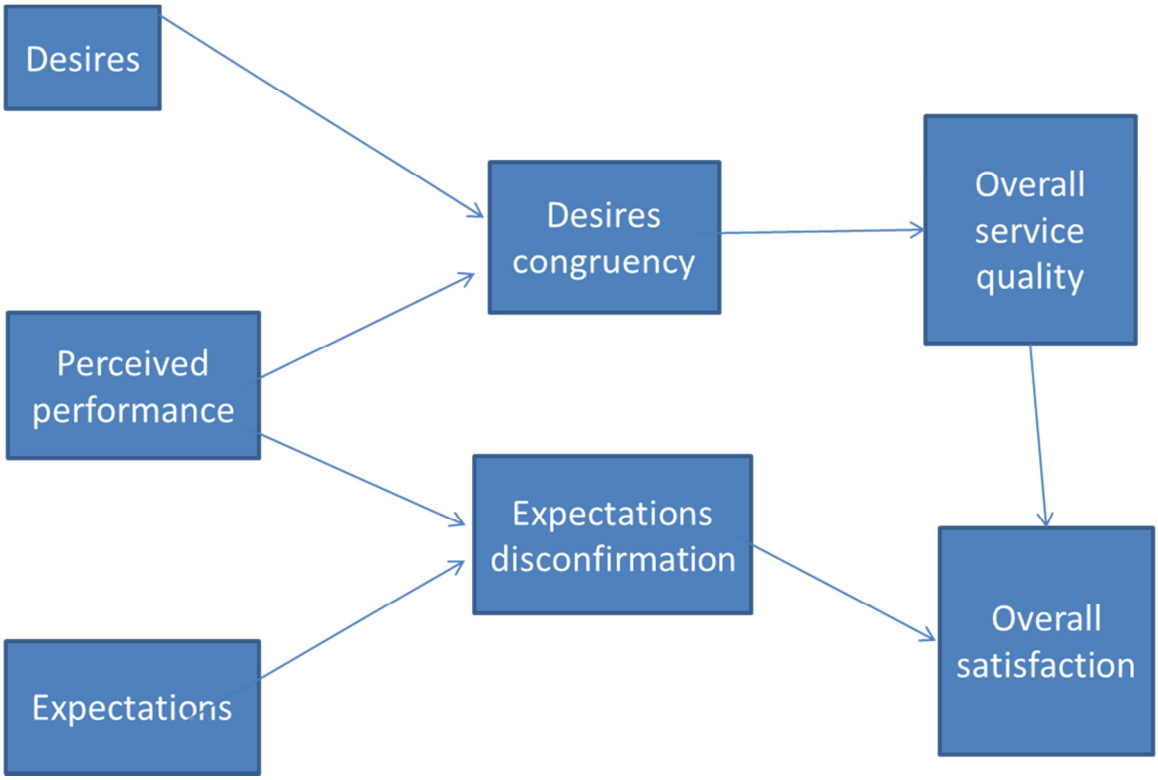

Figure 9: Customer expectations and satisfaction, based on Spreng and Mackoy (1996)

Customer relationships depend significantly on perceptions which rely on the interaction between people. If this interaction is perceived as successful, in other words, both parties achieve their goals, the relationship will be strengthened and will not be affected by small problems in the future. This loyalty needs to be nurtured constantly by the provider to ensure repeat 'business' (Buttle, 2009; Graves, 2013; Joubert, 2010; Kumar, 2010). Grandey, Fisk, and Steiner (2005) and O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1991) suggest that if the right person with the right attitude and personality is employed as a service provider, the service interaction will be smooth and pleasant for both provider and recipient of the service.

These days universities need to operate as businesses in order to attract new students and retain existing students, but, at the same time, they need to be mindful of the differences between an academic institution and a business. Students have many choices when it comes to universities, which they may not have in business transactions. Universities need to prove to their students that they are in a nurturing and academically challenging environment where they, the students, will develop new skills and be treated empathetically when problems, if any, arise (Browne et al., 1998; Hart & Coates, 2010; Li, Liang, & Crant, 2010).

Boyd (2012) mentions that universities have a renewed focus on meeting the expectations of the students as they have realised that this links directly with a higher student enrolment. He suggests this service should incorporate the following: treating the students with respect; solving their problems in a timely and responsive way – they should treat the students as they themselves, would like to be treated. Pounder (1999) considered the problems of determining quality within higher education, while O'Neill and Palmer (2004) specifically mention the impact support staff have on students, and they mention the effect of personal interactions on the perceived quality of service received. Sultan and Wong (2010) feel that higher education has two goals: service and education and the service component relates to registration, cafeterias, etc., in other words, support staff functions. Sahney, Banwet, and Karunes (2004) point out that students are very demanding and insist

on ‘quality’ to the extent that education is becoming a product with students as consumers of this product

Other authors, though, have warned about service failure and its consequences (Kassim & Abdullah, 2010; Madupalli & Poddar, 2014; Maher & Sobh, 2014) and have pointed out that companies need to have a suitable response when this occurs. A. K. Smith, Bolton, and Wagner (1999) concur with the need for appropriate responses. If there is an appropriate response after a complaint, generally speaking, the client will be content (Gong, Yi, & Choi, 2014; Kim, Wang, & Mattila, 2010).

The following diagram (Figure 10) illustrates the links between the various factors that can be deemed to be integral to a service interaction, by emphasising, among other aspects, the need for competence and communication between provider and client, which develops trust and leads to general satisfaction and resolution of problem areas. This trust is sometimes seen as lacking between students and support staff and is often the basis for generalised complaints which end up as being insufficiently specific to enable speedy resolution, so the student feels the institution has failed, yet again.

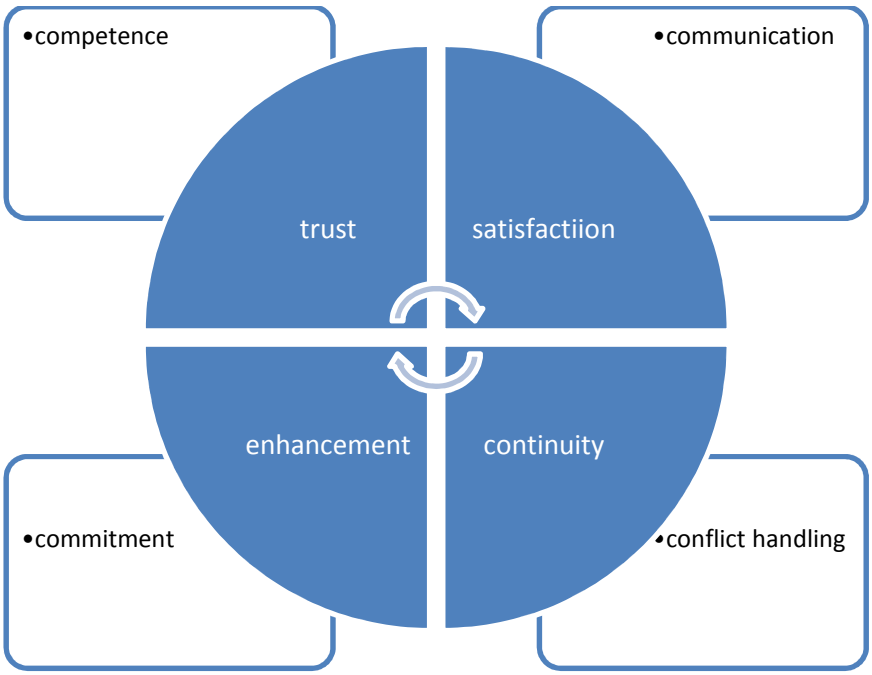

Figure 10: Components of service interaction, based on Selnes (1998)

To conclude this section, and based on the abovementioned literature, service can be considered as:

a) competent staff, working professionally,
b) communication, both listening and responding,
c) timely responses,
d) available when needed,
e) good attitude, friendly and approachable,
f) able to meet service expectations (Cronin Jr & Taylor, 1994; Cuthbert, 1996; Grönroos & Voima, 2013; Liao & Chuang, 2004).

Therefore, the ideal person in a service position should be friendly, greet students with a smile, be prepared to go the extra mile to help clients, communicate information accurately and timeously, listen to the request and be available. This person will then have met the service expectations of the client.

The first research question to be investigated, therefore, is: what constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

2.8 Personality

Wright (2006, p. 297) points out that "personality can be seen as a cluster of attributes or characteristics that remain more or less the same over time" and that there is a need to understand the individual so that the right service can be delivered to the right person at the right time.

Attempts to understand people and why they do what they do, has a long history. In ancient Greece, initially, Galen developed a 'type' theory where he tried to assign people to types known as 'melancholic', 'choleric', 'sanguine' or 'phlegmatic' and suggested that everyone conformed to one of these types. Aristotle decided that parts of the body (hands, feet, face) could determine the personality of the person. This developed over time even further with researchers suggesting that astrology (when you were born) or graphology (the way you write) determines your personality

(Geron, 1993). More recently, the Big Five-factor model has been the preferred choice in attempting to determine, very broadly, people's personality traits. Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard (2012) suggest that personality can be modified, given the right situations, but that the person's underlying personality tends to remain consistent and does not change significantly, but the personal traits displayed by the individual affect all encounters, both service-related and personal.

