

The importance of National Parks and the quality of Service to customers

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Abstract: South African public entities have been performing poorly in public service delivery. This article offers an instrument that can improve public service performance. The article highlights the importance of financial management in the national parks and how quality service can be provided in the National Park.

Keywords: SANParks, Kruger National Park, Customer, quality

1. Introduction

Public entities or state-owned organisations in South Africa have been facing challenges that have negatively affected the effective and efficient attainment of service delivery goals (Masuku, 2019:118-134; Kanyane, 2014:90-110). Most public entities have faced financial, governance, and accountability problems, leading to poor service delivery (Grossi et al., 2015). The reports from the auditor general on the financial performance of SANParks for the 2019/20 financial year highlight this point.

2. Service Excellence

Adhering to and properly implementing excellence models such as the SAPSM can help to improve public entities' financial performance and service delivery. There are several instances where excellence models have been credited with producing desired results of better quality products and services and improving financial management (Edgeman, 2018).

Grunewald et al. (2016:60-68) have identified socioeconomic factors that affect service quality in the African wildlife tourism sector. The authors have shown that visiting tourists demand value for money from local tourism facilities and that it is important to evaluate the quality of services delivered to visitors regularly. Jin et al. (2015: 82-95) have identified financial, marketing and customer-service-related factors that influence perceived values of interest among local and international visitors. The authors have shown that it is essential for tourism centres to be visible enough on local and international platforms to be financially viable on a maintainable foundation. Mikulic et al. (2017:226-233) have shown that campsite choice by visitors at national parks such as Kruger National Park depends upon the ability of parks to provide a wide variety of quality services required by visitors at affordable rates and efficiency. Pietila and Kangas (2015: 26-36) have shown that the ability of national parks such as Kruger National Park to attract a steady flow of local and international visitors is dependent upon their ability to offer quality recreational services at competitive rates. Based on findings obtained from a 5-year-long study, Leask (2016:334-361) has shown that the ability of national parks to remain financially viable on a sustainable basis is influenced by their ability to offer recreational services at a competitive cost of service and the ability to conduct market-related research in areas related to service quality, customer expectations, customer relationships, customer preferences and service fees at rival parks.

3. National Parks

Swemmer et al. (2015:4-20) have shown that parks in South Africa, such as the Kruger National Park, are a key point of attraction to locals and global tourists interested in the quality game and wildlife viewing experience. The authors have highlighted the significance of South African National Parks to the local economy and international visitors and have recommended that South African national parks deserve to be supported and promoted vigorously. Leon et al. (2015: 21-29) have highlighted the necessity for balancing the needs of local communities with the need to protect the entire ecosystem at national parks. The authors have highlighted the need to be mindful of the basic survival and recreational needs of visiting tourists, wild animals and the general environment.

Ferreira and Van Zyl (2016:39-53) have argued that Kruger National Park needs to build the capacity to serve visiting tourists by serving local food products to them rather than relying on fast food products as a means of providing visitors with a unique South African experience. Shaw and Rademeyer (2016:173-192) have argued that Kruger National Park must be adequately equipped to counter wildlife poaching. The authors have emphasised the need for protecting wildlife with enough vigour and commitment from the South African Government.

Lindsey et al. (2012:218-221) have highlighted the strategic benefits and rewards of conserving the general environment in and around Kruger National Park as a means of placing Kruger National Park as the foremost tourist attraction for wildlife game viewing in the world. The authors have called for drastic measures to protect wildlife and the general environment. Mabunda and Wilson (2009:116-133) have called for the promotion of sustainable tourism at Kruger National Park by way of protecting and supporting the national park as well as the surrounding environment vigorously. Furthermore, the authors have called for improved assistance from the South African Government and private sector to enable the park to protect its wild animals and general environment adequately. They have argued that it is vital to promote public-private partnerships in the quest to protect wildlife and the general environment.

Mikesell (2013:44-45) highlighted the need for fiscal discipline and robust financial skills in service delivery institutions such as Kruger National Park. Based on a study conducted in Australia, Strickland-Munro and Moore (2013:26-41) showed the benefits of protecting natural resources, indigenous values of local communities, wildlife and the general environment. The authors indicated that the ability of national parks to raise steady income from visiting tourists is a key requirement for sustainable operation, and they have shown the benefits of optimally utilising finances and human resources. Coria and Calfucura (2012:47-55) asserted that businesses that provide wildlife and game viewing services must ensure financial viability by utilising their financial and natural resources optimally. In this regard, the authors have argued that successful ecotourism depends upon the degree to which service providers provide attractive services to visitors without jeopardising the welfare of animals, indigenous values and the natural environment. Furthermore, Van Wijk et al. (2015:104-125) showed the importance of fiscal discipline, conservation and institutional innovation for ensuring sustainability in the wildlife and game-viewing industry. The authors pointed out that utilising financial and natural resources with robust discipline is a key predictor of sustained development and growth in national parks.

Brun et al. (2015:285-295) have constructed spatial models to quantify the extent of socioeconomic and environmental damage caused by the deforestation of protected areas in Indonesia. The key causes of failure were lack of good leadership, corruption, lack of managerial and financial skills, and lack of respect for the natural environment. The authors called for strict enforcement of environmental legislation and good corporate leadership and governance.

All financial activities conducted in Kruger National Park are based on guidelines and regulations stipulated in the South African Public Finance Management Act (Act number 1 of 1999) (South African National Treasury, 1999). Compliance with The Public Finance Management Act (PFMA) is mandatory in all financial transactions at Kruger National Park. All financial transactions at Kruger National Park are audited by the nation's Auditor General as authorised by the PFMA to scrutinise the merits of all financial transactions annually. The PFMA applies to financial transactions that are based on planning, budgeting, budget implementation (such as procurement, payments, accounting and reporting) and internal and external audit exercises (Mishra, 2015:70).

4. Conclusions

Khan et al. (2016:1697-1724) asserted that effective or ineffective service delivery institutions in all economic sectors hinge on how prudently they utilise financial resources. In this regard, the key aspect is to spend money following approved plans of action. The Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has lost about 50% of all national revenues owed to the national government due to the failure of civil servants to comply with financial guidelines and regulations (Vickland&Nieuwenhuijs, 2005:96). As a result of this failure, Donor agencies such as the USAID had to perform their own accounting functions by ignoring the national ministry of finance. Sound financial management can assist developing nations to be financially viable (Peterson, 2011:205). The author has shown how efficiently Ethiopia has managed to utilise the flow of aid money by adhering to the basic principles of fiscal discipline. It is possible to improve overall performance and sustainability in Kruger National Park by adhering to the PFMA vigorously (Tsheletsane& Fourie, 2014:43).

Acknowledgements

The researcher(s) would like to acknowledge Tshwane University of Technology for allowing me to link this article to my study.

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