AN ACTION RESEARCH PROJECT TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A CUSTOMER CARE POLICY AND CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS AT REAL ESTATE SOLUTIONS COMPANY LIMITED

A SPECIAL PURPOSE STATE ENTERPRISE IN TRINIDAD AND TOBAGO

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of Liverpool for the degree of Doctor of Business Administration

by

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ABSTRACT

An Action Research Project to Develop and Implement a Customer Care Policy and Customer Complaints Handling Process At Real Estate Solutions Company Limited

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Historically, very little attention has been directed towards enhancing customer relationships in the real estate industry more so in Special Purpose State Enterprises (SPSEs) that are landlords. In spite of the fact that there has been some movement towards embracing Customer Relationship Management (CRM), customer care and complaints handling in the real estate industry, SPSEs continue to lag behind.

The thesis critically analyses the state of CRM, customer care and complaints handling at Real Estate Solutions Company Limited (RESL), a SPSE located in Trinidad and Tobago with a view to developing and implementing a Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process. Specifically, it investigates why RESL has placed limited focus on CRM, whether publicness has impacted the company's ability to deliver excellent customer care to its tenants and will embedding complaints handling improve the company's financial position.

To answer my three research questions under investigation, the method of action research was used. An action research group of key customer facing employees from RESL was formed to engage in collaborative inquiry into the issues of customer care and complaints handling. The group and I were engaged in the co-creation of knowledge, development of the Customer Care Policy and customer complaints handling process. In addition to the work undertaken by the research group, interviews were conducted with executive management and senior Managers and the outcomes were subject to thematic analysis. A case example demonstrating lengthy delays in customer care delivery to a RESL tenant was analysed and a questionnaire was administered to all employees to solicit their opinions on customer care at the company.

The results of the practical intervention unearthed overarching themes of the transactional nature of the landlord-tenant relationship, the fetter of RESL being a SPSE, executive inertia, silo thinking and behaviour and negligence in handling customer complaints .

The results of the inquiry also find RESL in a weak position in the face of its tenants, as customer care is accorded lip service in corporate documents whilst attention is directed towards capital projects with more visible results. The results suggest the need for SPSEs to develop mechanisms to insulate themselves from the uncertainty of five year political cycles as well as redesign work processed if they are to deliver customer value in keeping with their landlord-tenant leasing arrangement.

As insider action researcher, I worked collaboratively with the action research group throughout the inquiry and reflected on the challenges of embedding change in organisations especially SPSEs. Work streams for future research are recommended, given the paucity of research and publication on corporate real estate management and customer care delivery in SPSEs in the Caribbean region.

DECLARATION OF OWN WORK

I hereby certify that this thesis that I submit is in accordance with the requirements for the award of Doctorate in Business Administration. It is solely my work and has in no way been extracted or copied from the work of another person. The only exception relates to works that the author has cited throughout this thesis and which have been appropriately acknowledged.

Declared by: Erica Prentice

Signed: 

Dated: 24 September 2020

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

There is no way in which I could have completed the writing of this thesis without drawing on all of the spiritual teachings and principles that my parents instilled in me, such as discipline, a desire to succeed and striving to go beyond excellence. I acknowledge my family and friends who rallied with me during this very long and at times very lonely journey of writing this thesis.

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The completion of this thesis would have been impossible without the support of my Supervisor at RESL and other employees who facilitated interview sessions, as well as the employees who formed the action research group and were at the heart of this action research thesis.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BSC	Balanced Score Card
CRE	Corporate Real Estate
CREM	Corporate Real Estate Management
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CSF	Critical Success Factors
DBA	Doctorate in Business Administration
EZ	Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRCL	Government Realtors Company Limited
ICT	Information and Computer Technology
IDC	Industrial Development Corporation
IT	Information Technology
JD	Job Description
KPI	Key Performance Indicator
NPM	New Public Management
P3	Public Private Partnership
PIDCOTT	Property and Industrial Development Company of Trinidad and Tobago
PO	Property Officer
PSREM	Public Sector Real Estate Management
READ	Real Estate Assets Division
REAM	Real Estate Asset Management
RESL	Real Estate Solutions Company Limited
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SPSE	Special Purpose State Enterprise
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TIDCO	Tourism and Industrial Development Company Limited
UK	United Kingdom

APPENDIX

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This introductory chapter positions my research within the context of customer relationship management (CRM), customer care and complaints handling in a Special Purpose State Enterprise (SPSE) charged with the responsibility for managing real estate on behalf of the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago.

The chapter begins by providing an overview of the focus of the thesis, the context and rationale for the research. The purpose of the thesis is provided next, followed by the research questions to be answered. Before concluding the chapter, the approach to the research and location of primary action are discussed. The thesis structure is then presented to guide the reader through the thesis.

1.2 THESIS FOCUS

Despite the fact that a lot has been written on CRM implementation in the private sector, there is a paucity of research on embedding CRM, customer care and complaints handling in the Public Sector, especially in real estate companies. In this regard, the focus of the research is to understand the challenges of embedding customer driven approaches from the private sector into Government institutions that are charged with creating value for their customers who are industrial tenants. The action research project sought to develop and implement a Customer Care Policy and customer complaints handling process in order to properly record, track and report on the status of complaints to address the needs of the company's tenants for better customer care delivery.

Customer relationship management (CRM) found its way into the corporate world in the early 2000s and many authors have grappled with arriving at a clear definition of the concept (Payne and Frow 2013; Buttle and Maklan 2019). Across all definitions however, there is recognition of the major elements of technology, people and processes. It is warranted then that the thesis begins with a formal definition of the term CRM adapted from Buttle and Maklan (2019 pp.22) which states that:

> CRM is the core business strategy that aims to create and maintain profitable relationships with customers by designing and delivering superior value proposition. It is grounded on high quality customer related data and enabled by information technology.

Owners of real estate have come to the realisation that one of the ways in which they can create added value for their tenants is by becoming more customer oriented(Palm 2011). This new orientation has implications for the processes, technology and human related interventions that landlords put in place in order to engender long lasting tenant relationships.

1.3 THE CONTEXT FOR RESEARCH AT REAL ESTATE SOLUTIONS COMPANY LIMITED: MAPPING THE TERRAIN

Real Estate Solutions Company Limited (RESL) is a SPSE which reports to the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Investment in Trinidad and Tobago. In 2013, the company was mandated by the Government to become commercially viable. In the company's Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 (p.12), RESL's mission was expressed as being "A catalyst for growth of businesses in the non-oil and gas sector by providing real estate solutions, which leverage the talents and passion of our people."

The company envisioned itself as "Providing innovative and sustainable real estate solutions that deliver lasting value to tenants, shareholders and society." (Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 p.12). As landlord, RESL placed focus on asset management and facilitation of the development of economic zones. The strategies enunciated by RESL to deliver on its mandate included completion of new economic zones, improving the infrastructure of legacy economic zones, operational and financial self- sufficiency, building private partnership capabilities as well as establishing and improving networks and partnerships. With respect to its governance structure, the company is headed by a Chairman and Board Members who develop policy. The President, Executive Management and other staff members are engaged in strategic and operational matters related to the company.

My position at the company for the past 13 years as a Manager in the Real Estate Assets Division (READ) allowed me to critically assess the company's stance on CRM, customer care and complaints handling as an insider action researcher. I lead the Department which is charged with ensuring that tenants are in compliance with their leasehold covenants. My responsibility includes the day to day operations of the Department inclusive of all lease administration transactions which emanate from the company's main stakeholder, its tenants.

The company has a portfolio of industrial properties comprising 772.13 hectares of industrial land and is landlord to more than 300 tenants who are involved in light manufacturing. Some of the tenants lease land and build their factories while others lease factories owned by the landlord. The responsibility for ensuring the structural integrity of the factories is that of the Facilities Maintenance Department.

RESL has had many predecessors in title and none of these entities placed any focus on customer care delivery. Based on a review of the operations of these entities, there was always a very small staff focused mainly on rent collection. All of the predecessor companies suffered from a lack of appropriately trained staff in corporate property management. There was and continues to be no sustained effort throughout the organisation at developing a CRM strategy to re-engineer or grow relationships with customers as suggested in the literature by Buttle and Maklan (2019).

One of the ongoing complaints from tenants is the length of time that the company took to effect repairs to their buildings in order to return them to normal business operations. The lengthy delay in effecting repairs results in tenants withholding rent even though in their leasing arrangement, the landlord's covenant to effect repairs and the tenant's covenant to remit rent are not to be read in conjunction with each other. The length of time it takes for the Facilities Maintenance Department to effect repairs to buildings has to be positioned within the context of the company being a SPSE with a heavy reliance on Government for timely release of funds for capital projects in the face of a shrinking national budget.

At RESL, there is an ongoing issue of a growing aged receivables portfolio where tenants in legacy industrial parks view their occupation as a Government hand out. These tenants at times default in remitting rent in a timely manner or refuse to accept rent reviews in accordance with their leasing arrangements. Based on a 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey which was administered by a firm hired by the company, only 55% of the tenants who were sampled expressed general satisfaction with the company as their landlord.

In October 2015, a Customer Care Management Project was initiated through the Corporate Communications Department to develop and implement a Customer Care Management Plan targeting the company’s existing tenants in order to improve the landlord-tenant relationship and customer service delivery.

The deliverables were, *inter alia*, a Customer Care Management Action Plan and a customer centered service delivery process. Certain elements of the project were implemented such as redesigned processes to facilitate faster issuance of leases to tenants however the project was not sustained due to the retirement of the project champion. In September 2017, the company began an exercise to prepare a new Strategic Plan for the period 2018-2022 where one of the weaknesses identified as a result of a SWOT analysis was that the organisation lacked understanding of the needs of its customers.

With the recognition that RESL was mandated to become commercially viable and reduce dependency on Government funding, lengthy discussions were entered into with the company’s in house and external Attorneys-at-Law with a view to drafting new forms of lease to ensure full recovery of market prices. The intent was also to provide tenants with a more marketable lease which can be used as collateral in their business transactions.

This new approach adopted by the company had its genesis in financial reengineering and proper property management in order to push property up the strategic agenda of the company, coupled with the need to be more accommodating to the requirements of its customers through a review of leasing products and services.

1.4 RATIONALE FOR THE RESEARCH: MY TOPIC ISSUE

The rationale and motivation for this research were grounded in the fact that as a leading SPSE charged with managing significant tracts of industrial land on behalf of the Government, the company never prepared or implemented a Customer Care Policy neither was there a clearly defined customer complaints handling process. As a consequence, the lead customer interfacing Division, that is, READ could not create work orders for complaints, speak meaningfully in quantitative terms on the number of complaints received on a monthly basis, track complaints to record their status or assess how long it took to have them resolved. In addition, the Department could not update tenants in a timely manner on the status of remediation of complaints or allow the tenant to provide feedback on the quality and timeliness of the remedial work. Further, there was no system to close work orders on successful completion of a job using a customer complaints handling process.

As one of the Managers in the Division, I have a special interest in unearthing practical solutions to address the many concerns of the tenants with respect to customer care. As insider action researcher, my orientation to the research was one of collaborative problem solving with my direct reports (Coghlan, 2001). Insider action research, as the method used in fulfillment of the requirements for the DBA at the University of Liverpool allowed me to work on a current problem in the company of a lack of customer care using the lens of an insider.

My interest in the project is also linked to the need to engender customer centricity and achieve the company's new mandate of self-sufficiency in managing its existing industrial parks as well as new parks that are to be developed. In this regard, the company can neither continue to adopt a reactive approach to the management of its property assets nor merely view the tenant as an occupier (Kivlehan, 2011).

Studies on the management of industrial parks in the Public Sector infer a positive correlation between tenant satisfaction and park performance (Edwards and Ellison, 2004; Kaganova and Nayyar-Stone, 2000). Since 2012, RESL has placed greater significance on measuring, tracking and improving tenant satisfaction levels in order to increase revenue collection. In spite of this strategic move, there has been little sustained effort aimed at embedding excellent customer care as part of the normal course of business in the organisation.

In the recently concluded strategic planning exercise where a new Strategic Plan was developed for the period 2018-2022, one of the company's strategic themes was Customer Service Excellence. The pronouncements in the new Strategic Plan were an opportunity for me to work on the said practical problem, revisit past initiatives and undertake a readiness assessment to move forward with the customer care project in the organisation mindful of my role as insider action researcher given previous failed initiatives. I posit that many of the initiatives did not materialise due to some of the factors which were identified by Payne and Frow (2013) which included the attitude of top management, little effort by top management to shift the attitudes of employees towards a customer driven approach plus too much focus on technology and not on the management of customer relationships. These failures were echoed in the writing of Buttle and Maklan (2015) and also included a lack of management involvement and insufficient Departmental coordination as well as an organisational culture which was not customer-focused.

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE THESIS

The main purpose of this action research thesis was to develop and implement a Customer Care Policy and a customer complaints handling process at RESL in order to address poor customer care delivery in the organisation.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were framed based on my critical review of the literature and identification of gaps of knowledge of the challenges of implementing CRM, customer care and complaints handling processes in Government institutions involved in the real estate industry.

Framing of the questions was also influenced by my privileged position of insider and practitioner and evidence of the concerted effort on the part of RESL to move the organisation to one of customer-centricity.

As a result, the following research questions were framed:

1. Why at an enterprise level has there been limited focus on customer relationship management at RESL?
2. Has publicness impacted the ability of RESL to deliver excellent customer care to its tenants and if so how?
3. Will embedding a more systematic approach to customer complaints handling at RESL improve its bottom line?

1.7 APPROACH TO THE RESEARCH

The method of action research was adopted. This method consists of diagnosis of the issue, planning of action, taking action and reflection on action that are repeated in a cyclical manner (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). The method of action research allowed me to work on a live issue in the organisation in order to bring about meaningful change (Abraham, 2012). In engaging in action, double loop learning takes place (Greenwood and Levin, 2007). The method adopted throughout the study gave me the flexibility to research the complexity of the organisation and better understand why as a real estate company even though customer service excellence was recognised as an important strategic objective, there was no sustained initiative aimed at embedding same.