The study of personality traits and the way these affect job satisfaction also has a long history (Nordvik, 1991; Prediger & Hanson, 1976). It was felt that if personality was matched to work profile, the worker would be more contented and therefore a happier employee. Early research suggested that there was no substantive difference in personality traits between men and women occupying the same jobs. Researchers have discussed these traits extensively and consider the most important in the work environment to be conscientiousness, extraversion, emotional resilience, teamwork, assertiveness, motivation and service orientation (Geron, 1993; Lounsbury, Moffitt, Gibson, Drost, & Stevens, 2007; Lounsbury, Park, Sundstrom, Williamson, & Pemberton, 2004; Mount, Barrick, Scullen, & Rounds, 2005; Warr & Pearce, 2004; L.-F. Zhang, 2002, 2006; L. f. Zhang, 2008). Several authors have discussed a proactive personality as a desirable trait in the work environment and define this as a "tendency to take personal initiative across a range of activities and situations" (Brown, Cober, Kane, Levy, & Shalhoop, 2006, p. 717). Both Brown et al. (2006) and Li et al. (2010) consider that this initiative smooths the way in work relations and this leads to a more confident and assured relationship between co-workers.

Personality has also been discussed in the marketing environment where researchers suggest that an understanding of the personality of the customer can lead to a more satisfactory consumer/provider interaction and encourage consumer loyalty and increased word-of-mouth marketing of the brand and company (T. A. Smith, 2012). Other researchers suggest that the ability to handle conflict is crucial in customer/provider dealings (Ejaz, Iqbal, & Ara, 2012). Bahl and Black (2014) discuss the different personalities displayed by students in various fields of study in their

research, and have concluded that business focused students tend to be assertive, conscientious and extraverted. This research confirms their study.

The Big Five Model of Personality Characteristics is used regularly in the business environment when personality is discussed (Ejaz et al., 2012; Mupaya, 2012; Seibert, Kraimer, & Crant, 2001). These characteristics are broad without much detail, but provide a simpler means of describing people than the Myers-Briggs system. Although these can be considered a 'broad brush', they could point to potential problems within the consumer/provider interaction, since they demonstrate that certain personality characteristics are more suitable for working with people than other characteristics, and thus, could indicate which support staff would be better placed in a back room position, and who would be better in the direct contact area (Mupaya, 2012).

The emotional state of the employee also affects a service interaction and the perceptions of the recipient of the interaction. This directly affects the brand, as an unsatisfactory emotional experience will also affect the customer/provider relationship and this experience will be shared, to the detriment of the brand (Bagozzi, Gopinath, & Nyer, 1999; Coussement & Poel, 2009; Groth & Grandey, 2012).

Singelis and Brown (1995) link the individual's behaviour to his culture and feel the two cannot be separated, that each influences the other and both change and adapt to the current situation with the individual necessarily being aware of these adaptations.

This section can be summarised by defining the personality traits as mentioned in the literature, specifically as detailed by, *inter alia*, Church (2001) and Gosling, Rentfrow, and Swann Jr (2003):

a) Extraverts are talkative, sociable and assertive,
b) Agreeable people tend to be trusting, affectionate and kind,
c) Conscientious people are thoughtful, goal orientated and organised,
d) Neurotic people are moody and anxious,

e) Open people have imagination and have wide-ranging interests.

This is looking at personality with a very broad brush, and without going into great detail that a test such as the Myers-Briggs personality test would highlight. There are also overlaps here, as, for example, an anxious person may well display extroversion when necessary and may also have a range of interests outside of the course being studied.

2.9 Culture

There has been considerable discussion on what culture actually is. O'Reilly et al. (1991, p. 491) concluded that "culture can be thought of as a set of cognitions shared by members of a social unit… (which includes) fundamental assumptions, values, behavioural norms and expectations…", by which they mean that people who have a similar background tend to have a similar outlook on life.

Hofstede and McCrae (2004) have carried out extensive research in the field of culture and its effect on groups of people. Swaidan (2012, p. 201), basing his definition on Hofstede, has defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group of people from another" and suggests that culture plays an important role in any transaction between a consumer and a provider.

Gbadamosi (2013) points out that in Africa, the individual is subservient to the group and the way the individual interacts with other people will depend on his/her interactions within the larger group. This will affect the consumer/provider relationship, especially if the provider is unaware of this subservience. Garmon and Mgijima (2012) underline the importance of respect and human dignity within the African culture and the way in which interpersonal interaction should ideally be conducted for the benefit of everyone. Mahembe and Engelbrecht (2014) consider what they call 'cultural intelligence' to be essential in a multi-cultural environment and that people within this environment should be sensitive to cultures other than their own.

Dramalis (2012) mentions the effect of culture on all social interactions, and maintains that understanding the relevant cultures in these interactions makes for improved communication and a better consumer/provider situation. There has been debate about the validity and desirability of testing cultural bias (Church, 2001; Van der Vijver & Rothmann, 2004), but in a multi-lingual, multi-cultural environment, the better people understand one another, the better the social and business interaction will be and the interaction will have a satisfactory conclusion.

Cleveland, Erdoğan, Arıkan, and Poyraz (2011) maintain that there is a definite connection between the economy, the individual and culture and that people tend to have two cultures: one based in their traditional, local environment and the other grounded in their daily, more global culture. This suggestion is confirmed by Ueltschy, Laroche, Tamilia, and Yannopoulos (2004) who say that the impact of culture on service quality needs further research.

The University of the Witwatersrand attracts international students for various reasons, such as cost, desire to experience life in another country and a high standard of education received (the university is one of the top universities in Africa based on international ratings), and this multi-cultural, multi-lingual environment can affect students adversely if not appropriately handled. Research indicates that students do not always complain directly to the people who can assist them, but often to friends and this word-of-mouth negativity can affect future potential students, so the problem should be addressed timeously (Chan et al., 2010; Hart & Coates, 2010; Irizarry & Marlowe, 2010).

An early proponent of organizational culture is Schein (1990), who felt that organizational culture is a fuzzy concept, but that it encompasses what a group of people have come to share over time. For Schein, culture is everywhere and involves the assumptions that people within the organisation have developed as they have handled problems. This has now become part of the way in which work is carried out in the organisation. Hogan and Coote (2014) have expanded Schein's understanding to include innovative behaviour within the organisation, but seem to

agree with Schein's original expression of artefacts, values and norms within the organisation.

Organisational culture is not the same as personal culture. Zilber (2012, p. 91) suggests that institutions have their own culture. She feels that institutional theory can be used to study organisations, that organisational culture can be studied through an institutional lens, to the benefit of both organisation and the individual culture. She would like to know "how cultures within organizations are worked out in relation to cultures outside organizations, how organizational cultures are being transformed and translated through time…" which suggests that personal culture and organisational culture are dynamic and interact with each other on an on-going basis, that people look to work in organisations where they feel at home. Aten, Howard-Grenville, and Ventresca (2012) maintain that institutional theory has concentrated on people while organizational theory has tended to focus on 'culture' but that the two strands of research should incorporate both people and culture since the two cannot be fruitfully separated.

Culture is two-fold – the individual's personal culture and the culture of the organisation in which h/she works. These are not necessarily the same and this research will have to be very careful in distinguishing between the two. Tam, Sharma, and Kim (2014) discuss the differences between intra-cultural exchanges and inter-cultural service and the potential effect this has on the service encounter, and underline the difference in expectations and potential language barriers. Mattila (1999) and Donthu and Yoo (1998) underline the effect of personal culture on service perceptions as they feel that no one engages with anyone else *de nova*, that everyone has an existing personal culture which inevitably affects all interactions.

Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard (2012, p. 75) define culture as: "the sum total of learned beliefs, values and customs that serve to direct the consumer behaviour of members of a particular society" and since culture changes over time, service providers need to be aware of these changes and adapt to them. Figure 11 graphically demonstrates the link from the employee to the client's satisfaction.

