



Quality of Public Services at the Public Company of the Regional Drinking Water (Perumdams) Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the quality of public services at the Tirta Berkah Regional Public Company of Drinking Water (PERUMDAM) Labuan Branch, as well as identify obstacles and efforts made by the company in improving the quality of service to the community. The research method used is a qualitative approach with data collection techniques through observation, interviews, and documentation. Data analysis is carried out through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions. The results of the study show that the quality of public services at PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch has not been fully optimal. Of the five public service indicators used as a reference—tangible evidence, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy—the empathy indicators still show weaknesses, especially in the responsiveness of officers to customer problems. The main problem faced by customers is water distribution disruptions such as dead water and turbid water that has not been completely resolved. In addition, there have been no significant steps from the company to suppress these complaints. Thus, improving the competence of officers and evaluating the water distribution system is an urgent need to improve the quality of public services in a sustainable manner.

Keywords: *Service Quality, Empathy, Reliability, Responsiveness, Clean Water*

I. Introduction

Public services are one of the government's main responsibilities in meeting the needs of the community. Law Number 25 of 2009 explains that public services are activities or a series of activities in order to meet the needs of citizens for goods, services, and/or administrative services provided by state administrators. The government, through various public institutions, has an obligation to provide fast, precise, and quality services to the public in accordance with the principles of *good governance*.

In practice, public services in Indonesia still face various problems, such as convoluted procedures, long turnaround times, lack of transparency, and low empathy from service officials. The community is often positioned as a party that serves, not those that are served. This condition requires public service reform so that the bureaucracy is more responsive to the needs of the community and able to provide effective and efficient services.

One of the important aspects of public service is the quality of service. According to Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry, the quality of service can be measured through five dimensions: tangible evidence, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. The application of these five dimensions is important for public institutions in assessing the extent to which the services provided have met the expectations of the community.

The Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PERUMDAM) is one of the local government institutions that plays a strategic role in providing clean water for the community. PERUMDAM Labuan Branch, as a service unit under the auspices of the Pandeglang Regency Government, has the responsibility to ensure the

availability of clean water and provide satisfactory service to customers. However, various community reports show that there are still complaints about the services provided, such as delays in handling water disturbances, cloudy water quality, and lack of responsiveness of officers to customer complaints.

This condition shows that the quality of service provided by PERUMDAM Labuan Branch is not fully optimal. Good service should be able to meet customer expectations consistently through improving the work system, improving employee competence, and applying the principles of excellent service. Therefore, it is important to conduct research to assess and analyze the quality of public services implemented by PERUMDAM Labuan Branch, as well as identify factors that affect the level of customer satisfaction.

This study aims to describe and analyze the quality of public services at PERUMDAM Labuan Branch based on Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry indicators. The results of the research are expected to provide an empirical picture of the level of effectiveness of the public services provided and become evaluation material for related agencies to improve services in the future. Practically, the results of this research are also expected to contribute to improving the quality of clean water services and encourage the implementation of a more responsive and community-oriented work culture.

Thus, this research has relevance both academically and practically. Academically, the results of the research enriched the literature on the implementation of public service quality at the regional level. Practically, the research findings can be the basis for PERUMDAM and local governments in formulating strategies to improve service quality in order to be able to create public trust and improve community welfare.

Literature Review

The Concept of Public Service

Public services are activities carried out by the government or public institutions in order to meet the needs of the community. According to Law Number 25 of 2009, public services are activities or a series of activities in order to meet service needs in accordance with laws and regulations for citizens for goods, services, and/or administrative services provided by public administrators. In the context of government administration, public services are a manifestation of the state's function to serve, not to be served.

Ratminto and Atik (2006) define service as the process of helping others in need in certain ways that require sensitivity and interpersonal relationships in order to create satisfaction and success. Public services basically involve two parties: service providers and service recipients. The quality of interaction between the two determines the level of public satisfaction with the performance of the bureaucracy.

In its implementation, public services ideally meet the principles of professionalism, efficiency, transparency, accountability, and equality. However, the reality shows that public service practices in Indonesia are often still colored by convoluted procedures, long service times, and a lack of empathy of the bureaucratic apparatus towards the community. This condition requires bureaucratic reform so that public services can be carried out effectively, efficiently, and oriented to the needs of citizens.

The Concept of Quality and Quality of Public Services

Quality is a measure that shows the extent to which a product or service is able to meet the needs and expectations of users. Goetsch & Davis (2005) define quality as a dynamic condition related to products, services, people, processes, and the environment that meet or exceed customer expectations. Thus, quality is not only related to the final result, but also includes the process and attitude in providing services.

In the context of public services, quality is an important indicator for the success of government administration. Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry developed a SERVQUAL model that identifies five key dimensions of service quality, namely:

1. **Tangible Evidence** – includes facilities and infrastructure, physical facilities, employee appearance, and supporting equipment that reflects the professionalism of the institution.
2. **Reliability** – the ability of the institution to provide services precisely, accurately, and trustworthily according to promises to the community.

