

Building Entrepreneurial Relationships: An SME Perspective of Public Service Delivery Management (SDM) in Eastern Highlands Province, Papua New Guinea

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Abstract: This study explored the status and effect of the service delivery management (SDM) by the District Development Authorities (DDAs) towards the growth of small and medium entrepreneurship in the Eastern Highlands Province (EHP). It focused on the SDM elements of service culture, service quality, employee engagement and customer experience approaches. Utilizing the mixed method to research, the data were gathered through survey and interview from the owners-managers of 160 SMEs operating at the 8 districts of Eastern Highlands Province. The data were statistically processed using frequency distribution, weighted mean, rank, standard deviation and Chi-square test.

The study found out that the SDM approaches for service culture, service quality, employees' engagement and customer experience are less operative, with observed weaknesses and shortcomings that require improvements; and therefore meet only some expectations of the beneficiaries. There is no relationship between organizational culture and leadership to the progress of small and medium entrepreneurship. The causal strategic management measures along the study's independent variables indicate that SMEs in EHP are aware of their role as partners in socio-economic development; desirous to work with the DDAs in their respective districts towards growth of small and medium entrepreneurship in the province. The study suggests other areas for further research.

Keywords: DDAs, Small and medium enterprises (SMEs), service delivery management, service culture, service quality, employees' engagement, customer experience.

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1.0 Introduction

The services of SMEs cover the activities of almost all areas of businesses such as manufacturing, mining, wholesaling, retailing, services, etc. in developing countries. Governments everywhere have asked what they can do to encourage the growth of SMEs. Thus, in recent years, public opinions have led for public institutions requesting quality services and increased attention to the plight of the micro, small and medium enterprises.

In Papua New Guinea, SMEs' development is considered as a major project of the government to perk-up the country's economic development especially in the remote provinces. This consideration is favorable however, the SME sector should be accorded the necessary assistance by the government to foster development and sustain the growth. The government has to deal first with the key constraints. For "level of attrition among small businesses is high, with just 20% of SMEs in PNG surviving for five years," according to the World Bank (2015).

At the provincial level, the 2017 SME survey report by Commerce, Tourism and Industry of Eastern Highlands Province (EHP) discloses that despite the provincial government assistance, many SMEs performed beyond expectations. Per Soso (2017) "of the 1,449 SMEs identified, 45% are inactive and 17% are run-down."

This condition shows that there is quite a large gap between the intentions of the local government and its understanding of the needs and challenges SMEs face.

The above situation is worth exploring through diverse perspectives. One area is the methodology of the public service delivery management approaches at the district level.

1.1. Purpose and objective of the study

The purpose of this study is to discuss the social influence of service delivery management (SDM) approaches from the SMEs' perspective and how the delivery impacted SMEs evolvement in EHP. Specifically, the study's aims are to qualitatively appraise the SDM activities of DDAs in terms of service culture, service quality, employee engagement and customer experience; and, determine the relationships between DDAs' organizational culture and leadership to small and medium entrepreneurship development in the province of Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea.

1.2. Hypothesis of the study

Ho: There are no significant relationships between the organizational culture and leadership of DDAs to the development of entrepreneurship in EHP.

Ha: There are significant relationships between the organizational culture and leadership of DDAs to the development of small and medium entrepreneurship in EHP.

1.3. Limitation of the study

This study was conducted in one province rather than in all provinces of Papua New Guinea where all LLGs and DDAs are mandated by SME Policy 2016 to assist developing SMEs in the country. This geographic limitation implies that the study was restricted to a single geographic context. The use of a cross-sectional survey rather than a longitudinal survey which might yield different results is also considered limitation of the study.

2.0 Materials and Methods

This study is qualitative and quantitative in design utilizing the survey method to research. A questionnaire consisting of dichotomous questions and Likert scale on the independent parameters of service culture, service quality, employee engagement and customer experience variable was used. The primary and secondary data were utilized by the study. The primary data were derived from the responses on the survey-questionnaire provided to and accomplished by SME respondents and from interviews made with SME participants.

The research sample consists of 160 SME-owners currently operating in the 8 districts of EHP, PNG. Simple descriptive analysis was employed to explore SMEs perceptions how the service delivery management approaches along the given independent variables of the study are implemented DDAs. The gathered data were subjected to statistical treatment using frequency distribution, rank, weighted mean and standard deviation. To determine the relationships between the DDAs' leadership and organizational culture to the SMEs' growth in the province, the Chi-square statistic in research was used in testing the hypothesis of the study.

3.0 Review of Literature

SMEs always want to forge relationships with financial and non-financial institutions run by the government. SMEs note well that through the government influences, they can build networking culture with national and international organizations for new opportunities in the market. Likewise, the government can offer financial incentives, relief and support to establish competitive advantage and recognition of opportunities. Hence, government and political incentives are very crucial for SMEs support (Tahir, et al, 2016). Given this, it can be concluded that the roles of government in SME development authenticates that the state is a major factor influencing the nature and pace of SME development. Hence, the enactment of laws and policies favorable to SMEs is required.

In Papua New Guinea, the SME Policy initiated by the government in 2016 is a brave initiative to kick-start economic development and employment opportunity outside of the resources sector. It presents both a number of challenges and opportunities for businesses in PNG. For PNG entrepreneurs, the government is committed to assist them starting up new businesses, grow existing business and develop into sectors currently dominated by foreign controlled entities (PWC, 2016). In view of the importance of SME sector, "it is envisaged that the SME sector development will be the catalyst for facilitating the improvements in the performance indicators. The growth of SME will mean that more PNG citizens will be engaged in economic development opportunities which will financially empower them and would contribute to improving their social status which will improve the socioeconomic indicators" (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2016).

Another way of immediate assistance the government can provide to the sector is bringing public services near to the beneficiaries. Developing and developed countries around the world have observed that decentralized service delivery can result in quicker gains than with centralized systems. Many countries' central government ministries responsible for service delivery have created field offices. They delegated more decisions and resources to their local staff. This process referred to as deconcentration. Technically, deconcentration is an administrative decentralization. It is a transfer to lower-level central government authorities, or to other local authorities who are upwardly accountable to the central government. As enthused by Ribot (2002), "a well deconcentrated government system is able to increase the total amount of resources available for pro-poor public services and can allocate these resources across the national stage in accordance with where local needs are greatest."

Along this line, SME development in Papua New Guinea is decentralized to LLGs by the transfer of specific service delivery functions and decision making in Papua New Guinea. The roles of local level government and the district development authorities in the implementation of SME Policy are crucial. The PNG's SME Policy has spelled-out these aspects where LLG instrumentalities and the DDA agencies to engage into. Part 5 (Policies by Industry Sector and Classifications) defines the nature of participations of line agencies and government instrumentalities assigned at the various district-provincial-LLGs by industry classifications (Ministry of Commerce and Industry, 2016).