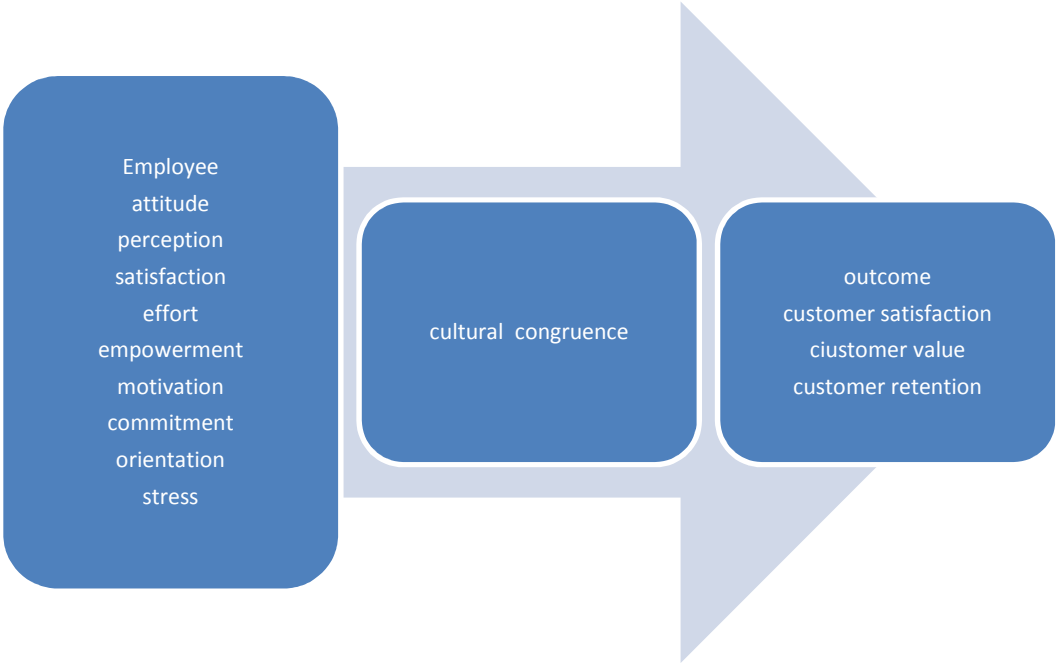

Figure 11: Culture and customer satisfaction, based on Huang and Rundle-Thiele (2014)

The section can be encapsulated in the following way:

a) Power distance – cultures that have low power distance are democratic and consult widely, whereas those with a high power distance are more autocratic,
b) Individualism – in individualistic societies, personal achievement is stressed, but in collective societies, the group is important,
c) Uncertainty avoidance – societies with high uncertainty avoidance tend to display their emotions freely and like structure, whereas societies with low uncertainty avoidance are more relaxed and accept whatever happens,
d) Masculinity – masculine societies are competitive and assertive, whereas feminine societies value quality of life and interpersonal relationships. Hofstede calls this quality vs quantity of life (Hofstede & McCrae, 2004).

Based on the above, two further questions can be posed:

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

2.10 Conclusion of Literature Review

There is a great deal of literature on marketing, personality and culture – all with the individual authors' own bias. This literature review has, perforce, been selective and has attempted to highlight the main issues and concerns that have been raised over the last several years. It has examined consumer behaviour and customer relationships in terms of service quality, personality and culture in an attempt to understand the drivers affecting the interaction between students and support staff in an academic institution. Literature suggests that there are links between personality and culture in the general service encounter. The use of a university business school as a prism to confirm or disconfirm this is unusual, especially within the African context as this has not been widely studied.

Three research questions were derived from this review. These are:

Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research strategy

This research is primarily positivist and deductive since the design of the research was established with the aim of providing evidence from both a survey and interviews from which conclusions could be deduced. The researcher proves the connection between the personality and the culture of both consumer and provider at the intersection of the service rendered. Mixed methods research was applied in order to draw from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research.

Both qualitative and quantitative research has been used in marketing, depending on the intended outcome (Bakti & Sumaedi, 2013; Creswell & Clark, 2007; Voss et al., 2010).

3.2 Research methodology /paradigm

This research used mixed methods with a questionnaire delivered to all Diploma and Masters students at the Wits Business School, University of the Witwatersrand, followed by interviews with selected participants, drawn from the support staff at the School, who were able to add information not easily obtained from a questionnaire. The ideals of a case study provided a frame for this research, because it is localised to a specific School within one faculty at one University, so conforms to the general rules governing case studies, although it is not treated specifically as a case study, as defined by Yin (2011) (Rugg & Petre, 2006; Welman & Kruger, 2001). There has been a certain amount of controversy over the definition and use of mixed methods as a research tool, as it can be viewed as lacking in intellectual and research rigor. However, Cameron (2011, p. 96) defines mixed methods as “research in which the investigator collects, analyses, mixes, and draws inferences from both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or a program of inquiry.” This definition is in line with Buttle (2009)’s approach to mixed methods. This suggests research which

draws from both earlier research strands (quantitative and qualitative) in order to benefit from the strength of both, and can thus be seen as rigorous and substantive research.

3.3 Research Design

The research was two-fold: a questionnaire based on the work of Hofstede and McCrae (2004) and Schein (1990) for the organisation and personal culture and personality aspects and Brochado (2009) for the service aspects, followed by interviews with selected administrative and library staff to determine both the way in which they interact with students and in order to understand the problems they encounter. In other words, this research aims to provide the support staff with the opportunity to rebut the complaints of the students in order to determine the validity of these complaints. Xenikou and Furnham (1996) were consulted in order to understand the optimal survey design.

It is usual in quantitative research to create hypotheses to be tested. However, in this research, the number of variables meant that there were too many hypotheses to be effectively tested, for example, all the 'personality' traits would have had to be tested against all the 'culture' variables and the 'service' variables. This would entail testing 26 variables against each other, and as a result, it was decided that hypotheses would not be used and the research would be based on the selected research questions.

Quantitative researchers in this field include Buglear (2005), Layder (2012), Lin and Jones (1997) and Oppenheim (1966) who all discuss questionnaire design and analysis and point out the problems in developing useful and usable questionnaires.

3.4 Population and sample

3.4.1 *Population*

The population is potentially any student at any graduate institution of higher learning internationally, but practically speaking, was limited to students on the Management Campus of the University of the Witwatersrand in Johannesburg

3.4.2 *Sample and sampling method*

Purposive sampling was used, since this is a convenience sample as the population was easily accessible to the researcher. Since the research sought to understand the link between the students and the local Administrative, sub-Faculty Registrar officers and Library staff in an attempt to determine problem areas and solutions, this is a usable sample and sample size. Administraive staff who handled registrations and the degree/diploma process are known as faculty officers but are not academic staff.

The target sample was i) Diploma, Masters and Ph.D. students currently registered at Wits Business School, and ii) selected support staff in both the library and the administration and local faculty office who interact regularly with students. The number of students who received the survey was 550. 119 students responded – 66 men and 53 women, thus 55% male and 45% female responses received.

Table 1: Profile of student respondents by race

#	Answer	Response	%
1	White	28	24%
2	African	59	50%
3	Indian	27	23%
4	Coloured	4	3%
5	Other	1	1%
	Total	119	100%

Ten support staff were interviewed, three from the library, six from the academic support unit at Wits Business School and one faculty officer located on the Management Campus.

Table 2: Profile of support staff respondents (by location)

Respondent	Location	Number
Faculty officer	**Sub-faculty offices**	**1**
Programme managers	**Academic office**	**6**
Library staff	**Library**	**3**

3.5 The research instrument

There were two research instruments – a questionnaire delivered electronically to the students and semi-structured interviews of approximately 60 minutes long, both in the form of focus groups and individual face-to-face interviews, with selected support and library staff at Wits Business School.

The questionnaire is divided into several sections:

Personality: these questions were based on those used by Barrick and Mount (1991); Barrick and Mount (1993), Ehrhart et al. (2009), Gosling et al. (2003) and Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1994). Ten questions were asked in this section, including questions such as: 'I see myself as someone who is reserved…' and 'I see myself as someone who is relaxed, handles stress well…'A slider was used to move between 'strongly disagree' to 'strongly agree' on a scale of 0 – 100, in increments of 10.

Culture: these questions were based on those used by Church (2001), Hofstede and McCrae (2004), Hofstede (2006), Northouse (2012) and Triandis and Suh (2002). In this section, 18 questions were posed, such as 'In my cultural background power is

shared by everyone' and 'In my cultural background people plan for the future'. Again, a slider was used, moving from 'Not at all' to 'Frequently', on a scale of 0 – 100 in increments of 10. The questions were carefully phrased, with two ways of expressing the same concept in an attempt to cover multiple ways of understanding culture.

Service: these questions were based on those used by Brochado (2009), Curth, Uhrich, and Benkenstein (2014), Liao and Chuang (2004), O'Neill and Palmer (2004), Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1994), Sahney et al. (2004), Sultan and Wong (2010) and Tan and Kek (2004). Seven questions were posed here, in a rank order format, so that respondents had to move the fields around in order to indicate which was considered the most important factor as understood by the respondent. Questions ranged from 'the support person should be friendly and personal' to 'the support person should know the relevant procedures.'

Demographics: these questions were used to determine the sex, the course studied and the year the student first registered.

Free text sections: there were three free text sections – a) a section where the student could mention the kind of cultural background with which s/he identified, b) a section where the student could comment on the kind of experience they expected to receive, c) a section for free comment on actual service experienced within the School.

The questionnaire is attached as Appendix A.

Three questions were posed to the focus groups and the faculty officer:

i) What problems do you experience in your dealings with students?
ii) How do you handle these problems?
iii) Does culture/language/personality cause problems for you?

Interviews: Open-ended interviews were conducted with support staff, library staff and a faculty officer. The purpose of these interviews was to gauge the way that

support staff interact with students and to understand the problems they encounter and their approach to the resolution of these problems. In order not to disrupt work too much, the interviews for both the support staff and the library staff were held as focus groups – the one being conducted during lunch time and the other at a time when the library is usually closed. The Faculty officer was interviewed in her office. The interviews were recorded, partially transcribed (there were occasions when the sound was inaudible, presumably because the speaker was too far from the microphone, and analysed for common themes.

