



Service Gap Analysis of Public Transport Services – A Case Study of NWKRTC

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INTRODUCTION

Public transport is a shared passenger transport service which is available for use by the general public, as distinct from modes such as taxicab, car pooling or hired buses which are not shared by strangers without private arrangement. Public transport modes include buses, trains, rapid transit (metro/subways/undergrounds etc) and autos. Public transport between cities is dominated by airlines, coaches, and intercity rail. Public transport services are usually funded by government subsidies and fares charged to each passenger. Services are normally regulated and possibly subsidized from local or national tax revenue. Public transportation revitalizes business districts and lets employers tap into a larger workforce. It stimulates commerce and increases property values. Public Transport benefits an audience of transport operators, and consulting firms and academic institutions involved in development, utilization or research of computer-aided planning and scheduling in public transport. Public transportation is a great way to get more hours in the day.

Karnataka State Road Transport Corporation (KSRTC) is a state-owned road transportation company in Karnataka. KSRTC was set up in 1961 under the provisions of Road Transport Corporation Act, 1950. It is wholly owned by the Government of Karnataka. In August 1997, KSRTC was divided and a new corporation by the name Bangalore Metropolitan Transport Corporation (BMTC) was formed. In November 1997, another new road transport corporation called North Western Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NWKRTC) was formed to cater to the transportation needs of North Western parts of Karnataka. Recently, the North Eastern Karnataka Road Transport Corporation (NEKRTC) was also formed with its corporate office in Gulbarga. The company runs a fleet of buses of all types like ordinary, semi-luxury, deluxe, and air-conditioned Volvo "Airavat" buses. The KSRTC operates services within Karnataka as well as far flung destinations such as Trivandrum, Mumbai, and Vijayawada, among others. The KSRTC runs different type of buses to suit every section of the society. KSRTC is also known for its introduction of Volvo B7RLE low body city buses. These buses are air conditioned, with improved tyre suspensions, a far cry from the other old members of fleet. Mission of KSRTC is "Meeting Challenges with Innovation". KSRTC services almost all villages in Karnataka. At present, 92% villages are served by KSRTC (6743 out of 7298 Villages) and 44% in other areas. KSRTC operates 6463 schedules in a day covering an effective distance of 23.74 lakh kms with a total fleet of 7599 buses. It transports, on an average, 24.57 lakh passengers per day.

NWKRTC (HUBLI-DHARWAD)

NWKRTC is the lifeline of North Karnataka region in particular and that of State at large. As such the trust and faith of millions of customers, be it passengers or general populace along this road transport, is inter-linked to the growth of the corporation.

NWKRTC are the first STU in India to launch the state of the art new Generation sleeper coach AC buses with high powered rear engine. Further our esteemed premier buses viz. Volvo A/c, Meghadooth A/c, Rajahansa and other many brands that will allow passengers to reach their destination in comfort and style. NWKRTC has embarked on a mission to establish itself as a modern, growth oriented organization and to make its presence felt in the country's dynamic transport sector. It has a vision to become a modern world class passenger's road trans-

port organization, committed to powering Karnataka's growth on all fronts by maximizing transport services with revenue and minimizing the cost of operation from existing infrastructure. Besides, striving for achieving excellence in its performance, NWKRTC is fully conscious of its corporate Social Responsibility towards community and has decided to contribute more its services towards social responsibility oriented activities. Its recent contribution is "KSRTC women buses from Hubli to Dharwad"

The NWKRTC is extending concessional passes to the public for the few routes, concessional bus pass for school and colleges students. Senior Citizen fare Concession (25%) for passengers of age 65 and above. Free Bus-passes to the Freedom Fighters, and to the Blind persons. Concessional Bus passes to the Physically Handicapped persons. NWKRTC also provides services with concessional rate for school/college for excursion, educational tour etc. NWKRTC has tie-up with 'Hubli – Dharwad – One' service providers. Through the 'Hubli – Dharwad – One' passengers can get all kinds of bus pass, renewal of bus existing passes, no need to come to NWKRTC bus stands.

SERVICE QUALITY

In the service literature, service quality is interpreted as perceived quality which means a customer's judgment about a service. The authors of Service Quality (SERVQUAL) which has been extensively used in assessing service quality of different service providers including banks suggested that "Quality evaluations are not made solely on the outcome of a service; they also involve evaluations of the process of service delivery". Within the SERVQUAL model, service quality is defined as the gap between customer perceptions of what happened during the service transaction and his expectations of how the service transaction should have been performed. SERVQUAL refers to five dimensions of quality:

- Tangibles (appearance of KSRTC's facilities, employees, equipment and communication materials).
- Reliability (delivering the promised outputs at the stated level).
- Responsiveness (providing prompt service and help to passengers; the reaction speed plays a vital role here).
- Assurance (ability of KSRTC to inspire trust and confidence in the firm through knowledge, politeness and trustworthiness of the employees).
- Empathy (willingness and capability to give personalized attention to a passenger).