Further, the policy requires all provincial governments and districts to have an SME development plan that is aligned to the National SME Master Plan and inclusive of districts, local level governments and the Wards (Section 6.3:p.42). The major cross cutting issues and threats identified in each province must be addressed as enablers to facilitate SME Growth (Section 6.5: p.42).

3.1 PNG's local level governments (LLGs) and the district development authorities (DDAs)

Papua New Guinea has three spheres of government: national, provincial and local. The local government is provided for by the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments (OLPGLLGs) of 1995 and the Local-Level Governments Administration Act of 1997. The Minister of Provincial and Local Government Affairs is responsible for local government, which comprises 325 local-level governments in 89 districts. The local-level governments are also responsible for economic promotion jointly with provincial governments. They are also mandated to assist the further development of SMEs in their respective localities. Per the SME Policy (2016, p.viii), "to effectively implement this Policy, all agencies must take ownership so that all impediments hindering the growth of the SME sector are addressed."

In February 2014, the PNG Parliament amended the Organic Law on Provincial Governments and Local-Level Governments 1995 (OLPGLLG) to remove the Joint District Planning and Budget Priorities Committees. These were replaced, under the District Development Authority (DDA) Act, which was passed in December 2014. The District Development Authority Act of 2014 established District Development Authorities (DDAs) as the mechanism for disbursing development funds in districts and local-level governments (LLGs). DDAs are responsible for service

delivery at the LLGs and districts level. They were rolled out in most districts across Papua New Guinea in 2015. One of the functions of an Authority is to perform service delivery functions and carry out service delivery responsibilities specified in the Ministerial determination made under Section 6 (DDA Act, 2014).

At the initial implementation phase of DDA Act, Reilly et al. (2015) have observed on the monitoring capacity of the national government to a critical success factor. The researchers claimed that monitoring “is likely to present a significant challenge given the problems that exist in communicating with PNG’s 89 districts.” Two years after the implementation, Duncan, et al (2017) recommended the development of “outcome indicators showing how effectively service delivery is being performed.” The same researchers further cited in their study that “monitoring information will need to be analysed, synthesized, and communicated to the full range of stakeholders. Moreover, for DDAs to be successful, they will require the right staff at the right location to coordinate and implement district and local-level service delivery programs and development activities.”

In the study of Duncan & Banga (2018), it enumerated the details of deficiencies of governance at the provincial level as regards implementation of DDA Act. Included are the “lack of administrative capacity for planning and policy implementation; lack of commitment by bureaucratic staff to their work; lack of incentives for staff to attend work on a regular basis; politicization of appointments; political interference in administrative matters; excessive expenditure on salaries and emoluments; and, the high number of staff in acting positions and casual appointments since 2002.”

3.2 Leadership

Public service leaders in modern democracies are facing challenges which are increasingly complex and interconnected. Improving public service capability, productivity and innovation is increasingly necessary to meet citizens’ expectations and rebuild trust in the government. According to OECD (1999), such is a “fundamental leadership challenge. To meet this challenge, administration seeks to identify the skills, competencies and leadership styles required of the senior civil service in a fit-for-purpose, innovation-ready public service.”

Effective leadership is integral to organizational effectiveness. Effective leaders create positive organizational cultures, strengthen

motivation, clarify mission and organizational objectives, and steer organizations to more productive and high performing outcomes (Partnership for Public Service, 2003). Leadership plays a crucial role in the other factors believed to drive employee satisfaction: utilizing employee skills and teamwork, developing and sustaining effective leaders for the government (U.S. Office of Personnel Management, 2002). According to Ingraham, et al, (2003), “developing leaders for the 21st century requires attention to workforce trends as well as flexibility and creativity.

3.3 Public service delivery

Public services are the activities and services done in any government capacity in the interest and benefit of the general public (Shittu, 2020). Their defining characteristics public service include: they exist for reasons of policy; provide services to the public; redistributive; and act as a trust. Consequently, public service delivery is the extent to which the services provided by the listed sectors meet or exceed the expectation of the general public being the beneficiaries. According to Humphrey & Schmitz (1998), these services are “mainly or completely funded by taxation.” Accountability for service delivery of various public goods and services is the basic responsibility of the State. The State has a very important role to play in making available the essential public goods and services that ensure certain minimum level of well-being to everyone in need of those (Ramakrishnan, 2013).

Public services encompass all the interactions between citizens and businesses and their governments at all levels. They are provided by the governments. Along this line, “public services tend to reflect the political and institutional behaviour of these organizations” according to Lane (2000). Meanwhile, the European Union (2017) provides that “this interface is the front-line of good governance and public sector innovation”. Therefore, management of public services is essential to ensuring that governments operate efficiently and effectively delivering public value.

In the contemporary times, public services are embedded within a network comprised of multiple actors whose direct and indirect interactions do not exist in isolation but as part of a wider ecosystem. This characterization of public services is consistent with the broader service management literature, where the network or ecosystem view of services has emerged as the dominant view within the research on service-dominant logic (Jaakkola and Hakanen, 2013).

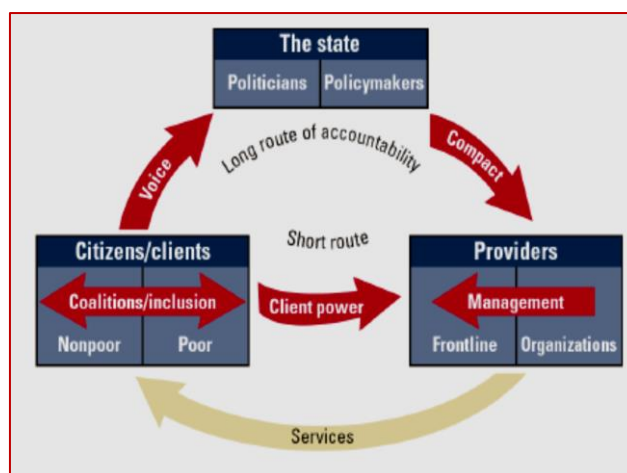


Figure 1: The Accountability Triangle

Source: World Development Report (WDR), 2004

These key relationships of power are shown in the World Bank's accountability triangle (Figure 1). Public service is an aggrupation of players known as the 'public delivery service chain'. This chain is made up of a plethora of institutions and interactions. These interactions start from bargaining over public good allocations in Parliament to implementing public projects at the local level. Each step in delivering public goods is a link in the public service delivery chain. The core of public service is the notion that "successful services for poor people emerge from institutional relationships in which the actors are accountable to each other" according to World Bank (2004). In terms of public service accountability, the relationship among actors must have these features: (1) delegation, (2) performance, (3) information about performance, and (5) enforceability.