3.6 Procedure for data collection

The data was collected by the researcher during a two-month period convenient to the students and the support and library staff. The questionnaires were delivered electronically to the students' preferred email addresses. There were two follow-up reminder emails to the students, requesting them to complete the survey. The interviews were held at a time convenient to the selected respondents.

3.7 Data analysis and interpretation

The qualitative research component was recorded and analysed to discover the support staff-student interactions, problems that the support staff encounter, and the complaints they regularly receive from the students and the support staff resolution thereof, using thematic content analysis.

The questionnaire was developed in Qualtrics, and then analysed using SAS, under the guidance of the researcher's supervisor and his textbook (Lee, 2014). The following statistics were considered in order to examine the responses to the questionnaire:

i) Goodness of fit: this is used to adjust the results by discarding 'outliers' that will affect the results negatively. It examines the discrepancy between observed data and what was expected in the model in question. By following a standard search procedure, the best 'fit' model is obtained

ii) Correlation co-efficient: this measures the strength of the relationship between variables. Rank correlation co-efficients were used to measure the relationship between variables

iii) FIT summary: full information maximum likelihood tests were run in order to handle missing data in the questionnaire responses.

3.8 Limitations of the study

Common methods bias could have been a limitation as the students were self-reporting and the individual feelings and emotions might have affected the answers supplied.

The study was limited to PhD, Masters and Diploma students on the Management campus of the University of the Witwatersrand, and so might not be generally applicable to all situations. However, other institutions in South Africa that face the same challenges might find pointers which will help them resolve their own problems.

The major limitation of the study is that this study is an examination of personality and culture in one academic institution in South Africa in the interaction between administrative and library staff and students, and only these areas were examined. There was no attempt to discuss problems that students may encounter which are not directly affected by personality or culture, such as visas, residential complications, and health matters.

Other limitations that may have affected the research are the number of people who responded to the survey - a larger response may have produced different results. The sample itself could be considered a limitation as the same research done at a different institution or at another point in time may have also led to different results.

3.9 Validity and reliability

For the quantitative section, reliability and validity were established by using standard deviations provided by SAS.

Qualitative research relies more on credibility and trustworthiness and these were obtained by triangulation using the survey results.

Krefting (1991, p. 217) discusses the required rigor in both qualitative and quantitative research and summarises this conveniently, in a similar way to that of Venkatesh, Brown, and Bala (2013), Healy and Perry (2000) and Yilmaz (2013) as:

Table 3: Comparison of Qualitative and Quantitative research, sourced from Krefting (1991)

Criterion	**Qualitative approach**	**Quantitative approach**
Truth value	Credibility	Internal validity
Applicability	Transferability	External validity
Consistency	Dependability	Reliability
Neutrality	Confirmability	Objectivity

This table demonstrates that issues, such as validity and reliability in quantitative research are directly comparable with credibility, transferability and dependability in qualitative research, thus showing that the strengths of each method enhances the results obtained by combining the two methods. Mixed methods as a way of conducting research is growing in popularity for this reason (Creswell & Clark, 2007).

According to Creswell and Clark (2007) and Venkatesh et al. (2013), mixed methods uses both the validity and reliability standards pertinent to quantitative research and the credibility and trustworthiness found in qualitative research. They also provide hints and tips on the best way to handle the combined research methodologies by detailing the best way to undertake this type of research to ensure optimal results.

3.9.1 *External validity and transferability*

As mentioned earlier, this research is limited to one sub-section within one academic institution, so cannot be assumed to be valid across all academic institutions. The principles concerning service levels should, however, be valid across all universities and related institutions.

3.9.2 *Internal validity and credibility*

The researcher has done her best to control for internal validity by ensuring that the respondents were able to choose to be part of the research and that there was no prodding or leading of respondents in their responses.

3.9.3 *Reliability and dependability*

This research has used both qualitative and quantitative research methods. This is generally accepted as a good way to establish reliability, since triangulation of methods is possible (Welman & Kruger, 2001).

3.10 Demographic profile of respondents

The questionnaire was distributed to 550 students. After two reminders, only 149 questionnaires had been completed, and only 119 were actually usable because of missing data in the remaining questionnaires. This was disappointing as the researcher had hoped for a better response since all the students know the researcher as she has provided information literacy instruction to the whole student

body. In hindsight, perhaps the low response was because the students all know the researcher, even though the responses were confidential.

The support staff (programme managers, library staff, local faculty officer) were keen to be part of the research and happy to share their experiences. The researcher had to be careful not to prompt answers since she has worked in the library for many years and knows the kind of problems regularly encountered in this environment.

3.11 Conclusion

Since this research uses the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research, it should be robust and the conclusions drawn from the survey and the interviews can be considered reliable enough to suggest interventions to improve or enhance service between support staff and students.

4. PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

4.1 Introduction

Questions drawing out personality characteristics, cultural trends, desired service levels and actual service received were followed by standard demographic questions. The questions follow standard scales, using sliders, rank order and scale points in order to keep respondents interested. Statistical tests were run using SAS software to analyse the results. The chosen tests highlighted the correlation between the variables and could be considered statistically reliable and valid. Two pilot studies were undertaken to ensure the questions were clear and could be easily answered.

The chapter is divided into two parts: the quantitative section and the qualitative section.

4.2 Quantitative results

The research questions considered here are:

Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

The results were analysed using SAS software. The survey questions were considered statistically and then correlated with the free text sections in the survey and the quantitative results confirmed and were enhanced by the qualitative results which were obtained from the open, free text questions in the questionnaire.

Demographics: 119 students responded – 66 men and 53 women, thus 55% male and 45% female responses received.

Age: There is one outlier – a student born in 1952, but the rest of the students were born between 1975 and 1990.

Race: 119 students responded to this question – the table showing race is found in chapter 3.

Study programme for which the students were registered:

In total, 111 students responded to this question. There were some very low responses, but the majority were registered for the following programmes:

Table 4: % respondents by course

Course	**Response**	**%**
PDM - full time	15	14%
PDM – part time	22	20%
MBA – full time	10	9%
MBA – part time	51	46%

The majority of students registered in 2014

A small section of the survey elicited answers to questions 2 and 3, which were:

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Personality: the majority of students felt they do a thorough job, handle stress well, are imaginative and trusting. Most participants feel they are trusting, relaxed, sociable, thorough and have an active imagination. Very few participants feel they are disorganized, not artistic, fault finding and nervous.

Culture: the majority of students felt that their culture is encouraging, proud of the achievements of both parents and children, reward these achievements while expressing group and cultural concern for other people.

Most participants felt that order is important and that people should obey general societal rules. This correlates with many participants agreeing that everyone should be a part of the team and disagreeing that the individual is more important than the group. Students felt neutral about whether people of the same cultural background question decisions made by their leaders. The cultural background of many participants emphasised taking pride in peoples' achievements and rewarding those achievements. Almost half the participants still feel than society is male dominated. An above average number of participants agreed that people from their cultural backgrounds are both assertive and empathetic. The standard deviations for humaneness, group collectiveness, performance and power distance indicate that these three groups are more normally distributed than the influence of gender on culture, uncertainty, and individualism. This would seem to indicate that the cultural background of the participants is generally group focused, motivating and empathetic.

One student however, had a very different view here: '*as an African student who only speaks English often when spoken to in a South African language wen [sic] I express my lack of understanding, the conversation becomes off putting in the sense*

that a former friendly deminor [sic] turns to one of lack of interest, or a full blown Q and A as to why I won't learn the language, this is very uncomfortable'

The bulk of the statistics derived from the questionnaire were devoted to assessing the student response to various service attributes. There was significant heteroscadasticity, but this was not considered a major problem since the sample was relatively small. As a reminder:

Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

The results of the rank ordered section on service have been analysed using regression analysis and rotating the variables in order to highlight their significance to the students.

4.3 Quantitative Results, statistically considered

4.3.1 *Reliability and Factor Structure of Multi-Item Scales*

The statistical component of the questionnaire was designed to show the connection between service, personality and culture. The 'Personality' factor analysis did not structure together, so these factors are analysed separately. Confirmatory factor analysis was applied to the 'Culture' component, with robust adjustments for outliers. Certain items were omitted due to lack of fit. Structural equation modelling was then applied, using the SAS sub-program PROC CALIS. Table 5 provides the Fit summary obtained from the PROC CALIS.

Table 5: Fit summary for 'culture'

Fit Summary		
Absolute Index	**Chi-Square**	111.39
	Chi-Square DF	78
	Pr > Chi-Square	0.01
	Standardized RMR (SRMR)	0.08
Parsimony Index	**RMSEA Estimate**	0.06
	RMSEA Lower 90% Confidence Limit	0.03
	RMSEA Upper 90% Confidence Limit	0.09
	Akaike Information Criterion	227.4
	Bozdogan CAIC	441.5
	Schwarz Bayesian Criterion	383.5
Incremental Index	**Bentler Comparative Fit Index**	0.94
	Bentler-Bonett Non-normed Index	0.90

In this table, the final factors used for an assessment of 'culture' were 'group collectivist', 'gender', 'uncertainty avoidance', 'performance', 'power distance', 'humane' and 'individualism'. The final factor scores were created through averaging individual items. The chi-squared statistic is significant, therefore the observed data is significantly different from the research question. The researcher expected culture to have a significant impact on service, however, the

observed data show a lower impact. However, the chi-squared correlates significantly with the qualitative results.

