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Knowledge Management Applications in Johannesburg Water's Call Centre

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2012-01-20
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Knowledge Management Applications in Johannesburg Water's Call Centre

Suchithra Ruplal

A Research Report submitted to Graduate School of Public and Development Management, University of Witwatersrand in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in the field of Public and Development Management

June 2010

Abstract

Call Centres are viewed more and more as important and powerful means through which companies can improve service delivery to their customers. This research paper investigates how the strategic application of knowledge management within the Call Centre customer interface, through the support of senior management, can improve service delivery within Johannesburg Water. One-on-one interviews were conducted with selected Call Centre team leaders, and management from the Call Centre and the Operations department. Primary data was also extracted from the company's information management system (IMS). The Customer Service Representatives (CSRs) were observed within their work environment. Appendix A describes an example of the Call Centre customer service interface when a customer calls to log a complaint with Johannesburg Water, a Municipal Owned Entity (MOE). Knowledge management when applied as part of the Customer Relationship Management (CRM) strategy may be helpful in improving service delivery. Call Centre management has to invest in its people component of Knowledge Management (KM) strategy in order to have effective processes and effective technologies. Research conducted may be applicable and adapted to other public sector Call Centres. The study conducted indicates that senior management should focus on strengthening the "people" component of KM in order to achieve effective service delivery. Knowledge management gaps at the Call Centre were identified through the study which would be beneficial to Call Centre management in improving service effectiveness of the Call Centre for the organisation.

Declaration

I declare that this report is my own, unaided work, which is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Management (in the field of Public and Development Management) at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other University.

Suchithra Ruplal

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30 June 2010

Dedication

To my husband Praneel, my children Shravan and Sunaina, my parents Mr and Mrs S Suparsad, and my brother Umang. Thank you for your support, love and understanding. I could not have done this without you at my side. To my late father-in law, Mr Haricharan Ruplal, “Dad, where ever you may be, Thank you for your inspiration and motivation. You have kept me going all this time. This is for you”.

Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to my supervisor, Dr Ivor Sarakinsky, for his guidance and assistance throughout the research process. I would also like to thank all the interviewees for their time and patience when the interviews were conducted. I would like to acknowledge Dr T Mogale for his valuable insight and guidance in completing this report.

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Chapter 1

Knowledge Management Applications in Johannesburg Water's Call Centre

1.1 Introduction and Background

Johannesburg Water (JW) is a municipal owned entity, which is responsible to provide efficient water and sanitation services to a large customer base within the City of Johannesburg. One of the entity's top priorities is customer service. Water and sanitation services are provided along business principles, ensuring both customer satisfaction and cost recovery. Johannesburg Water's in house Call Centre provides an avenue for customers to communicate questions, queries and complaints about the service provided by the Utility. Customers must in turn receive the relevant information in the right time from the Customer Service Representative (CSR). During the interaction between the customer and the CSR, questions are posed to the customer, enquiring about the nature of the specific problem experienced. The CSR is expected to record all relevant information onto the information Management System (IMS), and thereafter to provide the customer with a service request number for reference purposes. The service request is then routed automatically via the IMS to a responsible operational depot to respond to the complaint. The Call Centre needs to be able to contribute positively to service delivery performance by going further than mere information management and rather focusing on managing the knowledge of the CSR's who interact directly with customers.

By providing the customer with the correct information as well as recording the correct information onto the IMS, the Call Centre supports the organisation in achieving its strategic customer relationship management goals. Within the millions of hours of calls received each year, lies highly

valuable business information that provides a wealth of insight on the way the business at the Call Centre is being conducted as well as opportunities for improvement. The Call Centre representative should not be viewed as just “an outlet”, whereby frustrated customer vents their fury. The role and value is much more than receiving customer complaints, but extends to building the Call Centre’s knowledge base.

According to Wigg (2000, p. 2), “Knowledge management plays important roles in public administration in that it builds intellectual capital, to improve the effectiveness of public decision making and situation handling. Wigg further states that with the absence of intellectual capital, if actions are based on ignorance, these actions “will be ineffective and arbitrary” (Wigg, 2000, p. 10). The organisation can benefit greatly by understanding and managing the components and factors crucial to the effectiveness of the knowledge management applications implemented within the Call Centre environment, especially if the intention is to “develop competent people who are “all doing the right thing first time resulting in lower costs and improved performance” (Wigg, 2000, p. 19).

1.2 Problem Statement

One of the greatest challenges that Johannesburg Water faces, in its aim to satisfy the needs of its customers, is the management of knowledge at its Call Centre. In an environment such as the one found at the Call Centre, the CSR’s need to be able to access information quickly and correctly to respond to customers needing advice or complaining about service delivery. The quality of information recorded at the Call Centre is directly related to the response provided by the operational depots. The crucial link between the caller, the Call Centre and the operational depot is information. The accuracy of the information captured on the IMS affects the responsiveness and effectiveness of the service provided by the

operational depots.

The research focuses on the Call Centre customer interface and how essential Johannesburg Water business knowledge is managed and applied within the Call Centre. In the Call Centre environment it is crucial that the CSR's not translate service delivery issues and complaints into their own meanings and transfer this knowledge onto other CSR's, the IMS or back to the customer. The expectation from management is that all agents provide customers with the same responses to the same queries. Inconsistency results in the misrepresentation of customers' needs and problems, which has serious negative consequences for the organisation's reputation and the achievement of its customer relationship management goals and objectives. There are certain drivers that may influence behaviour and competency that may impact the quality of information as well as the quality of service provided by the entity.

1.3. Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to investigate how the strategic application of knowledge management within the Call Centre customer interface, through the support of senior management, can improve service delivery within Johannesburg Water.

1.4. Research Questions

The focus of the research is on the application of knowledge within Johannesburg Water's Call Centre, specifically looking at how the organisation manages the tacit and explicit knowledge of the CSR's who take complaints from customers. The 3 main areas covered in the

research questions were:

1.4.1 What knowledge is identified as “critical” organisational knowledge within the Call Centre?

1.4.2 How and where is crucial knowledge stored, collected and accessed in the Call Centre?

1.4.3 How is information and knowledge utilised and shared among Call Centre staff?

1.4.1 Support of KM for critical business success from Call Centre senior management.

According to Morrissey (2005, p. 5), knowledge identification, collection, storage, sharing and utilisation remain as the main features of any knowledge management system. Companies should be able to firstly identify what organisational information is crucial to the success of the business. Secondly, there should be tools and processes that enable the storage and collection of this valuable information. Thirdly, the employees should be able to use and share the knowledge and information. Morrissey (2005) states that knowledge management can be successfully applied in companies where there is an integration of these features with the support from senior management.

The first area of questioning aims at confirming if the Call Centre representatives themselves identify and recognise what high value information is crucial to the management of customer complaints received at Johannesburg Water. The second area looks at how and where this important information is stored at the Call Centre. The third area focuses on whether the information and knowledge is used and shared with colleagues and other users. The final area of questioning is aimed at determining what value the CSR’s hold, and the role of senior

management in supporting the knowledge management process and applications within the Call Centre.

1.5 Limitations

The study is limited to Johannesburg Water (PTY) Ltd, a Public Utility in the South African environment. The focus of the research deals only with the utility in question and does not offer to make a generalised conclusion that is applicable to all utilities. The researcher is employed by Utility as a Customer Care Manager at an operational depot, and as such has been on the receiving end of information that is captured from the Call Centre. It was therefore essential that the researcher always be conscious of not making value judgements. The limitation from this perspective is that there is an expectation of a certain level of quality of information that needs to be captured from the Call Centre in order for the operational depots to resolve the complaint effectively and efficiently.

There may be an unintended bias towards the expectations of the quality of information on the service requests being captured by the Call Centre, as the position of the researcher is based at an operational depot. The circumstances that exist within the particular utility may be unique to that Utility and findings made would limit to that specific utility only. The impact of service delivery within this utility would also be limited to the of the customer-CSR-IMS interactions. Interviewees were made aware from the outset of the purpose of the study for a Master of Management degree at the Graduate School at the University of the Witwatersrand. The research conducted does not intend to place Johannesburg Water under dispute and the views indicated in this report is not a reflection of Johannesburg Water’s official position or views.

1.6 Conclusion

The aim of the study is to consider successful Knowledge management and its applications in terms of the value it holds for improving service delivery of the company as a whole, as well as specifically within the environment of the Call Centre. The Literature Review in Chapter Two identifies three themes i.e. The benefits of KM at the Call Centre in terms of improving service delivery objectives, KM as a strategic objective for the Call Centre and the integration of three components, “people”, “processes” and “technology” for successful KM in the Call Centre.

Chapter 3 describes the use of the qualitative research approach and data collection which provides useful insight into the how the Call Centre operates. In Chapter 4, Research results are shared from the interviews held with Call Centre Team leaders and other Operational Staff, the data extraction from the Information Management System as well as independent observations of the CSR’s working within the Call centre environment. Key issues that emerged from the research are analysed in Chapter 5 while Chapter 6 focuses on recommendations and the conclusion.

CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Public Sector organisations like Johannesburg Water, are “daily coming under public scrutiny, as public demand has increased transparency of Operations, greater accountability for the money spent, and better services” (Saldanha, 2002, p. 1). With an increase in public awareness regarding services to be provided, the entity is constantly under pressure to provide services at a specific level set by the City of Johannesburg. All water and sanitation needs and demands are being reported to the in house JW Call Centre. The customer expects that questions and queries will be answered quickly and correctly, and as such, “a contact centre must both anticipate and react to customers changing needs and demands to achieve strategic customer care, which in turn has major implications for the kinds of skill, knowledge and competencies of all the Call Centre staff” (Saldanha, 2002, p. 5). This clearly means that senior management must ensure that the strategy of the Call Centre is not merely reactionary, but is progressing towards being proactive in accessing the type and nature of the customer.

The Call Centre is seen as the central point and the channel through which customers interact with the service provider. In the case of Johannesburg Water, a public entity, the Call Centre is managed in house. The Call Centre environment can be described as highly pressurised, within which Customer Service Representatives (CSR’s) answer calls as “waiting agents” from customers. Houlihan (2000, p. 1) contextualises the Call Centre as being “situated at the intersection of rapidly expanding information and communication technologies (ICTs), reengineered business processes, a changing (or changed) profile of customer needs

and expectations and a prevailing culture of occupational restructuring". The CSR's are the first line interaction with customers, answering questions, queries and recording all information provided by the customer onto an information management system. The required action can only be taken quickly and effectively if the information is recorded in a specific manner.

The IMS is the technology through which incoming work is recorded and managed. According to Houlihan (2000, p. 2), "The factor that makes the Call Centre environment so unique is the information and communication technologies (ICTs) infrastructure which forms the basis of how work is carried out". In the case of Johannesburg Water, the choice of codes used to describe the type of complaint is the decision of the CSR taking the call. These decisions are based on the "knowledge" that the CSR has either been trained on, or has acquired through interactions with other CSR's, Supervisors, managers and even the customers themselves. The extent of each CSR's knowledge of the organisation's business and the services provided has a collective effect on whether or not the Utility achieves its service delivery objectives. As such, the Call Centre plays a crucial role in the promotion and maintenance of the organisation's customer relationship management strategy.

Based on the literature surveyed, the following key themes emerged as most prominent:

2.2.1 The benefits of knowledge management at the Call Centre to improve organisational service delivery objectives.

2.2.2 Knowledge management as a strategic objective for the Call Centre.

2.2.3 Integrating "people", "processes" and "technology" for sustaining successful knowledge management in a Call Centre.

2.2.1 The benefits of knowledge management at the Call Centre to improve organisational service delivery objectives

The mere presence of the Call Centre may not guarantee that the Public Utility will achieve its customer relationship management (CRM) strategies. The measurement of time it takes to answer a call, or the abandonment rates, etc form part of the CRM strategy, but what is more important is to ensure the alignment of the Call Centre's strategy with the strategies from the Operations Department in order to achieve customer satisfaction and performance objectives, which can be described as the right response and the right information in the right time. Through the appropriate processes and systems, the Call Centre would be able to assist the Utility in improving effectiveness and reducing operational costs (Robertson, 2002). According to Robertson, the Call Centre can ensure that customers receive the information they require if their knowledge resources are "managed in a coordinated and integrated way" (Robertson, 2002). In an ever-changing environment, where customers' needs are evolving, Utilities have to find ways of improving their business knowledge, which in turn gives the Utility an advantage in responding to customer complaints.