Service delivery management requires a continuous process of improvement. Making continuous improvement part of company culture is an excellent and cost-effective approach to tackling an organization's most complex challenges. In this view, the effectiveness, efficiency and economy of public service need to be analyzed through citizen charters and various external audits such as social audit, peoples' audit and report cards (Ramakrishnan, 2013). When supported by improvement technology, results can be achieved quickly, and success can be sustained over time. The digital society, 24/7 media and social networks have raised awareness of what is achievable. This strengthens demands for greater accountability from the public sector. Citizens and businesses increasingly demand public services that are better, faster, cheaper, and often prefer to be online, not in-line (Sha, 2005).

However, the power of accountability is significantly reduced if citizens are unable to measure their government's performance in a meaningful way.

Reilly, et al (2015) noted that: "despite significant increases in resourcing over the last two decades, service delivery is still failing to reach most citizens in Papua New Guinea." The key question "whether the decline in service delivery is causally related to the country's political architecture" was addressed. The researchers' review concluded that "none of the basic institutional features of its system of government can be held directly responsible for service delivery failures. Rather it is the way the institutions are used, and in some cases abused, that is the key issue" Therefore, the service delivery in Papua New Guinea clearly needs significant improvement (Duncan, et al, 2017).

3.4 Service delivery management (SDM)

Service delivery as a support is a continuous process with no definite start and end. Customers expect to obtain value for their

money, time, and effort from access to goods, labor, professional skills, facilities, networks, and systems. Service delivery and processes are important means to satisfy customers' expectations. However, processes and delivery system are to be managed well. Thus the discipline and principles of service management has to be embraced by service providers.

Technically, service management is the "combination of organisational tasks and activities designed to provide users and customers with a high-value service" (Clarke & Johnston, 2005). The service delivery (SD) system will be of great use when actualizing service activity plan. Thus, service management is practically managing and delivering service to the users. It requires understanding customers' needs, managing delivery processes and ensures the objectives are met, while also paying attention to the continual improvement of services. As such, service management is a central organisational function and one that is critical to private or public organisational success.

Meanwhile, the service delivery (SD) system is the way an organization delivers services to internal or external customers. It is a "set of interlinked functions in terms of inputs, processes, outputs, and outcomes; including a variety of tools, technologies, and people who support the delivery of the service" (Russel, 2021). Per Grönroos' (2000), companies must design their service delivery system based on these understandings: (1) "What value the customer is getting from the service? (2) How total quality is perceived in customer relationships to facilitate such value? (3) How an organization will be able to deliver this perceived quality? (4) How an organization should be developed and managed? And, (5) Making the organization function so the customer value expectation is met." These five understandings lead to the design of a company's service excellence model.

A model is built to understand why companies fail to deliver excellent service. The model illustrating which service elements should be included is shown in Figure 2. Service culture, employee engagement, service quality, and customer experience are the noted key elements of a service delivery system. Ankerstjerne & Andersen (2013) explain that the "order that these four points are listed in is not random. There is a logical sequence in first defining the service culture, then employee engagement, which will then foster a high level of service quality, which will then develop the right customer experience, which is a virtuous circle." At the end of the day, the traditional models and themes are no longer sufficient. Future focus should be on the service delivery system and the power of the human touch.



Figure 2: The Service Excellence Model

Source: Ankerstjerne & Andersen, 2013

3.4.1. Service culture element

Developing a service culture requires time and consistency. Service culture exists when business owners or managers motivate the employees in the organization to take a customer-centric approach to their regular duties and work activities. This particular element is best understood if culture and organizational culture's backgrounds are given emphasis.

Culture

Culture is usually something deeply rooted in people. It is "the way in which a group of people solve problems and reconciles dilemmas" (Trompenaars & Turner, 1998). A comprehensive definition of culture is given by Kluckhohn (1951). He accounted culture as: (1) the total way of life of a people; (2) the social legacy the individual acquires from his group; (3) a way of thinking, feeling, and believing; (4) an abstraction from behavior; (5) a theory on the part of the anthropologist about the way in which a group of people in fact behave; (6) a storehouse of pooled learning; (7) a set of standardized orientations to recurrent problems; (8) learned behavior; (9) a mechanism for the normative regulation of behavior; (10) a set of techniques for adjusting both the external environment and to other men; (11) a precipitate of history; and (12) turning, perhaps in desperation, to similes, as a map, as a sieve, and as a matrix.

Importantly, the influences of culture (or cultural influence) need to be taken into account in order to achieve an effective leadership. Understanding a culture is the essential step in order to consider the real effects of a leadership approach (Vailati (2014). Leadership styles cannot be imported and exercised in the same way across different cultures and countries. A leadership style may have different effects and meanings in relation to the cultural environment in which it is exercised.

Organizational Culture

Ensuring company performance is what an organization culture wants to achieve. As organizational objectives become more

specific, organizations become increasingly formal and more institutionalized over a longer term. The development of organizational values, beliefs and practices ensures the differentiation of the organization from others to determine success. Hence, organizational culture is a key factor of organizational effectiveness.

An organisational culture is a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration. That, it has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way members perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems. In most cases, organisational culture becomes the personality of the entire organisation as it defines what the organisation does and what it does not do (Schein, 1992; Tharp, 2009).

Cameron and Quinn (1999) describe organisational culture based on the four competing values model. Per the model, the dominant organisational cultures are hierarchy, clan, and market and adhocracy organisational culture. The framework (Figure 3), propounded by Quinn and Rohrbaugh (1983) helps to explain the four different organisational types exhibited by organisations. According to Ubias & Alas (2009), "the y-axis indicates the organisation's flexibility or central control in dealing with issues. The x-axis represents organisations that value control and follow hierarchical organisational culture which emphasises documented procedures and processes. On the other continuum are organisations which are flexible (clan culture) with less rules and regulations." The adhocracy and market culture type's focuses on the external part of the organisation while the clan and hierarchy types focuses on the internal effectiveness of the organisation (Ghannay & Mamlouk, 2015). An adhocracy organisational culture effectively supports EO whereas hierarchical organisational culture inhibits EO (Khalid, et al. 2016).