3. Responsiveness – the willingness of employees to help and provide services quickly and responsive to customer needs.
4. Assurance – includes the knowledge, manners, and ability of employees to foster a sense of security and trust in the community.
5. Empathy – the individual's attention and concern for the customer through good communication and understanding of their needs.

These five dimensions are the basis for evaluating the quality of public services because they directly reflect the community's experience in interacting with service provider institutions. Quality public services are expected to be able to increase public satisfaction and trust in government institutions.

Public Service in the Perspective of Local Government

The implementation of public services at the regional level is part of the implementation of regional autonomy as stipulated in Law Number 23 of 2014 concerning Regional Government. Local governments have the authority to regulate and manage the affairs of their communities, including the provision of basic services such as clean water, education, and health.

In this context, Regionally-Owned Enterprises (BUMD) are an important instrument in the implementation of public services in the economic and utility sectors. The Regional Public Drinking Water Company (PERUMDAM) is a form of BUMD that functions to provide clean water to the community. As a public service provider, PERUMDAM is not only required to achieve operational efficiency, but also must ensure customer satisfaction through fast, precise, and quality service.

The success of public services in the region is highly dependent on the quality of human resources, the availability of facilities and infrastructure, and the management system implemented. Therefore, improving the quality of public services must be carried out comprehensively through improving employee competence, applying information technology, and strengthening internal evaluation and supervision mechanisms.

Challenges of Service Quality in the Regional Drinking Water Sector

Water is a basic human need and is included in the category of public goods whose provision is the responsibility of the government. PERUMDAM as a clean water service provider is expected to be able to meet quality, quantity, and continuity standards. However, various obstacles are still faced by many PERUMDAM branches in Indonesia, such as limited infrastructure, distribution network leakage, water supply disruptions, and low customer satisfaction with the officers' response.

In Pandeglang Regency, PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch faces a similar problem. Based on community reports, frequent complaints include turbid water, distribution disruptions, and slow response to customer complaints. This shows the need to improve the quality of service both from technical and non-technical aspects. The dimensions of empathy and responsiveness are the aspects that are most often complained about because they are directly related to the interaction between officers and customers.

Assessment of service quality in the drinking water sector can be an important tool for PERUMDAM management to evaluate performance and determine improvement steps. Good public service is not only seen from how quickly technical problems are resolved, but also from the extent to which institutions are able to build harmonious and communicative relationships with the community that uses services.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study uses the SERVQUAL model approach from Zeithaml, Parasuraman, and Berry as the main reference to assess the quality of public services at PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch. This model is relevant because it emphasizes on the customer's perception of the five dimensions of service that reflect physical, procedural, and interpersonal aspects.

In this context, the quality of public services is determined by the balance between the three main components as explained by Morgan and Murgatroyd, namely the interpersonal component, the procedural/process component, and the technical/professional component. The three components must run in balance to produce optimal service.

By applying this theoretical approach, the research is expected to provide an empirical understanding of how each dimension of service quality is applied in PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah, as well as how the role of employees, facilities, and procedures contribute to the level of community satisfaction as service users.

III. Research Methods

Approaches and Types of Research

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach, which aims to deeply understand social phenomena related to the quality of public services in the Tirta Berkah Regional Public Company of Drinking Water (PERUMDAM) Labuan Branch. The qualitative approach allows researchers to interpret social realities based on the perceptions and direct experiences of informants. According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011), qualitative research focuses on understanding the meaning that individuals construct towards their social environment.

A descriptive approach is used to systematically describe the actual conditions of public services provided by PERUMDAM. This type of research does not attempt to test hypotheses, but emphasizes the description and interpretation of data obtained in the field. Thus, the results of the research are expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of how service quality is applied and perceived by the community.

Research Location and Time

The research was carried out at the Tirta Berkah Regional Drinking Water Public Company (PERUMDAM) Labuan Branch, Pandeglang Regency, Banten Province. This location was chosen purposively considering that the Labuan Branch is one of the main service units that has a large number of customers and faces various problems related to the quality of clean water services. In addition, researchers also have good access to the research location because they work in the same institution, thus facilitating the observation and field data collection process.

The research activities were carried out from March to May 2022, including the initial observation stage, in-depth interviews, documentation, data analysis, and the preparation of research results.

Data Sources and Types

This study uses two types of data sources, namely primary data and secondary data.

Primary data was obtained directly from the results of field observations and in-depth interviews with informants consisting of PERUMDAM employees and active customers of the Labuan Branch. Primary data includes respondents' views, experiences, and perceptions of the quality of public services they receive.