During the practice intervention, a series of data collection methods were adopted which included review of corporate documents, semi structured interviews, case analysis, formation of an action research group as well as issuance of a companywide questionnaire. All of the methods were used to triangulate the data which helped to validate and justify my findings related to CRM, customer care and complaints handling at RESL.

The first phase of the thesis was predominantly focused on diagnosing the organisational issue through collection of qualitative data from corporate documents, the company's Executive Management and selected Managers through semi-structured interviews. The outcomes revealed the bureaucracies within the organisation which stymied the ability of the organisation to take certain actions. This first phase provided me with a better understanding of the nature of SPSEs. The second phase of the thesis involved formation of the action research group and planning for the action to be taken in phase three, while phase four was dedicated to evaluation and reflection on action taken in the previous phases.

1.8 LOCATION OF THE PRIMARY ACTION

Given the nature of the action research method which required change to be effected within the organisation, the core action research was located at the taking action phase. The recently completed Strategic Plan 2018-2022 was accepted by the Board of the company and as previously stated, one of the strategic initiatives was Customer Care Management. The major action items of the programme included development of a customer service excellence policy framework for the company, formation of a cross functional team, development and rollout of a customer care management project as well as administering a tenant satisfaction survey. I was tasked to lead certain action items under the overall programme, one of which was the customer care handling project.

The programme was implemented with the recognition that excellence in customer service in the real estate industry positively impacts the landlord's return on investment, through less void periods and wiling tenants who remit rental and other property charges.

1.9 THESIS STRUCTURE

The overall structure of the thesis takes the form of nine chapters, including the introductory chapter. In chapter two I critically assess the literature and theoretical dimensions of CRM and customer care within the context of corporate and public sector real estate management. The third chapter is concerned with the methodology and research method used in the thesis. In chapter four the compelling need for change at RESL is diagnosed and focus placed on five key themes which emerged. Chapter five begins with planning action around CRM based on discussion at the action research group meetings. In chapter six, the Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process are developed. This is followed by a discussion and interpretation of the findings from the practice intervention in chapter seven. In chapter eight, I reflect on my journey as an insider action researcher striving to make a change in thinking towards customer centricity. In the final chapter, I answer the research questions posed in this chapter, discuss the contribution that the thesis makes to knowledge, along with unfinished work streams and make recommendations for future research.

1.10 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to introduce the study and its areas of focus, that is, customer care delivery at a SPSE charged with the responsibility for diversifying the country's economy through the leasing of land and built accommodation to tenants. An overview of CRM was presented as well as the rationale for the research which had its basis in my direct involvement in customer care delivery at the study site. The research questions which were posed in the study emanated from my review of the literature as well as pronouncements in the organisation on customer service excellence as enunciated in its latest Strategic Plan. This chapter outlines the structure of the thesis and gives a brief insight into the contents of each of the other eight chapters. The chapter which follows is the literature review which discussed four important strands of literature related to the focus of the study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

In the introductory chapter I set out the context for my research on CRM in a Special Purpose State Enterprise (SPSE) mandated by the Government to manage a portfolio of real estate assets on its behalf. The purpose of this chapter is to situate RESL in the relevant body of literature on Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM), Public Sector Real Estate Management (PREM) and CRM while analysing and evaluating their applicability to Government entities involved in real estate asset management (REAM).

The scope of the literature review encompassed four strands as follows:

1. Key debates surrounding CREM, customer care and complaints management in Public Sector real estate management.
2. Organisational benefits and challenges of embedding CRM and customer care in Public Sector real estate companies.
3. Critical success factors for CRM implementation.
4. Managing customer complaints as an integral part of CRM within the context of Public Sector real estate companies.

For consistency, throughout this thesis the term "tenant" was used given the fact that in property management, there exists a narrow legal definition of the relationship between landlord and tenant, thus this definition has guided the manner in which property management has historically been viewed (Edwards and Ellison, 2004).

2.2 Key Debates Surrounding Corporate Real Estate Management

Corporate Real Estate Management (CREM) as a real estate discipline has emerged within the last 20 years and even today there continues to be academic debates around the knowledge base of the subject and the implication for the practice of property management. In this connection, the full domain of CREM has not yet been captured by authors as can be seen by the many attempts to define the concept in the literature.

Definitions have ranged from CREM being a real estate discipline (Heywood and Kenley 2013 p.1), the management of buildings (Klosowski 2018) to a business strategy (Buttle and Maklan 2019). The definition this thesis uses is as cited in van der Voordt (2017 pp.249) which states that:

> CREM focuses on the alignment of real estate to corporate needs and objectives, incorporating the needs and wishes of shareholders and different stakeholders on strategic, tactical and operational levels.

In CREM, there are many stakeholder relationships which include tenants, fence line communities, private sector owners, the Government, shareholders and employees. In keeping with the purpose of this thesis, the aspect of CREM that I placed focus on was customer care and complaints management in the landlord-tenant relationship with the tenant being a key stakeholder and user of corporate real estate, more so, real estate owned by the Government.

In the light of the above definition, CREM can be viewed as more than a routine day to day activity but an overall holistic corporate real estate managerial process. Heywood and Kenley (2013) however argue that despite the fact that CREM concerns itself with, *inter alia*, operationalising real estate assets, a significant amount of work has to be undertaken to legitimise the contribution that CREM makes to organisational performance. Having looked at the many debates around the definition of CREM, I endorse Heywood and Kenley (2013) who posited that the quality of the science to support the production of new knowledge in the discipline is lacking, due to the absence of consensus amongst academic as to what constitutes CREM. Arguably, CREM as a discipline has emerged many years ago and the present struggle to arrive at consensus on a definition and the constituent parts strongly suggests the need for more research on this topic.

CREM recognises the real estate portfolio of a company as a tangible asset which must be properly managed and complaints raised by tenants addressed efficiently in order to encourage customer loyalty. Within the context of CREM, the relationship between landlord and tenant is an important one (Edwards and Ellison, 2004).

It is useful to note that this relationship has changed significantly as a more customer centric approach to property management is applied given the longevity of the relationship, some of which can last for 99 years depending on the leasing arrangement in place. Edwards and Ellison (2004) further noted that after its human resources, corporate property can be classified as an organisation's biggest cost factor yet still it is treated as an overhead expense. Similarly, Wojewnik-Filipkowska, Rymarzak and Lausberg (2015) have further developed this perspective when they pointed out that there has been a revolution in how the real estate of a company is viewed. For Wojewnik-Filipkowska, Rymarzak and Lausberg (2015), real estate has clearly evolved from being viewed as a company's cost centre to a revenue centre. It is important to point out that as a revenue centre, this type of asset like any other, calls for astute property management strategies in order to maintain financial self-sufficiency.

For many companies, their corporate real estate comprises between 25-40% of their overall assets. These assets represent significant means of capital investment which arguably must redound to the benefit of shareholders by way of value. In the Caribbean, real assets owned by the Government form a significant portion of its wealth, as the State owns 52% of all real property which to a large extent is not astutely managed to extract maximum value.

Heywood (2011) and Sulaiman et al. (2015) have noted that the real estate portfolio of many organisations are not strategically managed in a manner to support the business processes of the organisation. This position is supported by Haynes and Haynes (2012) and Lalloo (2013) who posited that organisations in the business of CREM, for the most part are devoid of systems which enable them to execute effectively the activity of CREM. Enabling systems for CREM are critical at the organisational level. These systems must include an element of proper asset inventories (Ovvusu, 2013 and Bokpe, 2017) as cited in Boakye-Agyeman and Bugri (2019) backed by well-resourced Real Estate Units.

Role and Function of Corporate Real Estate Management

Corporate real estate management plays a strategic role in the life of the organisation through the provision of land and built accommodation to meet the needs of its customers (van den Beemt-Tjeerdsma and Veuger (2016). It is even considered by van den Beemt-Tjeerdsma and Veuger (2016) that CREM contributes to organisational performance. For Heywood and Kenley (2013), many authors have failed to consider that a significant amount of work is still needed to substantiate CREM's contribution to organisational performance. The weight of the evidence however suggests that to a large extent CREM does contribute to the performance of organisations.

Many studies and publications have sought to define the role and function of CREM. To this end, Harris and Cooke (2014) have suggested that the role and function has to be understood within the context of the changing demand for real estate. It is important to emphasise that the conduct of many business transactions has changed and real estate is viewed as more than property acquisition, leasing, disposal and valuation. Real estate is now viewed as a corporate resource which is more efficiently used to support the goals and objectives of organisations.

Given the fact that CREM concerns itself with ensuring a significant return on investment (Buttle and Maklan 2019), it is important that all aspects of the landlord-tenant relationship be well managed in order to improve the company's bottom line.

2.3 THE NEW VISION FOR PUBLIC SECTOR REAL ESTATE MANAGEMENT

In the same way in which there continues to be a lack of consensus on the definition of CREM, around 1981, there was a shift in how public sector real estate was viewed as well as how occupants of real estate were defined (Kivlehan, 2011). It is considered by administrators who manage public real estate that this categorisation of real estate should be viewed as contributing significant value to the revenue streams of organisations (Wojewnik-Filipkowska, Rymarzak and Lausberg (2015). Boakye-Agyeman and Bugri (2019) also considered that real estate, in order to support the performance of any organisation, must be strategically managed.

In contrast, Heywood and Kenley (2013) argue that corporate real estate which can be held by either the private or public sector, still has not undoubtedly demonstrated its usefulness to the balance sheet of organisations or how the organisation performs. Having looked at the debate, I am of the view that the weight of evidence would suggest that corporate real estate does make a contribution to the bottom line of any organisation in that business.

Public sector real estate was increasingly viewed as assets worthy of proper strategic management and landlords started to view their tenants as customers who are direct beneficiaries of the products and services of the organisation. Commentators including Kivlehan (2011) expressed the view that landlords must view their tenants as more than cash-flow, as the power rests with the tenant to take his business elsewhere. In contrast, other schools of thought subscribe to the view that the demarcation is a straight forward one, once a lease exists, you are a tenant and when you go into occupation, you are an occupier. This shifting language impacts the approach taken by Public Sector Managers in the exercise of customer care delivery due to the confusion created in the minds of these officials.

In his writing on Polish municipalities, Marona (2016) lauded the introduction of New Public Management (NPM) as it presented an opportunity for Public Sector Managers in real estate to treat with some of the glaring managerial deficiencies and also to enhance some of their real estate management processes. This sentiment was echoed in the pronouncements of Kask (2014) another Polish author who called for a radical turnaround in the manner in which real estate assets under the jurisdiction of public sector organisations are managed. This call was made within the context of how taxpayers’ money was being spent as the data showed that public sector assets continued to be a cost centre and a financial burden on the Government. This evidence suggests that the time had come for public sector organisations involved in REAM to reorganise their business processes for better service delivery thereby reducing dependency on Government subventions.

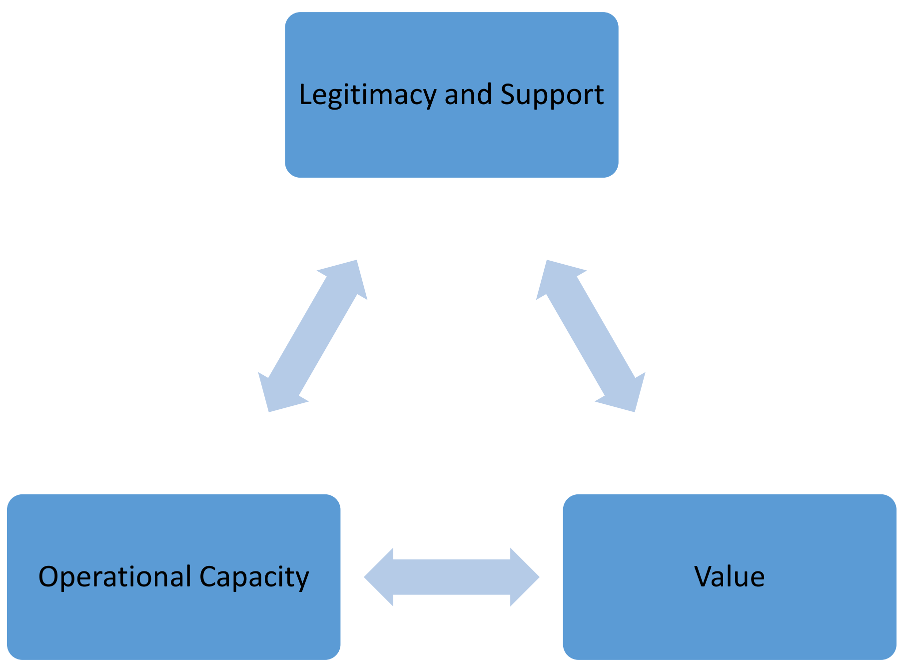
2.4 CREATING PUBLIC VALUE- HOW POLITICS SHAPES THE DISCOURSE

The concept of creating public value as developed by Mark Moore became exceedingly popular in the 1990s. The concept was developed in response to the need to engender change in the manner in which public management was exercised (Moore 1995). In his seminal work on public value, Moore (1995) challenged the thinking of public officials on the role of Government in society, to see this role as more of a creator of public value. Moore (1995) further challenged these officials to view themselves as not just clerical officers and Managers but as custodians of public assets with the capacity to deliver a high level of service to citizens who use the Government machinery.

Using the concept of the strategic triangle, Moore (1995) expressed the view that public officials need to clearly define the area of the organisation where the potential exists to make improvements and create public value.

The three sides of Moore's triangle are public value, operational capacity and legitimacy and support. **Figure 2.1** is relevant.

Figure 2.1: Moore's 1995 Strategic Triangle



Source: Moore (1995)

Once action is taken by Public Officers to improve a condition or problem impacting the citizenry, this can redound to the creation of public value. The other side of the triangle, operational capacity speaks to the "how" of creating the said public value or the end goal. This begs the question as to what procedures, processes or activities will the Public Official engage in to bring about value.