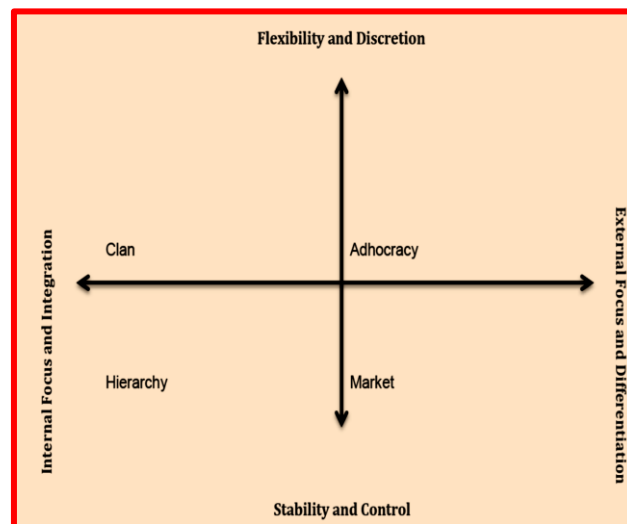


Figure 3: The Competing Values Framework

(Source: Ubius & Alas, 2009)

Adelekan, 2016 cites that “to build innovative culture, certain requirements must be met involving six kinds of attitudes. They are: (1) the ability of managers to take risks; (2) encouraging creativity, participation of all employees in building innovation-oriented culture, (3) responsibility of both managers and employees for their actions, (4) allowing employees to develop their interests and use their unique talents, (5) developing the company’s mission, which the employees will identify with; (6) providing employees with a sense that their work is meaningful and has a positive impact on the achievement of objectives.”

Externally orientated organisational cultures play a crucial role towards fostering entrepreneurial orientation (EO) within organisations. Edwards (2014) explains that entrepreneurial orientation (EO) is “a key concept when executives are crafting strategies in the hopes of doing something new and exploiting opportunities that other organizations cannot exploit. EO refers to the processes, practices, and decision-making styles of organizations that act entrepreneurially. Any organization’s level of EO can be understood by examining how it stacks up relative to five dimensions: autonomy, competitive aggressiveness, innovativeness, proactiveness, and risk taking.” These dimensions are also relevant to individuals.

An organisational culture which supplies enough resources to employees and rewards new ideas tend to promote entrepreneurial orientation (EO). Purr and Bharti (2015) enthuse that EO “acts as guideline that can be used to align employee behavior towards achieving innovation and flexibility of organisational goals.” Organisational culture influences creativity and innovation of employees. It inspires employees to surpass their expectations and to come up with creative and innovative ways to improve customer

satisfaction as well as overall organisational competitiveness. Firms which wish to incorporate EO in their businesses ought to adapt, change and align their organisational culture to the prevailing business environment. “

The LLGs and DDAs tasked to promote and develop SMEs are organizations by themselves. They have their own cultural styles of providing public services to their constituents.

Service Culture

Service Culture is built on elements of leadership principles, norms, work habits and vision, mission and values. Once a superior service delivery system and a realistic service concept have been established, there is no other component as fundamental to the long-term success of a service organization as its culture (Ankerstjerne & Andersen, 2013).

Dorson, et al (2020) provide the following important elements in the development of service culture: (1) “Seek feedback - to show genuine interest in finding out what customers want from company, products and services; (2) Communicate and establish consistency - actions and words of business owner or manager set the tone for what employees view as core philosophies of the business. If employees project a service attitude in dealings with customers or clients, that helps; (3) Reward and recognize - a need to include service standards in job descriptions, employee evaluations and compensation, to strengthens employees’ commitment. Business owners or managers may also have to eliminate workers that don't fit into or desire to fit into the culture; (4) Set policies and train - once customer-friendly policies are established, the owner needs to orient and train new employees to accept the standards.” Part of developing an enduring service culture is getting new hires to quickly assimilate into it.

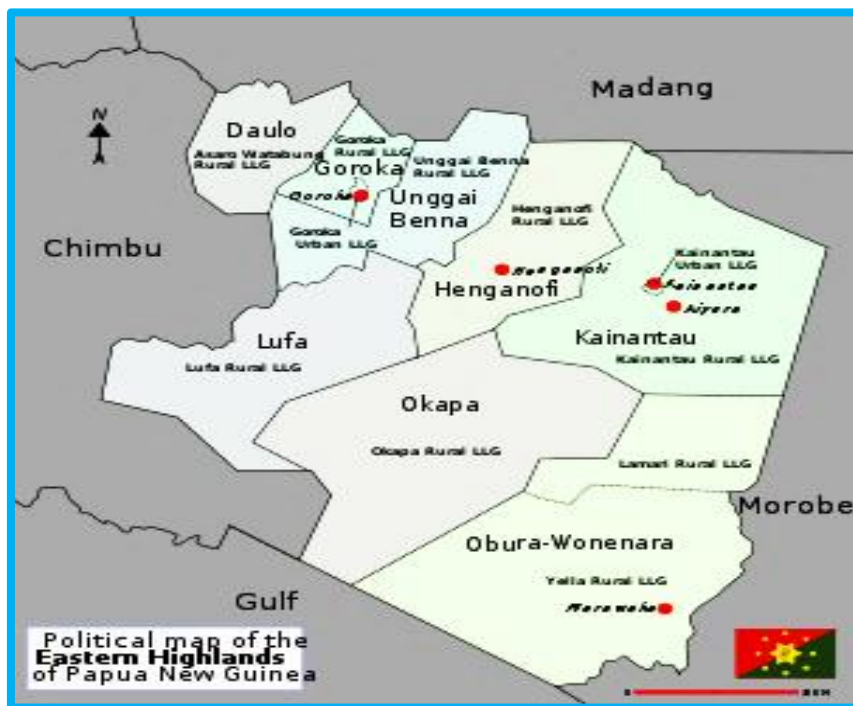


Figure 4: Map of Eastern Highland Province of PNG

Source: Google Maps

The Eastern Highlands Province of Papua New Guinea, the setting of this study, consists of eight districts as shown in Figure 4. The districts are (1) Daulo; (2) Goroka; (3) Unggai Benna; (4) Henganofi; (5) Kainantau; (6) Lufa; (7) Okapa; and (8) Obura-Wonerara. Each district has its own pattern of shared meaning, feeling, and behavior making it a distinctive group of people with other districts in Highlands Region. This pattern may have been developed through time and the gradual acquisition of knowledge through education, developed skills through life-long practical experiences. Hence, the people's norms and behaviors are adapted from the environment they live in. Consequently, the people perception on service delivery, for example, maybe viewed differently. On the part of the SMEs, this sector is also sporadically located at the different districts of the province. Hence, they also have their own individual perspective differences cause by their aspirations in engaging business, values, norms and sensitivities, as customers of the delivery service of the local level government units task to assist them.

In terms of their perceptions on service value, customers will evaluate the performance of the services that LLGs and DDAs provide based on the value and quality of the services that the Service Management of the district agency offers. The success of a Service Management division is based on how well it is integrated within the enterprise and supports the business by providing services that the SME-customer needs. A public sector agency can provide consistent support services to customers only when standard processes, policies and procedures are well defined with clear hand-offs between groups (Baddeley & Dawes, 1986).