NEED FOR THE STUDY

Transport system is said to be the channel which facilitate in the mobility of men and material. Competition is torrid and a desperate need for revenue has driven down the margin. This leaves service margins as a savor for corporations and a target for customers. In the good old days, providers would not sell, rather customers automatically bought it. But this trend has changed drastically. Therefore it is very important to understand the end users perceptions and expectations.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. Understand customer gap.
2. Understand service providers' gaps.
3. Understand service providers' strategies to overcome gaps.
4. Suggest suitable suggestions and how to overcome the gaps.

METHODOLOGY

SERVQUAL - factors provided the basis for development of a measurement tool. The service quality attributes used in our research are of 22. These factors were measured using five-point scales from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 5 ("strongly agree") with a mid-point as neutral category. Primary data was collected by through survey using structured questionnaire of servqual model with personal interview with passengers. Sample size for the survey was 100 passengers selected randomly. The target population was composed of service user of NWKSRTC above 18 years of age who had used this service. The sample includes 30% female and 70% male. The age distribution was quite even as 76% were youths between 21 to 30 years, 14% were aged between 31 to 40 years, 8% were aged from 41 to 50 and 2% were aged above 50 years.

DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETATION

Tangible Dimension of Service Quality: Tangibles which represent the appearance of up to date equipments, staff members and physical facilities help customers form an impression about the service they are getting from NWKRTC. They expect employees to be properly dressed, interior to be visually appealing and equipment up-to-date. The study reveals that on an average their satisfaction level is -0.50 that is negative gap.



Graph – 1: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

Passengers have a dissatisfaction regarding this dimension. They expect NWKSRTC to have up to date equipments from time to time. Physical facilities should be visually appealing; employees should be well dressed and appear neat. That is the quality of seats, windows, floor space, unscrapped vehicles with good amount of speed etc. Private service providers are able to even provide them with entertainment in buses such as television and music system, which NWKSRTC is unable to provide. As they are using old buses since a long time, they are neither visually appealing nor conditions of buses also good. Employees, drivers, conductors, are not properly dressed up. For instance one can see a driver/conductor not properly groomed. Employees are not well educated or trained up to be neatly dressed up and maintain dignity of their work. And moreover these employees are not dressing up well, keeping in mind the kind of service they are providing.

Reliability Dimension of the Service Quality: Reliability refers to the ability to perform the promised service dependably and accurately considering the identification of this dimension seems sound passengers do not want to have problems while travelling. Specific criteria that customers use in this dimension include: Timeliness, Consistency/ Regularity, and Accuracy.



Graph – 2: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

As this is a public transport service, NWKSRTC doesn't provide any kind of promise as much in the form of advertisement, as other service providers do. So its promises can be considered as arrival of a bus and reaching destination at the scheduled time. About sympathetic behaviour passengers expect high cooperation from the employees, for ex-

ample, if they do not have change, they feel conductors being non cooperative with them, not sympathetic. Similarly the drivers sometimes do not stop at some stops. About dependability passengers are highly depending on NWKSRTC but as far as time is concerned NWKSRTC is not dependable. Only few records are kept accurately including each passengers boarded at each stop. Sometimes even they fail to collect tickets. In such case, they have failed in maintaining records about the service provided.

Responsiveness Dimension of Service Quality: Responsiveness which relates to performance standards and can be addressed as process quality. Customers want to get a service promptly, timely, sympathetically, in a reassuring manner, a service without errors and dependability, performed to high standards accurately and by giving due importance to its service recipient. Passengers are not satisfied with this dimension. Their average expectation with regards to responsiveness is 3.52. But the level of satisfaction that they have derived is relatively poor.



Graph – 3: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

Passengers expect that NWKRTC keep telling them when exactly a service will be delivered or performed. Whenever, NWKRTC go offering special services for instance, special buses during any special occasion that should be communicated in advance. Most of the passengers agree that KSRTC is able to provide prompt service through its employees. Further they said that not all the employees are willing to help its customers. So there's a negative gap of 0.72. It has to try to improve its relationship with its customer as they are valuable asset. Sometimes employees are so busy that they have failed to respond customers' requests promptly. So we can see that there's a negative gap in this regard of 0.45. However NWKRTC must make attempts to overcome these gaps, regarding employees' willingness to help passengers and employees' responsiveness to passengers having high negative gap should be focussed.