The SRMR is a reasonable fit, in other words, the model is 'close enough' to the data, that is, 'culture' has an impact on service, but not a large enough impact to be significant.

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) correlates with the SRMR, which indicates a satisfactory fit.

A few additional results are shown in Table 6, for interest, but are not relevant to this research and are not discussed further. These are:

a) Akaike Information Criterion (AIC) and Bozdogan's Consistent Akaike's Information Criterion (CAIC) are alternative methods used to calculate the 'best' factor result after considering all other results and are measures of the relative quality of the model set of data.

b) Related to AIC and the CAIC is the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and the Schwartz criterion, also known as the Schwartz Bayesian Criterion which also helps select appropriate models for statistical calculations.

c) Comparative fit indexes, as suggested by Bentler and Bonett, are also ways of calculating 'goodness-of-fit' in structural equation modelling.

The incremental indices all indicate an adequate fit.

4.3.2 *Pearson's Correlation Coefficient*

This was also run in order to determine the degree of correlation between the various variables. Pearson's correlation coefficient is designed to examine and highlight the relationship between different variables. The lower the correlation the less linear the relationship. A low correlation does not necessarily mean that there is no relationship between variables. It does not identify non-linear connections, nor does it indicate cause and effect (Howell, 2008). Significance levels are used in

Pearson's tests. These can be confusing, but statistically speaking, 'significance' means that something is probably true, but, at the same time, might not be very important. The significance level is also known as the 'p' value, and is generally regarded as probably important. The confidence level in this test measures the reliability of the result. The higher the percentage level, the more reliable the result is considered. It should be noted that sample size can affect the confidence level as a small sample is not regarded as as reliable as a large sample (quantitatively speaking). Pearson's demonstrates both negative and positive correlations. According to Howell (2008), a coefficient is merely a point between -1 and +1 and the nearer it is to either end the better the relationship between the two variables under examination, the more negative the relationship, the lower the correlation between the variables, and the more positive the relationship, the higher the correlation between the variables (Howell, 2008).

The tables have been divided into three sections (personality, culture, service) and colour-coded to make them easier to read. The blue blocks indicate 0.4 and above – this is statistically significant, and in fact, 0.5 and above is very significant. The green blocks are from .03 to .04 which indicates average significance. The yellow blocks are from .2 to .3 which indicates minimal significance.

Table 6 shows the Pearson's correlation coefficient for personality traits displayed by the students, using their own assessment of themselves.

Table 6: Personality traits according to the students

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. reserved	1.00									
2. trusting	.18**	1.00								
3. disorganised	.17**	-.01**	1.00							
4. relaxed	.13**	.17**	-.05**	1.00						
5. not artistic	.05**	-.08**	.30***	.05**	1.00					
6. sociable	-.45***	.01**	.15**	.02**	.15**	1.00				
7. fault finding	.01**	-.17**	.03**	-.16**	.16**	.07**	1.00			
8. thorough	-.03**	-.15**	.02**	.01**	.21**	.08**	.20**	1.00		
9. nervous	.19**	-.05**	.14**	-.29**	.10**	.04**	.15**	.16**	1.00	
10. imaginative	-.15**	.08**	.13**	-.07**	.00	.17**	.21**	.25**	.25**	1.00

It will be noticed that reserved and sociable are negatively correlated at -.45, which indicates that reserved people tend not to be sociable, which confirms the literature concerning personality traits (Church, 2001; Geron, 1993; Gosling et al., 2003).

People with a disorganised personality possibly have few artistic interests because the correlation coefficient is 0.3 which indicates average significance.

There is a slight positive correlation between thorough and imaginative (.25); thorough and individualism (.28) which indicates that students who appreciate thoroughness expect certain levels of performance. There is a slight negative

correlation between relaxed and thorough (-.29), which indicates that students who are relaxed can also be thorough in their academic work.

Table 7 displays the Pearson's correlation coefficients of culture, as determined by the students themselves.

Table 7: The correlation coefficients of culture

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Group collective	1.00						
2. Gender/culture	-.25**	1.00					
3. Uncertainty	.01**	.42***	1.00				
4. Performance	.45***	-.08**	.16**	1.00			
5. Power distance	.38***	-.11**	-.24**	.24**	1.00		
6. Humane	.53***	.02**	.25**	.51***	.14**	1.00	
7. Individualism	-.23**	.21**	-.13**	-.14**	.31**	-.27**	1.00

It will be noticed that group collective, gender culture and performance all correlate positively with humane, performance and uncertainty at .53, .45, .42 and .51. This indicates that people who consider themselves part of the group are also concerned about the individual as the individual needs to develop to improve and grow the group. This is significant in the African context as the individual often has to mentor and support other members of the family in their quest for education. Humane and thorough are correlated (.27) which indicates that people who care about their co-students tend to approach their studies in a thorough way. This is confirmed by the free text sections of the survey.

Power distance at .31 correlates slightly with individualism which indicates that the individual considers him/herself more important than the group.

Table 8 shows the Pearson's correlation coefficient of desired service, in other words, the service that the students would like to receive from university staff members.

Table 8: Correlation coefficients of service

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Knowledge	1.00						
2. Available	-.08**	1.00					
3. Reply	-.09**	.09**	1.00				
4. Listen	-.28**	-.20**	-.10**	1.00			
5. Work Area	-.06**	-.18**	-.19**	-.17**	1.00		
6. Friendly	-.19**	-.28**	-.30***	-.01**	-.20**	1.00	
7. Professionalism	-.09**	-.36***	-.22**	-.18**	-.13**	-.21**	1.00

Performance is important as the individual needs to have questions answered and a professional service delivery from the support staff, but it is not highlighted in the Correlation Coefficient. However, availability and professionalism correlates negatively at -.36, which indicates that the students feel the support staff are not available at times convenient to them (the students) and are not professional in their interactions with the students. This confirms statements in the free text sections. Trusting and listening (-.28), sociable and professionalism (-.25), availability and friendly (-.28), knowledge and listening (-.28) and humane and individualism (-.27) are correlated, which indicates that the students, while they are thorough and trusting, expect to receive a professional support service which is available, friendly and listens to their problems.

4.3.3 *Regression analyses of perceptions of support staff service*

The following section discusses the regression analysis on each support staff outcome as measured through the ranking. Because the sample size is so small and there are no large predictor variables and also because missing data exists, this section uses a two-step procedure. First, an ordinary least square step-wise regression is utilised to establish a likely subset of significant predictor variables, thereafter a full information maximum likelihood regression (FIML) implemented through the SAS PROC CALLIS procedure is applied to the subset in order to account for missing data and estimate the final number.

4.3.4 *Knowledge of support staff*

The subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise first procedure in the initial step include disorganised, relaxed, nervous. Table 9 shows the second step FIML analysis for this subset.

Table 9: FIML Regression on Knowledge

Variable	B	β
Intercept	11.53***	0.00
Disorganised	-0.01	-0.14
Relaxed	0.01*	0.19
Nervous	0.02*	0.23
Available	-0.36	-0.48
R^2	0.45	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01, ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*

Notes for differences: [a] Intercept differences expressed as % of raw difference if >5%, slope differences are for βs. [†] Small = < .05 for βs, < .03 for R^2

The final FIML model has an R^2 of 0 .48 therefore we may infer that 48% of the variance in students ranking of knowledge as an important trait has been explained by the model. The most influential predictor of knowledge is nervousness (β = .28, p < .01), suggesting that more nervous individuals are somewhat more prone to prefer knowledgeable support staff. Debatably, relaxed personalities also rate knowledge somewhat more highly but this is a weak albeit statistically significant effect (β = .18, p < .01). Other effects are small.

4.3.5 *Listening*

In this case, the subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise regression retains only trusting. In addition, there is no missing data, so the OLS regression is the final analysis. Table 10 shows this regression.

Table 10: FIML Regression on Listening

Variable	B	β
Intercept	15.01***	0.00
Trusting	-0.01**	-0.16
R^2	0.45	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01 ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*

The final OLS model has an R^2 of .45 therefore we may infer that 45% of the variance in students ranking of listening as an important trait has been explained by the model. In this case, more trusting students want support staff who listen less, but this is a weak albeit statistically significant effect (β = -.16, p < .01)

4.3.6 *Professionalism*

The subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise regression retains African, age, sociable, gender and culture, uncertainty and humane. In addition, there is no missing data, so the OLS regression is the final analysis. Table 11 show the regression on professionalism.

Table 11: FIML Regression on Professionalism

Variable	B	β
Intercept	14.86***	0.00
African	0.52*	0.12
Age	0.04*	0.11
Sociable	-0.02**	-0.17
Gender/culture	0.02**	0.19
Uncertainty	-0.01*	-0.14
Humane	0.01*	0.12
R^2	0.66	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01, ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*

The final OLS model has an R^2 of .66 therefore we may infer that 66% of the variance in students' ranking of professionalism as an important trait has been explained by the model. All effects are relatively weak with betas less than .2, although all are statistically significant. Gender/ culture shows the strongest with beta = .19 inferring that the more masculine the society the more students want professionalism in support staff. There are two negative effects (sociable and uncertainty) indicating that more sociable and more uncertain students emphasise professionalism slightly less in support staff (β = -.17 and -.14, p<.05 respectively).