Secondary data was obtained from official documents of PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah, annual reports, internal archives, books, scientific journals, and other literature sources relevant to the research topic. Secondary data serves to complement and reinforce the findings obtained through interviews and observations.

The main data source consisted of 10 informants, namely five employees of PERUMDAM Labuan Branch and five active customers. The selection of informants was carried out using the purposive sampling technique, which is the selection of respondents based on certain considerations in accordance with the needs and objectives of the research.

Data Collection Techniques

To obtain valid and comprehensive data, this study uses three main data collection techniques:

- **Direct observation:** The researcher observed service activities at the PERUMDAM Labuan Branch office, including interactions between officers and customers, facility conditions, and complaint handling mechanisms. This observation provides an empirical overview of public service practices that take place in the field.
- **In-depth *interview*:** This technique is used to dig up more detailed information about the informant's experience and perception of the quality of service. Interviews were conducted directly and openly using semi-structured interview guidelines so that researchers could tailor questions to the situation and response of the interviewees.

- **Documentation:** The researcher collects various supporting documents such as activity reports, customer count data, complaint lists, and other internal archives to verify the results of observations and interviews.

These three techniques are used simultaneously to obtain data that complement each other and provide a complete picture of the problem being studied.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was carried out using the interactive model of Miles and Huberman (1994), which included three main stages:

- **Data *reduction*:** The data from interviews and observations are selected, summarized, and focused on main matters related to the quality of public services. The purpose of data reduction is to filter out information relevant to the focus of the research, such as employee responsiveness, empathy, reliability, and physical means.
- **Data *display*:** Data that has been reduced is presented in the form of a descriptive narrative to make it easier for researchers to understand patterns and relationships between findings. The presentation of data also allows researchers to identify the suitability between customer and employee perceptions of service quality.
- **Conclusion drawing and verification:** Temporary conclusions that emerge during the analysis process are verified repeatedly until a valid and consistent understanding is obtained. Researchers ensure that the findings obtained reflect real conditions in the field.

The analysis process is carried out continuously from the beginning of data collection to the end of the research, with an inductive approach oriented to meaning and social context.

Data Validity (Validity)

To ensure the validity of the data, this study applied the triangulation technique of sources and methods. Triangulation is carried out by comparing information from various sources (employees and customers), and using several data collection techniques (observation, interviews, and documentation). In addition, member checking is also carried out by reconfirming the results of the researcher's interpretation to the informant to ensure the compatibility between the data obtained and the facts in the field.

These steps are intended so that the research results have a high level of credibility and reliability and can be scientifically accounted for.

Research Ethics

This research was carried out by upholding the ethical principles of social research, such as maintaining the confidentiality of the identity of informants, obtaining permission from related parties before conducting interviews, and using data only for academic purposes. All information is presented objectively and is not manipulated for any particular purpose.

IV. Results and Discussion

Overview of Research Locations

The Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch Regional Public Company (PERUMDAM) is one of the work units under the Pandeglang Regency Government engaged in the provision of clean water. The company has the main responsibility for water treatment, distribution, and service for the community in the Labuan area and its surroundings. Based on 2022 data, the number of active customers reached around 6,800 home connections, spread across various villages such as Labuan, Teluk, Caringin, and Margagiri.

PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah has a vision of "the realization of a healthy company and excellent service", with the mission of providing clean water services that meet the requirements of quality, quantity, and continuity. However, the reality on the ground shows that there are still various obstacles in service, such as water

distribution disruptions, turbid water, and customer complaints related to the officers' response to complaints.

Public Service Quality Based on SERVQUAL's Five Dimensions

The assessment of the quality of public services at PERUMDAM Labuan Branch was analyzed using the five dimensions of SERVQUAL (Zeithaml, Parasuraman & Berry), namely tangible evidence, *reliability*, *responsiveness*, assurance, and *empathy*.

a. Tangible Evidence

The results of the observation show that the physical facilities at the PERUMDAM Labuan Branch office are relatively adequate. The service room is equipped with air conditioning, seating for customers, and a digital payment system that facilitates transactions. Employees are also considered quite neat and polite in appearance. However, some customers stated that service space is still limited when there is a queue during peak hours. In general, the physical evidence aspect already supports customer convenience, although there is a need to increase the capacity of service rooms and facility maintenance.

b. Reliability

From the results of the interviews, most customers assessed that administrative services, such as account payments and new connection registration, had run well and quickly. However, in the technical aspect, such as dead water disturbances or pipe leaks, handling is still often delayed. This is due to the limited technical resources and equipment facilities in the field. Thus, the reliability of PERUMDAM Labuan services has not fully met customer expectations, especially in the speed of repairing water distribution disruptions.

c. Responsiveness

This dimension is one of the most criticized indicators by customers. The results of the interview showed that some customers complained about the length of the officer's response in following up on complaints. Although PERUMDAM has provided complaint channels through social media and service counters, follow-up to reports is often delayed due to the limited number of technicians in the field. However, employees show a cooperative and open attitude in receiving customer reports.