3.4.2. Employee engagement element

Employee engagement is critical to fostering public trust in government agencies and institutions at all levels. Employees who are engaged and interested in their work are higher performers and more fulfilled; they also make better teammates and colleagues and

provide better service to constituents (Hughes, 2021). A company that has an effective employee engagement strategy and a highly engaged workforce is more likely to retain top performers as well as attract new talent. Top performers embrace change, search out ways to improve, and challenge the status quo. They expect all employees be held accountable for delivering results, whereas low performers avoid accountability, cling to the status quo, and resist change (Smith, 2017).

Engaged employees have the power to transform seemingly insignificant situations. As Agarwal, et al (2021) noted, "engaged employees in the public sector take pride in their organization and its mission and are deeply committed to its success. They provide discretionary effort, going above basic job requirements to help the organization achieve its mission. Whenever possible, show employees how their specific tasks help to accomplish mission-critical goals. This deepens the emotional ties between an organization and employees" Engaged employees find their work meaningful and rewarding and, in turn, they deliver for the organization, its leaders, their coworkers, and the public. Employees, who see the connection between their work and how their talents are being used, contribute to a positive organizational culture, which can be a powerful force that affects the well-being and success of an organization (Alom, 2019).

Successful organizations are value-driven with employee-centric cultures (Dale & Carnegie, 2018). According to these researchers, there are two primary factors that drive employee engagement. These are: (1) Engagement with the Organization measures how engaged employees are with the organization as a whole, and by extension, how they feel about senior management. This factor has to do with confidence in organizational leadership as well as trust, fairness, values, and respect - i.e. how people like to be treated by others, both at work and outside of work; and, (2) Engagement with "My Manager" is a more specific measure of how employees

relate to their direct supervisors. Topics include feeling valued, being treated fairly, receiving feedback and direction, and generally, having a strong working relationship between employee and manager based on mutual respect.

On the part of leadership and leaders, Oehler, et al (2014) cited that “Engaging leaders step up, opting to proactively own solutions where others cannot or do not. They energize others, keeping people focused on purpose and vision with contagious positivity. They connect and stabilize groups by listening, staying calm and unifying people.” They serve and grow by empowering, enabling, and developing others. And they stay grounded, remaining humble, open, candid, and authentic in their communication and behavior.

Supervisor support is often argued to be a meaningful predictor of employee engagement. In the study of Myung and McDonald (2016), the data from a sample of 1,251 employees from state and local government agencies show that supervisor support affects employee engagement both directly and indirectly through its influence on perceived organizational support. In turn, this influences the variance in employee engagement. Results further show that the path linking supervisor support to organizational support is moderated by learning opportunities, such that the positive relationships become invigorated among individuals who reported having opportunities to learn and grow in their job.

3.4.3. Service Quality

Service quality is an important dimension of organisational performance in the public sector especially at the local government

level. The main output of local government is the provision of services. Service quality (SQ) is a comparison of perceived expectations (E) of a service with perceived performance (P), giving rise to the equation $SQ = P - E$ (Lewis and Booms, 1983). A business with high service quality will meet or exceed customer expectations whilst remaining economically competitive. Improved service quality increases profitability and long term economic competitiveness. Service quality can be related to service potential (for example, worker's qualifications); service process (for example, the quickness of service) and service result (customer satisfaction). Individual service quality states the service quality of employees as distinct from the quality that the customers perceived (Grönroos, 2017).

Service quality is an overall judgment similar to attitude towards the service and generally accepted as an antecedent of overall customer satisfaction (Zeithaml & Bitner, 1996). Parasuraman, et al. (1988) have defined service quality as the ability of the organization to meet or exceed customer expectations. It is the difference between customer expectations of service and perceived service. Perceived service quality results from comparisons by customers of expectations with their perceptions of service delivered by the suppliers (Zeithaml, et al., 1990). If expectations are greater than performance, then perceived quality is less than satisfactory and hence customer dissatisfaction occurs (Parasuraman, et al., 1985; Lewis & Mitchell, 1990).

Table 1: The 5 dimensions of SERVQUAL

Dimensions	Items
Tangibles: physical facilities, equipment, and appearance of personnel	1. Should have up-to-date equipment; 2. Physical facilities should be visually appealing; 3. Employees should be well dressed and appear neat; 4. Appearance of physical facilities should be in keeping with the type of services.
Reliability: to perform the promised service dependably and accurately	5. Should do things by the time they promise; 6. When customers have problems, they should be sympathetic and reassuring; 7. Should be dependable; 8. Should provide their services at the time they promise; 9. Should keep accurate records
Responsiveness: to help customers and provide prompt service	10. Should not be expected to tell customers when services will be performed*; 11. Not realistic for customers to expect prompt service*; 12. Employees do not always have to be willing to help customers*; 13. is OK if they are too busy to respond to requests promptly*
Assurance: courtesy knowledge, ability of employees to inspire trust and confidence	14. Customers should be able to trust employees; 15. Customers should feel safe in their transactions with these stores' employees; 16. The employees should be polite; 17. Employees should get adequate support to do their jobs well
Empathy: caring, individualized attention the firm provides its customers	18. Company should not be expected to give customers individual attention*; 19. Employees cannot be expected to give customers personal attention*; 20. Unrealistic to expect employees to know what the needs of their customers are*; 21. Unrealistic for them to have customers' best interests at heart*; 22. Should not be expected to have operating hours convenient to all customers*

* reverse coded

Source: Parasuraman, et al., 1988; Finn & Lamb, 1991

A model for measuring service quality was developed by Parasuraman, et al, (1988), the SERVQUAL. Table 1 describes the 5 dimensions and 22 items presented in seven-point Likert scale. They measured especially functional service quality through empirical studies in banking, credit card, repair and maintenance, and long-distance telephone services. Although it was originally designed and tested in private sector organisations, it can be adapted to public sector organisations with minor modifications. Wisniewski (2001); and, Rhee & Rha (2009) suggest that SERVQUAL can be successfully applied in the public sector but should be modified to suit the context.

Delivering quality service means conforming to customers' expectations on a consistent basis. Service quality and customer satisfaction constructs their order in different industries and reflects at each service counter. Customers form service expectations from past experiences, word of mouth and marketing communications. In general, customers compare perceived service with expected service, and if the former falls short of the latter the customers are disappointed (Parasuraman, A.; Berry, L.; Zeithaml, VA., 1991).

The public sector organizations have come under increasing pressure to deliver quality services (Randall and Senior, 1994) and improve efficiencies (Robinson, 2003). Customer needs and expectations are changing when it comes to governmental services and their quality requirements. However, service quality practices in public sector organizations is slow and is further exacerbated by difficulties in measuring outcomes, greater scrutiny from the public and press, a lack of freedom to act in an arbitrary fashion and a requirement for decisions to be based in law (Teicher, et al., 2002).