4.3.6 Friendliness

The subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise regression only retains Reserved. In addition, there is no missing data, so the OLS regression is the final analysis. Table 12 shows the regression on friendliness.

Table 12: FIML Regression on Friendliness

Variable	B	β
Intercept	16.73***	0.00
Reserved	0.01*	0.14
R^2	0.51	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01, ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*
Notes for differences: [a] Intercept differences expressed as % of raw difference if >5%, slope differences are for βs. [†] Small = < .05 for βs, < .03 for R^2

The final OLS model has an R^2 of .51 therefore we may infer that 51% of the variance in students' ranking of friendliness as an important trait has been explained by the model. All effects are relatively weak with betas less than .2, although all are statistically significant. Gender/ culture shows the strongest with beta = .16 inferring that the more masculine the society the more students want friendliness in support staff. There are two negative effects (sociable and uncertainty) indicating that more sociable and more uncertain students emphasise friendliness slightly less in support staff (β = -.17 and -.14, p<.05 respectively)

4.3.7 *Reply*

The subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise regression only retains Age and Reserved. In addition, there is no missing data, so the OLS regression is the final analysis. Table 13 shows the regression for reply.

Table 13: FIML Regression on Reply

Variable	B	β
Intercept	10.83***	0.00
Age	0.04*	0.15
Reserved	0.02*	0.25
R^2	0.47	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01, ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*
Notes for differences: [a] Intercept differences expressed as % of raw difference if >5%, slope differences are for βs. [†] Small = < .05 for βs, < .03 for R^2

The final OLS model has an R^2 of .47 therefore we may infer that 47% of the variance in students' ranking of reply as an important trait has been explained by the model. All effects are relatively weak with betas less than .2, although all are statistically significant. Gender/ culture shows the strongest with beta = .11 inferring that the more masculine the society the more students want responses in support staff. There are two negative effects (sociable and uncertainty) indicating

that more sociable and more uncertain students emphasise response slightly less in support staff (β = -.17 and -.14, p<.05 respectively)

4.3.8 *Work area*

The subset of predictors extracted by the step-wise regression only retains Trusting. In addition, there is no missing data, so the OLS regression is the final analysis. Table 14 shows the regression on work area.

Table 14: FIML Regression on Work Area

Variable	B	β
Intercept	12.99***	0.00
Trusting	0.01*	0.15
R^2	0.48	

*Notes for parameters: B = unstandardized parameters, β = standardized parameters, *** = p < .01, ** = p < .05, * = p < .10.*
Notes for differences: [a] Intercept differences expressed as % of raw difference if >5%, slope differences are for βs. [†] Small = < .05 for βs, < .03 for R^2

The final OLS model has an R^2 of .48 therefore we may infer that 48% of the variance in students' ranking of work area as an important factor has been explained by the model. All effects are relatively weak with betas less than .2, although all are statistically significant. Friendly shows the strongest with β = -.77 inferring that more students want friendliness in support staff.

Missing data was handled using an FIML (full information on maximum likelihood) regression, with the dependent variable rotated in order to assess best fit. This regression was chosen because it is possible to derive efficient data with small data sets, such as were available in this research. According to Alison (2012),

when using FIML, each variable is considered to account for missing data. Culture items were grouped using averaging into aggregate sub-dimension scores for convenience.

4.4 Conclusions drawn from the statistical results

The survey delivered to the students examined their view of their personality and culture and asked what they desired in terms of service from support staff. The statistical results highlighted that most students saw themselves as thorough and imaginative, but at the same time, they consider themselves relaxed, sociable and trusting. The group concerns and performance are very important cultural indicators, while individualism is low in importance on the culture scale. The students require support staff who are knowledgeable, will listen and reply to their concerns.

4.5 Qualitative results

The same questions are now considered qualitatively.

Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

4.5.1 *Results drawn from the survey*

How do the students see themselves culturally

There was a fairly wide spread of responses here, but the majority of students considered themselves (37) 'Westernised". Several (9) felt themselves to be conservative and traditional, while others (10) felt their religious affiliation was important. Many students maintained that they (18) are open-minded and liberal, with a strong corporate bias. The most delightful response, from the researcher's point of view was the student who said s/he is a *Corporate Beachbum.*

What do the students require in support staff interaction

98 students responded to this open question. The responses can be divided into general themes:

Timely responses: *quick responses, prompt, time is valuable, confirmation of receipt of request, concrete time frame*

Polite/friendly: *helpful tone, approachable, clear, explains what they know, willingness to help, focus on me*

Honesty/commitment: *commitment to finding out the answer*

Professional: *listen to my request, exact answers, personal knowledge of my course, consistent with policies, relevant, direct me to the person who can help me, confident, provide advice*

Marks: *explain what is happening, where the marks can be found*

Feedback: *prompt, accurate, within stipulated time frames, clear, answer the question*

What the students feel they actually receive from support staff

Again this is best analysed broadly. 106 students responded to this open query. Responses varied from favourable to negative. One student has progressed from MAP, via PDM to MBA and has found support average to good "*MAP 93 – Excellent support staff, PDM 11/13 – Average support staff, MBA PT Saturday – Excellent support staff"*

Negative responses: *admin at WBS is not the best; not pleasant if the person is not responsible for that particular programme, mostly negative responses from the ladies; too relaxed and require a lot of prompting and follow up; no customer centricity; rude; seriously below average assistance from the fees office; administrative function is very bad at times; slow, don't have the power or the inclination to fully assist; dismissive – a single student's concerns are lumped into a*

*general category 'students whinging again'. Support staff tend to avoid giving answers and passing on the problem to someone else; helpful only to the extent to which it relates to their area of immediate responsibility; lack of a proper/ formal channel/ process through which I can interact with them; admin staff (for the most part) are sullen and not customer-centric; library staff (students manning the desk) are unfriendly and inattentive; you [are] treated as a child; response time by library staff is slow *days to reply to an email; government mentality; generally not helpful; competence levels are not that great; they seem to use the fact that the 'procedures' do not allow them to perform certain functions as a reason not to go the extra mile to help; not so great, it's as if you are bothering them; long waiting times for information*.

This can be summarised as unhelpful and not competent, the support staff seem to make excuses for not helping students

Positive responses: *everyone seems friendly, helpful and kind; always available and willing to help where they can; service has been generally good; very pleasant and general efficient; always been very helpful to me, and are always friendly and willing to assist; generally friendly and polite, always willing to help or point you in the right direction if they are the ones that do not deal with that particular area; WBS has been beyond helpful through my academic journey; generally very professional; exceeded my expectations; they are friendly and go out of their way to try and help; excellent service at the library; generally the support is competent, but not EXPERT level; library – generally helpful but not friendly; staff are friendly and supportive, as well as well-educated and knowledgeable; in general about 95% good service; extremely helpful, polite, professional; friendly and reliable.*

This can also be summarised as support staff are generally helpful and do their best. A comment that was voiced several times is that WBS staff are significantly better than Main Campus staff, which is definitely positive for the School.

Overall, one can conclude that positive comments from students are slightly fewer than negative comments, which is a concern that should be addressed. The

negative comments centre around response times and friendliness, which supports the findings of the survey. The positive comments also mention friendliness and efficiency. If one reverts to the survey, it seems that fewer students find support staff friendly and helpful than those who find the opposite.

4.6 Interview results

Focus groups: the two focus groups were held with the library staff and the programme managers. The researcher was careful to allow the conversation to flow and not interject, since she, herself, has worked in the library, and has been a student, so knows both side of the coin, so to speak. It was important for the research not to allow personal bias to interfere with the interviews.

Individual interview: this was held with a senior local faculty officer in her office. Again, the researcher took great care not to steer the interview in any specific direction, but allowed the officer to voice her opinions freely.

In total, 10 people were involved in the interviews – 6 programme managers, 3 library staff members, one local faculty officer.

The results were remarkably similar from all three groups:

Service interactions:

We don't have any problems with the students – they ask and we give it to them; I never have any problems with my students; the students can be very demanding at times; they think they are very important; sometimes unreasonable; they complain about availability even though there is someone here until 6 – 6:30 daily, they complain about the food so we gave them vouchers for the canteen, they complain about parking so we arranged extra parking across the road …

The programme managers consider the academic staff to be even worse than the students at times; they feel that the academic demands are unreasonable and unrealistic; *we are not supported here, we try to follow the rules and procedures and*

then an academic overrules us – this sets a precedent and then everyone wants the same rule applied to themselves; we work with the consequences for the School in mind but no one supports us; it is difficult when the Head of School makes promises to the students and neglects to inform us – we look like fools. The Head of School keeps on comparing us to his previous institution, but WBS is a very different place with a different culture; we have no authority to take any decisions even when we have developed a workable solution to a problem; it feels as if we are going backwards hoping something will propel us forwards; one negative student can poison a whole class and we have seen this happen; the students are petty, hoping to bend the rules with their ridiculous demands.