From a service delivery perspective, the combination of knowledge management and customer relationship management approaches imply positive effects on achieving the organisation's goals and objectives (Gebert, Geib, Kolbe and Brenner, 2003). Many knowledge management gurus declare that knowledge as a resource is crucial in providing organisations with a competitive advantage. Knowledge management also allows managers to constantly ask themselves, "How can we improve our service? What processes can be changed to make us more cost effective and improve our image with our customers, what technology can be implemented to effect these new and improved changes and how can we

ensure that our people know what they need to know to make our business better?.

Liew (2008, p. 13) agrees that the integration of knowledge management and CRM “has strong ramifications in the long-term competitiveness of organisations." Within an information intensive, data processing environment as found within the Public Utility Call Centre, there is a crucial need to manage the information and knowledge optimally in order to improve on service delivery.

Rasooli and Albadvi (2007, p. 5) further stated that in order to achieve “seamless and consistent to the customers, we must capture the knowledge that exists in everyone’s heads- before these heads disappear.” The Call Centre is the centralised point for customer contact and as such can be seen as an ideal environment for the application of successful knowledge management initiatives. The nature of business conducted within the question and answer environment of the Call Centre provides the Utility with an opportunity to use their knowledge assets to improve customer services. This is supported by Davlos (2004), when he states that customer service centres and contact centres “provide some of the best examples of successful KM applications.”

Richards (2008, p. 4) further supports the value of a knowledge management system,

> …which would allow Call Centre workers to handle the routine problems more quickly and could provide greater employee satisfaction and stability as well as improve the company’s reputation and customer satisfaction.

2.2.2 Knowledge management as a strategic objective for the Call Centre.

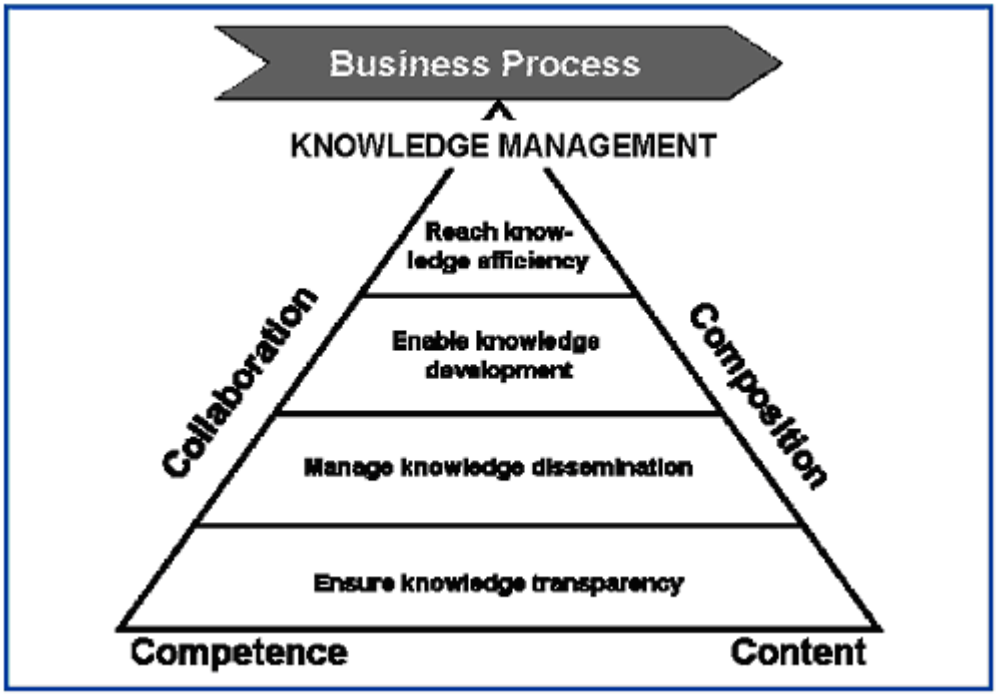
The literature surveyed supports the view that the application of successful knowledge management requires support from senior management. Liew (2008) argues that the introduction of knowledge management into a company, is a strategic issue, and therefore requires a carefully thought out strategic plan. In order for knowledge management to thrive and be successful, it needs the participation and support of all employees within the organisation. Proper implementation of KM programs within the public sector environment may suffer from bureaucratic delays and other administrative red tape, but as Liew (2008, p. 12) states that KM "requires the buy-in and support of top management".

Liew's views are further supported by R Gopinathan, Deputy Director, Service Centre for Organisational Excellence (PSCOE) at Singapore's Service College (CSC) who is well known for promoting knowledge management in the public sector. According to Gopinathan (2008, p. 2), "Education is an important aspect of knowledge management" and "leaders need to be engaged with because their support is crucial". Through educating corporate leaders, they can gain the understanding of CRM and KM application implications. Leadership will recognise that organisational goals can be more successfully achieved if it is linked to the mindful deployment of a KM program.

Workers are more likely to be motivated, encouraged and feel valued if they are seen as "experts" in a chosen field. Workers through the KM program are recognised for sharing and disseminating tacit knowledge (the intangible or know-how found in their heads) with other colleagues, team leaders, supervisors and managers. Explicit knowledge refers to the knowledge that is articulated, documented, stored, formalised and written.

This knowledge is to be retrieved in databases, standard operating procedures, manuals and textbooks. This useful insight on the different categories of knowledge offers executives and senior managers' guidance when designing and implementing KM programs.

Figure 1: Knowledge Management (KM) Goal Pyramid



Source: Gerbert et al, 2003

The four goals, (as seen in Figure 1) Knowledge transparency, knowledge dissemination, knowledge development and knowledge efficiency demonstrates that "chunks" of several knowledge characteristics combined, are relevant to business processes" (Gebert et al, 2003). This model known as the CRM model offers Johannesburg Water as an organisation an opportunity to manage knowledge based on these influential dimensions that influence the performance of the process involved (Gebert et al, 2003). The four goals would act as enablers for the organisation to achieve its performance goals and strategic objectives.

According to Morrissey (2005, p. 20), implementation is futile without senior management support for two primary reasons:

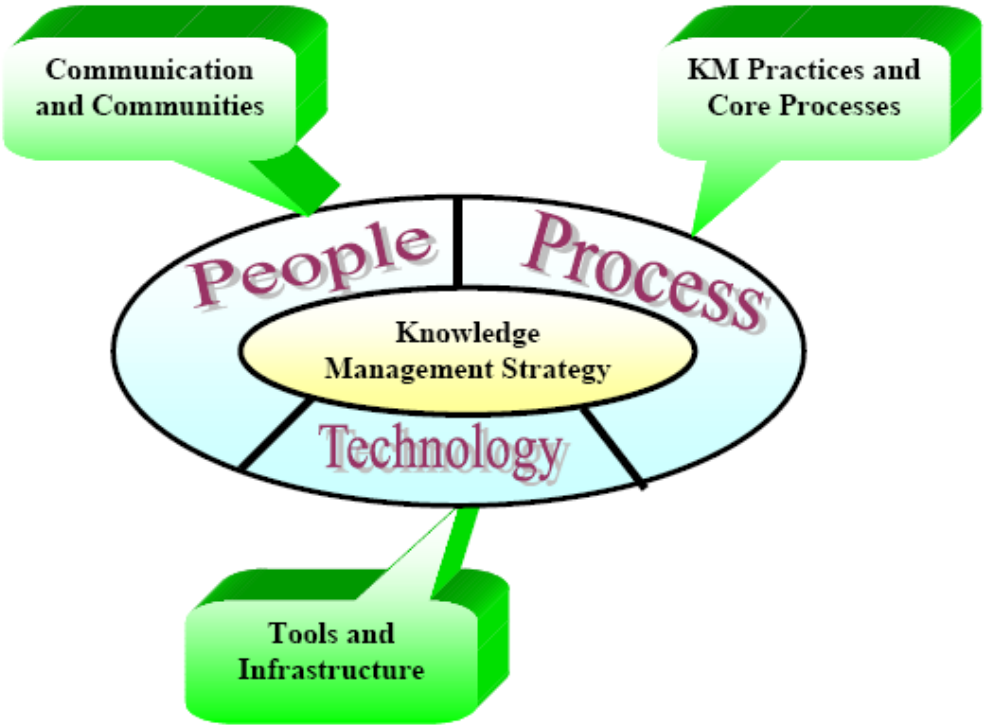
I. It is generally necessary in order to justify an investment, and,

II. Junior employees will more likely adopt and endorse the project if they see the same support from their senior leadership.

Senior management must recognise that they need to manage these crucial aspects (collaboration, composition, competence and content) that affect performance processes. Gebert et al (2003), suggests that these aspects supports the CRM strategy for improved customer service by ensuring that knowledge is managed about, from and for customers. As soon as senior management embrace and believe in the KM initiative, other employees are more likely to acquire, contribute, share, generate and adapt knowledge within the established KM system.

2.2.3 Integrating "people", "processes" and "technology" for sustaining successful Knowledge Management in a Call Centre

Figure 2: How to attain the Knowledge Advantage

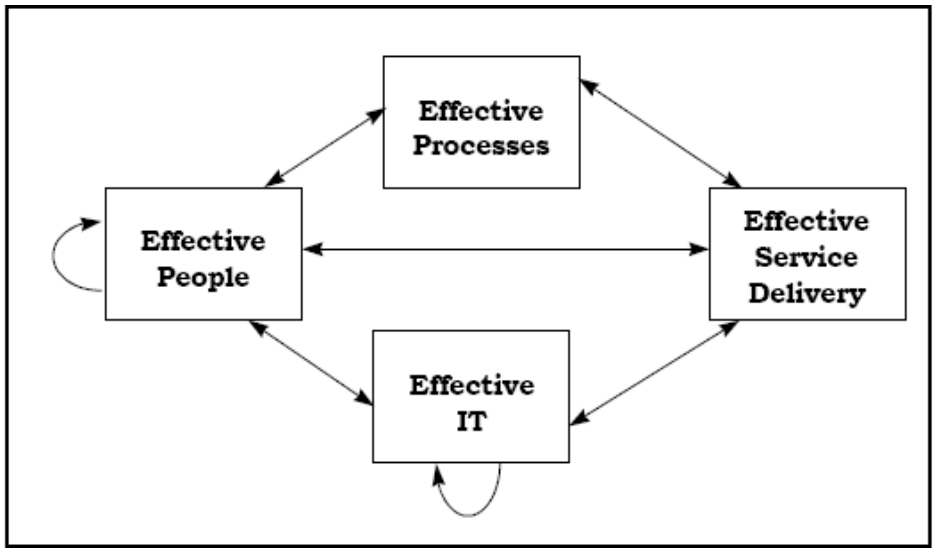


Source: Suresh, 2002, p.8

In order to achieve and sustain CRM strategies through KM, it is vital that people (individual competency), process (structural capital and intangible assets) and technology (IT) are managed efficiently and effectively (Liew, 2008). Gao, Li and Clarke (2008), state that organisations must have effective and efficient management of organisational knowledge through the integration of people, technology and processes (as seen in Figure 2). The focus should not be only on one or two of these components, but should involve these components working together as a dynamic relationship. A successful Call Centre does not just mean the combination of the three elements, but means the balance of them to produce superior

results. The research focuses on the integration of the three elements in order to achieve a knowledge advantage within the Call Centre and the company as a whole in delivering a service. Due to the nature and the role of the Call Centre," information and communication technology has become an integral part of all Call Centre management" (Koh, Gunasekaran, Thomas and Arunachalam, 2005).

Figure 3: Theoretical Model for Service Delivery



Source: Evenson, 1999, p. 5

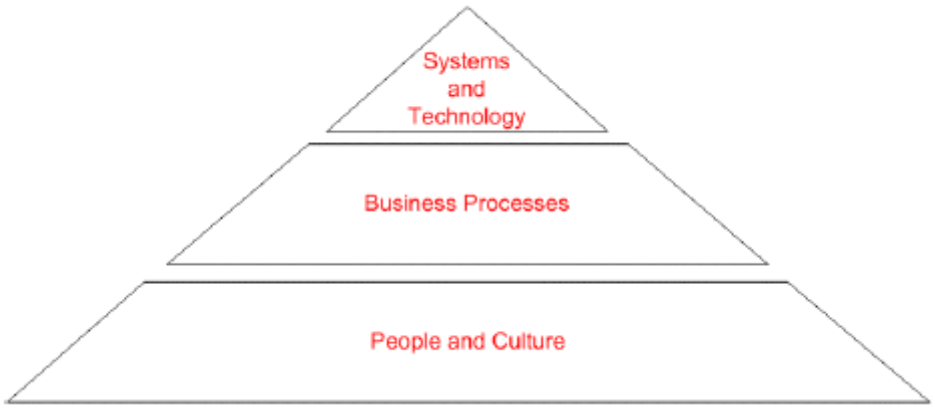
According to Evenson (Figure 3), the above theoretical model is proposed for achieving effective service delivery. The key drivers, i.e. effective people, effective processes and effective technology (IT) need to work together, in a sensitive balance to accomplish "effective service delivery" (Evenson, 1999, p. 4).