Moore (1995) also spoke to the requirement of the Official to obtain legitimacy and support from within the authorising environment to sustain the change initiative. This legitimacy and support must be keenly displayed by other persons in the organisation especially the Executive Team who should see value in remedying the broken procedure or process, as this broken process can negatively impact the bottom line. This legitimacy and support ought to translate into the requisite financial backing and mobilisation of assets in order to accomplish what is needed by the organisation to create public value.

These three sides of the triangle are not always strategically aligned given the political nature of dispensing public service. This at times results in companies being stymied in their ability to efficiently and effectively deliver public value. My second research question as stated at **section 1.6** was aimed at addressing this issue.

Despite the fact that many academics and public officials have embraced the concept of creating public value, there are opponents in Rhodes and Wanna (2007). Rhodes and Wanna (2007) added to the debate and have critiqued Moore's concept labelling it inadequate in its applicability to Westminster systems. Rhodes and Wanna(2007) went on to accuse Moore(1995) of misconstruing the role and function of public officials by conferring on them powers which they do not have and even if they did, the exercise of same in the political arena will render them insignificant.

Further criticism was labelled against Moore (1995) for the lack of clarity as to whether public value is a conceptual framework, a theory or a concept (Rhodes and Wanna 2007). More recently, Dudau, Glennon and Verschuere (2019) added their voice to the discussion of Moore's work when they expressed the view that Moore (1995) downplayed the complexity that is the Public Sector, a view supported by Cluley et al. (2020).

A rebuttal of the criticism of Moore's work came in the persons of Alfod and O'Flynn (2008) who admonished his critics for misrepresenting the work of Moore (1995). Alfrod and O'Flynn (2008) pointed out that his critics misunderstood the underpinnings of the strategic triangle and misunderstood Moore's view on the role of the public official. Having looked at the debates, it would seem that Moore's work could have been misunderstood, nevertheless what I took from Moore's work to inform my study was my role as a Manager in a SPSE in creating value for the tenants who occupy the company's premises. Within the body of literature on Public Sector Real Estate Management (PSREM), the piece that I concentrated on and where public value can be created for tenants who are citizens related to customer care delivery and complaint handling. Further I took from Moore, my role as an overseer of the real estate assets of RESL, actioning what can be implemented to deliver better customer care to the company's tenants.

In the same vein that Moore calls upon public officers to create public value, the research questions that this study sought to address were also a call for better public value delivery by RESL given the fact that it is the tenant as its main stakeholder for whom value must be created. I sought to understand why the limited focus on CRM and customer care, whether publicness played a role and how the bottom line of the company can be improved. In the same way that private entities are obligated to create value for their shareholders, for Moore (1995) Public Sector organisations also have a duty of care to create public value or societal good for citizens. Moore (1995) suggests that through its Managers, these Public Sector organisations should place focus on achieving results as opposed to managing processes. Additionally, as the world is continuously changing, these Managers should not be circumscribed by a narrow definition of the company's mission but be innovative as they reshape and expand the said mission.

Clearly, as the literature has demonstrated customers are demanding more "value" from their landlords as it relates to efficiency and effectiveness in customer care delivery and complaints handling (Sanderson and Edwards 2015, Sanderson 2016). It followed that public sector asset or property managers found themselves in an awkward position in the delivery of customer care in attempting to please the customer while not breaching any governmental policy due to the "publicness" of these organisations. For Cluley, Parker and Radnor (2020) this conundrum, characterises the complexity of the Public Sector and the ensuing challenge of creating value.

All organisations face strategic challenges, more so Public Sector organisations and SPSEs. The challenge centers around delivering excellent customer care with limited public funding given the global downturn. Given the strategic orientation of organisations, Public Sector organisations are more likely to adopt a reactionary posture as they are more susceptible to regulation from the political directorate.

I am mindful of Moore's call to public officers to marshal support to get the job done, however because Public Sector organisations operate within clearly defined political, local and regional boundaries, they are impeded by the choices that they can make with respect to market penetration and revenue generation, especially those engaged in the business of PSREM.

In Public Sector Real Estate Companies, however, due to the fact that real estate is viewed as a public or free good, occupiers do not always pay the full market price for leasing arrangements, they may be dissatisfied yet remain in occupation. From a public sector landlord, tenants demand very low rents and have an expectation that the Government will support their businesses in difficult economic times while overlooking breaches of their leasehold covenants. This all begs the question of the Government's ability to be a facilitative landlord given the fact that there continues to be a dependency on Central Government for funding to effect maintenance related repairs for tenants in occupation of built accommodation. With the many financial constraints experienced by SPSEs, these landlords push back on tenants and implement provisions in leases such as service charges which were never enforced. Evidently, tenants will resist payment as these are additional charges that were not envisaged.

Caught up in this spiral is the demand from the tenant for better customer care as they experience greater financial hardships in sustaining viable businesses. In spite of the constraints faced by Public Sector landlords in the execution of their duties, these landlords must adopt a strategic approach to CRM in order to efficiently deliver an acceptable level of service to ensure customer satisfaction.

2.5 VIEWING THE TENANT AS CUSTOMER

The real estate sector has been the centre of increased discussion around the need for customer centricity (Palm, 2011). The discussion has shifted from the landlord focusing on what Palm (2011) has labelled as bricks and mortar to view the tenant as a customer.

Palm (2011) undertook as study of 28 real estate companies in Sweden in order to test the hypotheses as to whether Swedish real estate companies are customer focused and whether there was any increase in customer orientation as time progressed. The author used content analysis in order to glean how the companies articulated their strategic intentions through their Annual Reports. An insightful revelation from the study by Palm (2011) was that the companies that he defined as "brick oriented", viewed their tenants as "something that, more or less, just comes with the properties" (Palm, 2011 p.140). This revelation was further compounded by the fact that there were very few companies in the study that were voicing customer oriented approaches in their Annual Reports and these were companies listed on the Swedish stock exchange. These pronouncements by Palm (2011) may indicate that property, especially those owned by public organisations are not strategically managed and the occupiers are not viewed as customers.

Ryan Masiello writing in Britain's Property Week (2017) on the private property market, reiterated the need to treat tenants as customers if entrepreneurs in the property business wanted their businesses to thrive. Acknowledging that very little research has been undertaken to ascertain if the treatment of tenants impacts the likelihood of those tenants renewing their leases and remaining in occupation, Sanderson (2016) argued that financial benefits can redound to the benefit of property owners if their tenants are treated as customers. This position was further extended, when Sanderson (2016) considered a link between good customer service, increased lease renewal and profitability resulting in a lower void rate.

Sanderson (2016) tested four hypotheses to ascertain the relationship between levels of occupier satisfaction and property returns. Sanderson (2016 p.330) sampled 273 properties which were comprised of, *inter alia,* retail shops, industrial sites and shopping malls. The findings showed for " the compounded five-year percentage by which the return exceeded the IPD sector average return is greater for properties with highly satisfied customers than for properties with poor customer satisfaction. Thus, taking the sample as a whole gives some support for the premise of this thesis, that treating tenants as valued customers does result in superior returns in the long term". Sanderson (2016) was clear to point out that the findings related to the retail sector.

2.6 CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT AND THE CREATION OF CUSTOMER VALUE

Companies adopting CRM strategies would have experienced significant growth in the implementation of the strategies, tools and techniques within the last 15 years across a variety of disciplines and amongst the academic community (Kumar and Reinartz 2018). As the popularity of CRM strategies and techniques increased, there was a shift in perception of CRM as solely focused on Information Technology (Shukla and Pattnaik 2019) to view CRM from the perspective of strategy which if well implemented can redound to better customer care delivery and enhanced organisational performance.

CRM is essential to any modern business operation. Given the manner in which CRM has evolved from the 1990s, and the many academics with an interest in the subject (Kivelhan, 2011; Chan and Lam, 2012; Payne and Frow, 2013; Wetzel, Hammerschmidt and Zablah, 2014; Debnath, Datta and Mukhopadhyay, 2016; Buttle and Maklan, 2019) it is challenging to agree among academics and practitioners on a single definition for the term. Academics in the field of CRM have broadened its meaning from being a combination of philosophy, technology tool and business process(Rababah et al.,2011) to a fundamental business strategy to manipulate customer relationships(Buttle and Maklan2019), while Kumar and Reinartz(2012) noted certain elements of analysing databases and harnessing communication in order to bring lifetime value to customers.

Notwithstanding the varieties of definitions of CRM, there are three basic elements which include, processes, people and technology (Rababah et al., 2011). With today's highly competitive business environment and increasing cost of doing business, companies must engage in strategies to strengthen and maintain long lasting customer relationships.

Arguably, customer care approaches and strategies in the private sector are better embedded in their business operations while Public Sector officials have to battle with a myriad of issues related to funding, bureaucratic structures and politics. Moore's (1995) strategic triangle recognises these challenges when reference was made to the importance of the authorising environment in creating public value. **Section 2.4** refers.

Sota et al. (2018) have posited that despite the fact that the philosophical underpinning of CRM has not changed, the strategies, tools and techniques have progressed and organisations must be nimble in order to survive. In spite of the fact that the context for my research is within the subject matter of real estate, the definition of CRM that the thesis used was one taken from Payne and Frow (2013 pp.207) who defined CRM as:

> a cross-functional approach concerned with creating improved shareholder value through the development of appropriate relationships with key customers and customer segments. It typically involves appropriate business and cluster strategies, the acquisition and diffusion of customer knowledge, managing the co-creation of customer value, developing integrated channel strategies and the intelligent use of data and technology solutions to create superior customer experiences.

I have embraced this definition as I find it to be all encompassing as it recognises that CRM is not the business of any one Department or Division, it is cross functional. Once implemented correctly, CRM has the potential to benefit all shareholders with a vested interest in the company. Additionally, through the implementation of CRM strategies and harnessing of technology, value is created for customers, the public value Moore (1995) spoke about which can be achieved by the alignment of the three elements of the strategic triangle as evidenced in **figure 2.**1.

The benefits of CRM range from customer loyalty and retention (Wetzel, Hammerschmidt and Zablah, 2014), customer satisfaction (Yim, Chan and Lam, 2012), improved bottom line (Payne and Frow, 2013), customised products and services as well as increased efficiency in customer service delivery (Debnath, Datta and Mukhopadhyay, 2016).

CRM researchers, Kumar and Reinartz (2012) identified three types of CRM which can occur at the functional, customer facing and strategic level of the organisation. This research focused on the customer facing level as the aim was to view the customer holistically across all customer touch points. As Kumar and Reinartz (2012) has noted, silo mentalities have no business in CRM and no one function in the organisation has ownership over the customer. Developing this perspective, the literature has revealed that processes which cross cut the organisation as opposed to silo Departmental behaviour have a greater chance at sustainability in execution. It is the cross cutting processes if well implemented that will have the potential to create value for customers.

Despite the many advocates of the merits of CRM, in contrast Rababah et.al (2011) argue that significant improvement is not achieved in the bottom line of companies that implement CRM, given a failure rate of between 55-75% as CRM has been viewed mainly from the lens of technology and not from the perspective of strategic CRM. Other authors such as Law, Ennew, and Mitussis (2013) and Chen and Wu (2016) who conducted research on the relationship between CRM and performance have found little extenuating evidence of a positive correlation between the two. The reason for this rested with the applicability and complexity of the technology which impacted adoption decisions coupled with the organisation's limited focus on customer centricity. Other studies undertaken by Reimann, Schilke, and Thomas (2010) and Ernst, Hoyer, Krafft, and Krieger, (2011) have also revealed similar findings. Notwithstanding this criticism, the weight of evidence would suggest that the benefits of proper implementation of CRM on the bottom line of companies far outweigh the negative.

Two Concepts of Customer Value

Kumar and Reinartz (2018) introduce two concepts of customer value. Once concept speaks to the value of the customer to the organisation and the other of what the customer values from the organisation. With respect to the first concept of the value of the customer to the organisation, Kumar and Reinartz (2018) posit that the value of the customer to the organisation manifests itself in increased revenue and profit for the company as well as customers who remain loyal and committed. On the other hand, what customers value from an organisation are products and services which meet their requirements coupled with a positive customer experience. The two concepts interrelate in the sense that once the customer derives value from the organisation, it is highly likely that the customer will deepen that relationship which will in turn add to the organisation's level of profitability through which value from the customer is derived (Kumar and Reinartz 2018).

Despite the fact that the literature suggests that customer value creation can result in increased revenue once certain quality customers continue to transact business with the firm on a sustained basis, Payne and Frow (2013) challenged this position from the perspective of the lack of consensus by companies on what in fact comprises customer value, how will it be delivered and what will be the value added.

The two concepts of customer value, that is value to the customer and value to the company (Kumar and Reinartz 2018) are applicable to RESL. From the customer's perspective, value from the organisation is derived when its real estate offerings are congruent with its mission and vision. This translates into well maintained properties for lease, timely receipt of good and marketable title, reasonable rent and efficient complaints handling.

One of the bedrocks on which CRM is based is the fact that if a company perfects the art of good customer care delivery, that company will be more likely to have loyal customers who value the organisation and comply with the covenants of their leasehold arrangement. With reference to the specific context of my research into CRM and customer care in the real estate sector, it follows that if occupiers of real estate are delighted by their landlord's actions, landlords should experience less void periods, lease renewals, timely rental and service fees payments.

Sanderson and Edwards (2016) based on their research into satisfaction amongst tenants in occupation of UK offices have noted that the most important factor for the occupiers of these offices is the physical condition of the premises. For these occupiers, customer value is created when their landlords focus attention on the quality of accommodation which is placed on the real estate market. Viewing tenants as customers is a rarity (Kivlehan, 2011; Worthington 2015), especially in public sector real estate companies, given the strict legal relationship between landlord and tenant.