The library felt that most of the student problems they encounter are because students do not want to learn how to be independent and use the databases themselves – *they fight when they can't get their own way; defensive when they haven't been for training; expect books to be fetched, photocopies made for them; that they can pay their fines with debit cards; if they haven't submitted assignments on time, it becomes the library's fault (the printer wasn't working, the databases were down); they don't plan their work properly and blame us; they need training in what they can expect from us – we do not support Sakai or Turnitin as these are not library tools; students tend to say 'oh but so-and-so always does this for me'; they have an attitude problem; they don't listen; they expect you to be an IT specialist when their computers won't work; if faculty makes a mistake with the registration, it becomes the library's fault, but we don't capture any data, so we can't fix these problems.*

All three groups mentioned policies and procedures – *the students don't understand, we have policies; I know my policies and procedures; we have to work within the university policies; there are certain things we can't do because of university policies; I know my rules and standing orders.*

Personality:

Students are arrogant, impatient, expect you to drop everything to attend to them; think they are the only person you are dealing with… The students have an attitude; they expect to get their own way always. This was a common complaint, which also has been voiced by secretarial staff who were not interviewed, but commented spontaneously.

Culture:

This does not seem to be a problem for the majority of support staff. The local faculty officer mentioned that when she first started in the School, she had problems understanding other cultures, but she got used to the environment, and does not consider culture a problem any longer – even the international students do not cause problems. The other staff interviewed did not seem to be aware that culture could cause, for example, communication problems.

The qualitative results indicate a fairly even spread between students who are 'happy enough' and students who are very unhappy, with more students expressing discontent than those who are satisfied. The support staff acknowledge that there are challenges in dealing with a diverse student population, but they feel they do the best they can, and would appreciate it if there was more co-operation and understanding on the part of the students. The primary problem highlighted by both the students and the support staff is communication and/or the lack thereof. The support staff have ideas for improved communication, but have not put these into practice. The research did not specifically explore ways of improving communication.

4.5 Conclusion

There seems to be a fairly even split in the student responses between those who are satisfied with the service they receive from the support, library and local faculty staff, and those who are discontented with the service levels.

People who see themselves as slightly neurotic and conscientious are more likely to be unhappy with the service received, while the extravert is not as concerned, and is more likely to accept service and understand when problems occur that are beyond the control of the local university staff. They are more likely to understand that when Johannesburg City Power cuts the electric cable and there are delays until the generators kick in, that it is not the library's fault.

Culture does not seem to play a significant role at Wits Business School and speculative reasons behind this are addressed in the next chapter.

The next chapter explores the results in greater detail in order to reach conclusions which are locally valid, but may not be generally applicable.

5. DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

Both the questionnaire and the interview results are discussed concurrently, since the research is looking at the link, if any, between personality, culture and service delivery within an academic institution. This is in line with the suggestion made by Buttle (2009) that, in analysing mixed methods research, it is often convenient to merge the results in order to establish a coherent discussion. Literature suggests a definite link between personality and culture (Church, 2001; Hofstede & McCrae, 2004; Northouse, 2012; Triandis & Suh, 2002) and a consideration of the results should indicate whether this link applies in South African academic institutions. As the literature has indicated, there is an unspoken contract between the service provider and the recipient of the service (Bal et al., 2013; Chen & Kao, 2012). This interaction develops levels of trust which make the interaction more pleasurable for everyone, and solutions can be reached to perceived problems if this trust is maintained (Coetzee & Veldsman, 2013; O'dell & Pajunen, 2000).

This chapter considers the findings of the research in greater depth in order to ascertain whether the questions posed have been answered satisfactorily and what the managerial implications, if any, are.

As a reminder, three research questions and two hypotheses were derived from the literature. These are:

Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Research question 2: Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Research question 3: Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

5.2 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 1

What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?

Theoretical implications

According to the theory discussed in Chapter 2, clients and service providers co-create the service encounter (Koenig-Lewis & Palmer, 2014). Service is an intangible quality, and the perception on the part of the recipient controls the quality of the encounter (Lewis & Entwistle, 1990; Salanova et al., 2005; Vargo et al., 2008). Grönroos (2008), Prahalad and Ramaswamy (2004b) and A. F. Payne et al. (2008) are emphatic that the client is as responsible for service received as the provider of the service, and that the provider needs to ensure that s/he understands the client in order to deliver a superior service. Russell-Bennett et al. (2013) and Grönroos (2011a) agree with this but mention that the client has to have received a benefit in order to feel satisfied, and the service provider has to be motivated to provide the best possible service (Schneider et al., 1998). Zeithaml et al. (1990) confirms the need for an intimate knowledge of the clients' requirements in order to deliver superior service, however, the literature highlights the fact that the pre-existing values held by the client also affect the perception of service quality (Bolton et al., 2014).

The students were quite clear that they expected to interact with professional staff, who are knowledgeable and able to respond timeously to any query posed. They wanted polite, knowledgeable and responsive support staff, which is in line with what literature suggests is the basis of good service (Grönroos, 2011a; Russell-Bennett et al., 2013). This was clearly articulated in the free text section and confirmed by the survey.

Many students felt they were receiving an adequate service, some even felt the service is superior and specifically named certain people in their responses. The support staff feel they deliver exceptional service under sometimes trying circumstances, such as arrogant students trying to bend the rules, demanding more

than the support staff is enabled to provide. The support staff highlighted the *attitude* of the students as problematic, as the students indicated that exceptions should be made since they (the students) had paid a great deal of money to attend the courses. One of the support staff felt this was not a problem for her, since in her case, the company usually pays the course fee and any problems with non-payment, she could just funnel towards the relevant financial department.

A significant number of students responding to the free text section felt, that though they knew exactly what kind of service they expected to receive, they were not receiving this service; they were aggrieved and happy to voice their frustration.

Managerial implications

The SERVQUAL model and its various emendations is designed to show potential problems and gaps in service delivery. If one sets this out linearly, it becomes clear that there are differences between student and staff expectations. These are the gaps that need to be addressed by the School in order for the students to feel they are receiving value for money. Closing these gaps would also allow the support staff to feel they are contributing to the value the students receive and that this value will enable the School to develop and reach its strategic goals.

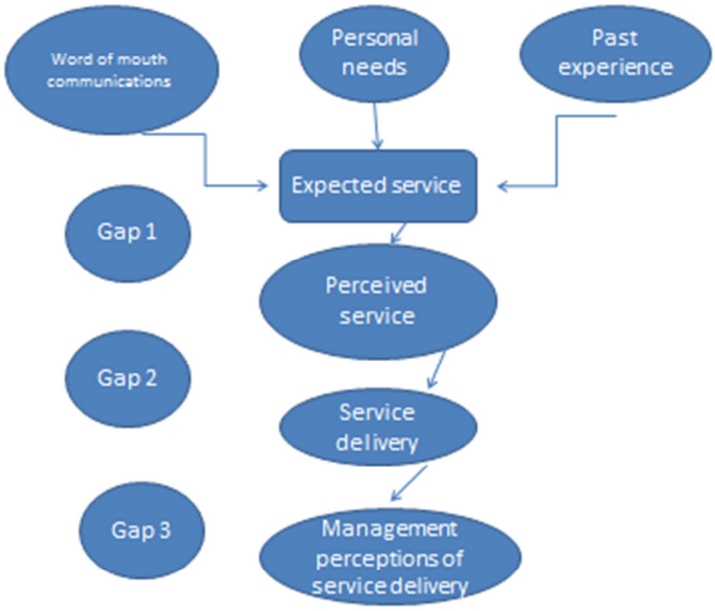

Figure 12: Gaps in service delivery, adapted from Machado and Diggines (2012)

There is obviously a breakdown between the students and the support staff since the support staff feel they offer a good service and the students do not feel they receive this service. This suggests that communication between support staff and students is not optimal, especially when procedures are involved. The university has many checks and balances around delivery of, for example, assignment and examination results, and this information is not always relayed to the students. If it is, the students ignore it as they tend to feel that they are exceptional and should be treated almost *'like royalty'* as one support staff member put it. The library staff offer round-the-year training in the use of the library resources, in classrooms, in the computer laboratory and one-on-one, but still are regularly told that the students '*received no training'* – it is difficult to know how often one needs to repeat training at Masters level before the student is independent enough to handle their own information searching. The library have tried providing manuals bound into the course packs and handed out loose documents and neither have solved the problem. The Programme Managers repeat the same information about the process

to no avail. Judging by the interviews, the support staff are irritated by this constant repetition, and would willingly engage with any solution that could potentially work.

A solution that could be tried and which might work very well is to have the academic equivalent of a FAQs link on the School's home page, wherein are detailed, perhaps with short videos, the answers to the most regularly asked questions. The direct link to this web page could be placed on all notice boards, both static and electronic, in the School.