IBM states that a Call Centre can serve as a "portal", which is a:

> single personalised interface that integrates people, processes, applications and information, which helps contact centre employees gain fast security-rich access to data that is crucial to performing

their particular jobs, thereby improving overall productivity, increasing customer satisfaction, enhancing business responsiveness and promoting the company's competitive edge (IBM, 2005, p. 4).

Figure 4: Fundamental Elements in an Effective KM program



Source: Alter et al, 2004, p.4

Alter, et. Al., (2004, p.4) confirms that an effective knowledge management program has "people" and "culture" at the foundation of the initiative (Figure 4). The most crucial and largest component that needs attention first is the focus on the people and the culture, following which business processes and systems and technology are concentrated on. CSRs should have access to information that can assist in improving the service being provided, as well as to increase their business knowledge of the company.

According to Suresh (2002), knowledge management can secure a greater strategic advantage through "generating greater value through the knowledge in people, technologies and processes". The Beagle Research Group (2006, p. 3), state that the implementation of any business process in an organisation, is "like a stool supported by three legs labelled people, process and technology". Technology has like never before, brought the

customer and the service provider in closer contact. The “people” and the “processes” can be supported more efficiently and effectively through the most applicable technologies.

Rasooli and Albadvi (2007), go further to state that information management has in fact aided and enhanced companies towards achieving improved customer services. eGain (2004), seen as a leading provider of contact centre software and customer services states that it is important for the contribution to the knowledge base, that contributions be made by “the people who are both technically competent” as well as who are not “too far removed from day-to-day customer contact. According to Koh et al (2005), KM application can create a “positive value to the CSR’s contribution of services to the organisation and to the customers”.

Within a diverse world, we need to accept that customer satisfaction is also diverse, and that there is no “one size fits all” to please all customers. Evenson (1999, p. 3) emphasises that the management of the “people” within the Call Centre and technology, creates a “high performance Call Centre environment”. One of the main challenges to Call Centre Operations is to exceed these diverse customer expectations. “People”, “process” and “technology” is viewed as the building blocks of any Call Centre.

Call handling is much more than just answering the telephone. The people behind these telephones are influenced by the physical and social environment within which they carry out their duties. It is essential that the difficulties are acknowledged, and real solutions be found to deal with how these impact on the quality of information relayed, captured and transmitted via the CSRs onto the IMS. The well being of the CSRs would inevitable affect the Call Centre’s effectiveness and customer focus objectives. According to Sprigg, Smith & Jackson (2003, p. 56), “Call handling is made stressful for a call handler when they have a high

workload, are unclear about their work role, cannot make full use of their skills and have conflicting role demands."

2.3 Conclusion

In order to meet and exceed the challenges of service delivery expectations, Johannesburg Water has to ensure that knowledge is managed in an effective and efficient manner. The objective of the study is to investigate effective KM applications that are beneficial to the success of the company. The key themes supported through the literature surveyed focuses on the benefits of knowledge management in improving JW's service delivery objectives; knowledge management as a strategic objective for the Call Centre, and how the integration of "people", "processes" and "technology" can sustain knowledge management in the JW Call Centre successfully.

The study conducted at Johannesburg Water's Call Centre highlights the relevance, importance and value of effective knowledge management applications within the Call Centre to improve consistency and quality of the responses provided to customers. The research questions aimed at investigating what crucial business information is identified, stored, collected and shared amongst the Call Centre employees who interact with call-in customers. The research supported the balancing of three elements of KM, i.e. people, process and technology, which is crucial to delivering excellent customer service. The study also agrees with the views expressed in the literature surveyed which indicates that KM can not be applied successfully without the support and commitment from leadership to steer the process in the desired direction.

Chapter 3

Research Method

3.1 Introduction

The effects of knowledge management in improving service delivery in a public utility Call Centre like Johannesburg Water's is investigated through a qualitative approach. The key focus of inquiry was investigating and understanding the way the CSR's interpret and record information on the IMS based on their knowledge and interpretation of the business, as well as understanding where and how they search for new information. The research design implemented in this study focused on a purely qualitative approach.

The focus of the qualitative approach is the description, understanding and the explanation of a specific phenomenon. A real understanding can be found when studying and analysing the dynamics of the situation at hand.

According to Creswell (2003, p.181) qualitative research methodology offers unique characteristics:

a) Occurs in natural settings where human behaviour and events occur;
b) Is based on assumptions that are very different from quantitative designs. Theory or hypotheses are not established a priori;
c) The researcher is the primary instrument in data collection rather than some inanimate mechanism;
d) The data that emerge from a qualitative study are descriptive. That is, data is reported in words rather than in numbers.

In terms of this study, the social environment being investigated is specifically the Call Centre, which employs CSR's to handle incoming

water and sanitation customer complaints and compliments. The participant's experiences and perceptions were focused upon. It is also important to note that the researcher in this report is an employee of the Utility as a Customer Care Manager at an operational depot, which means that there would be some degree of unintended bias transferred to how the information is gathered and explained. The researcher was aware of this bias which could influence the outcome of the report. When conducting interviews, the researcher did not provide opinions of what the interviewees said. It was important also not to ask the questions in such a manner as to lead the answers from the interviewees. The researcher also asked the questions without showing bias through specific facial expressions.

Three methods of gathering data involved recording the views and experiences of the CSR's during one on one informal interviews, extracting and analysing primary data from the Utility's IMS and the observation of the CSR's within their work environment of the Call Centre.

The analysis of the primary data extracted from the information management system is crucial in demonstrating whether calls are being logged correctly or not. A specific high priority complaint type, namely sewer main blockages (C522) was chosen to be analysed over a period of six months, from January 2009 to June 2009. Primary data is presented in a table, whereby each month's service requests are described according to the number of complaints logged, actual works orders completed, the deviations between the actual blockages completed compared to the calls logged for the complaint, and lastly the percentage which describes this deviation. The analysis is important in indicating problems of interpretation when logging customer complaints.

3.2 Research Approach

The research at hand was answered using a single research method as the diverse interactions between the various parties affected by the implementation of a knowledge management system in a public utility is complex and varying in nature as described previously. A qualitative approach involves the researcher “going to the site of the participant to conduct research” (Creswell, 2003, p. 181). The benefit of the qualitative approach was that, as a researcher, I gained rich details and information of the environment and how the participant reacts within it.

3.3 Research Design

The primary data collected involved focused one-on-one interviews, with CSR Team leaders and Call Centre management. According to Babbie (2004), interviews may be used as a primary source of data collection in the case of a qualitative research methodology as they provide for fewer incomplete answers. The CSR’s are the employees who interact directly with the IMS system, and have months or years of experience interacting with customer queries, complaints and also escalating serious complaints to the Operations department for response. It was beneficial to interview the CSR Team Leaders to gain an understanding of what challenges the Call Centre faces. The interview schedule contained 13 questions (see Appendix B), which took approximately an hour to complete. The CSR’s provided information on what databases and or documents they refer to for retrieving the required knowledge when logging complaints. It was also essential to interview a manager, responsible to manage the information

(received as service requests) when it arrives at the depots. Issues relating to how response times may be affected due to poor information captured at the Call Centre confirm the experiences of the Operations department. This technique highlighted the need for collaboration and cooperation between the two departments.

The interaction with the Operations department via the interviews was essential to understand their frustrations and concerns due to inconsistent and poor information on service requests. By interviewing specific individuals from the Call Centre and Operations, valuable information was gained regarding the pressures, challenges and concerns existent within each of these sections. The inaccurate logging of customer complaints

CSR's were observed within the Call Centre environment itself. The "observation" involved a time period of an hour. Within this allocated time, I had an opportunity to observe without being disruptive at all, what the environmental and/or social behavioural impacts are on the customer interface. By observing elements of the Call Centre culture I gained a better understanding of what affects the interpretation of the customer calls. According to Creswell (2003, p. 186), the advantage of the qualitative research approach when conducting observations is that,

- "The researcher has a first hand experience with participants;
- The researcher can record information as it is revealed;
- Unusual aspects can be noticed during observation;
- It is useful in exploring topics that may be uncomfortable for the participant to discuss

3.4 Data Collection

The qualitative method involved document analysis, one-on-one interviews

as well as an observation of the call centre environment. The data analysis of text information included Standard Operating Procedures and Call Centre scripts. The data collection mechanism for the CSR-customer relationship involved a semi-structured interview protocol. Babbie (2004, p. 273) agrees that interviews elicit opinions and produce fewer incomplete answers. The interview questions included a mix of predominantly open-ended questions as well as a few mutually exclusive closed ended questions. The interview questions were focused on:

- Identifying what information the CSRs regarded as “crucial” business information in solving customer complaints;
- The storage and updating of the information;
- Training of the information;
- Sharing of the information;
- How do the CSRs acquire crucial business information;
- The value of managing crucial business knowledge;
- The role of senior management in KM

The interview protocol involved recording information as the interview was being conducted. There were ten interviews conducted with a specific group of managers, senior managers and customer service representatives. The interviewee sample was chosen based on levels of experience, responsibility, understanding and involvement with either the customer information captured or response to the information captured by the Call Centre. The interview sessions varied from 45 minutes to 60 minutes per interviewee. The names of the individuals were changed in

order to ensure confidentiality. The names of the respondents are replaced with acronyms, which are indicated in Table 1 below. Interviewee responses have been provided below each question posed, indicating the views of the respondents. The responses have been grouped together to emphasise the degree of consensus or agreement of the respondents interviewed. The emerging requirements and suggestions of the respondents have been presented according to the majority and or minority views.

Table 1: List of Respondents

No.	Interview Date	Respondent and Acronym
1	21/12/2009	Team Leader 1 (CSRTL 1)
2	21/12/2009	Team Leader 2 (CSRTL 2)
3	21/12/2009	Team Leader 3 (CSRTL 3)
4	21/12/2009	Team Leader 4 (CSRTL 4)
5	22/12/2009	Team Leader 5 (CSRTL 5)
6	22/12/2009	Team Leader 6 (CSRTL 6)
7	22/12/2009	Team Leader 7 (CSRTL 7)
8	22/12/2009	Acting Technical Contact Centre Manager (ATCCM)
9	23/12/2009	Customer Care Manager Operations(CCM)
10	23/12/2009	Regional Manager Operations (RM)

Primary data was also collected via Johannesburg Water's IMS system focusing on actual captured data captured from the Call Centre which was routed to the depots to be resolved. This primary data reflects the number of customer complaints within a specific time period (January 2009 to December 2009), the actual work done in response to the calls taken and the deviation between these. This was valuable in highlighting the value of quality information on providing excellent services.

Johannesburg Water's Call Centre occupies the entire first floor of the building which is based within the inner city of Johannesburg. The working environment of the Johannesburg Water Call Centre incorporates a large open plan space, within which the CSRs occupy cubicles. Each CSR has a head set attached to a telephone and a personal computer. In the middle of the floor, is the electronic customer notice board, which has urgent "no water" and "planned shutdown" notices displayed on it. This notice board is always kept updated with the latest notifications.

3.5 Conclusion

The qualitative approach of the research design provided valuable insight of the Call Centre, the people, processes and technologies that are being used to provide a certain level of customer services. By interacting with the CSRs via the one-on-one interviews, observing the environment and also extracting data from the IMS, the researcher gained an understanding of what, how and where knowledge is being managed in the Call Centre to ultimately provide customer service to the customers calling in to log water and sanitation complaints.

Chapter 4

Research Results

4.1 Introduction

As discussed in the previous chapter, one on one interviews were used as the data collection method to elicit opinions of the respondents. The intention was to gain a real understanding when analysing the possible factors that affect the dynamics of the customer interface at the Call Centre. Primary data for a specific complaint code was also extracted for analysis from Johannesburg Water's Information Management System focusing on a six month period (January 2009 to June 2009). Part of the qualitative research included spending time studying the environment at the Call Centre as an observer.

4.2 One-on-one interviews

4.2.1 Question One: What information do you regard as valuable and important when answering and solving customer complaints?

This question sought to confirm what information the CSR's as well as respondents from Operations thought of as "valuable" when attending to customer complaints through the customer interface at the Call Centre. Respondents from both the Call Centre and Operations felt strongly that the Call Centre scripts and the agreed Customer Service Standard Operating Procedures (SOP's) were the most crucial and valued sources of information to refer to. In terms of the Call Centre scripts, these are documents drafted in 2002/ 2003 when Johannesburg Water was established. These scripts offer the CSR set questions to follow in the customer interface. The CSRs are expected to ask complainants specific questions, which will provide clarification on the type of problem the

customer is experiencing. The assumption is that all customers are alike in reacting and responding to the questions posed.