d. Jaminan (*Assurance*)

PERUMDAM Labuan Branch officers are considered to understand the work procedures and are able to provide good explanations to customers. They are courteous and professional in serving, thus fostering a sense of security and trust in the institution of customers. However, some customers expect an increase in proactive communication, such as early notification when water distribution disruptions occur. Information transparency is considered important to maintain public confidence in the company's performance.

e. Empati (*Empathy*)

The empathy aspect is the dimension with the lowest assessment based on the interview results. Customers consider that employees' concern for public complaints is still not optimal. Some customers reveal that complaints are often only responded to administratively without any real follow-up on the ground. In fact, empathy is an important factor in building long-term relationships between service providers and service users.

Problems Faced in the Service

Based on the results of the research, there are several main obstacles in the implementation of public services at PERUMDAM Labuan Branch, namely:

- Limited technical means and human resources, which leads to slow response to water disruptions and customer complaints.

- Water quality is not consistent, especially in the rainy season, where water tends to be cloudy due to filtration system disturbances.
- Lack of internal coordination between departments, so customer complaints are not always handled immediately.
- Lack of socialization and transparency of information related to repair schedules or service disruptions.

These problems have a direct impact on the level of customer satisfaction and the image of the institution as a public service provider.

Efforts to Improve Service Quality

Despite facing a number of obstacles, the Labuan Branch of PERUMDAM has taken several improvement steps, including:

- Digitization of services, through the implementation of an online payment system and the provision of a social media-based complaint channel.
- Increasing employee capacity, by holding excellent service training and improving technical competence.
- Repair of the water distribution system, through the replacement of leaking pipes and the addition of pump units.
- Cross-sectoral cooperation, between central and branch management, to accelerate the process of facility improvement.

However, the implementation of the program still needs further evaluation to have a real impact on customer satisfaction.

Analysis of Findings and Implications

The results of the study show that the quality of public services at PERUMDAM Labuan Branch has not been optimal, especially in the dimensions of empathy and responsiveness. This is in line with the findings of Zeithaml et al. that these two dimensions are often the main determinants of public perception of the quality of public services. The performance of employees at the operational level has shown professionalism, but it has not been supported by a fast and responsive service management system.

This condition illustrates that improving service quality does not only depend on technical aspects, but also on changes in organizational culture and service orientation. The application of the principle of public service excellence needs to be instilled in all employees so that every service action is oriented towards community satisfaction.

Conceptually, the results of this study strengthen the SERVQUAL theory which places customer satisfaction as the outcome of the compatibility between expectations and perceptions. In the context of PERUMDAM, efforts to improve public services must be directed at the integration of employee professionalism, modernization of service systems, and strengthening transparent public communication.

Conclusions and Suggestions

Conclusion

The results of the research on the quality of public services at the Tirta Berkah Regional Public Company of Drinking Water (PERUMDAM) Labuan Branch show that in general the services provided have run quite well, but have not fully met the expectations of the community. Based on the analysis of the five dimensions of service quality (*tangible, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy*), it was found that the aspects of empathy and responsiveness are dimensions that still need serious attention.

In the dimension of physical evidence (*tangible*), service facilities and work facilities are considered adequate and able to provide comfort for customers. Reliability shows that administrative services are relatively good

and regular, but the speed of handling technical problems in the field is still the main obstacle. Meanwhile, assurances related to professionalism and employee attitudes are good enough to foster a sense of security and public trust, although proactive communication needs to be improved.

The main problems faced by PERUMDAM Labuan Branch include limited human resources, slow handling of complaints, and low consistency in clean water distribution. These factors have implications for the low level of customer satisfaction with the public services provided. Thus, the improvement of the quality of public services needs to be carried out comprehensively, not only in the technical aspects but also in the work culture oriented towards customer satisfaction and social responsibility.

Suggestions

Based on the results of the research, some recommendations can be submitted as follows:

1. Increasing the capacity of human resources through excellent service training, customer communication management, and improving the technical capabilities of employees to be more responsive to public complaints.
2. Optimize the complaint and rapid response system by utilizing digital technology, such as customer service applications or integrated online channels, to speed up the follow-up of any harassment reports.
3. Improvement of water infrastructure and distribution systems, including periodic maintenance of pipelines, so that continuity and quality of clean water can be maintained.
4. Strengthening public communication and information transparency, for example by providing official notification to customers in the event of service interruptions or repair schedules.
5. Building a culture of empathy and accountability, where every employee understands that customer satisfaction is the main goal of public service.

By implementing these steps consistently, it is hoped that PERUMDAM Tirta Berkah Labuan Branch will be able to improve the quality of services in a sustainable manner, strengthen public trust, and become an example of professional and responsive public service practices at the regional level.

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