In view of the above, various sources of public service quality are explored and a new classification scheme formulated by using critical incidents technique. Seung & June's (2009) study offered four main qualities of public service - process quality, outcome quality, design quality, and relationship quality. The beneficiaries, as the final customers, give priority to the process and outcome qualities, whereas the social workers, as intermediary customers, have high regard for the design and relationship qualities. On the other hand, Munhurrin, et al (2010) study reveal that while there is a significant shortfall in meeting customer expectations, the front-line employees (FLE) appears to have a good understanding of what these expectations actually are. After analysis, the highest gaps were pertaining to the clients' belief that service providers do not have their clients' interest at heart nor do they show effort in solving clients' problems. Other high gaps came from the physical aspect of how public service employees dress, as well as the appearance of public services buildings.

3.4.4. Customer experience element

Customer experience includes elements of customer intelligence, account management and continuous improvements. Perception is king and constantly evaluating how both customer and end-user perceive service delivery is important for continuous collaboration. Successful service delivery works on the basis that the customer is a part of the creation and delivery of the service and then designs processes built on that philosophy – this is called co-creation.

In private sector, a great customer experience is the business' key to success. The better experience customers have, the more repeat customers and positive reviews it will receive and friction of customer complaints and returns are reduced (Latham, 2020).

Customer experience (CX) is getting more important everywhere, including in government. Citizens are accustomed to the experiences offered by private companies and now want the same from governments

Customer experience, sometimes abbreviated to CX, is the totality of cognitive, affective, sensory, and behavioral customer responses during all stages of the consumption process including pre-purchase, consumption, and post-purchase stages (Shaw 2007). Different dimensions of customer experience include senses, emotions, feelings, perceptions, cognitive evaluations, involvement, memories, as well as spiritual components, and behavioral intentions (Gentile, et al, 2007). The pre-consumption anticipation experience can be described as the amount of pleasure or displeasure received from savoring future events. The remembered experience is related to a recollection of memories about previous events and experiences of a product or service (Wirtz, et al, 2003).

The foundational elements of a remarkable customer experience consist of six key disciplines, beginning with strategy, customer understanding, design, measurement, governance and culture (Manning & Bodine, 2012). A company's ability to deliver an experience that sets it apart in the eyes of its customers will increase the amount of consumer spending with the company and inspire loyalty to its brand. According to Sebor (2008) "Loyalty is now driven primarily by a company's interaction with its customers and how well it delivers on their wants and needs."

Government agencies need to build a holistic view of the customer experience. In so doing, they can put themselves in their clients' shoes, understand their journeys as they access services, and figure out what really delights or displeases their customers (D'Emidio, et, al., 2019). The customer-experience-top-frustration causes are: (1) long wait times; (2) employees who do not understand customer needs; (3) unresolved issues/questions; (4) too much automation/not enough of a human touch; (5) service that is not personalized; and (6) rude/angry employees.

According to the Institute of Corporate Learning (2024), "government agencies at every level can gain by putting the needs and wants of citizens first. Consumer expectations are only increasing as technological advances such as smartphones and apps open new frontiers of convenience, speed, and transparency for private sector customers. At the same time, tightening government budgets are making it difficult for the public sector to deliver services of a similarly high quality." What counts as poor customer experiences in business will only be learned by opening the door to customer feedback, then working to minimize the impact of factors that cause a bad experience for the team.

Customer feedback is information collected from customers about their experience with the company's product, service, website, or business as a whole. Business owners or managers can use this feedback to improve customer experience by removing or reducing areas of friction and increasing positive touch points (Macdonald, 2019). There 7 ways to improve customer experience as suggested by Macdonald. They are: (1) Create a clear customer experience vision; (2) Understand who your customers are; (3) Create an emotional connection with your customers; (4) Capture customer feedback in real time; (5) Use a quality framework for development of your team; (6) Act upon regular employee

feedback; and, (7) Measure the ROI from delivering great customer experience.

4.0 Results and Discussion

4.1. Status of implementation of service delivery management approaches

The findings of the study on how the SME-participants perceived the actual approaches implemented the service delivery management elements by DDAs are discussed in this section.

4.1.1. Service Culture

The approaches rendered along service culture element below average and just meeting some expectations of SMEs. To this effect, the DDAs' norms, work habits and values demonstrated by service employees contained significant weaknesses that need attentions by the management. In some ways, they are reflective of the organizational culture of the district. This rating also means that the service employees, while performing well in some parts of their jobs, need help in areas of attitude, consciousness, public service aptitude, approach and attentiveness of customers.

Table 2: "Service Culture" dimensions

Indicator	min	max	n	sd	wm	rank
Departments, work teams and employees' responsibility delegation.	1	4	140	1.000	2.54	1
Formal communication and documentation of clients' feedback.	1	5	137	1.040	2.53	2
Employees' understanding of public service central values.	1	4	138	0.970	2.46	3
Allocation of service delivery resources..	1	5	140	1.170	2.45	4
Service attitude towards clients' needs.	1	5	140	1.070	2.42	5
Consciousness to agency performance, exploration and improvements.	1	5	141	1.080	2.42	6
Public service aptitude	1	4	141	1.000	2.40	7
Projection on customer-first approach.	1	4	138	1.060	2.35	8
Attentiveness to customer wants.	1	5	139	1.090	2.32	9
Overall				1.050	2.43	

Legend: N - population; wm - weighted mean; sd - standard deviation; 5: (Excellent, 4.46-5.00);

4: (Above Average, 3.46-4.45); 3: (Average, 2.46-3.45); 2: (Below Average, 1.46-2.45); 1: (Very Poor, 1.0-1.45)

According to SME-participants during interview, the incompleteness of resources; lack of knowledge by staff; and, not being conscious of the valuable opportunity lost to SMEs due to uncalled waiting time. The deficiency in delivering core public services by some district agencies can be attributed to weak public sector management and inadequate operational funding for various operations and functions of the agencies.

The participants further enthused that each district's approaches need to be reviewed. District governments must put more force and attention to the plight of their constituents so that all economic sectors may experience forward development. Furthermore, the participants suggested that the district level government needs to work together with fervor. This can cause the public services provision progressive and the agencies become more effective in dealing with the sector's needs. They further opined that for efficient and improved public service delivery management, there is a need to moderate and balance service culture approaches to all SME-constituents regardless of their political and religious affiliations.

For the management level, the participants suggested that the DDAs and LLGs must identify the priority areas that are critical toward more effective accountability and sustained standard of governance and public service delivery. They added that the agencies' management must fix the problems that stems from unclear responsibilities and poor coordination among provincial authorities and multiple district management.