“When we were trained on the Call Centre scripts, we were told to follow the specific questions. This did not leave much room for being flexible, considering that every customer call is different” (CSRTL1, 2009). “What I found interesting when I used to follow the Call Centre scripts was that when customers called to report a sewer main blockage, they would insist that the blockage is a main blockage. They wanted immediate reaction from the depots and were hesitant to answer any further questions. I guess you do get customers like this. Our customers are very clever, they know just how to make any problem ‘urgent’, in order to get a quicker response” (CSRTL2, 2009).

4.2.2 Where has this information been stored in the Call Centre?

All the respondents from the Call Centre thought that the SOP’s were found in physical files kept somewhere in the Call Centre, most probably in the senior managers office. All Team leaders had copies of the SOPs stored on their computers. Respondents from Operations also had copies of the Customer Service SOP’s on their computers for reference purposes. All respondents from the Call Centre had copies of the Call Centre scripts on their computers, while respondents from Operations did not have copies and were not familiar with them. This question aimed to investigate if the Team leaders actually had knowledge of where to find valuable business knowledge, and the types of technological tools used by the Call Centre to manage organisational knowledge and information. Only three Team leaders and the ATCCM were aware that the Call Centre also had a server which has both the Call Centre scripts and the SOP’s stored on it.

“I have kept information that I have thought was important for future reference for myself. I have kept copies of the Call Centre scripts and the SOPs in a folder in ‘My Documents’ on my pc” (CSRTL5, 2009).
“We have stored the SOP’s that we worked together with the Customer Service department at each of the depots, as well as with our senior management as hard copies and in a database at the Head Office. We refer to these as and when required” (CCM, 2009). Each section has used different ways of gathering; storing and utilising the crucial information found in SOPs and Call Centre scripts. People have taken the necessary steps, according to their information and knowledge requirements to collect, store and utilise valuable information that they may use to manage their work.

4.2.3 When last were you trained on this information?

This question looked at how often this crucial business information and knowledge is shared. Retraining is essential in this environment where the staff turnaround is very high, and also where CSR’s have adapted the processes so much so that these processes may be far removed from their intended purposes. The Call Centre respondents all confirmed that they were trained on the Call Centre scripts when they joined the company, and not thereafter. The SOP’s were trained in 2003 and retraining has not taken place since. Three of the Call Centre respondents felt that they receive training everyday through their specific experiences and through what they “learn” from other colleagues working in the Call Centre.

“I was trained on the Call Centre scripts when I joined in 2003. The SOPs were trained with all staff in 2003, and since then we have used them as reference documents, or refer to them when someone has not complied with a procedure or process. I know that these are valuable documents, but the information in them needs serious “overhauling” (CSRTL 6, 2009).

“We can see that the quality of information is becoming worse. This is a clear indication that training or retraining is not happening. The Call Centre used to be much more effective when regular training was taking place. The other thing is that the CSRs used to come to the depot for ‘onsite training’. They would travel with the teams and visit the various types of complaints. By seeing what technical problems are actually like, they were able to take down complaints much more effectively. They no longer come to the depots for training, in fact they don’t even request it anymore” (CCM, 2009).

4.2.4 Has this information been updated that you are aware of?

This question seeks to establish whether Call Centre management has proactively and consistently updated improvements and changes to the standing processes and procedures. All the respondents confirmed that they were not aware if the SOP’s and Call Centre scripts have been updated. If these documents were updated, they were not made aware of it. No communication was received from management that these documents have been updated or changed.

“I am not sure if the Call Centre scripts are as relevant as they used to be…Well the customers themselves have changed since we first started, they seem more demanding” (CSRTL 6, 2009). CSRTL6 and CSRTL7 agreed that management needed to take the updating of the scripts seriously. The reason for this is that they know that their calls are monitored at times, and that they did not want this to affect their performance.

4.2.5 Do you know who is responsible to update any changes to the Call Centre procedures? Please expand

All respondents felt strongly that it was the duty and responsibility of "someone" from senior management who should be updating any changes to SOP's and Call Centre scripts. Respondents, CSRTL1, CSRTL2 and CSRTL6 felt that there needs to be regular meetings with management, whereby any changes for improvement can be discussed for implementation. These respondents emphasised that all relevant stakeholders need to be involved. "We deal with customers all day, we know mostly the type of problems they experience and we know also how to deal with the worst ones. I am not saying that I know everything; I am still learning new things when I speak to customers. Management must involve us, the people on the ground when revising the scripts" (CSRTL 5, 2009).

4.2.6 How have you acquired the knowledge you have in order to respond to customer complaints effectively and efficiently? Please explain.

CSRTL1 stated that he uses the knowledge that he gained over the years of working in the Call Centre as well as the training he was exposed to when he visited the operational depots. According to this respondent, "getting the information right" is still a trial and error process. In many situations, he would also contact the operational depots and speak to technical staff that provided answers to complicated customer questions.

According to CSRTL2, CSRTL3, CSRLTL4, CSRTL5, CSRTL6 and CSRTL7 knowledge has also been gained through years of experience of working in the Call Centre environment. However, by talking to colleagues working in the same environment, more knowledge has been acquired. "If

I am stuck, or if I feel that need some advice, I ask my colleagues, some of who have been here longer than I have. Yes, discussing with colleagues has helped me greatly get by with some of the more difficult customer interactions. I think that I have become more confident and comfortable to answer any type of complaint" (CSRTL 4, 2009).

ATCCM also felt that by being proactive and having an enquiring mind, has resulted in assisting with learning more about the Call Centre. This respondent has ensured that she has gathered all the SOP's and Call Centre scripts, and saved these in files on her pc for reference purposes. "We work well as a team here, and we help each other with information on processes when ever needs be" (ATCCM, 2009).

According to the RM and the CCM, respondents from Operations, the CSR's needed to have regular training, and meetings to share information and knowledge. The concern from Operations is that the quality of information captured is directly linked to the information that the CSR's have "gathered" over the years, and that this may not be inline with the organisation's perspective. "Some times I wonder where these guys get their information from; it seems that they have reinvented some of the SOP's to suit themselves. We are on the receiving end of the poor information, and we have to sometimes make another call to the customer to investigate and confirm what the problem exactly is. This is pure time and money wastage" (CCM, 2009)

4.2.7 Are your colleagues willing to share any organisational knowledge they may have with you? Please explain.

60% of the respondents believed that colleagues were willing to share information. While the remaining 40%, concurred that CSR's display what would be considered as normal human behaviour, by being unwilling to

share information easily. This they felt is not something that could be changed overnight, and that they were possessive because of the type of environment found in the Call Centre. “I know what I know, because of the type of person I am. I have spent many years gathering my information. I have realised that I need to keep this information to myself as no one else shares anyway. I know that this does not seem good, but when I have done my best no one cares. I don’t get anything for trying very hard. I have come up with new and excellent ways of collecting and retrieving my information. I did even show this to one of my seniors, but I guess that this will take too much effort from their side to even think about it” (CSRTL1, 2009).

Respondents from Operations emphasised that sharing is always good, but this still needs to be controlled by Call Centre management, as to whether or not the information and knowledge shared is actually constructive or not. “I recall that many years ago, we went through quite a process to revise the SOP’s. This process was very inclusive, and we, that’s the entire team, learnt a lot from just speaking to each other. I was glad that we actually came together to revise the SOP’s, I think that it was one of the best decisions that the management of the time actually did. It is a shame that since then, we did not see the signed versions, neither were we retrained on the new SOP’s. All our hard work seemed to be in vain, as so much has changed since then!” (CCM, 2009).

4.2.8 Do you think it would be useful to consistently update changes to the SOP’s and Call Centre scripts? Please explain.

All the respondents agreed that it is imperative that the customer service SOP’s and the Call Centre scripts are consistently updated. Respondents from Call Centre and Operations stated that in this way the documents remain as relevant documents which have valuable organisational knowledge. The ATCCM felt that this is also important when using the

documents for conducting training of new incumbents and retraining for other employees.

“Times are constantly changing. We are living in a changing world; it seems that we are still placing emphasis on the past. Our core reference documents have not been updated for such a long time. I know that we refer to them only in name, and not for the value of the information that is found in them. We are at too low a level to pressurise management to do something about this. All we can do is survive here, and make sure that we make our performance targets” (CSRTL 2, 2009).

“What concerns me is that there is no monitoring of consistency and standards, for us at the Call Centre, or for what Operations does. I can not remember anything from the induction training I had four years ago. I know that someone gave a speech on the Call Centre scripts, gave me a hard copy, and said that I must refer to this when answering complaints. It did work at the beginning, but I must say that it did not leave me much room to be flexible. I found my own way of dealing with customers, even the worst ones” (CSRTL 4, 2009).

4.2.9 Do you think it would be valuable to manage organisational knowledge for the benefit of the employees as well as the organisation itself? Why do you think so?

Respondents repeated their points of view regarding the value it would hold for the company. CSRLT1 – CSRLT 7 felt that in a changing environment, especially with the high turnover at the Call Centre, people leave the company with valuable information and knowledge. They emphasised that in some cases they had to “reinvent” certain processes where through time the original had changed so much, without being captured, that the new processes seemed far removed from what they were actually trying to achieve. Call Centre respondents were keen to

mention that if they were made to feel part of the process of sharing knowledge, they would have more ownership of the information and knowledge. Employee engagement would provide valuable insight to the management of customers as well as into what influences and affects the CSRs in performing their daily tasks to the level of what the business requires.

CSRTL1 mentioned that in some cases, due to the lack of management of this valuable information, whether tacit or explicit, this has resulted in "good people" leaving out of frustration. CSRTL2 also added that while it is their duty to help customers, they feel that management has not helped them. There is a lack of continuous support in the form of providing training and having meetings where they can contribute to increasing and improving their current knowledge base.

The ATCCM confirmed that there was a "Quality Assurance section" that checked if the information recorded on the IMS was according to the SOP's. The Team leader from this section also checked the "voice recording" on random calls to check if the questions asked complied with the scripting. The ATCCM also mentioned that at times it was difficult to check the voice recording system to do monitoring, as the system was frequently not working. There were many occasions where they had picked up problem areas, and conducted retraining with those particular individuals. The respondents from Operations were aware of the voice recording system, but also confirmed that this was unreliable, as the system "was more down than working". Accenture (2007, p. 1), a global management consulting, technology services and outsourcing company, believe that "listening to the voice of the customer", carries "the potential for gaining critical business intelligence". The analysis and monitoring of the customer interface provides an opportunity for management to identify the knowledge gaps within the "people", "processes" and the "technology"

and to find effective ways of improving these. Call analysis is important in providing ways of continually improving the services provided.

CSRTL4 stated that, “We are at the front line of the customer interface, and this is not easy. Dealing with irate customers most of the time takes a lot of energy. We are expected to know what we know and always be on top of things. We need management to play their part. When last were we trained on anything new?”

CSRTL3 stated, “I have been dealing with customers for the last three years, and I have definitely learnt a lot by now on how to ‘read’ a customer just by the tone in his/her voice. I think that I gathered quite a bit of technical knowledge by liaising with the technical specialists from the depots, and this has helped me to give more accurate feedback to the customer as well as to analyse the problem when capturing on the IMS. I think that management must create some kind of an avenue for us to get together and share our ideas and experiences. I think that this could be more relevant to our new employees than just handing them the ‘old’ scripts that we received years ago” (CSRTL3, 2009).

4.2.10 Do you think that senior management support is important in managing knowledge and implementing a KM program? Why?

All respondents agreed that senior management needs to play a key role on ensuring that this business process succeeds. CSRTL1-CSRTL7 and ATCCM felt that without senior management’s involvement “nothing would happen”. According to the Call Centre respondents, staff in the Call Centre would take a project or an instruction more seriously if it came from senior management. According to the ATCCM, the CSRs need to “see” senior managers being involved. They, the CSRs would be more positive and buy-in would be better with the involvement of senior management.

“Management’s presence is critical in anything that needs implementing. If we see that management is serious this will be shown through their presence and support of the new program. They need to be consistent though. I am sure that we can learn a lot from each other, and with management giving their approval stamp, we will achieve even more” (CSRTL 7).

Respondents from Operations also supported the involvement of senior management to ensure that the KM as a business process is successful. “The KM business process can be very beneficial to the Call Centre and the company as a whole. Can you imagine all of us working together to improve by sharing what we know, and to even implement what we agree to be the best for our company. Senior management can make this happen if they put their minds to it. Time is of the essence. We know what is lacking, I am sure they also see that” (CCM, 2009).