Within the last decade or so however, there has been a marked improvement in the approach by real estate practitioners to place focus on customer centricity in real estate (Palm 2011; Palm2016; Sanderson 2016). I will now turn to discuss customer care within the context of public sector real estate companies.

2.7 CUSTOMER CARE IN PUBLIC SECTOR REAL ESTATE COMPANIES

Within the last 20 years the role of the Public Sector has to a certain extent evolved from its highly bureaucratic nature to a more decentralised approach in the conduct of business transactions (Rainey and Bozeman 2000; Crosby et al., 2017). The role and function of the public sector is to provide quality service to the citizens thereby contributing to the creation of public value. With the advent of NPM, which ushered in reforms in the public sector by the delivery of enhanced services, it is expected that there will be added value to the lives of the citizenry (Kurtz 2019).

In the literature on customer care delivery in the Public Sector, one of the debates centers on whether the persons who seek public services should be viewed as citizens, customers or partners (Fountain 2001; Thomas 2013). Fountain (2001 p.56) has adopted a critical perspective of the use and applicability of the concept of customer service in the Public Sector when she expressed the view that the mere replacement of the word "citizen" with " customer" is sorely inadequate and the borrowing of terminology from the private sector will not work as the strategies used by the private sector are better articulated than what pertain in the Public Sector.

This debate on the concept of citizen or customer was joined by Thomas (2013) who noted that the challenge for public officers is real as these officials interact with each other in many different roles. To cite an example, an entity may interact with a public officer as a customer seeking assistance with a particular matter, however the entity may be in a position to partner with the Government in resolving the matter more expeditiously. Interestingly, this interaction with the entity as customer and partner can result in sustained relationships as the entity may have more of the financial wherewithal to partner with the Government.

Buttle and Maklan's (2019) contribution to the debate has been that the majority of writings on CRM has its origins in the private sector, however CRM principles can be applied to the public sector, although to a limited extent. Buttle and Marklan's (2019) reasoning on this matter is similar to that of Fountain (2001) as Buttle and Marklan (2019) are of the opinion that the Government provides services to citizens and not customers. Notably, the public sector has lagged behind the private sector in leveraging on these relationships as a means of enhancing revenue generation. In addition to the strategies in the private sector being better articulated, the private sector may not experience funding challenges as the Public Sector. Additionally, the private sector is not caught up in five-year political cycles which could stymie successful project implementation. Another differentiator between the two sectors is the fact that decision making in the Public Sector is a bureaucratic process requiring approvals from different officials resulting in organisational inertia.

In the literature there continues to be debates on the appropriateness of viewing citizens as customers. According to Thomas (2013) people can interact with Government institutions as either a citizen, a customer or a partner and in so doing, the roles and opportunities change. A citizen expects that the Government will listen to their concerns and not take decisions that are inimical to their overall well- being.

The concept of citizen is more all-embracing and the exercise of citizenship has a role to play in democracy. Clearly, a citizen can be a customer as some time in their lives they will have to transact some business with the Government. The use of language and concepts of customer care in the Public Sector has its genesis in the notion that citizens as customers have an expectation that they will receive the same level of service be it from the private or public sector.

As such, the language of the private sector found its way into the Public Sector, leading to the use of such words as customer centricity and customer focused. The debate in the literature continues as to whether it is possible to separate customer from citizen, rendering the challenge unsolved. From the public's perspective, they view themselves as both citizen and customer. Returning to Moore's (1995) concept of public value, Mc Donald (2006) is of the opinion that the concept can shed some light on the citizen-customer debate.

For Mc Donald (2006), a noteworthy element of the concept of public value is that of public preference. In any democratic society, only the citizen who interacts with a Government agency as citizen or customer can determine if they have in fact received value and by extension if the organisation has created that value. This scenario further speaks to the challenge of finding a definitive answer to the citizen- customer debate.

Smith and Charles (2018) in their research into customer service in the Jamaican Public Service, noted that the country is working on improving service delivery to its customers. Smith and Charles (2018) were clear to indicate that efforts made by that country are not up to international standard. A similar finding was revealed in 2015 when Pareja et al. (2016) undertook a study on Latin America and the Caribbean on the quality and satisfaction with public services.

One of the major findings from the study was the level of dissatisfaction of respondents with the transactional nature of public services in the region (Pareja et al., 2016). An important finding from the study on customer care delivery was the total processing time of transactions. Notwithstanding, when one speaks of customer care in the Public Sector, the expectations are no different from what pertains in the private sector.

The customer expects to build a lasting relationship with the business where they can receive the value that was promised. This expectation sits at the heart of Kumar and Reinartz's (2018) concept of value to the customer based on customers' expectations. When expectations are not met, this results in customers severing business relationships amidst complaints. In applying the fundamental concepts and principles from CRM and customer care to the management of Public Sector real estate companies, it is clear that the landlord-tenant relationship has to be revisited.

Kivlehan (2011), in discussing how the tenant is viewed as customer, client or occupier in the UK, highlighted the fact that more fundamentally there is the need to revisit the landlord-tenant relationship as undoubtedly, good customer services positively impacts the profitability of the business. Additionally, the quality of customer care determines whether a tenant will continue to lease space or terminate their tenancy.

It is important to point out that, when it comes to leasing of real estate, it is not a simple undertaking for a business to pack up and leave. There are many logistical, employee related and locational issues which propel businesses to decide on a specific location in the first place, as such property managers need to listen and respond effectively to issues and concerns raised by their occupiers. Generally, tenants in occupation of public sector properties have continued to complain about poor customer service, the quality of their premises and other amenities (Phelps 2011) without recourse.

Despite these potentially negative fallouts, Public Sector organisations especially those involved in CREM have continued to not place a high value on customer centricity due to the fact that the type of customers that they attract can ill afford to engage in leasing arrangements on the private real estate market and as such settle for payment of lease rates which are just below market as pertains in Trinidad and Tobago.

Based on my inquiry, even though Public Sector customer care implementation approaches have been borrowed from the private sector, they have not been embedded in the fabric of organisations such as RESL and the difficulty of so doing persists. There has not been much debate in the literature on this matter, however a possible explanation is the highly bureaucratic structure and an unsupportive culture of change initiatives. In order to embed a culture of customer centricity in the practice of SPSEs, what is needed is questioning of the prevailing systems and processes. Having discussed the fact that the very nature of Government institutions appear to retard their ability to deliver excellent customer care when compared to the private sector, discussion will now take place on some of the critical success factors for CRM implementation.

2.8 CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS FOR CRM IMPLEMENTATION

Despite the fact that amongst academics and practitioners there is agreement on the importance of CRM and the need for organisations to become more customer centric, the implementation of CRM systems and introduction of a culture of customer centricity is challenging (Bibiano, Marco-Simó and Pastor, 2014).

Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018), in their research on CRM implementation, have noted that approximately 70% of CRM projects have failed to achieve objectives due to poor implementation. If CRM and the focus on customer centricity are aimed at nurturing lasting customer relationships then the reasons for failure require some elucidation.

One of the fundamentals of CRM and the refocusing on customer centricity involves the elements of processes, people and technology (Mohd, Rababah and Ibrahim, 2011) which must all be integrated for success. Critical success factors (CSF) are derived from an organisation's mission and strategic objectives. These CSFs determine whether the initiatives introduced in organisations will fail or succeed in any organisation be it private or public sector.

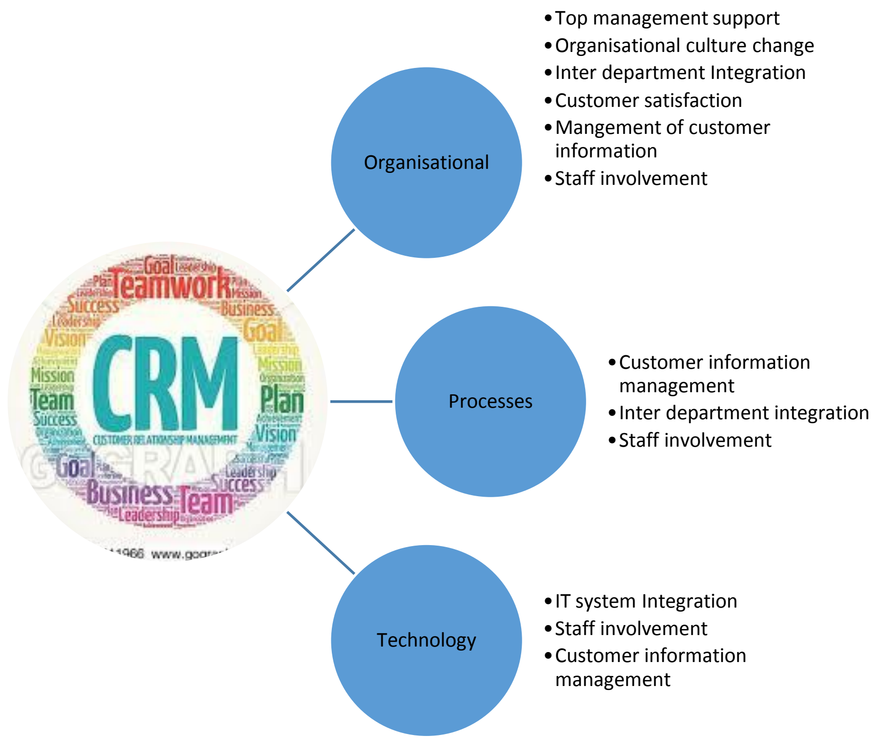
CRM is an ongoing strategic organisational process which cannot be viewed as merely rollout of software (Kumar and Reinartz, 2018). CRM has to be viewed by organisations from the perspective of ongoing efforts by all to make the switch to a customer centric organisation. CRM researchers (Bibiano, Marco-Simó and Pastor, 2014; Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018; Kumar and Reinartz, 2018; Tekin, 2013) have identified certain CSFs for the successful implementation of CRM and shifting focus on customer centricity. One of the most important factors for successful CRM implementation is the support from top management (Bibiano, Marco-Simó and Pastor, 2014; Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018; Tekin, 2013) through the integration of business functions to deliver better customer value.

The adoption of cross functional processes as opposed to silo behaviour and mentality was also highlighted by Kumar and Reinartz (2018) as another critical success factor. Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018) highlighted the importance of all staff involvement and the importance of an organisation culture which is customer focused to facilitate meeting the needs of customers.

Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018) did not downplay the role of information technology, however they cautioned that technology is an enabler which must be properly integrated into business operations to facilitate 360 degrees review of customers. The issue of staff training and development to assist with better understanding of customer needs was also identified as significant in repositioning the organisation towards better service delivery.

Figure 2.2 captures the critical CRM success factors used in the study from the perspective of organisational issues, processes and technology as adapted from Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018)

Figure 2.2: Critical Success Factors in CRM Implementation



Source: Adapted from Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018)

Very little has been researched on best practices in CRM implementation and customer orientation in public organisations (Lawson-Body et al., 2011), worse yet, public sector real estate organisations.

This paucity of research begs the question of the applicability of customer centricity approaches from the Public Sector to the private sector, however researchers have not documented any extenuating factors which debar private sector best practices from being applied to Public Sector organisations. From a holistic perspective, it is only when there is alignment between people, processes and technology will companies be able to deliver a higher level of customer care, strengthen customer relationships and improve the bottom line of their companies.

2.9 CUSTOMER CARE AND CUSTOMER COMPLAINT MANAGEMENT

To complain about poor service is an option that is at the disposal of any customer. Complaints are a rich source of concrete information for businesses (Hsiao et al., 2016) and as such these businesses should use the information from complaints to strengthen relationships which can eventually improve the bottom line of the companies. However, in order to treat properly with customer complaints, organisations are required to establish appropriate processes and procedures which are communicated throughout the organisation. These processes must be monitored and adjusted on an ongoing basis to ensure that complaints are being addressed to the satisfaction of the customer (Stauss and Seidel, 2019). Additionally, the information from a complaint must form part of the strategic decision making process of the company failing which, the merit in the complaint will be lost.

Several definitions of what is a complaint have been proposed, however for the purpose of this thesis I adopt Tolba et al. (2016) definition cited in Išoraitė (2017 p.843) which states that "Customer complaints include all written, oral or electronic communications in which customers express their displeasure regarding some deficiency or failure in the product or service."

Given the fact that companies are moving towards customer centricity in their operations, complaints management assumes even more strategic significance within the context of a company's Customer Care Policy and complaints management process. Even though Public Sector real estate companies have little or no competition due to their below market leasing rates they still need to place strategic importance on complaints management by going beyond lip service.

The loudest that a customer can speak to a company about its dissatisfaction is through lodging a complaint. By the company not responding or providing insufficient remedy to the customer, this sends a distinct message of disinterest (Stauss and Seidel 2019). To achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty, in the mind of the customer there must be no gap between the complaint made and the satisfactory resolution of the complaint.

Complaint management then sits at the core of customer dissatisfaction reduction and focuses on organisational processes for addressing issues and concerns brought to the company's attention by its customers. Customer care speaks to the handling of all issues inclusive of complaints.

In applying the concepts from the literature on CRM, customer care and complaint handling to Public Sector real estate companies who are in long term relationships of landlord and tenant, customer complaints must be taken seriously. Tenants lease land or buildings to establish their businesses and wish to remain with the same landlord in the same location for as long as possible (Rasila, 2010). Given the transactional manner in which business is conducted it is inevitable that complaints from customers will arise and must be resolved. It is clear that if the complaints are not addressed to their satisfaction, this can result in increased void rates, deterioration of the built stock and poor references for the landlord (Williams and Naumann, 2011; Sanderson 2016).

In the same way that it is widely accepted across the literature that top management support is needed for successful CRM implementation, arguably, executive management has to take customer complaints seriously. The organisation's internal procedures and processes must speak to how these complaints will be handled and employees must view the complaint from the perspective of the customer, therein lies the value and importance of complaint management.