The students have highlighted what they consider to be poor service and the support staff have responded with their perception of the service they actually deliver. There is a disconnection between the two points of view, which the research has highlighted [*Research question 1: What constitutes bad service from the students' point of view?]* The question has been answered and the support staff have had the opportunity to rebut the students' claims. A communication intervention has been suggested as a potential solution to what at first sight appears to be an intractable problem which has been a problem for many years.

5.3 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 2

Do different cultural factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Theoretical implications

Culture affects all social interactions in some way, according to Dramalis (2012), and this is particularly so in a multi-cultural environment such as that pertaining in Africa, and specifically in South Africa, where the cultural rules of engagement are fairly clearly laid out for those who understand them (Garmon & Mgijima, 2012; Gbadamosi, 2013; O'Reilly et al., 1991), but are not so clear for those who are 'outsiders' (Swaidan, 2012). Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard (2012) have pointed out that culture is not fixed, and does change over time, therefore it behoves the

service provider to be aware of these changes in order to respond appropriately to them.

Managerial Implications

Culture did not seem to be a significant factor at the School, with only one student mentioning his/her discomfort here, when the academic support staff treated him/her with disdain when they realised that s/he did not speak a local language besides English. This, however, indicates a certain insensitivity towards people of colour who do not speak local indigenous languages, and the staff need to be aware that the university attracts many international students who do not speak local languages – in fact, they work with them as several lecturers actually originate from elsewhere in Africa. The support staff should also not assume that no European student would understand if they speak to each other in a local indigenous language as many Europeans and Indians do, in fact, speak local languages other than English and Afrikaans.

In order to alert support staff to a situation of which they may not be aware, senior management should consider the development of a consumer awareness programme for all staff (including secretarial staff) that emphasises cultural sensitivity. This programme would need to be repeatedly regularly, for both new staff and more experienced staff who have forgotten the principles underlying the programme.

It can be considered that research question 2 [*What cultural factors affect the student/support staff interaction?]* has been addressed in this research and has found to be relatively unimportant to the current student body, although this may not be the case in the future.

There was a wide spread of cultural backgrounds, as expected in a Business School in the major financial city in South Africa. No one culture dominated and, because of the use of Socratic teaching methods, all students, perforce, have to get along with each other. This probably suppresses personal culture and creates a Business

School culture for the duration of the course studied. This adaptability will prove useful in the business world and is something to be encouraged at the School.

Personal culture, however, did not affect the support staff/student interaction for the majority of students, and can be considered a minor issue at the School. One can thus conclude that personal culture has no real or noticeable effect on the service expectation of students. The support staff should, nonetheless, be aware of potential problems that may arise in the interaction, since the student and support staff co-create the service experience, as mentioned earlier.

The research question is not confirmed in this research.

5.4 Discussion pertaining to Research Question 3

Do different personality factors affect the students' view of the ideal support staff service received?

Theoretical implications

Inevitably, the personality of both the provider and the client will have an effect on the service interaction. T. A. Smith (2012) has specifically mentioned the need to understand the customers' personality in order to engender loyalty. The personality traits of workers has been explored by many researchers, as mentioned in the literature review earlier, and the desirability of having a 'proactive' personality, or someone who displays initiative is considered desirable in service providers (Brown et al., 2006; Li et al., 2010). It has also been mentioned that personality can appear to change or be modified, depending on the situation in which the person finds him/herself, but the basic personality of the individual appears to be fairly constant over time (Parumasur & Roberts-Lombard, 2012).

Personality tests try to determine where the person taking the test falls on a continuum between extraversion and introversion. This embraces conscientious people and nervous people. These divisions are applied with a broad brush and an extravert may demonstrate other traits at certain times, depending on the situation in

which the person is found, but the basic personality remains constant. Unsurprisingly, the majority of students admit to being extraverts, with a number considering themselves conscientious. This is a reasonable finding as people studying advanced qualifications tend to be ambitious and keen to grow in their professional life. As a result, this kind of person will either already be assertive or will wear the mantle of assertion in order to achieve personal goals.

Managerial implications

In any group of people, there will always be the quieter person who is overlooked because s/he does not shout as loudly as the rest. This person often has important points to make and considered suggestions for improvement of conditions and should never be ignored because they are not aggressive. Support staff need to be aware of these people and in interacting with them, reassure them that their needs are just as important as the more assertive students. Again this relates to the cultural sensitivity aspect, since the quieter people may come from an environment where the junior person does not speak up to or against a senior person. In some communities, the hierarchy is very strict and a young person has to abide by the community rules. Support staff will not know these rules unless they are alerted to their presence, and this is best achieved during formal training sessions. Again, these sessions will bear repeating on a regular basis to reinforce the sensitisation towards the students.

Based on the responses from the support staff, the assertive or aggressive student is the person who creates the most problems for the support staff since these students demand attention, do not want to follow the rules and expect the support staff to give in to their every demand, whether possible or not. One can, with justice, conclude that the personality of the student has a definite effect on the service interaction, bearing in mind the co-creation of the interaction. A little more understanding and patience on both the part of the support staff and the student would improve the interaction and result in a satisfactory outcome for both parties.

This research question is thus confirmed.

5.5 Conclusion

It would seem that there is a connection between personality and service in South Africa at an academic institution. Culture does not play as large a role as the researcher initially thought it would. An inference could be made that, since South Africa is multi-cultural and multi-lingual, people, especially students, have subsumed their personal cultures into the academic culture in order to benefit from the courses undertaken. This would need to be tested in order to determine whether the inference is valid or not.

6. CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter wraps up the study by confirming the conclusions reached in the results of the study. It then outlines the recommendations that could be implemented in terms of the study and concludes by putting forward suggestions for further research in specific areas that have been suggested by the current research.

6.2 Conclusions of the study

This study examined the service perceptions of both the support staff and the students at a business school in South Africa. The initial research suggested there may be a link between personality and personal culture and that this may affect the service interaction, both positively and negatively. However, the results indicated that personal culture, certainly at this institution, does not play a large role in the service interaction. Personality does play a role, since the majority of students consider themselves as extraverts and this assertiveness is obvious in their dealings with the support staff as they (the students) demand results that the support staff cannot always provide for institutional reasons. The students then tend to consider the support staff unhelpful and complain accordingly. This, unfortunately, psychologically speaking, probably makes the situation worse rather than better, with the support staff saying *the students are always complaining.* There definitely seems to be a communication breakdown between what the students want and feel is their right to receive, and what the support staff are able to supply. The students are also at fault here, since they are not prepared to accept that the support staff are not allowed to, for example, release marks prior to these marks being confirmed by the relevant committee. The support staff member will be dismissed if found guilty of this behaviour and consequently, is not willing to take the risk, but the students keep on pushing and demanding this information. In this situation, the co-creation of the service interaction becomes very one-sided and neither party feels satisfied with the

results – the support staff fall back on the university policies in defence, and the student feels aggrieved because s/he has not received the answer they wanted.

This research therefore confirms that personality does have an effect on service interactions at an academic institution, but that personal culture has no obvious effect on this service interaction. This may be the result of the following facts: a) the institution is located in the financial hub of South Africa, with a significant population from other parts of the country, and internationally; b) because of the teaching style used at this institution, the students' personal culture has to be pushed aside for the duration of the course since all the students have to work co-operatively in syndicate groups. Personal culture does not disappear, but is subsumed into the school culture for convenience.

This research, however, confirms the customer relationship literature in that service remains essential for the continuance of the institution. It makes no significant difference whether this service is delivered within an institution of higher learning or in the retail and manufacturing sector. The various attempts to suggest that universities are somehow 'different' in their service needs may have been valid in the past, but in the current financial environment where universities have to 'balance their books', this is no longer the case. Service delivery in a university has to match or improve on service received outside of the institution – if it does not, the student has many other choices and will chose one that delivers the desired service.

6.3 Recommendations

A couple of points have been flagged by this research:

- Communication remains a problem – a course in service delivery, interpersonal interactions and negotiation should be part of the induction of all new staff appointed to a front-of-house position so that when the support staff encounter problematic students, s/he has the skills to deal with the situation
- A FAQs (frequently asked questions) section should be created on the School's homepage and the URL to this should be widely advertised. Queries

and complaints can then be directed to this FAQs section – this will take some of the pressure off the academic and library support staff and will enable the student to solve their own queries

- Cultural sensitivity, while not a problem at the moment, may become a problem, unless the support staff are made aware of potential issues around culture. This sensitisation could also be delivered by means of a course, repeated at regular intervals.
- During student orientation, the students should be made aware of the policies and procedures that have to be followed by the support staff. This should also be communicated in course material so that the students are constantly reminded of what the support staff cannot do for them.

6.4 Suggestions for further research

This research is limited to one school in one faculty at one institution in South Africa. It only looked at the connection between local faculty staff, academic support staff and library staff and the students in an attempt to ascertain the gaps, if any, in the student / support staff service interaction. Based on the research, communication is a significant problem. This study could be replicated at other institutions, locally and internationally, to determine whether this is a local problem or endemic in other business schools. A subsequent study could also be undertaken to see whether the cultural aspects of the service interaction change over time, under different economic conditions or in other post-graduate schools locally and internationally. Language, while not a problem at the moment, may in the future, under different political dispensations, become a problem, and this could prove an interesting area of study.

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Appendix A: Survey