4.2.11 What role do you think “people”, “processes” and “technology” play within the Call Centre/ organisation?

All respondents felt that each of these components, on its own was not enough to achieve the objectives of the Call Centre. They were in agreement that a combination of the three components would result in a quality service being delivered to customers, as the right information would be captured in the right time, through the right people. CSRTL2 said that there were times when the “people” are not considered at all. They are seen as just implementers. This, according to CSRTL2, made the CSR’s feel like “outsiders”, as their opinions, and experiences and knowledge was not taken seriously. CSRTL5 added by saying that in some cases, management relies too much on “technology” to solve all its problems, and that the “people” component is forgotten.

“I can still remember when we worked on our previous IMS called Tasker, it was a great system. I know that one of its main problems was that we

could not interface it with the Billing system. Besides that, I can't understand why we had to change. We were never really advised as to why the change of IMS was necessary. It has taken us five years to get used to this new system, and I am sure that we will be changing to another system just as we are getting more comfortable with this one. I don't believe that the IMS has actually brought us as departments closer, in fact we have fallen more into the "silo mentality" than ever before" (CSRTL1, 2009).

"I agree that technology is very important, but how can it be more important than the people that actually will make this technology work? The other thing that concerns me is that I find that we have a tendency to change IT systems, because we believe that they will solve all our problems, whether it be customer, finance or even to monitor the number of bursts. The question I feel that we need to ask is, have we asked the people who interact everyday with the customers, the people that do the month end reports, shall I rather say, and the people behind the scenes, what they think? I don't feel that management trusts its people as much as they trust the IT systems" (CSRTL2, 2009).

4.2.12 Do you think it's important to integrate these components? Please explain.

All respondents, including those from Operations agreed that the three components should be integrated in order for the organisation as a whole to benefit. 90% of the respondents from the Call Centre emphasised that the struggle they are faced with is while being efficient (the number of calls taken, the duration of the calls, etc), they are expected to still be effective (offering a quality service to customers on the telephone). These respondents believe that an overemphasis on the use of technology to monitor efficiency also has had negative consequences.

CSRTL2 and CSRTL5 said that changes to processes are often the "side effects" of changes to technology, and this is an indication that the people

that signed off on the new technology have no appreciation for the people that implement the system on a daily basis. Changes should be done, while taking the people and the processes as well into account. “We really need a new way of thinking here. We’ve been doing things, for the sake of doing them, some processes don’t make much sense anymore, and some technologies that we’ve been using don’t even work consistently. Yes, it would be great if we, the company, could come up with something that best matches our business as it is today, as well as to plan for the future” (CSRTL6, 2009).

4.2.13 Do you think KM can be implemented to achieve organisational success? Please explain.

All respondents were in agreement that it was crucial for the business knowledge to be maintained, stored and managed so that goals and targets can be achieved. The ATCCM felt that there were some traces of KM already prevalent in the Call Centre, but that it was not properly managed. The Team leaders repeated once again that good plans and ideas remain just as that, because of the lack of sustained support from higher up. CSRTL 5 and 6 believe that KM would assist in clearly defining goals and objectives, while CSRTL2 stated that KM would be useful in involving individuals at different levels with relevant experience and to be able to workshop best practice / methods to achieve goals and objectives. CSRTL1 added that KM would assist in rolling out a training plan with set targets. The most popular and positive outcome that the respondents all agreed on is the aspect of “sharing information”, which in turn would encourage effective teamwork and team building. At the moment there are inadequate methods of sharing knowledge, as well as the collection and maintenance of this knowledge is lacking.

Respondents from Operations also indicated their support of KM as a

business process to improve service delivery. The importance of quality information is critical when responding to a customer complaint. The CCM provided an example of an incorrect problem code on the IMS and what consequences this has on the team being sent out to respond and complete the job. Overall the respondents were of the belief that KM offers a solution to appreciating the specialised knowledge that individuals may have, and to find a way of aligning this to the organisation's vision.

4.3 Research Results from Information Management System (IMS)

The IMS utilised by Johannesburg Water is an American system called Hansen, version 7.7. This system was implemented from August 2004, and is used by the Call Centre, Operations, including networks, environmental management, electro mechanical support, Capex, revenue and the works section.

4.3.1 The Value of "Customer experience management systems"

According to Bucci (2006, p. 1), "Companies invest in 'customer experience management systems' to ensure consistent, accurate, and positive customer interactions and to reduce Call Centre operating costs". Currently the purpose of the system utilised in the Call Centre ensures:

- Logging of water and sanitation customer complaints and requests, including Billing/ Revenue issues;

- The provision of customer interaction reports, i.e. resolution analysis, outstanding reporting;

- Provision of Asset management reports;
- Effective management of preventative maintenance programmes;
- Response Times reports

Table 2 shown below provides an understanding of the link between the call taken and the actual response provided. The period drawn and analysed is January 2009 to June 2009. Service requests were drawn from the IMS, and refer specifically to a depot in the southern region of Johannesburg. The C522 code refers to sewer main blockages. This problem type, is classified as a high priority problem code, and as such has a 24 hour completion time.

The column indicating the “Number of Complaints Logged at the Call Centre” shows the customer complaints that have been logged for sewer main blockages at the Call Centre. These can only reflect on the IMS if the CSR has created a service request for the customer reporting a problem.

The column “ACTUAL WORKS ORDERS COMPLETED” indicates the number of “real” main blockages that were completed by the Operational depot, in response to the customer complaint. The “DIFFERENCE/ DEVIATION” column is important in showing the difference between the number of sewer main blockage complaints logged and the actual number of blockages cleared by the Operational Teams.

The last column reflects the percentage of the actual sewer blockages cleared from the number of complaints received at the Call Centre. This percentage is crucial in demonstrating the information and knowledge gap of the complaint taken at the Call Centre versus the actual work done on site by Operations. Only 33%, or one third of the complaints logged as sewer main blockages are completed as real sewer main blockages. This indicates that two-thirds of the complaints logged have not been high

priority complaints which has serious consequences on the time and cost wastage for the Operational depot.

Table 2: Service requests logged versus actual response provided

PROBLEM OR COMPLAINT CODE	PERIOD IN WHICH SERVICE REQUESTS ARE RECEIVED	NUMBER OF COMPLAINTS LOGGED AT THE CALL CENTRE	ACTUAL WORKS ORDERS COMPLETED	DIFFERENCE / DEVIATION	PERCENTAGE OF ACTUAL WORKS ORDERS COMPLETED COMPARED TO TOTAL COMPLAINTS (SERVICE REQUESTS) RECEIVED
Sewer Main Blockages: Problem code(C522)	JAN 2009	525	141	384	27%
	FEB 2009	491	158	333	32%
	MAR 2009	543	163	380	30%
	APR 2009	481	199	282	41%
	MAY 2009	555	182	373	33%
	JUN 2009	618	212	406	34%

Sewer Main Blockages: Problem code(C522)	**TOTAL**	**3213**	**1055**	**2158**	**33%**

4.4 Research Results from Observation at Call Centre

The Call Centre' environment was observed for a period of an hour, during which the representatives were observed in their work environment answering calls and interacting with each other as well as with any KM tools. The environment was highly pressurised, with the sound of telephones ringing, people talking and people typing on keyboards. The urgent notices were placed on an electronic notice board found in the middle of the Call Centre. There were individuals found interacting with each other in groups as well as those individuals who were sitting next to each other found discussing issues. The environment was not over restrictive, as it was "open plan" in design, except for the fact that there was an intention to maximise the space. The effects of this work environment may affect the concentration demands of the CSRs. Work environment and task related stressors may negatively affect the quality of the information captured on the service requests and CSRs who feel strain in some form or another will not perform as well as expected.

4.5 Conclusion

Research results were obtained from the interviewees held with the CSR Team leaders, data extraction from the IMS as well as by observing the Call Centre environment at the Call Centre. Through interviewing the CSRs, crucial information regarding current KM applications as well as KM gaps that exists which impacts on the CSRs being more effective and efficient were recorded. The primary data extracted from the IMS provides critical information which highlights the role and value played by the Call Centre to the organisation achieving its customer centred goals. The

observation of the Call Centre environment offered important clues to the psychosocial factors which are impacting on the CSRs daily performance.

Chapter 5

Data Analysis

Data analysis conducted is based on the information gathered through the one on one informal interviews, the IMS as well as by observing the CSRs within the Call Centre environment.

5.1 Data Analysis from Interviews

The responses from the one-on-one interviews were aligned with the focus of the research questions. These responses have been categorised according to the main themes that the research questions have been based on. It was essential to initially investigate what the respondents viewed as “valuable business information and knowledge”. It was important to establish this at the outset, as this would confirm if the respondents agreed on what information is regarded as “valuable” to the success of the company. This knowledge was identified as two main sources, i.e. Customer Services standard operating procedures and Call Centre scripts. It was interesting to note that the Call Centre scripts were documents that the respondents from Operations had heard of, but were not familiar with the information contained within them. This raises the question of whether these scripts were actually formulated together with specialists from Operations who have the relevant technical information and knowledge. The technical specialists needed to be involved in the formulation of the scripts, to guide the questions which the CSRs would pose to the customer. Valid and accurate questions are important in drawing relevant information from the customer. This is crucial as the problem type is only logged on the IMS when the CSR gains a better understanding of what problem the customer is experiencing through the line of questioning that has taken place.

The second question looks specifically at the collection, storage and access of crucial Call Centre data. It was clear that the respondents from the Call Centre had copies of the SOP's stored on their computers. There was an assumption that senior management had physical copies stored in files. The access to this was for senior management. The Call Centre scripts are only kept by Call Centre staff and not anyone from Operations. The respondents from Operations indicated that they were unfamiliar with these scripts and how they worked. The concern here is that these scripts directly affect how the complaint is classified and recorded on the IMS. Should the incorrect or irrelevant questions be asked then the CSR would log an incorrect problem code. Table 2 reflects the discrepancies between the number of sewer main blockage complaints logged versus the number of actual blockages completed. There is a link between the number of discrepancies, the input of the scripts and how the classification of the complaint on the IMS occurs.

The outcome is that Operations may not respond timeously and with the correct team. By prompting the customer to provide relevant information, the CSR should be able to gain information that allows him/her to make a valued judgement on what the actual problem on site is. Figure 5 below, represents the Call Centre script for determining whether a sewer complaint is either a private or a main blockage. The "yes" or "no" answer from the complainant would then indicate to the CSR which problem type to log onto the IMS.

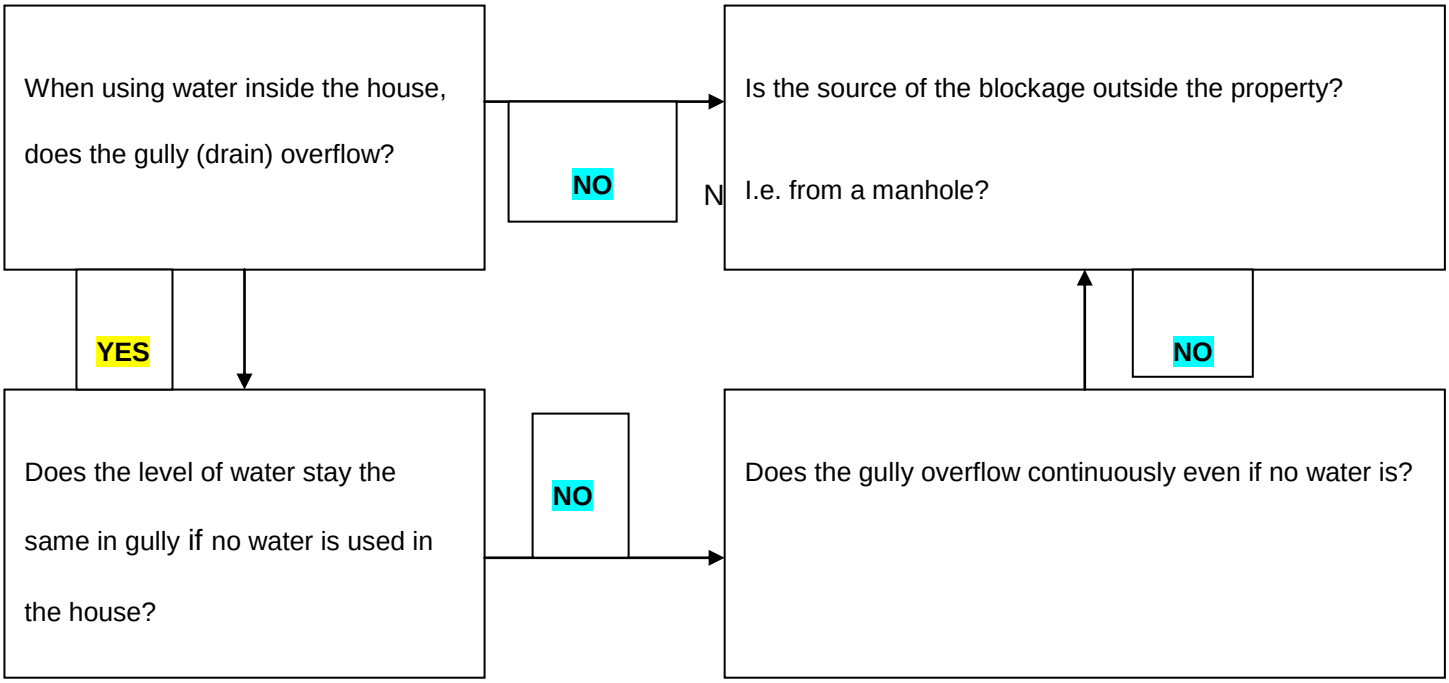
Figure 5: JW Call Centre script and Process Flow for Sewer main blockages - C522 Johannesburg Water (PTY) Ltd 2002/2003