Assurance Dimension of Service Quality: Assurance refers to the knowledge and courtesy of staff, their ability to inspire trust and confidence. A passenger wants employees be trustworthy, polite, feel safe in transacting competent, helpful, and polite. Research has showed that the average satisfaction is 3.065 whereas their expectation is high. i.e., 3.435 which has resulted in to a negative gap of 0.37



Graph – 4: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

The perceived level of service is said to be very low when compared to their expectations when it comes to employees trust worthiness. Most of the people do not trust its employees. Sometimes they are suspected for taking off valuables belonging to the passengers during journey. And they practise some illegal activities such as collecting money and not issuing the tickets, collecting extra money to move parcel from one place to another, not giving back the change intentionally. The recent Delhi case has a severe impact on the minds of the people. Especially woman feel very unsafe travelling alone not only at night, but also during day time. Employees of NWKSRTC are not found to be polite

enough. And it is also a miserable thing to note that these employees are not getting adequate support from NWKSRTC whether it is for doing their jobs well. They are not given rights to act on their own. For example, if the road is blocked or any hooligans attack takes place, these are not having the right to even change the route and escape from it. Rather are required to call depot manager, take prior permission and only then act according to the instructions given by them.

Empathy Dimension of Service Quality: Empathy which can be addressed as the quality of social interactions between the passenger and the service provider. A passenger wants employees to understand his needs, to respect them as individuals and to provide clear and understandable information. Although NWKRTC is becoming more and more high-tech the identification of a dimension that is high touch shows that personal contact still needs to be addressed.

In short this dimension can be explained as follows.

Treating customers as Individuals	The caring individualized attention that provider provides to his customer	Access (to staff, services, information) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Communication (clear, appropriate, timely) • Understanding the stakeholder • Services appropriate for stakeholders' needs • Individualized attention
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The research shows that KSRTC is lacking in meeting passengers expectation which is on an average 3.29 however the level of satisfaction that they are receiving is only 2.88. So there is a gap of 0.268. The following table and chart explains passengers' expectation and perception with regards to each question of this dimension.



Graph - 5: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

Research has showed that employees of NWKSRTC do not give individual and personal attention to its customers. They behave in a same manner with everyone. Whether it be man or woman, children or old people, so one can see a huge gap between the actual service derived and expected service. Sometimes these employees do not even understand what passengers need. They wait till ones needs are expected. When it comes to operating hours convenience, there's a positive gap indicating that expectation is low, but the quality of service provided is so superior that they are very satisfied. One can see NWKRTC buses moving on road even at night.

Dimension wise gap: The following table shows the gap of different dimensions:



Graph - 6: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

It has to be noted that *empathy gap* (-0.27) and *assurance gap* (-0.37) is less compared to all other gap. However all gaps are having a negative result. It means that NWKRTC has to put more efforts to study its

customer's expectation and should be able to satisfy them. It has to improve on its *tangibility dimension* (-0.50) as it is the one that will be more appealing to a service user.



Graph - 7: Source: Data compiled from the survey.

It can be said that the level of satisfaction passengers are deriving is less compared to their expectation. There's a gap of -0.44.

In the above matrix, those service attributes fall under first quadrant have high importance or high customer expectation and high performance. NWKRTC has high advantages as many service quality attributes fall in first quadrant having high customers satisfaction. However, NWKRTC has to improve its performance/quality in the following attributes: KSRTC's equipments, Physical facilities, keeping promise to do something in time, Accurate records, Prompt service, willingness to respond customers, Employee trust, Employees politeness, Individual attention to its customer, Understanding customers interest, Employees appearance.

Attributes to be maintained by KSRTC are as follows: KSRTC's support to its employees, the time pace at which they rendering service, operating hours convenient to customers, Customers feeling about safety in transacting. The relative performance of these attribute is high, as well as its performance is high. So KSRTC should be able to maintain these so that it can retain its passengers.

Lower maintained attribute, is NWKRTC's dependability, the passengers do not expect NWKRTC to be dependable. The importance of this attribute is low; similarly its performance is also low.

Attributes which are just met to customers' expectation are Employees willingness to help customers, Appearance of physical facilities. These are the factors which have shown that on an average that the perceptions are just met with their expectations. It means that the service provider is able to understand its customers and is able to provide them satisfaction.

SUGGESTIONS

Since passengers are exposed to sophisticated private transport services they expect more from public transport services also. Therefore overall average expectation is 3.40 whereas overall average perception is 2.97 so - 0.44 is the negative gap. To overcome these gaps NWKRTC has to procure equipment such as good bus, improve its interior, seats etc. And need to improve its physical equipments by making it visually appealing, make a compulsion to be in a proper attire and give the grooming etiquettes, Through strict code of conduct to employees this can be achieved. Reward an employee for being more sympathetic so that others get motivated to act in a same manner. Morale checks if imposed will help in setting things right. A careful audit for every 3 months would help it in maintaining all records accurately. Training employees to build a friendly kind of environment also solve any personal problems of employees that is coming in their way. This can be achieved by recruiting employees who are having good ethics and values in them. Empowering employees act at time of emergency or when the need arises without waiting for orders. Train employees on personal relationship building activities and make them understand that each individual is important. Feedback system should be implemented in order to make passengers/public express their need and expectations. A suggestion box should be kept in the bus, or bus stop and it should be reviewed from time to time.