As also shown in Table 2, there are certain areas of the service culture dimension of the LLGs and DDAs that were perceived to meet their expectations although some shortcomings noted may become passable. This means that there are DDAs have able to respond well to some of the customers' inquiries within the promised timeframe; endorsing or delegating queries and requests to the rightful authorities and/or employees. Leading the list is the delegation of responsibilities (2.54); clients' feedback documentation and responses through formal communication (2.53); and, understanding of values of public services (2.46). These situations show that good service culture equates customer satisfaction in some level.

Attentiveness towards the customers' wants (2.32) was rated poorly. Per the respondents, behavior and attitude must be conveyed in a more approachable manner. In this way, SME-constituents may provide trust and confidence on the services of DDAs. Along this line, raising public awareness of core public sector's functions, responsibilities, and standards will help improve the service culture of the DDAs.

4.1.2. Service Quality dimension

The product of any service delivery system is service quality especially in the case of pure service system like the public agencies of government institutions. Service quality is connected to consumer satisfaction. Customers form opinions about service

quality not just from a single reference but from a host of contributing factors.

The current study employed different indicators related to the different dimensions of service delivery management. Table 3 projects the performance ratings for the service quality dimension. The same table is a representation of the construct just cited.

From the tabulated data, service quality factor for the development of SMEs in EHP garnered a “below average” impression from the respondents. This finding can be surmised that the quality of and how the planned and structured service delivery activities rendered to SME-clients have significant shortcomings. The lowest rate accorded by the respondents is on empathy, specifically how clients are accorded with individualized attention. According to the participants, their needs and wants might be similar but they are unique in character. Therefore, individualized attention is necessary. Understanding the challenges, trends and issues;

knowing who are the paying clients and what they need could help improve employees’ empathy and responsiveness.

The participants claimed that the foremost reason low level impression is the lack of investment in basic resources, maintenance of physical structures and, the absence of or lack of technological facilities to fast track required information and services. The district employees’ services are lethargic. Clients devote unnecessary time waiting to be served. Additionally, employees’ necessary capabilities including knowledge on functions and competency are evidently lacking. These shortcomings might suppress more private investments and economic diversifications. They pose as handicap to most rural districts. In this regard, the participants suggested that provision of financial support on basic resources such as new information technology wares, capacity building and development of employees are necessary.

Table 3: Service operations and delivery management’s

“Service Quality” dimensions

Indicator	min	max	n	sd	wm	rank
Approach, method and attitude of performing a service.	1	5	136	1.004	2.33	1
Eagerness and interest in responding to customers' queries and needs.	1	5	154	1.072	2.32	2
Trust and confidence implanted with the client.	1	5	153	1.009	2.31	3
Manner and attitude in communicating with client.	1	5	157	1.077	2.30	4
Period a routine service task is completed.	1	5	135	1.054	2.30	5
Manners and ways in approaching client’s needs.	1	5	158	1.059	2.28	6
Aptitude and skills of performing a required and needful service.	1	5	158	1.061	2.27	7
Conduct/comportment conveyed with client.	1	5	159	0.979	2.25	8
Empathy and responsiveness accorded to client.	1	5	158	1.092	2.20	9
Overall				1.045	2.28	

Legend: N - population; wm - weighted mean; sd - standard deviation; 5: (Excellent, 4.46-5.00);

4: (Above Average, 3.46-4.45); 3: (Average, 2.46-3.45); 2: (Below Average, 1.46-2.45); 1: (Very Poor, 1.0-1.45)

In terms of reliability, the participants claimed that transparency of the administrative process is somewhat lacking, sometimes none. They opined that if transparency in all administrative process is clear, compliance with advertised conditions and deadlines would not be a problem. They suggest that the mechanisms that abuse and by pass quality service system must be eliminated, reinforced, or where necessary establish coordination mechanisms within the agencies.

4.1.3. Employees Engagement

Employee engagement is a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members to give of their best to achieve the mission of an organization. Employee engagement is about how conditions are created in which employees offer more of their capability and potential.

Table 4: Service operations and delivery management's

"Employees' Engagement" dimensions

Indicator	min	max	n	sd	wm	rank
Commitment to organization's mission.	1	4	157	1.155	2.61	1
Zealousness to job duties.	1	5	154	1.055	2.53	2
Acknowledgement of challenges of position or rank.	1	5	160	0.973	2.41	3
Attitude towards change and improvement.	1	5	159	0.912	2.40	4
Accountability towards results' delivery.	1	4	160	0.886	2.39	5
Discretion's effort placed into their work.	1	5	160	0.978	2.33	6
Receptivity to assessment and feedback.	1	4	155	1.001	2.28	7
Indulgence to organization's purpose and tolerance with clients' demands.	1	4	160	0.928	2.24	8
Overall				0.876	2.40	

Legend: N - population; wm - weighted mean; sd - standard deviation; 5: (Excellent, 4.46-5.00);

4: (Above Average, 3.46-4.45); 3: (Average, 2.46-3.45); 2: (Below Average, 1.46-2.45); 1: (Very Poor, 1.0-1.45)

The employee engagement factor influencing growth and development of SMEs in the EHP, as shown in Table 4, was also perceived to be "below average". This may imply that the extent to which employees feel about challenges of their jobs, change, accountability, and discretion effort, receptivity to assessment and feedback and tolerance with clients' demands are characterized as less effective due to a number of shortcomings. Since employee engagement is a two way commitment and communication between an organisation and its members, it appears that communication in the agency is somewhat less effective.

As reflected in Table 4, commitments to organization's mission; and, zealousness to job duties were rated "Average" by the SME respondents. These impressions may mean that the some districts' employees responsible to assist SMEs in their localities employed some degree of desirable qualities in the given pointers. Hence, expectations of SMEs are somewhat met. Likewise, the finding may mean that some employees' services fit well the SMEs' needs.

The employees' performances on the other areas of employee engagement dimension require substantial improvement because of significant weaknesses noted. Given this limitation, it is hard to see how the quality of service stakeholders aspire to achieve can be realized without putting the enthusiasm, commitment and knowledge of public service employees at the forefront of delivery strategies.

The impact of employees' engagement in the DDAs' public service delivery cannot be discounted. This is also true at the various districts agencies task to promote and assist SMEs in the province. In view of these, the participants have justified their rating. They notably observed that the employees' communication, facing challenges, effecting change and discretion efforts related to their jobs brought about by the SMEs problems are less effective to solve their problems. Sometimes they cause more difficulties solving their problems. Hence they suggest for the employees to improve on those given aspects. Likewise accountability, receptivity to feedback and tolerance with clients' demands are vital aspect of public service. They, too, require substantial improvement. The participants' intention is that due to the economic downturn had on small businesses, it's more vital than ever to use whatever initiatives possible to drive growth and competitiveness in the right direction.