2.10 CONCLUSION

There continues to be a lack of agreement between academics and practitioners on the constituent parts of CREM. Despite disagreement, the major elements as discussed in the literature range from a focus on real estate alignment to property management. The debate among practitioners has been mostly around the contribution of CREM to organisational performance as well as the lack of rigour in the production of knowledge in the field.

Notwithstanding, the language used by most real estate practitioners when they speak about CREM relates to strategic management of property to support corporate and customer needs. As discussion on CREM gained traction and there was the call to view occupiers of real estate not as tenants but as customers, this concept and others found their way into the domain of public sector real estate.

The applicability of these concepts and approaches were called into question by officials in the Public Sector due to the public nature of these organisations and I would argue that it is difficult for the private sector hat to fit seamlessly into the public sector context.

Reflecting on the literature, there was little written on customer care and complaint management in Public Sector real estate companies especially in the Caribbean. This may be explained by the bureaucratic processes in public organisations and how these processes stymie the ability of public officials to properly engage in real estate management. The nightmare of five year political cycles with changing political directorates dictate the pace.

The call by Moore (1995) to public officials to be guardians of public assets under their charge and to create public value is laudable. However, there is the need to be mindful of the doctrine of the separation of powers as public officers seek out avenues where they can legitimately create public value. Central to the call to create public value is the recipient of this “value”, the citizen or customer. Notwithstanding, CRM and customer care are useful concepts for public sector real estate organisations. CRM as a strategy is valid in the Public Sector because Property Managers are charged with properly managing from a strategic point of view the Government assets under their charge. This strategic management encompasses all touch points along a customer journey from tenant selection and onboarding, lease negotiation and administration, customer care, complaints management, retention to even termination of tenancy.

Throughout the process, the Property Manager is responsible for managing all aspects of the journey resulting in the creation of value for the occupiers of land and built accommodation owned by the Government. The usefulness of customer care for Public Sector real estate organisations stems from the manner in which these organisations handle concerns from customers who approach them for services.

Customer care includes complaint management, consequently, how complaints are managed by Public Sector landlords can signal whether a customer will remain occupation, renew a lease, remit rent or vacate the premises. No landlord wishes to have extended periods of void or tenants who do not remit rent as financial breaches can lead to litigation to resolve landlord – tenant disputes.

My conclusion drawn from the literature is that the proper alignment of the three elements of CRM, that is, people, processes and technology should redound to effective implementation. Once well implemented, CRM positively impacts the bottom-line of companies. Should any of these elements be improperly integrated, the company's success level at implementation will be limited.

Given the context of my research into a Public Sector real estate company, the CSFs that I looked for in CRM implementation at RESL based on the literature were in keeping with the three elements cited above. With respect to a company's processes, I concluded that the management of the touch points along the customer journey from on-boarding of a tenant to the life of the tenancy spoke to the importance of customer centricity to that organisation. In addition, how complaints were managed also signalled whether the company viewed complaints as important feedback for improvement in the company.

I also concluded that customer information management and integration between Departments and Divisions signalled a level of customer centricity away from being product focused. The importance of properly managing all of the customer touch points was also highlighted in the literature as being important for good customer care delivery and as such an analysis of the touch points from on-boarding of a tenant to them going into occupation was undertaken.

From the people element of CRM, I clearly understood the importance of involvement and commitment of top management in CRM initiatives as throughout the literature, the lack of executive support has been deemed the number one reason for CRM implementation failure. A company's value proposition communicates what value persons can expect to derive from being in a relationship with the company, as such the value proposition of the company was examined within the context of customer centricity.

I understood from the literature as well, the importance of having a highly motivated work force who understand the rudiments of customer care and are willing to delight the customer. The existence of training programmes for customer facing staff was also assessed as well as whether throughout the organisation there were KPIs in employees' job descriptions related to customer care and complaint management.

Given the important role of technology in CRM, I took from the literature the importance of the systematic integration of CRM technology. I sought to better understand how CRM technology should be implemented and whether the company had an integrated system which contained customer information.

In conclusion, the literature highlighted CSFs for CRM implementation and the relationship between customer care and complaint handling. Within the context of a Public Sector real estate company, investigation of the problem of the absence of customer centricity and ill developed strategies for complaint management were investigated through the conduct of interviews with Executive Management at RESL, the establishment of an action research group and administering a questionnaire to all staff at the company. These approaches will be further developed in the ensuing chapters.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I contextualise and explain the processes and methodology used in the study to collect data as a result of the key debates in the literature on CRM, customer care and complaints management. I discuss my epistemological and ontological stance as an insider action researcher at RESL as it is important for one's research design to be in congruity with the subject matter under investigation (Coghlan, Coghlan, and Shani, 2019). I then discuss the method of action research and the issues surrounding gaining access. This discussion is followed by an overview of my research design and data analysis.

The literature on CRM, customer care and complaints management as discussed in chapter 2 has identified CSFs for successful implementation of CRM in organisations, chief of which was support from top management. In reviewing the extant literature on the subject matter, it is strongly recommended that customer care be understood from the perspective of customer facing employees who are involved in customer care and complaints management along the customer journey. I drew on the more important concepts in the literature on CRM, customer care and complaint management to design the interview questions. The debates in the literature guided discussions in the action research group meetings as well as the drafting of a questionnaire which was issued to all staff on customer care. The outcome of these steps fed into the drafting of a Customer Care Policy and Complaints Handling Process for the company. It is important to highlight that the aim of data collection activities was to collect data to better understand the perspective of as many employees at RESL on customer care and complaint handling in order to generate actionable knowledge for practitioners who manage Public Sector real estate companies.

3.2 MY EPISTEMOLOGICAL AND ONTOLOGICAL POSITION AS ACTION RESEARCHER

One important feature of action research is the ability to create new knowledge as a result of the action taken as well as engender change within organisations (Coghlan and Brannick 2010; Abraham 2012). Positivism views knowledge or epistemology as having an existence of its own which is independent of the producer of the knowledge. Insider action researchers on the other hand, challenge this widely held view of positivists on knowledge creation and posit that knowledge has a life of its own and is not static. These researchers embrace a view of the world (ontology) which is in stark contrast to those who view the world through positivist lens. For action researchers, collaboration with the researched is important in the co-creation of praxis (Tekin and Kotaman 2013) as the researcher would have in depth knowledge of the workings of the organisation as well as involvement in the process that the researcher intends to change.

I was very aware of the possible negative implications of my preunderstanding of the business of the organisation (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) and possible role conflict in a place where I worked for the last 13 years. How I treated with these issues as an instigator of an insider action researcher are addressed later in this chapter as I now focus on my epistemological position of social constructivist.

3.2.1 Social Constructivism or Interpretivism: Framing the research

In social constructivism, researchers assiduously seek to understand the world of which they are a part (Creswell, 2013) and they attach meanings to their many experiences. Having researched and reflected upon different epistemological positions, I view the world through the lens of social constructivism or interpretivism.

In reality, it is impossible for any single philosophy or paradigm to explain the many facets of reality (Cunliffe, 2010) as the said philosophy will be restrictive in its methodological scope. The epistemological assumption of social constructivism, starts with critical reflection of what is.

The researcher who is so aligned, engages in reflexivity, discourse and sense making (Easterby-Smith, 2012) in order to produce new insights into the phenomenon. Additionally, under the interpretive framework of social constructivism, the researcher looks for complexity in the views of the researched (Creswell, 2013) as opposed to circumscribing his views under the rubric of narrowly defined categories. The overall intention is to rely heavily on the opinions of the researched within the research setting based on open ended questions to allow the researcher to document the voice of the researched in a live setting. In approaching the researched in this manner, the ‟story “of the organisation is told by the employees.

Given the philosophical beliefs associated with social constructivism, as I engaged in collaborative inquiry at RESL, I solicited opinions on what customer centricity for the organisation should encompass and why the organisation was unable to embed customer care into the fabric of the company. I was cognisant of the fact that my role duality as employee and insider action researcher have already influenced how I framed the research problem. The role of insider action researcher throws up many challenges and conflicting agendas (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) chief of which is the ability of the researcher to leverage on the multiple roles played in the organisation so that those roles become an asset as opposed to being a fetter to the process.

The social constructivist constructs many realities, as a consequence, the framing of the research was impacted by what I already knew of the organisation having worked there and participated in many change projects during my tenure. Framing was also impacted by the day to day work experiences of the staff of the READ as well as interactions with other employees.

3.3 THE RESEARCH METHOD

The approach to my study was abductive action research which meant that as researcher, I was attentive to the discussion at the action research group meetings as well as the outcome of interviews in order to derive meaning (Ong 2012). Besides meanings, my insider view allowed me to understand why customer care and complaints management were not accorded importance at RESL.

In engaging with the research process, this allowed me to use a new framework to better understand some of the challenges faced by RESL and engage in personal learning as the inquiry progressed. The purpose as indicated in chapter one, was to develop and implement a Customer Care Policy and a customer complaints handling process in the Real Estate Assets Division of the company. The action research method in implementation, calls upon the researcher to establish action research groups engaged in collaborative work which can result in research questions being modified after progressing through different action research cycles.

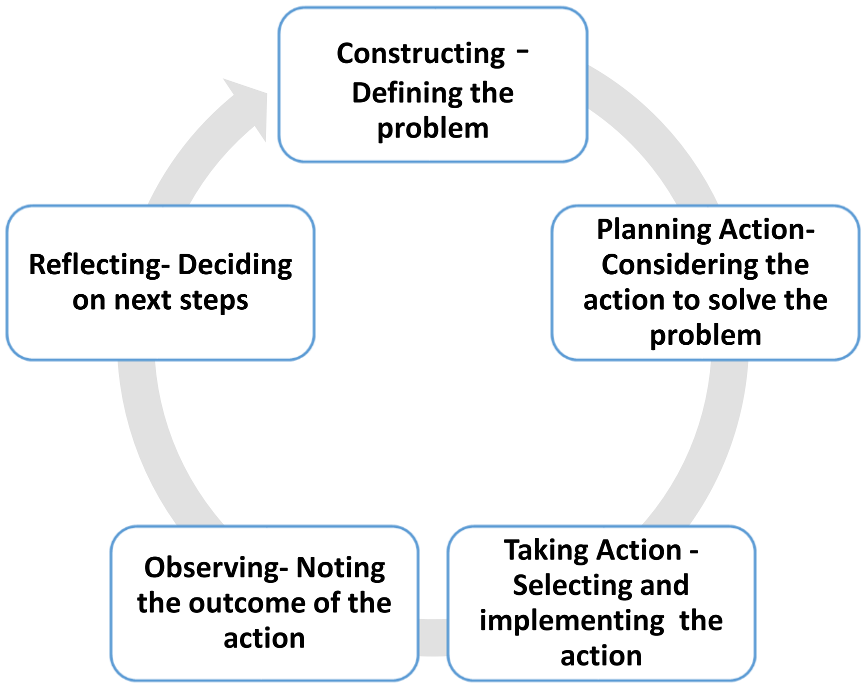
I adopted a qualitative approach in undertaking the inquiry and this approach subscribes to the view similar to social constructivism that the cognitive processes of individuals through their varied experiences create their reality (Creswell, 2013). The approach allowed me to reflect on the core values of the company, as well as my own values as an employee and how these values were exercised in reality. Having discussed the research method used in the inquiry, I will now discuss the characteristics of action research.

3.4 CHARACTERISTICS AND METHOD OF ACTION RESEARCH

Action research has been defined by Abraham (2012 p.6) as "a practical research method and should not be confused with the Action Learning process". The term action research was coined by Kurt Lewin (1946) and places focus on a problem to be resolved in a real life situation in an organisation (Coghlan and Shani 2017), the resolution of which is intended to generate actionable knowledge.

One of the most distinctive features of the action research method is the cyclical process, which requires the researcher to diagnose, plan action, take action, observe and reflect upon the action taken. **Figure 3.1** is relevant.

Figure 3.1: Action Research Cycle



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

Action research generates knowledge which is actionable and can prove very useful to the insider action researcher and the organisation under study (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010; Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2016). Planning and taking action are integral to the method of action research and the result of the action can change the strategic direction of the organisation under inquiry.

The collaborative nature of action research requires the research participants to function effectively as a team as opposed to a group of disparate individuals (Abraham, 2012; Johnson and Duberley, 2012). For Creswell (2013), it is enquiry completed with others where the voice of the participants is heard throughout the process.

Arguably, there is an overlap between the method of action research and my ontological and epistemological position as an insider action researcher. This overlap hinges on the fact that in the same way that for social constructivist's "meaning" of situations is constructed by participants (Creswell, 2013) as they interact with others, in the same vein, action research is involved in the co-creation of "meaning" and knowledge to engender change in organisations.

3.5 JUSTIFICATION FOR AND CRITIQUE OF USE OF THE ACTION RESEARCH METHOD

Despite criticism levelled against the method of action research there was merit in its use. The merit was found in its ability to generate actionable knowledge as a result of the engagement of participants and researcher in collaborative inquiry at an organisation where the researcher is employed (Coghlan and Brannick 2010; Coghlan, D, Coughlan, P and Shani, A 2019).

The method was also appropriate as it involved employees from different Divisions in the company who actively participated in drafting the company's first Customer Care Policy as well as a complaints handling process. Additionally, there is evidence that to embed change in organisations as was needed at RESL, the best approach is to involve the persons who are frontline (Abraham 2012) and customer facing.

Criticism has been levelled against insider action research in that power relations can manifest themselves in the research process (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) and the researcher can be intentionally left out of events happening in the organisation given the challenge of role duality. The concerns about the credibility of insider action research were also echoed in the work of Thiollent (2011) and Levin (2012). For Levin (2012) and the others, action research must meet the trustworthiness and relevance criteria if it has to be considered as making a contribution to the debate in the social sciences. Levin (2012) further argued that in addition to meeting the trustworthiness and relevance criteria, action research must also meet the rigour criteria in order to lay any claim to making a contribution to science.