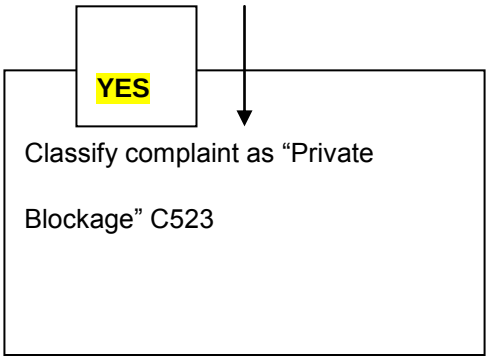
Script for Determining Type of Sewer Blockage

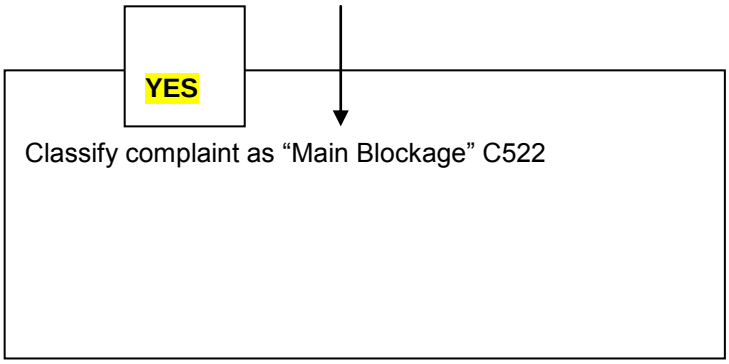
C523: This code is used for all private blockages that are reported to JW. This is usually indicated by the internal drains being blocked and only overflowing when a toilet, bath or sink is used by the residents of the property. There is a charge applicable to this service of which the customer must be made aware. An account number is therefore required for all these types of complaints.

C522: This code is used for all main line blockages that are reported to JW. This usually indicates that a sewer manhole is overflowing with sewer continuously overflowing, even if the residents of the property are not using their drainage system. The manhole could be either OFF or ON the property. The location of the manhole needs to be indicated on the service request. **Both stand numbers and street addresses are to be requested from the customer.**

Introduction: "Good day Sir/ Madam, do you mind if I ask you a few questions to determine the correct problem so ensure that JW are able to attend to your problem as efficiently as possible?"







Three team leaders and the ATCCM mentioned that they were aware that the Call Centre utilised a server which stored SOP’s, Call Centre scripts and other policy documents. The remaining respondents were totally unaware of this KM tool being used for the collection and utilisation of other Call Centre staff. This has not been effectively communicated to all staff, and hence the poor usage of this tool.

The study also indicated that the Call Centre has a voice recording system that is used at times, when working, to monitor if the CSRs were complying with the scripting and the SOP’s. Call monitoring has great value for identifying “problem areas” where training could be done. By identifying the gaps, Call Centre management could improve the quality of information that is being recorded on the IMS, as well as ensuring that customers are given the correct information and thereby improving customer satisfaction. Management should make sure that the system is always in working order, even if more resources are required to make this happen. Call monitoring has an important role to play in ensuring that tacit and explicit knowledge are utilised effectively.

According to Accenture (2007, p. 2), once management has been able to identify gaps, “this information is often used to coach individual agents on their performance or to develop more effective, better targeted agent training programs”. In this manner, individuals will have an opportunity to

acknowledge their own shortfalls and accept retraining. Every incoming call provides as opportunity for management to improve the services provided, as well as to encourage a learning organisation. Accenture suggests that those individuals who have been identified as specialists, and who are “best in the business” could have an opportunity of having their “best calls into a learning library” (Accenture, 2007, p. 3).

Senior management should place greater importance on the value of “coaching”. CSRs can be given a clear indication of their level of performance, through listening in on the conversations that they have with customers. In this manner, they will hear exactly how they communicated with the customer while capturing important information on the IMS. Any deviations from procedures could be discussed with the CSR, and development plans can be put into place immediately. Effective coaching will be helpful in reinforcing an environment of knowledge sharing as well as increasing staff motivation and morale. Through the regular reviewing of recorded CSR customer interface, senior management will be sending a message to the CSRs that the job they are performing is of value, both to the Call Centre and the company itself.

The respondents from the Call Centre also confirmed that in terms of the “sharing” of the information, in the form of training and retraining, all respondents from the Call Centre had only been trained on the scripts when they joined Johannesburg Water. CSRTL1 mentioned that “it’s not like we know everything, we are constantly learning, and therefore we need to update our resource documents regularly for them to have any value” (CSRTL1, 2009). They did indicate as well that the knowledge they gained by “talking” to other colleagues from either the Call Centre or from the depot, played an important role in terms of where they sourced their information from. This indicates that people are sharing information, within the call centre and across departments. The current knowledge documents and technological tools, which are made available to the

CSRs, seem insufficiently matched to the knowledge need.

This type of information sharing of what the CSRs assume the business knowledge to be may be “misaligned” with what the company views as its business knowledge. New experiences and trends that have been established are not being discussed for updating the SOP’s. These valuable documents were signed off by senior management in 2003, and has since not been updated. Senior management needs to ensure that the Call Centre staff are familiar with and know how to access information through the KM tools that the organisation has chosen to use. When individuals urgently require information, they will find channels to acquire this via sources that management itself may be unhappy with.

According to Primus Knowledge Solutions (2002, p. 5), “for most companies, potentially valuable information exists in multiple locations in multiple formats”, and therefore management needs to ensure that people know where and how to access relevant information quickly. The best practices of many years ago may not necessarily be the solution for the present, and therefore these best practices must be improved upon to provide the organisation with the “best way” to survive in an ever changing environment.

Respondents did believe that their senior management must ensure that regular meetings be held, so that ideas for changes can be discussed. Individuals at a senior level, should be able to identify who their specialists are, and provide opportunities for these people to contribute to sharing their knowledge. Management needs to find a way of identifying where and what knowledge exists in the organisation. The knowledge data base can be improved on if the “people” component is effectively utilised by senior management for their intellectual contributions to improve “processes”.

60% of the respondents from the Call Centre believed that the sharing of ideas, information and knowledge actually takes place within their environment. A KM business process cannot be successful if the knowledge is not shared within the work environment. Primus Knowledge Solutions emphasise that, “The major implementation hurdle in a knowledge-sharing system is not the technology, it is getting people used to it” (2002, p. 6). As social beings, people interact within a social environment which has networks. These networks need to be recognised and utilised by management for the value they may have regarding the specialised knowledge they could contribute to the knowledge base. The willingness to share valuable information and knowledge can only be supported if the environment created by management encourages this.

The customer interface requires a one on one interaction between the customer and the CSR. The “interface” involves human beings on either side of the telephone, one at the customer service front line, the CSR, providing the answers and the other being the customer, who is expecting to receive a high level of service. In order to analyse the customer’s problem and provide the necessary feedback, the CSR needs to have the correct information to share with the customer, as well as log the complaint on the IMS. The customer expects the call to be answered in such a way, that when they have completed reporting their complaint, they are more than satisfied with the service. The CSR has to have relevant information in order to respond accurately to the customer. eGain (2004, p. 11) highlight that, “it is important to routinely evaluate all knowledge items based on their creation and revision dates to make sure that they are still current”. Consistent training and retraining will assist with ensuring that all CSRs give the correct answer each time.

It is evident that there are excessive emotional demands which are supported by Curry and Lyon (2006, p. 2),

> “Employees are expected to appear happy to serve customers, in spite of any contradictions in their feelings. Management has to extend their concern over the negative effects of such emotional labour on employee psychological well-being and job-related burnout, defined as a state of emotional exhaustion caused by excessive psychological and emotional demands made on people helping people”.

The result of the “work pressure and conflict can lead to emotional exhaustion, resulting in increased absenteeism” (Curry et al, 2006, p. 2). Interviewees have confirmed that the staff turnover is high at the Call Centre. The stresses and constraints of this work environment have in some cases forced “good people” to leave. One can only assume that these individuals attempted to make the best of the situation as they could, but resorted to leaving may have been the best solution for them at the time. The results of high turn over are that a business loses not only the skilled and experienced employee, but that years of crucial business memory is lost. Management has to restart the process of training and developing its employees with business knowledge. This process of “redoing” can be viewed as costly and can also have a negative affects on productivity, the ability to provide a quality service as well as impacting on the morale of the people that work in these environments.

The study also indicated through the views of the Call Centre respondents, that they are continually motivating themselves. They have “taught themselves” after being trained only when they joined the company, and have since used what ever means to “remain in the loop”. This means that individuals must consistently find the energy to keep themselves committed in some form to the work they are expected to carry out. Management has been unable to “read the environment” and find ways of rectifying the situation. The CSRs display of form of emotional exhaustion, when they have to find their own ways of collecting and storing information

(Curry and Lyon (2008, p. 2).

It is crucial that employees actually understand their roles and job requirements in relation to the company's goals. Committed and motivated staff can assist in ensuring that technologies work and processes are adhered to. Employees that know what they are supposed to do, and how to retrieve the information and knowledge to ensure that they do the right work, are empowered employees. In turn, they would provide a better service to the customers calling into the Call Centre.

Working in the Call Centre is not, according to the study, as pleasant and easy a job or environment as one might think. The study revealed that there was not a strong sense of "team work" or camaraderie among the CSRs in general. The CSRs have to a large degree been left to their own devices to "get long and do the work", but this weakened morale as well as encouraged CSRs to "watch their backs". The appearance of "loyalty" and "commitment" seems to be purely out of fear of perhaps losing the job. Knowledge sharing is merely part of getting the work done. Effective collaboration and co-operation are important to enabling the Call Centre reach its customer related goals and targets.

The information that the employees have "in their heads" leaves with them every day when they go home. Why is this the case? It seems that the employees have built protective walls around themselves to protect "gained knowledge, ideas and other resources" that are valuable to them. The work of "answering customer complaints" should be viewed as "adding value and meaning" to the ultimate goal of the Call Centre and to the organisation, i.e. the attainment of customer satisfaction. It should be adding personal value to the individual CSR's who should be constantly striving to better themselves, in their career advancement path. In this manner, everyone succeeds and so does the organisation in achieving its business goals.

The Call Centre management needs to find ways of converting and incorporating the CSRs tacit knowledge into explicit organisational knowledge that can contribute to the organisation's knowledge base. The benefits of "common knowledge practices" (Baker and Badamshina, 2002, p. 13) relates to improved business processes, improved information management technologies and systems, more effective teams and better customer services.

The lack of recognition was also prevalent in the outcome of the study. Although some CSR's came forward to management with good ideas, they believed would make a difference in the way that they managed their work, these were not taken forward. The CSR's are not formally recognised for their efforts. None of the CSRs mentioned that they had received any form of motivation through a reward or recognition system. The only form of reward is the performance bonus that the CSRs may receive based of their performance within the financial period. Recognition must be part of the work environment, as without it people who "go out of their way to perform" and don't get recognised, may quickly change their attitudes, which in turn has a negative impact on their work.

Having the right or the most efficient technology does not mean the most effective service. Hylton (2002, p. 3) confirm that,

> "Implementing technology is more often than not viewed as a quick and easy fix. Technology is savvy; technology is easy to quantify; technology is easy to buy and install; technology largely captures explicit, tangible, documented knowledge, which is easy to see, touch and use. But a technology centred approach to knowledge management is the single, most damaging element of knowledge management in practice".