4.1.4. Customer Experience dimension

Customer experience is the clients' all-inclusive perception of their familiarities with the private service or the public departments' services. It is the result of every interaction a client or a beneficiary has with the business or a public service arm of the government from navigating the website to talking to customer service and receiving the product or service they bought or expected to receive. Everything the service providers do impacts customers' perception and their decision to keep coming back or not. So, a great customer experience is a key to success.

Table 5: Service operations and delivery management's

“Customer Experience” dimensions

Indicator	min	max	n	sd	wm	rank
Responsiveness in listening to clients.	1	5	158	1.296	2.61	1
Civility of approaches.	1	5	160	1.104	2.48	2
Avoidance of friction in solving client's specific problems and unique challenges posed.	1	5	157	1.088	2.44	3
Use of appropriate feedback in developing in-depth understanding of client.	1	5	156	1.258	2.43	4
Provision of personalized service.	1	5	159	1.091	2.40	5
Thoughtfulness demonstrated on client's needs.	1	5	155	1.073	2.33	6
Use of a systematic approach to collect, analyze, and act on client's feedback.	1	5	160	1.128	2.28	7
Resolving client's issues and concerns on automation procedures.	1	5	158	1.033	2.28	8
Consciousness of client's waiting time.	1	5	160	1.039	2.24	9
Overall				1.123	2.39	

Legend: N - population; wm - weighted mean; sd - standard deviation; 5: (Excellent, 4.46-5.00);

4: (Above Average, 3.46-4.45); 3: (Average, 2.46-3.45); 2: (Below Average, 1.46-2.45); 1: (Very Poor, 1.0-1.45)

Table 5 projects the results of the tabulated data on the various indices of customer experience aspect. Generally, the perception of the SME participants of the study conveyed a “below average” result. This finding can be deduced that the service activities and approaches are noted to be less active given the number of deficiencies that are noticeably present.

The SME participants expressed about the unfriendly approach they got when requesting for assistance. Other employees just suddenly quit responding on what they are requesting for particularly on automation procedures in lodging request. Many employees are not conscious of customers wasting valuable time waiting just to be served. In view of the fairly experiences they have, they expressed that “government agencies needs to prioritize customers/people wellbeing and understand people's needs to resolve problems they are facing in complying with the government requirements.” Per the majority of SME participants, “If only DDA agencies impact the business operations through favorable customer experiences, they will definitely be motivated to be self-reliant and economically independent.”

The descriptor indicating responsiveness to clients and civility of approaches have been generally rated as “Average” but with noted shortcomings. This finding is indicative of the SME-participants constructive views that if a service is done in a manner that is impartial or that conforms to rules of public service, such a service will be appraised to be meeting customers' expectations manner.

4.2. Relationship between organizational culture and leadership of LLGs and DDAs towards SMEs development in EHP

The culture in an organization is a key factor that profoundly changes people's perceptions. Understanding the SME culture is an essential step in order to consider the real effects of a leadership approach to any developmental efforts. The cultural influences on the leadership aspects need to be taken into particular account to achieve an effective leadership. Leadership is motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal (Ward, 2019).

Every leader has its own leadership style. A leadership style may have different effects and meanings in relation to the cultural environment in which it is exercised. It cannot be imported and exercised in the same way across different cultures and countries. In business, leadership means directing workers and colleagues with a strategy to meet the company's needs. The role of leadership in public administration at the current stage of socio-economic development grounded. Effective provision of services in the sphere of public administration depends on the work of managers, which in its turn depends on many factors – a style of leadership and motivation among them (Smerichevskiy & Klimova, 2015).

Table 6: Chi-square test of independence

Intervention	Outcome	Observed	Expected	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² / E
Leadership	Yes	110	75	35	1225	7.040
	No	46	15	31	984	5.653
Total						12.694

Intervention	Outcome	Observed	Expected	O – E	(O – E) ²	(O – E) ² / E
Organizational Culture	Yes	100	68	32	1012	5.818
	No	52	17	35	1257	7.224
Total						13.043
Degree of freedom (r1)*(c1) = (2-1)(2-1) = 1						1
Alpha level						0.05
Critical statistics for alpha level of 0.05 degree of freedom						3.841

The results of a Chi-square test are presented in Table 10. In this kind of test, if the *p-value* is less than or equal to the significance level, it indicates that the observed distribution is not the same as the expected distribution. Hence, it can be concluded that a relationship exists between the categorical variables (Benac, 2023).

The current study's alpha is set at .05 and the critical statistic for an alpha level of 0.05 and one degree of freedom is 3.8410. Based on Table 6, this critical statistics is smaller than the obtained statistic of 12.694 for leadership and, 13.043 for organizational culture, respectively. In this case, the null hypothesis of the study is accepted because there is not enough evidence to conclude that the variables are associated. Therefore the results can be interpreted that at 95% confidence, there are no relationships between organizational culture and leadership of the LLGs and DDAs to the development of small and medium entrepreneurship in EHP.

This finding is not in agreement with the study of Ezebilo, Odhuno and Kavan (2019) on organizational culture; and that of Ward (2019) positing that leadership is motivating a group of people to act towards achieving a common goal.

5.0 Conclusions and recommendations

Based on the findings, the study concluded that:

- The status of implementations of planned service operations and delivery management (SODM) approaches and activities on service culture, service quality, employee engagement, and customer experience dimensions are deemed to be just meets some expectations, fairly operational with noted number of shortcomings.
- There is no a relationship between organizational culture and leadership of local level government and district development agencies to the progress and development of small and medium entrepreneurship in the province for there is not enough evidence to conclude that the variables are associated.
- The small and medium entrepreneurs are knowledgeable, skillful and progressive economic individuals belonging to an innovative sector. They can constructively recognize the roles of local level government and district development authorities towards progress and development of small and medium entrepreneurship in the province. They are capable of proposing causal measures in public delivery service management, SME development and management, organization behaviour, and customer satisfaction management. These are SODM essentials of effective implementation approaches that could further the creation of value in the development of SMEs in the province of Eastern Highlands.

The study recommends that the key players and implementers of local level government agencies task to develop the SME sector in EHP must validate and adhere to the vital findings of the study. The District Development Authority managers assigned in the 8 districts who are tasked to perform service delivery functions and carry out service delivery responsibilities specified in the Ministerial determination made under DDA Act of 2014 should considered the participants' suggestions along service operations and delivery management approaches tendered for small and medium enterprises in their respective district. The Provincial Administration Office of Eastern Highlands Province should consider looking at the plight of the small and medium entrepreneurs and address their needs according to the various recommendations forwarded by the SMEs of the study.

Future research is recommended to deal on the longitudinal studies exploring the public service delivery innovation in public service or government department. In addition, future studies could investigate SMEs' perceptions of organisational justice across the different provincial government departments of Papua New Guinea.

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