A serious shortcoming with these arguments against the method of action research is the failure to recognise that knowledge is not context free. Another of the limitations with the criticism of action research is that it discounts the value of learnings derived from management practice which in itself demands of the researcher to go through rigorous cycles of constructing, planning, taking action and evaluating, which is the essence of action research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010). Having examined the criticism levelled against the method of action research, arguably, action research does provide a viable approach to the researcher wanting to undertake action research in their organisation. This viability is borne out of the fact that the method allows the researcher to conduct research from the perspective of an academic practitioner while allowing employees to participate in the process.

3.6 GAINING ACCESS: ETHICAL ISSUES AND CONSIDERATIONS IN THE INQUIRY

Primary access as defined by Coghlan and Brannick (2010 p.123) is " the ability to get into the organization and to be allowed to undertake research". As an employee with the company for over 13 years, primary access was not problematic. I was told by one of the former Presidents that I would not be allowed access to the company's financial records to which I replied that access to such records was not necessary. I received consent from the President of the company on 16 September 2016, followed by ethical approval from the University of Liverpool's Ethics Committee on 27 July 2017. I approached my immediate supervisor who is a Vice President in the company to request an interview and there was agreement through the Secretary on the date and time for the interview.

The Vice President was chosen because of his functional role in the Division, also across the literature one of the CSFs for shifting an organisation from product to customer focus was the support and commitment of top management (Kumar and Reinartz, 2018; Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018; Buttle and Maklan 2019).

In September 2016 I was required to sign a Confidentiality Agreement with my employer and one of the issues which arose was the process by which I will collect data and set up the action research group. I was advised that all action research group meetings should take place during lunch periods, however I was able to obtain approval from my supervisor, the initiative champion to conduct some of the meetings during working hours.

Given the interpersonal nature of the inquiry into customer care delivery at RESL, there was ongoing dialogue with all participants as the action research phases developed. I recognised that participants brought valuable experiences to the inquiry and knowledge of the operations of the company using different lenses. Essentially, we were co-creating knowledge to better serve the company and create value.

There was mutual respect throughout the process and I abided by the University of Liverpool's ethical standard by explaining the contents of the Participant Information Sheet and having participants endorse the Participant Consent Form. Designations were used when including direct quotations to protect the identity of the employees. At the onset, the members of the action research group were advised that they were free to discontinue if they no longer wanted to participate in the inquiry.

All employees remained as part of the inquiry. I built ethical behavior into every phase of the inquiry by being conscious of my role duality and the impact that this can have on the research situation always acting in the best interest of all participants.

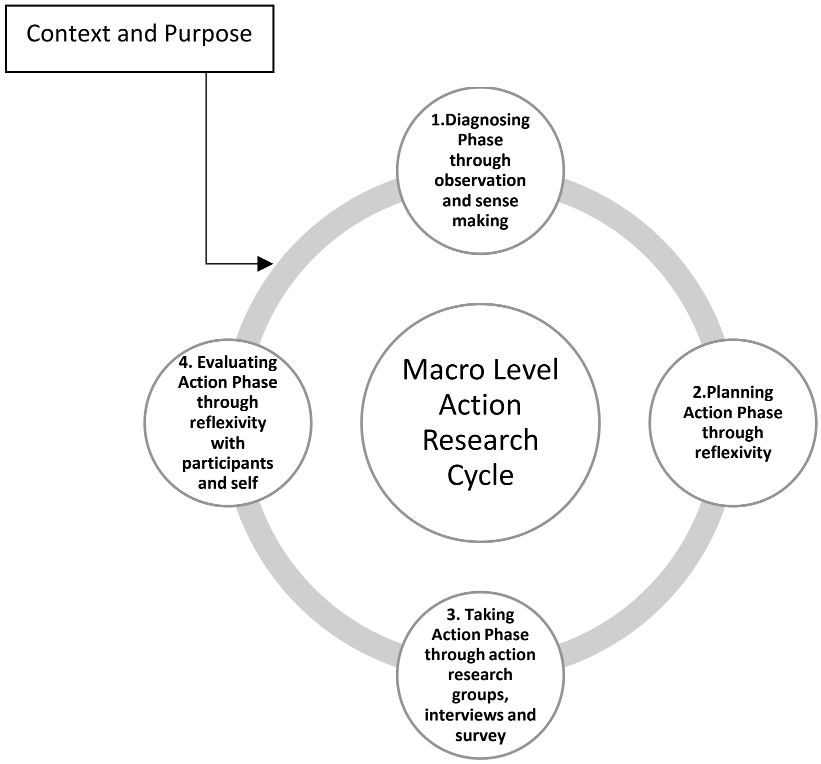
Besides gaining access to the organisation as an insider action researcher I was conscious of the subversiveness of my action (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) as I operated in the dual role as overt and covert operator. Overt in the sense that the action research group was aware of my project, however covert in my reflections, actions and journaling of experiences, as Creswell (2013) has noted many ethical issues can arise in data collection, analysis and dissemination .

The potential murkiness of role duality was mitigated by ongoing rigorous self- questioning and reflection on my position as employee and action researcher. In addition, the cyclical nature of action research facilitated members of the action research group to bring to the research setting their opinions and experiences as to how the complaints management process should be implemented. These factors mitigated against my role duality and the possible ethical issues which could have arisen.

3.7 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

One of the enduring features of action research is the cyclical process of constructing, planning action, taking action and evaluating action (Coghlan and Brannick 2010 pp.5) which is followed by another cycle of planning and so on. This process is demonstrated in **figure 3.1** referenced earlier in this chapter. I did not follow the multiple repetitious action research cycles as I was afforded limited time by executive management to convene the action research group meetings. I undertook one macro cycle of constructing, planning action, taking action, observing and evaluating action as documented in **figure 3.2**.

Figure 3.2: Macro Level Action Research Cycle

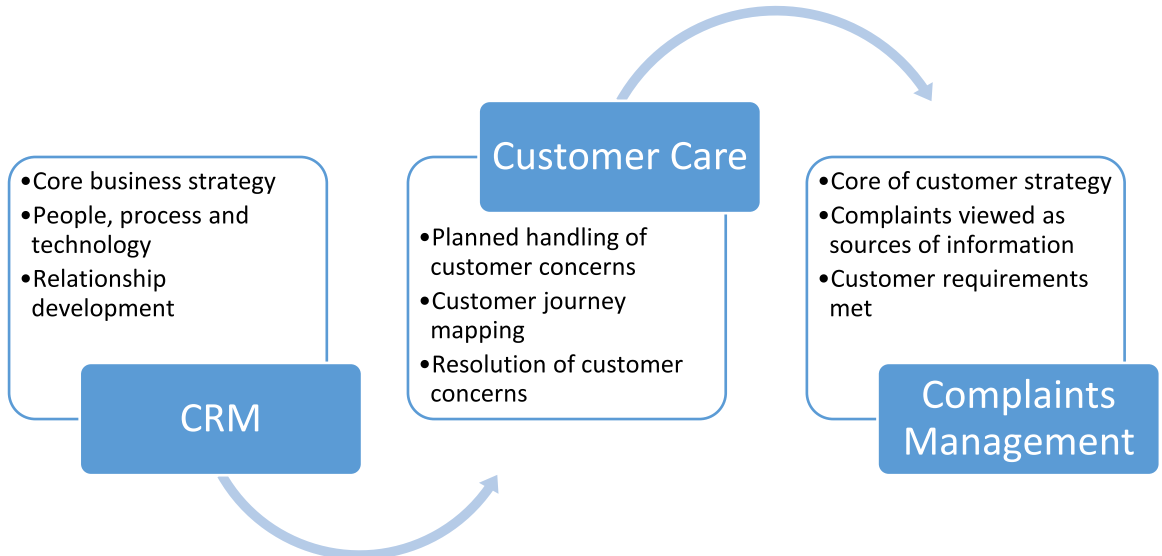


It proved challenging to write a continuous narrative while working in the same environment that I was researching and among persons who were my direct reports (Kenneally 2013). There were also restrictions on the time spent on the inquiry as the action research group comprised a cross section of employees who had to be guided by instructions from their Division heads.

3.8 Conceptual Framework: The Relationship between CRM, Customer Care and Complaints Management

For Akintoye (2015), a conceptual framework refers to all of the concepts and variables related to a phenomenon which help the researcher in explaining the said phenomenon. A conceptual framework also provides the researcher with an approach to research design, data collection and analysis. The elements of the conceptual framework at **figure 3.3** are supported by the findings from the literature on the interrelatedness between CRM, customer care and complaint management.

Figure 3.3: Conceptual Framework Linking CRM, Customer Care and Complaint Management



Source: Stauss and Seidel (2019)

As previously stated, successful CRM implementation requires the proper alignment of people, processes and technology in order for customer value to be created for entities who interact with the client system. CRM is focused on developing and strengthening the relationship (Stauss and Seidel 2019), in the case of this thesis between landlord and tenant.

In the framework, there is a relationship between CRM and customer care as customer care is focused on ensuring that there is an executable plan in place to handle all concerns from customers inclusive of complaints. Evidently, there exists a strategic relationship between complaints management and CRM. This relationship is important as complaints are sources of information. If the customer feels that the complaint is being taken seriously and addressed, this will strengthen the relationship between customer and client.

The management of complaints is central to customer care and a critical starting point to reducing customer dissatisfaction. With specific reference to RESL, if the company has customer care as integral to its business strategy, and its people, process and technology are well aligned, this should lead to less periods of voids and controversy over rental payments. As Sanderson and Edwards (2016) have posited, good customer care should see a positive return on investment and improved bottom line of the company.

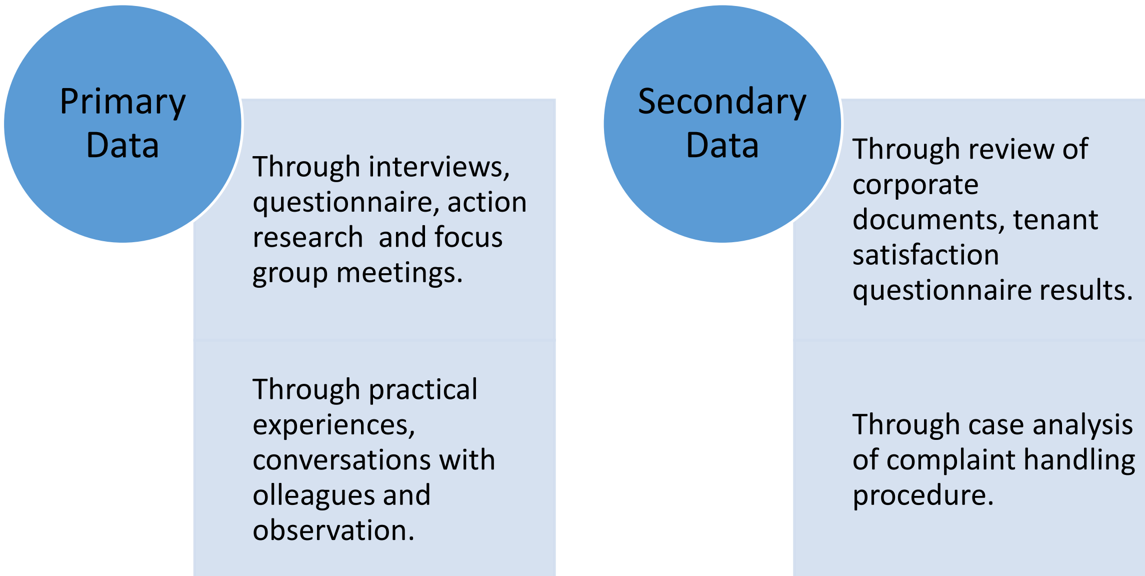
3.9 DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Data Collection

Data collection began on receipt of ethical clearance from the University of Liverpool as well as from my employer, RESL. In order to treat with the claim levelled at action research as lacking in rigour and relevance (Thiollent 2011, Levin 2012), the research design used a variety of data collection methods during the four phases of the macro action research cycle. The design was based upon the principle of both data and methodological triangulation in order to obtain an in-depth understanding of the issues related to CRM, customer care and complaints handling at RESL. According to Wilson (2014 p.74) "Triangulation refers to using more than one particular method when doing research in order to get richer, fuller data and /or to help confirm the results of the research".

The methods included an environmental scan of the company's corporate documents, semi-structured interviews, case analysis, focus group meetings and issuance of a company- wide questionnaire. This data collection methods allowed me to collect both primary and secondary data. **Figure 3.4** is relevant.

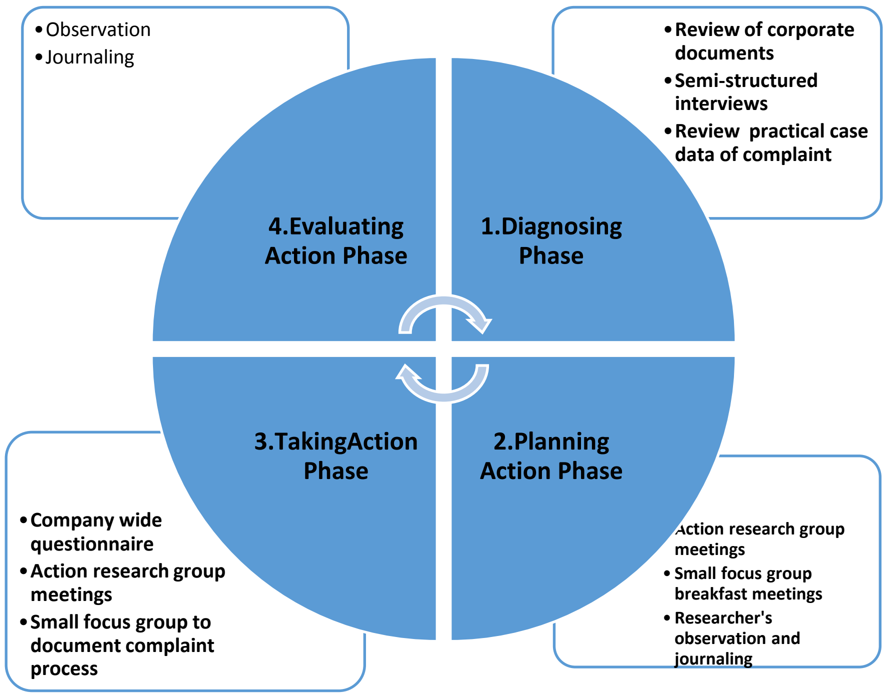
Figure 3.4: Categories of Data Collected



My intention was to purposely collect these data at different points in the life of the inquiry and from a cross-section of employees from different Divisions in order to fully explore some of the reasons for limited focus by the organisation on CRM, customer care and complaints management, as well as to understand the impact of publicness on customer value creation while demonstrating how embedding complaint management in RESL can impact its bottom line.