The components of "people", "process" and "technology" works in a close

balance together. The overemphasis of one or two over the other may result in an unintended undesired outcome, whereby services are not being delivered efficiently and effectively. Technology is useful in that it provides a way of collecting, sorting, utilising and sharing information, in this form technology can be viewed as the “enabler”. This is supported by Skyrme (2002, p. 3) when he states that technology “makes it easier to assemble and share information across organisational boundaries”. However, while the technology is available, management must ensure that “meetings and events, which act as vehicles to share tacit knowledge” are organised (Skyrme, 2002, p. 6).

IBM (2006, p. 10) suggests that CSRs need, “dynamic access to information and applications”, through the appropriate technology, which will “enhance collaboration between users and enabling businesses to respond in near real time to changing market conditions and customer requirements”. In this manner, technology assists in bringing the users together to strive for continuous improving their knowledge capital of the business. CSRs would feel more empowered and confident of themselves to be able to answer all variations of customer complaints and requests. The return on investment for the Call Centre would be “cost savings, operational efficiency and user satisfaction” (IBM, 2006, p. 11).

The emphasis on “balancing technology with personal service delivery” is essential to “maintain the value-added element” (Curry and Lyon, 2008, p. 1). The responsibility of making this happen lies with senior management, especially as there is a “rise in customer expectation of service delivery” (Curry et al, 2008, p. 1). The Beagle Research Group (2006, p. 3) reiterates the feelings from the Call Centre interviewees in that, “technology introduction drives process innovation and only then are users considered”. Hylton (2002, p. 3) adds that, “knowledge management is essentially about people and culture, and that the focus on technology

alone cannot meet the challenges of initiating and implementing truly effective knowledge management".

Call Centre management should ensure that the preferred KM solutions implemented are viable and realistic in terms of the specific environment of the Call Centre within Johannesburg Water. An effective KM program within the Call Centre would include both a top down and a bottom up approach. The support from Johannesburg Water's management and leadership is critical, and the needs analysis from the bottom up is crucial to provide details of "what's actually going on". In this way the components of "culture", "environment", and other organisational issues can be identified and analysed. Robertson adds further that the findings have to be meaningfully acted upon, and "will undoubtedly include a range of both strategic (long term) and tactical (short term) initiatives.

What the employees wish to see is the direct involvement of management in recognising that there are problems of managing information at the Call Centre. Employees will not be able to sustain knowledge management applications if management has not firstly conducted a proper knowledge audit. The knowledge audit would provide an "indication of the company's knowledge 'health', through fact finding, analysis, interpretation, and reporting activities which includes a study of the company's information and knowledge policies, its knowledge structure and knowledge flows" (Hylton, 2002, p. 4). Management needs to also ask the question, "Is Johannesburg Water ready for knowledge management?" Through the knowledge management audit, that knowledge that has been "out of sight", now will be revealed for the benefit of all sections and departments, with the greatest benefit eventually going to the customer.

The KM strategy would need to be specific to the Call Centre of Johannesburg Water, while including other departments that are "customers" of the Call Centre to participate as well. Robertson (2004, p.

7) believes that,

> "Developing a knowledge management strategy provides a unique opportunity to gain a greater understanding of the way the organisation operates, and the challenges that confront it"

The successful implementation of the KM audit requires the "top down" strategic thrust from the top managers who show a "vote of confidence", appreciation, support and involvement in the KM audit and thereafter the KM strategy achieving its goals.

5.2 Data Analysis from IMS

The data acquired from the IMS was analysed in terms of the number of calls received for a specific complaint code, and the percentage of that code that were actual problems on site. The data from IMS is relevant for sewer main blockages reported to the Call Centre within a six month period, from January 2009 to June 2009. These blockages were routed to the Southdale Operational Depot within the period mentioned. The total number of blockages logged in the period is 3213, of which 1055 service requests were reported by the teams as actual sewer main blockages. This information is recorded on a JW job card, and brought back to the depot for capturing by the Team Leaders. The Data controllers based at the depot capture the job card information onto the IMS.

It is interesting to note that only 33% of the reported sewer main blockages were actual main blockages, leaving the remaining 67% classified as other problems. Sewer problems are given the quickest resolution time, i.e. 24 hours, from the date and time that a customer logs the call at the Call Centre. From the call date and time, the "clock" starts ticking. Based on the address of the complaint, the IMS defaults the problem to the responsible depot, as in the case of Southdale depot.

The teams that are allocated these jobs are “Sewer Operators/ Artisans”. These specific teams comprise of the Team leader plus three other workers. The sewer teams are allocated the highest number of people, due to the nature of the work of unblocking the sewer mains, as well as the safety aspect. According to the evidence provided by this study, one third of the reported blockages are real main blockages. The root of this problem is related to the type of information that is being recorded by the CSRs logging the complaints at the Call Centre. Questions of “are the CSR’s actually utilising the Call Centre scripts”, or “are the scripts no longer effective enough to be able to draw the information out of the customer” need to be asked.

The correct questions need to be asked in order for the accurate problem code and additional comments from the customer to be recorded on the IMS. Through the interviews, it was clear that the CSR’s have not been retrained on the scripts since they joined the Call Centre, in some cases over 6 years ago. It also seems that the Customer Service SOP’s in terms of following the work flow is also poorly being adhered to. The CSRs have come up with their own personal methods, making use of both tacit and explicit knowledge gained over the years, when dealing with each customer complaint. It gives the impression that these CSRs operate almost in a “survival mode”, whereby they take the calls in order to achieve “efficiency” targets, i.e. the number of calls taken within a specific period.

The concern raised here is “what about effectiveness of the service delivered”, as well as the consequences to the operational depot that has to respond both efficiently and effectively to the complaints. According to the statistics drawn from the IMS in this specific study, one could conclude that the Call Centre “has failed to contribute effectively towards the aim of achieving customer satisfaction, which indicates a significant gap in Call Centre Operations, itself” (Jaiswal, 2008, p. 2).

According to Jaiswal (2008, p. 7)

> "Standard measures such as average talk time and calls per agent can actually restrict the agent's ability to answer customers' call effectively. Agents feel frustrated since these measures do not allow them to satisfactory handle customers' queries .The measures only indicate the efficiency level in Call Centres and could actually lead to unintended consequences such as lost revenue and annoyed customers".

The study demonstrates that Call Centre management needs to carefully reconsider the "perverted outcomes" of focusing too much on efficiency, at the cost of being less effective. The solution lays in listening to the what the CSRs are saying, in terms of what they know, where they acquire this information, as this is having a direct impact on the quality of information captured on the IMS.

The study indicates that in the public sector environment, the needs and demands from customers have increased. Customers are more aware of what their "service rights" are, and will seek out and expect a high level of service from the public sector organisation, as in the case of Johannesburg Water, which provides an essential service. The appropriate technology is essential to check if the organisation, in this case the Call Centre, is actually achieving its targets and goals, to conduct quality call monitoring, to measure improvements in customer dispute resolution, to evaluate CSR performance, to ensure policy, procedural compliance, to provide user access to training documents, to serve as an internal communication tool.

5.3 Analysis of Call Centre environment

The environment was "a buzz" with the sound of telephones ringing, and

the voices of the CSRs answering them. The section called “Works Co-ordination” was the busiest, as they are responsible to escalate high priority complaints, to the depots while also to update the IMS with additional information on why there are delays to complaints being resolved. To the observer, the environment could be described as a high pressure one, and there seemed to be urgency in the activities that were taking place. Team leaders were seen walking to and from the work station to the works co section advising and liaising with the Team Leader on duty from this section. It was interesting to note that all communication with customers is done in English only.

The level of “noise” seemed disconcerting and uncomfortable, as while incoming calls were being taken, other CSRs were seen and heard talking to colleagues in the nearby cubicles. As the observer, I noticed that the CSRs were attempting to answer the incoming calls by the third ring. The CSRs did not spend more than two to three minutes logging the complaint on the IMS. The impression gained is that there is an emphasis on “efficiency” i.e. how quickly the call is answered and how many calls are taken per day, while at the same time the CSR is expected to be effective in ensuring that all relevant questions are asked, in order to obtain information on the actual problem on site.

The outcome of these contrasting and opposing objectives is noted in the feedback given at the interviews, as in the examples of high staff turn over, insufficient training, and overall staff demotivation. According to Wallace, Eagleson & Waldersee (1999, p. 3), “The negative consequences that follow this efficiency goal, such as exhaustion, stress and turnover, are regretted and cause deep concern to management”. As the observer, I also noted that while other CSRs were taking customer complaints, some CSRs occupied themselves with activities that neither were nor related to those associated with the Call Centre, i.e. playing games on the pc, chatting with friends, etc.

This gave the impression that it was accepted behaviour and that there was no strict monitoring of productivity. Wallace et al (1999, p. 3) states that in the Call Centre environment, we are dealing with "emotional labour", and that management can only address goals like productivity, efficiency and effectiveness if the focus is on "developing skills and ensuring motivation and commitment". As mentioned by some of the CSRs at the interview, some are putting in extra personal effort to ensure that they retain and learn new knowledge. Wallace et al (1999, p. 3) go further to mention that management needs to be conscious that efficiency and effectiveness are not achieved "at the expense of the physical and psychological well being of the staff".

The environment itself in terms of being comfortable to work in was quite hot. The area where the CSRs sat did have air conditioners, but it seemed that they are unable to cope with the size of the room, and the amount of people accommodated in it. By observing the people and how they coped with the heat, I found that some cubicles situated close to the windows, were opened. This meant that the person sitting at this spot was not satisfied with the cooling provided by the air conditioners. Those CSRs sitting directly under the air conditioners were wearing much warmer clothes than those who were sitting far away from any form of air flow.

According to Houlihan (2001, p. 5), "Managers play a major role in shaping attitudes of the CSRs, both positively and negatively", which in turn influence the service that is delivered to any customer that maybe calling at a particular time. The chaotic and high pressured environment of the Call Centre, has contradictory elements, one the one hand the CSRs must always be polite and show their concern for each customer when talking to the customer over the phone. On the other hand they could be struggling to provide accurate answers because their knowledge of the business is poor. At this point, the role and responsibility of management is clear, in "creating a shared and transparent knowledge bases among their people, and steering away from defining the knowledge database as the

technology, and determining what agents can and cannot do" (Houlihan, 2001, p. 12).

5.4 Conclusion

Research results were analysed from the interviews held with the respondents from the Call Centre and Operations, data extraction from the IMS as well as from observing the CSRs interacting within the Call Centre environment. The key issues that emerged from the data analysis include understanding how the CSRs incorporate "crucial "business information when interacting with the IMS to provide a quality service to customers, the valuing the "people" element of KM above the other two elements, understanding the social, environmental and psychological factors that influence job performance, for the Call Centre, the role and responsibility of senior management in ensuring that KM is successfully managed.

Chapter 6

Recommendations and Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The output of this specific study is put forward in the form of recommendations. The recommendations focus around the key themes of the study, i.e.

- understanding the benefits of knowledge management in improving JW's service delivery objectives;
- knowledge management as a strategic objective for the Call Centre;
- How the integration of "people", "processes" and "technology" can sustain knowledge management in the JW Call Centre successfully.

6.2 Summary

The qualitative research approach has been very useful in obtaining information that would be helpful to Call Centre management understanding the reasons for the current levels of performance of the CSRs as well as the department as a whole. The information received indicates the important role played by the "people" answering the calls and capturing the service requests for operational resolution. Senior management support for KM as a business process is crucial in ensuring the successful outcome of providing excellent customer services.

6.3. Significance

A study of the application of knowledge management in improving service delivery in a public utility Call Centre is significant for several reasons. The study gives critical insight to the role knowledge management applications in improving customer service. The success in implementing a carefully planned KM strategy links to the CRM strategy and needs the support, understanding and guidance from senior management. The benefits to the Call Centre and to the organisation would include a net effective of decreasing costs and increasing productivity, which could be considered as a critical operational goal in any public utility. The utility could also use knowledge management as a continuous improvement tool for sustained improved service delivery.

According to Koh, et. Al., (2005, p. 1), knowledge management, as a concept and a business process has been around since the eighties. The study conducted found that management's KM interventions within the Call Centre are not clearly defined or enforced. It was essential in this study to understand how the CSRs translate the knowledge they have attained into relevant information on the IMS for the depots to respond to. This study was also crucial in investigating at what level the Call Centre in Johannesburg Water reflects elements of applied knowledge management.

6.4. Recommendations

KM as a Business Strategy

The study conducted stresses a need for effective knowledge management to be implemented first at a high level, i.e. strategic level. Once there is buy-in and commitment from senior management, the KM audit can be conducted, which will produce KM initiatives/ applications for implementation. The “effectiveness” of the initiatives, will depend on the “effectiveness” of the people, process and the technology. The effectiveness of knowledge management will depend on the organisation’s strategy of creating and sharing crucial organisational knowledge throughout the entire organisation itself. This strategy can only be successful if it includes knowledge sharing at all levels of the organisation.