The between-method of triangulation would have also added rigour and objectivity to my inquiry, thereby treating with the criticism levelled against insider action researchers of being too close to the data. The research consisted of four phases. **Figure 3.5** maps the data collection methods against the four phases of the macro research cycle.

Figure 3.5: Data Collection Methods Mapped Against Phases of Macro Action Research Cycle



Hereunder, I present an overview of the activities undertaken in each phase. In subsequent chapters I present full details of how the methods were implemented and the findings therefrom. In Phase 1, the diagnosing phase of the research, I reviewed RESL's corporate documents as well as the findings from a 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey in order to diagnose the organisational problem and better understand the company's perspective and practices related to CRM, customer care and complaints management. Phase 1 also saw a semi-structured interview conducted with the head of the Division in order to collect qualitative data specifically related to the three research questions that I sought to answer. During this phase, I analysed the case of a complaint made to the organisation by a tenant and the length of time it took for the complaint to be resolved. This analysis was instructive as it provided insights into areas of the company's complaint management system which needed to be strengthened. The findings from Phase 1 are analysed in chapter 4. The outcome of these activities informed the activities in phase two and this process was adopted throughout all of the phases.

For Phase 2, planning action, the action research group was formed. The group was comprised of a cross section of employees who were the core group of persons with whom I engaged in discussion and co-created knowledge on customer care and complaint management. Through direct observation, journaling and collaboration with this group I also collected significant information on their thoughts and perceptions related to customer care delivery at the company. Planning for the issuance of a staff questionnaire on customer care was also undertaken in order to obtain a company-wide perspective on customer care. Additionally, breakfast meetings were convened by the company's President to discuss the company's strategic initiatives, one of which was Customer Care and Management. Data and analysis can be found in chapter 5.

Phase 3, the taking action phase included the issuance of a closed ended questionnaire to administer to all employees to collect data on customer care and complaint handling. Work continued alongside the action research group on the development of the Customer Care Policy with a view to finalisation of a first draft document. A focus group meeting was held with my direct reports prior to the complaint handling process being refined and further developed as they were directly responsible for following through on complaints brought to the company's attention by customers. The details of this Phase are documented in chapter 6.

In Phase 4, evaluating action, my focus rested with in depth evaluation and reflection on the findings from all of the previous phases. Throughout the inquiry, journaling was used as another data collection tool. As the inquiry progressed I maintained accurate records of my experiences and used these jottings as reflective pieces throughout the four phases. Additionally, attention was placed on an assessment of the appropriateness of my actions as insider action researcher and what my actions would be if another phase had to be undertaken. Chapter 7 discusses these matters.

All of the data collection methods were chosen given the research questions that I was required to answer. The methods were applied in an authentic context at RESL and the findings contributed to my gaining a better understanding of the place of CRM, customer care and complaints handling at the organisation. **Tables 3.1** to **3.3** map the research questions against the data collection methods and their purpose within the research strategy.

Table 3.1: Research Question 1 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Purpose

Research question 1	Data collection methods	Purpose
Why at an enterprise level has there been limited focus on customer relationship management at RESL?	Review of corporate documents	To understand the company's strategic objectives. The context for use of the words tenant and customer. The linguistic fingerprint of the company.
	Interviews with executive managers	To collect primary data from executives to capture first hand their perspective on customer care as exercised by the company.
	Action research group meetings	To collect primary data on CRM from a different category of employee. To co-create knowledge and develop implementation strategies.
	Staff survey	To collect primary data from employees who were neither interviewed nor formed part of the action research group to obtain their opinion on customer care at RESL.

Table 3.2: Research Question 2 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Purpose

Research question 2	Data collection methods	Purpose
Has publicness impacted the ability of RESL to deliver excellent customer care to its tenants and if so how?	Action research group meetings	To collect primary data from the cross functional team to understand the role that publicness played in preventing RESL from delivering better customer care to tenants.
	Interviews with executive managers	To provide perspectives on the impact of publicness on customer care delivery.

Table 3.3: Research Question 3 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Purpose

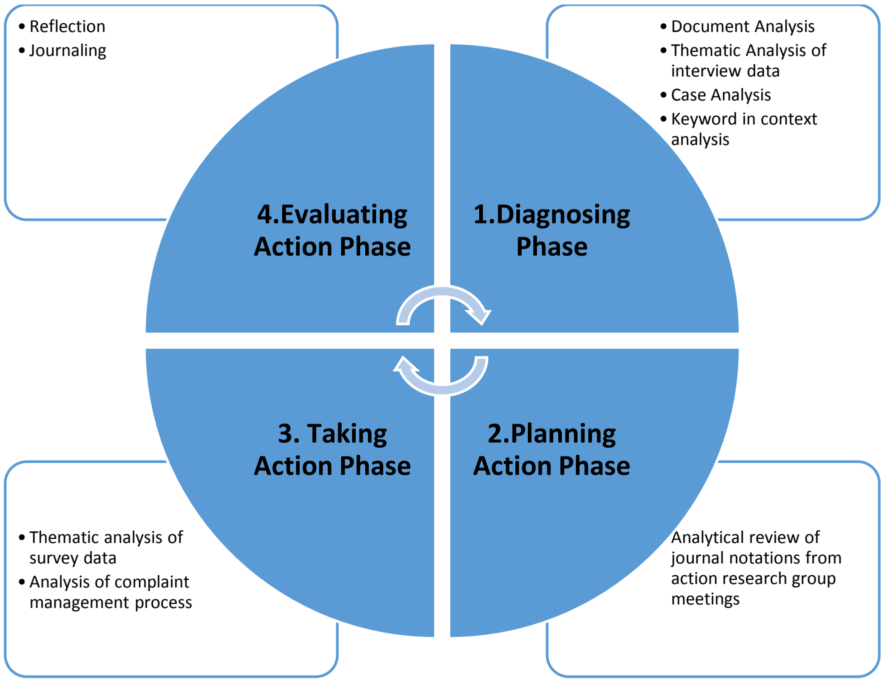
Research question 3	Data collection methods	Purpose
Will embedding a more systematic approach to customer complaints handling at RESL improve its bottom line?	Interviews, researcher's observation and journaling	As insider action research, what I gained from interviews, reflection, journaling and observation allowed me new insights into the practical implications and challenges of embedding customer complaints in the organisation, especially SPSEs.

I now turn attention to the data analysis strategies used in the inquiry.

3.10 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES

My data analysis strategies did not follow a linear approach but was spiral in nature (Creswell 2013). The analysis strategies included a combination of document analysis, case analysis, thematic analysis of interview and survey data, discourse analysis of the action research group data and analysis of complaint data. Both data triangulation and between-method triangulation added to credibility of the findings and assumptions made in relation to CRM, customer care and complaints management at RESL. **Figure 3.6** maps the data analysis strategies against the four phases of the macro action research cycle.

Figure 3.6: **Data Analysis Strategies Mapped Against Phases of Macro Action Research Cycle**



Phase 1: Document and Keyword-in Context Analysis, Thematic Analysis of Interview Data and Case Analysis

Document Analysis and Keyword-in Context Analysis

Phase 1 of the spiral began with in depth analysis of the company's 2013-2015 and 2018-2022 Strategic Plans. Company documents give context and background to the research under investigation. In this regard, I examined these documents to understand the company's strategic vision as well as how the company viewed its tenants.

Particular attention was focused on the context within which the word tenant and customer were used as this contributed to a better understanding of the company's focus. In addition, I wanted to better understand whether there was any change or development in ideology between the two Strategic Plans in relation to customer care and complaints management as they related to my research questions.

Notes and significant phrases that stood out for me were documented. In a similar vein, the data from the latest Tenant Satisfaction Survey of 2015 were analysed to extract the key findings related to the tenants' opinion of their landlord across key variables such as landlord-tenant relationship, park maintenance and timeliness of responses. The data also gave better understanding of whether tenants felt that they were deriving value from their landlord based on their leasehold covenants.

Thematic Analysis of Interview Data

For Nowell et al. (2017 p.2), " thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that can be widely used across a range of epistemologies and research questions". Another advantage of using thematic analysis was drawn from Maguire and Delahunt (2017 p.3353) who noted that thematic analysis "unlike many qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective", as such, the flexibility of the method of analysis proved useful for the purpose of my inquiry as it did not restrict me to any one theoretical lens.

One of the reasons for undertaking thematic analysis is to identify recurring themes (Maguire and Delahunt, 2017). Maguire and Delahunt (2017 p.3353) describe the concept of a theme as "patterns in the data that are important or interesting" and which the researcher can use to speak to the issue under inquiry. Given the merits of thematic analysis, it afforded me the opportunity to interpret the data and analyse what was taking place at RESL.

After transcribing the notes from interviews, group meetings and observations, I reread them for clarity. I then developed codes based on my inquiry and research questions in order to reduce the amount of data collected during the overall process. I then searched for recurring themes based on the three interviews with Executives and Managers. An inductive thematic analysis was undertaken as I allowed the themes to emerge from the data collected throughout the inquiry and not rely on the literature on CRM to unearth the themes. The advantage of inductive thematic analysis is that I started with a blank slate and did not allow my preunderstanding of RESL to fit the data into a predefined framework to colour the outcome.

Having developed an initial set of themes, those that overlapped each other were merged into a single theme. The significant themes were named and out of them, subthemes were developed. A high level thematic map was developed in order to illustrate the interrelationship between the themes and subthemes. Direct quotations from interviewees and action research group members were incorporated into the text based on the themes and subthemes that I developed during the inquiry. I did not paraphrase or summarise text as a mechanism to bring evidence into the text for fear of misinterpretation.

Case Analysis

In chapter 4, I documented the case of a tenant who made a maintenance related complaint to the company. The case presented the chronology of exchanges between the parties. I analysed these exchanges and noted the length of time taken to arrive at a resolution of the matter. From this response, I was able to draw meaning and themes given my insider information about how matters such as these have been handled in the past. In chapter 4 will be found further details on the practical steps that were taken to analyse the data in Phase 1 of the macro research cycle.

Phase 2: Analytical Review of Journal Notations from Action Research Group Meetings

Phase 2 of the macro action research cycle involved analysing journal notations from the discourses at the action research group meetings. As insider action researcher, I listened to the language used at these meetings especially as employees discussed their perspective of how customer care was exercised at the company. Different experiences and stories were shared at these meetings shaped by the organisational context. These stories impacted their views and shed more light on customer care. Chapter 5 contains further details of how this method of data analysis was undertaken.

Phase 3: Thematic Analysis of Employee Survey Data

The third phase was focused on analysis of data from an open ended questionnaire which was issued to all employees in October 2018. The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect data from all staff on their perception of the company's approach to customer care and complaints handling.

In undertaking the analysis alongside the rest of the action research group members, the approach was to design a coding system in line with the aim of the questionnaire and the research questions in order to surface themes. In addition to surfacing themes, the intention was to explore the relationships in the data similar to the approach taken in the analysis of the interview data. Further details of the process can be found in chapter 6.

Having discussed the data analysis strategies, it is to be noted that none of the data collection or data analysis methods was used exclusively. Document analysis was combined with thematic analysis of interview data. Discourse analysis of action research group meetings was combined with sense making and reflection on pronouncements, while the questionnaire results were combined with interview data results. The combination of research strategies helped to triangulate the data and increase validity of results given the research questions that I wanted to answer (**section 1.6 refers**) on CRM, customer care and complaints management.

Tables 3.4 to 3.6 map the research questions against the data collection methods and method of analysis as discussed in the sections above.

Table 3.4: Research Question 1 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Method of Analysis

Research question 1	**Data collection methods**	**Purpose**	**Method of Analysis**
Why at an enterprise level has there been limited focus on customer relationship management at RESL?	Review of corporate documents	To better understand the company's strategic objectives. The context for use of the words tenant and customer. The overall linguistic fingerprint of the company.	A combination document analysis, thematic analysis and key word -in-context to identify the major themes in the corporate documents.
	Interviews with executive managers	To collect primary data from executives to capture first hand their perspective on CRM as exercised by the company.	Thematic analysis to unearth recurring themes from different interviewees.
	Action research group meetings	To collect primary data on CRM from the perspective of a different category of employee. To co-create knowledge and develop implementation strategies.	Thematic analysis to assess similarities or differences between the themes from the interviews and those of the action research group meetings.
	Staff survey	To collect primary data from employees who were neither interviewed nor formed part of the action research group to obtain their opinion on customer care at RESL.	Thematic analysis which captured employees' perspectives on customer care in the organisation.

Table 3.5: Research Question 2 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Method of Analysis

Research question 2	Data collection methods	Purpose	Method of Analysis
Has publicness impacted the ability of RESL to deliver excellent customer care to its tenants and if so how?	Action research group meetings	To also collect primary data from the cross functional team to understand the role that publicness played in preventing RESL from delivering better customer care to its tenants.	Thematic analysis, case analysis and reflection for the similar purpose in answering the first research question.
	Interviews with executive managers	To provide perspectives on the impact if any of publicness on customer care delivery.	Analysis of themes which emerged to understand whether there were similar pronouncements across the interviewees.