The critical business information should be collected from the people that work with the system every day, the first managers that ensure that daily targets are met, and senior managers who are recognised for their expert technical and organisational knowledge. There should not be one specific level of staff that provides all information, but rather across all departments in understanding that collaboration and cohesion are essential to the company success.

By building strong internal social cohesion, management will encourage value driven improvement. This will diminish the focus on pure ICT solutions. Management should by then be prepared to manage evolving competence requirements. Effective training will be required to achieve a skilled workforce, and build a strong knowledge base within the Call Centre. Call Centre Management may view Knowledge management as an overwhelming challenge to manage, implement and monitor. The management of tacit knowledge as well as ensuring that an environment is

created within which people feel free and valued for sharing their knowledge may be seen as two of the main challenges to overcome.

Value of the "People" component

The study has confirmed that the "people" are not included except at the end of any changes to business processes or to implementation of new technologies. This situation has resulted in a lack of motivation and commitment that is actually for other reasons, other than feeling valued by the company or management. CSRs suggested that the change process to a new IMS, must involve more people who actually spend all their working time utilising the system. KM as a business process needs to be inclusive and sensitive to the needs of the "people" component of managing knowledge effectively and efficiently. The people form the "intellectual assets" of the company and are should be regarded as more important as JW's network assets. The current system has its shortfalls, but people have found innovative ways to work around them.

Call Centre management must recognise and understand that customer focus can not be seen separately from employee focus. To spend more time and money on the "people" component will positively influence the way in which the CSRs handle customer complaints. The attitude that the CSRs have is affected by the way in which they as employees are being treated. Management must be able to understand that empowered CSRs, who have the knowledge and power to handle all types of customer queries, can impact on complaint management.

Call Centre Management should find appropriate ways of formalising the information sharing that occurs in corridors and during coffee breaks. The CSRs as much as they communicate information to each other, this information is not shared at a higher level. The reason given for this attitude is that the environment that exists in the Call Centre is one where "instinct kicks in" and people have to be in survival mode. Each CSR

interprets calls differently and the resulting information capturing and communication with the customers reflects this interpretative component.

The study indicated that there have been no interventions made by management to “tap into” this valuable source of explicit knowledge, for the benefit of the organisation. The challenge at this stage will be that individuals may not be content or willing to share information. Management will have to “value, reward, and motivate knowledge creation, knowledge sharing, knowledge inclusion and broad-based knowledge engagement.

The Call Centre’s management has to take time analysing the physical environment to confirm if it is actually conducive to the CSRs, who spend hours a day, every day on the phone, logging customer complaints. The study indicated that all Call Centre staff was located on the one floor, and that it is a “noisy” environment. This does not give a good impression to the customer, calling in to hear the background noise and to barely hear what the CSR is saying. There was a sense that too many people have been located in one place, and that the CSRs had to make do with this. The temperature in the Call Centre seemed too warm, and although there were air conditioners, the area is too big for these air conditioners to be effective.

KM in action

The initiatives suggested by Robertson (2004), are helpful within the Johannesburg Water context, in that it firstly focuses on strengthening the “people” component of the KM process. By first concentrating on building communities of practice, people within the Call Centre would feel more confident and “safe” to share information. Sharing information encourages a learning culture. Staff will also feel that the knowledge they have to contribute is valued by management, when their knowledge is captured on the knowledge systems. Through rewarding the desired “knowledge sharing/ knowledge learning” behaviour, management can motivate

people to improve themselves, while also assisting with improving the organisation.

By first building a strong knowledge workforce, the task of improving and policies and procedures may require much less effort. The task of also implementing relevant and effective technologies may also be less cumbersome. Robertson (2004) emphasises that, it is essential that knowledge gained from staff, including those going on retirement, be gathered and stored for all employees to access and learn from. The identified knowledge experts should be included in decisions that involve changes to current KM technologies.

The research recommendations support Haines' (2009, p. 3) alternate suggestions for a "winning management strategy". These suggestions should be considered in relation to the specific nature of business within Johannesburg Water and the services it provides.

- "***Formulate measurable business objectives***"
  The objectives at the Call Centre need to align with the overall CRM strategy of Johannesburg Water. Objectives should not focus only on efficiency but also include effectiveness as well.

- "***Ensure ongoing executive buy-in***"
  Employees will accept and buy-in more easily if they see the drive from senior management. Knowledge management as a business process can not manage and drive itself.

- "***Creation of the right KM team***"
  The KM team would be mandated to drive the strategy through all levels, and ensure that the objectives of the strategy are actually achieved, and may include individuals from JW with specialist knowledge and key persons from management.

- "***Identify and tackle cultural resistance to knowledge sharing***"
  All staff needs to see and understand the value of sharing knowledge. Employees need to recognise that they are working towards common shared goals.

- "***Select and create relevant knowledge content***"
  By communicating with staff, through the knowledge audit, management should be able to clearly identify what knowledge is of importance to the Call Centre being able to achieve its customer service goals..

- "***Obsess about knowledge quality***"
  The value of quality of information needs to be emphasised through the KM strategy. In the Call Centre, the quality of information has an impact on the effectiveness of Operations in response to customer complaints. By improving on captured information on the service requests, the response as well as cost effectiveness of the service will be improved. Monitoring and evaluation will provide an indication of whether the company is succeeding or not in this regards.

The KM strategy as suggested by Robertson and Haines provides possible solutions to the existing gaps in the KM applications implemented at the Call Centre. Johannesburg Water's senior management must recognise that their business environment has a unique set of circumstances, influential factors and drivers, all contributing to challenging the organisation's drive for success. The company also has the comfort of having employees who still maintain the belief that "things can get better". Management should take the opportunity and time of really finding out where exactly where they are in terms of "the knowledge

health", through conducting a proper knowledge management audit, thereby finding the best solution that suits the company.

6.5 Further Research

There should be more extensive research conducted which focuses on KM applications in Call Centres within specifically the public sector environment. It would be useful to gain knowledge from successful KM models and initiatives that are currently being utilised in public sector organisations, as well as in house public sector Call Centres. It seems that to a large extent the successful application is largely a "hit and miss" effort. This is possibly the reason why managers in the public sector resort to the "quick fix" methods which directly impact their performance management systems.

6.6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to investigate the knowledge management applications within Johannesburg Water's Call Centre. As a municipal owned entity of the City of Johannesburg, Johannesburg Water is responsible to ensure that the customer service targets in terms of service delivery agreements between the COJ and JW are met. Each customer that calls the Call Centre is expected to log their complaint onto JW's IMS so that responsive action can be taken by the operational depot. The study has shown that there are some KM elements prevalent in some form in the way JW is managing its Call Centre and more especially the information on IMS.

The first contact that customers have with the water and sanitation entity is via the in house Call Centre. The CSRs are the individuals that have a one on one conversation with the customer, in an attempt to understand, interpret and record the complaint onto the IMS. Knowledge management

applications involve the balancing of three components, i.e. people, processes and technology.

The critical business knowledge is stored in two main sources, i.e. Customer Services standard operating procedures and Call Centre scripts. However most of the knowledge gained by the CSR's is through the interaction with one another. The storage of the formal business knowledge includes manual files, hard drives on personal computers, and a central database for users to access. The knowledge of the business that is found and accumulated in the heads of the CSR's remains hidden until the individual needs to respond to a customer complaint.

Management's role is critical to the success of knowledge management as a business process in Johannesburg Water's Call Centre. The study has also indicated through the interviewees that "learning-on-the-job" has far surpassed the expectations of management, to the extent that individuals have come up with their own tools and processes to manage the customer interface. Management can also no longer afford for the CSRs to retain information as a way of being protective and guarded against "being too open". The crucial intangible assets that the eye can not see have great value for the organisation in terms of business improvement. With an open and free environment that values and rewards knowledge sharing, the individual CSRs will be able contribute effectively in improving the business of the Call Centre, and the organisation as a whole.

The quality of the information recorded on the service requests influences the service that is delivered from the operational depots. In cases where the incorrect code is captured, or where other crucial information is lacking, the operational teams' response is both ineffective and inefficient. Customers are left feeling frustrated and upset that the service provider is unable to deliver a proper service on time. Both money and time are wasted due to inaccurate information logged on the service request from

the Call Centre. Senior management must take heed of these signs and respond with constructive solutions to this problem. Call Centres don't run themselves and Call Centre management should find the best methods of making them successful.

Johannesburg Water aims for effective service delivery, and this can only be achieved if "the three primary drivers of the quality of an organization's service delivery which are effective people, effective internal processes and effective information technology…work effectively to developing world class service delivery" (Evenson, 1999, p. 4). Effective people are people that are empowered and knowledgeable to be able to resolve customer complaints. The study indicates as well that the people need to feel valued for their ideas and inputs, and opportunities needs to be created by management to allow for sharing of knowledge to occur, which ultimately is for the benefit of the organisation as a whole. Effective knowledge management applications will not be able to sustain it; it requires people from both the level of management and the CSRs to maintain and to find ways of extending the knowledge base.

The implementation of Knowledge management as a successful business process requires the commitment, tolerance, buy-in and support of people at all levels within the organisation. Johannesburg Water's Call Centre management needs to ask the question, "What does customer satisfaction actually mean?" to them. Customer satisfaction should be much more than just the CSRs answering calls very quickly. The true meaning should encompass the customer interacting with a skilled, knowledgeable and courteous CSR as well as having the call resolved with the correct response in the shortest possible time. Customer satisfaction is about, happy customers, who have the trust and belief in what value the entity is adding to the lives of the customers they serve.

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Appendix A

Customer logging a complaint to a CSR at a Public Utility Call Centre

CSR: Good morning, Johannesburg Water Call Centre, Molly speaking. How may I help you?

Customer: Hello. My name is Andrew Smith. There is a lot of sewer coming out of my gulley near my kitchen door, in my back yard. The place is in a terrible mess. I need help urgently please.

CSR: Sir, I will log a service request for you, but I will need some details from you please.

Customer: Yes, that's fine.

CSR: Sir, please can you provide me your physical address, where this problem is occurring?

Customer: I live at number 4 Rifle Range Road, West Turffontein.

CSR: Thanks. Please can I have your contact details as well?

Customer: My cell number is 074 791 0248 and my landline is 011 680 7891.

CSR: Thank you. Sir I will need to ask you a few questions

about the nature of the problem, in order to log the complaint accurately. Please tell me if the sewer is flowing out continuously out of the gulley, or does it only push out when you use the toilet or use water in the kitchen?

Customer: I can see the sewer flowing out continuously, whether we use the toilet or not. Like I said, my back yard is in a terrible mess.

CSR: Sir, from what you have described, this seems to be a sewer main blockage. I am logging your complaint as a sewer main blockage. The depot should be able to resolve your complaint within the next 24 hours. I am inserting notes that your yard is being affected by the overflowing sewer and that the complaint is urgent.

Customer: Yes, I would appreciate it, if you would make this call urgent. I am worried about damages to my property at the back yard.

CSR: I have made your call a priority 1 complaint. The depot to respond and resolve your complaint will be Southdale depot. Your reference number for your complaint is 362 3536.

Customer: Thanks.

CSR: Sir, please quote this reference number when you call the Call Centre to find out about the progress made on your complaint. The Call Centre representative attending to your call will provide you with an update

on the progress by the depot in responding to your complaint.

Customer: Thank you.

CSR: Thank you and Good-bye.

Customer: Goodbye.

Annexure B

Questionnaire for Interview at the Call Centre

Question One: What information do you regard as valuable and important when answering and solving customer complaints?

Question Two: Where has this information been stored in the Call Centre?

Question Three: When last were you trained on this information?

Question Four: Has this information been updated that you are aware of?

Question Five: Do you know who is responsible to update any changes to the Call Centre procedures? Please expand

Question Six: How have you acquired the knowledge you have in order to respond to customer complaints effectively and efficiently? Please explain.

Question Seven: Are your colleagues willing to share any organisational knowledge they may have with you? Please explain.

Question Eight: Do you think it would be useful to consistently update changes to the SOP's and Call Centre scripts? Please explain.

Question Nine: Do you think it would be valuable to manage organisational knowledge for the benefit of the employees as well as the organisation itself? Why do you think so?

Question Ten: Do you think that senior management support is important in managing knowledge and implementing a KM program? Why?

Question 11: What role do you think “people”, “processes” and “technology” play within the Call Centre/ organisation?

Question 12: Do you think it’s important to integrate these components? Please explain.

Question 13: Do you think KM can be implemented to achieve organisational success? Please explain.