Table 3.6: Research Question 3 Mapped Against Data Collection Methods and Method of Analysis

Research question 3	Data collection methods	Purpose	Method of Analysis
Will embedding a more systematic approach to customer complaints handling at RESL improve its bottom line?	Interviews, researcher's observation and journaling	As insider action research, what I gained from interviews, reflection, journaling and observation allowed me new insights into the practical implications and challenges of embedding customer complaints in the organisation given that it operated in silos.	Thematic analysis and inferring meaning from my journal notations.

3.11 THE THESIS ACTION RESEARCH: ME IN THE RESEARCH

As I undertook the action research phases of the inquiry, I was mindful of who I was vis-à-vis the research process. My positionality in the organisation as a long standing Manager and now insider action researcher brought with it considerable practical and technical experiences and information which I tried to manage carefully and not become narcissistic (Weick, 2002). Throughout the action research phases, I questioned my understanding of the core problem, my beliefs as to why a Customer Care Policy was never developed for the company and why there was no sustained implementation of a customer care handling process. Given the fact that the inquiry was about my professional practice, I studied myself as I lead the change process (Tenni, Smith and Boucher, 2003). I did not become narcisstic or leaned towards self aggrandisement but allowed the voices of the researched to be heard throughout the inquiry.

To mitigate some of the limitations mentioned above, I acknowledged the possible conflict which can arise given the role complexity as researcher and employee. I was conscious that I brought to the inquiry my values, experiences, perceptions about the organisation. Manoeuvring between my role as insider action researcher and Manager was challenging. During action research group meetings, I took on the persona of the researcher as I wanted to be forthright and get to the bottom of the problems and document the "why" of events in keeping with my social constructivist lens. Even though I was straightforward with the members of the action research group, they freely expressed their opinions as the story unfolded. However, as I interacted with my direct reports in discussing how we implement the complaints handling processes, my role was more that of the Manager having served in the position for a considerable period of time.

3.12 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the insider action research method used in this inquiry as an approach to understanding the operations of organisations from the perspective of an insider action researcher. The basic underpinnings of insider action research were elaborated upon and the criticisms levelled against the method by positivists were debated. I identified my epistemological position as that of a social constructivist who embraces many realities of understanding phenomena.

An overview of the four action research phases was presented. I discussed the data collection and analysis strategies mapped against the three research questions. In the ensuing chapter, I will present my findings from phase one and discuss how I diagnosed the compelling need for change at RESL.

CHAPTER 4: DIAGNOSING THE PROBLEM

4.1 Introduction

In the first phase of the macro level action research cycle, focus was placed on diagnosis of the organisational issue. **Figure 4.1** represents an overview of the macro level action research cycle. Zuber- Skeritt (2002) has expressed the view that the action research project should begin with assembling the learning team to engage in the cyclical process of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. The action research group was not assembled in this first phase which commenced in February 2018. The reason being, I wanted to undertake a comprehensive review of the company's corporate documents from the perspective of action researcher and not an employee without the input of others as I contributed to the preparation of the company's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan.

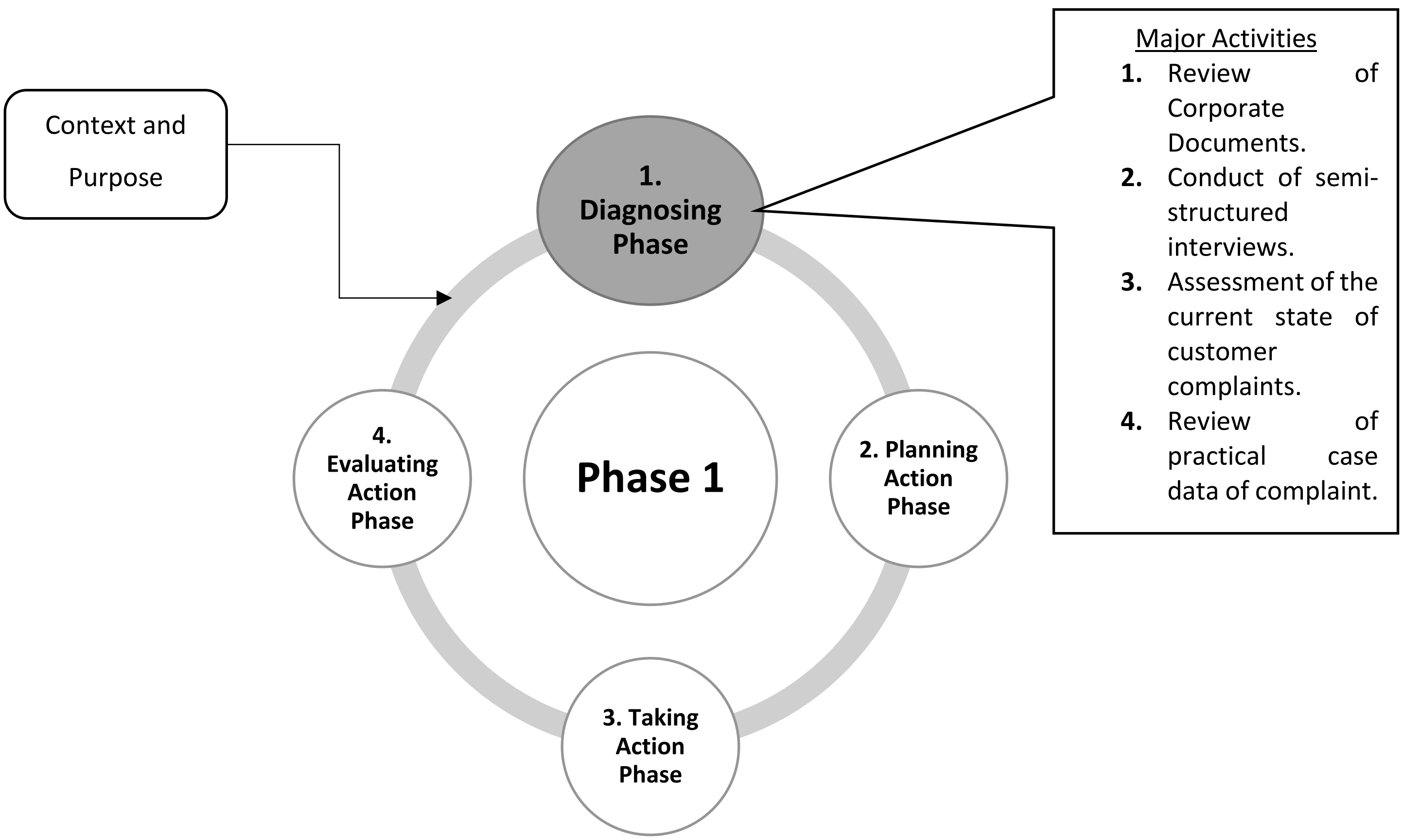
My journaling of observations began in this phase as I perused the contents of the company's Strategic Plan Documents for the periods 2013-2015 and 2018-2022 to understand the perceptions of Executive Management, how they viewed the company's tenants and their thought patterns which charted the way forward for the organisation. As a member of the team which drafted the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, I used fresh lenses to review the document in its entirety. The findings of a 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey undertaken by an advertising firm were also reviewed in order to make notations of some of the major findings from the survey.

My perusal of the corporate documents of RESL was aimed at better understanding if the international perspective of tenant as customer found its way into the pages of corporate documents of RESL and if not why not. The expectation is that given its mandate of commercial viability and diversification away from oil and gas, that RESL would understand the relevance of embedding a customer centric approach at the company. In this regard, the focus of this phase was on diagnosing how customer centricity was displayed in the corporate documents. The rationale for adopting this approach was that the outcome of this diagnosis would provide guidance as to what should be the focus of the Customer Care Policy and Complaints Handling Process to be developed and implemented later in the inquiry.

The interview method and meetings were used in this phase to collect data from the Vice President of the READ, the Manager, Facilities Maintenance; the Manager, Human Resource and Administration and ICT personnel in order to gain a better understanding of the organisational issue and the perspective of senior employees on customer care in the organisation**.**

Figure 4. 1 captures the major research activities undertaken in the diagnosis phase of the inquiry.

Figure 4.1 Diagnosis Phase of Macro Cycle



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

4.2 CORPORATE DOCUMENTS REVIEW

Role of Strategic Plans

Strategic Plans are the voice of the management of organisations vis-à-vis their vision, mission, and strategic objectives. Strategic Plans and Annual Reports are important management tools in which are expressed the core values to which companies subscribe (Rutherford, 2005).

Despite the considerable investment in time by Executive Management in developing Strategic Plans, on many occasions they are filed away and the organisation reverts to business as usual without developing operational plans to guide the day to day activities of the organisation (Kalali et al., 2011; Sial et al.,2013). This scenario is compounded by the fact that if there is a change in leadership of the organisation, the organisation stops and has to be reset before it takes up traction, resulting in programmes and projects not being completed (Nixon, Harrington and Parker,2012). To this end, the Strategic Plans of READ for the period 2013-2015 and 2018-2022 were reviewed. The major pattern in the language of the documents that I looked for was the context within which the term "customer" as opposed to "tenant" was used and the underlying connections based on the context. I also considered whether the notion of "publicness" of State Enterprises impacted in any way how major stakeholders in the organisation were viewed.

Review of 2013-2015 Strategic Plan

In analysing the Strategic Plan, my focus was on discovering patterns and meaning in the linguistics of the Plan through keywords- in-context analysis combined with word count. These two analytical approaches were aimed at strengthening my analysis given the critique of action research as a method lacking in rigor and relevance. This issue was discussed in chapter three.

In reviewing the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan, one of the responsibilities of the company was defined as the optimisation of its real estate assets in a commercially viable manner. The notion of commercial viability was an approach never envisaged by this SPSE since its establishment in the early 1960s, however this new mandate was handed down by the Government based on a Cabinet decision.

The notion of commercial viability was further extended and the company's intent was" to make suitable real estate available to qualified tenants and developers in a commercially viable manner" (Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan 2013-2015 p. 3). Further on in the Strategic Plan, in discussing one of the company's strategic imperatives, it was noted that ["Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] recognises the positive relationship between *tenant* (my italics) satisfaction and the performance of its real estate assets. Therefore greater emphasis will be placed on ensuring a *customer* (my italics) focused approach. Initiatives such as ensuring that all *tenants* (my italics) have clear title to their properties."[Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan 2013-2015 p. 4]. As can be seen from this quotation, the organisation used the word tenant and customer interchangeably and the written word gives the impression that a tenant and a customer are viewed as two separate entities.

The statement in the Strategic Plan begs the question as to why the language did not speak to a positive relationship between customer satisfaction and real estate asset performance. Under the said strategic initiative, reference was made to ensuring that all tenants have clear title to their property. This language reconfirms that when issues of land title were referenced, emphasis was placed on the legal relationship between RESL as Landlord and the occupier was viewed as a tenant and not a customer. This perspective is supported by Kivlehan (2011) when the author expressed the view that to consider "occupiers as customers requires a shift in perception about the relationship between Landlords and tenants" (Kivlehan, 2011 p.3).

With respect to "*customer targets*" (my italics) for the company, a strategic objective was stated as "Improve quality of *Tenants*" (my italics). Again, a customer is viewed as a tenant and not the other way around where the tenant should be viewed as a customer. The measure of a "quality" tenant was viewed as one remitting rental payments in a timely manner. This perspective can be interpreted as a transactional one as the landlord-tenant relationship is governed by a registered lease with strict covenants to be upheld by both parties.

In discussing the development of new industrial sites, a risk identified by the company was whether they will obtain enough of the right type of "customers" for the sites, however as the statement was developed further, the phraseology shifted to " right tenants" for the defined areas. A clear vacillation between the use of the words" customer" and "tenant" depending on the context. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2010 p.114) "[o]rganizations lead two lives", one life represents the organisation's public utterances through its Strategic Plans , orgainsational charts and high level strategic maps and the other life represents the culture and informal aspect of the organisation.

Using the word count command as another data analysis method, the word "customer" was counted on 31 occasions and "tenant" on 68 occasions. I acknowledge that there are drawbacks with word counts, as devoid of context, the word itself is meaningless. As a result, I leant more heavily on the meanings and contexts within which the words were used. It was noted that the context within which the word" customer" was used was specific to a new applicant however once the applicant accepted a tenancy, the applicant was viewed as a tenant, due to the fact that a legal relationship of landlord and tenant commenced. Based on this evidence, it is almost certain that RESL was drawing upon two different narratives when the word "tenant" as opposed to "customer" was used and with little awareness of this stance.

Close on the heels of the use of the word" tenant" the company used words such as "lease" or "marketable title", the legal jargon of the subject matter of landlord and tenant. An example of this is "111 *tenants* (my italics) do not have a clear and marketable title" [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan 2013-2015 p.13]. Also" As a forward thinking landlord, [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] recognises the positive relationship between *tenant*(my italics) satisfaction and the performance of its real estate assets and as such greater emphasis will be placed on ensuring a *customer*(my italics) focused approach to the management of its real estate assets inclusive of its processes and procedures in order to enhance service delivery and satisfy investor needs" [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan p. 13].

Table 4.1 presents the keywords-in-context which demonstrate the two narratives used by the company and the context in which the two words were used.

Table 4.1: Analysis of keywords-in- Context: Two Narratives from the 2013-2015 Strategic Plan

Context for Use of Tenant	Context for Use of Customer
Real estate assets performance	New applicant
Clear and marketable title	New site development
Remittance of rent	Service delivery
Transactions with the company	Discussion around management of real estate assets
Reference to a lease	Enhancement of service delivery
Reference to reentry of property	
Reference to legal relationship	
Onboarding of a new entity	

Source: Researcher's Journaling (2018)

Based on the pattern and context of usage of the word "tenant"and "customer"coupled with the more frequent of the use of the word "tenant", it is evident that the concept of "tenant" as opposed to "customer" was more significant in the corporate life of RESL and used in a very legalistic context without awareness of the switch in language.

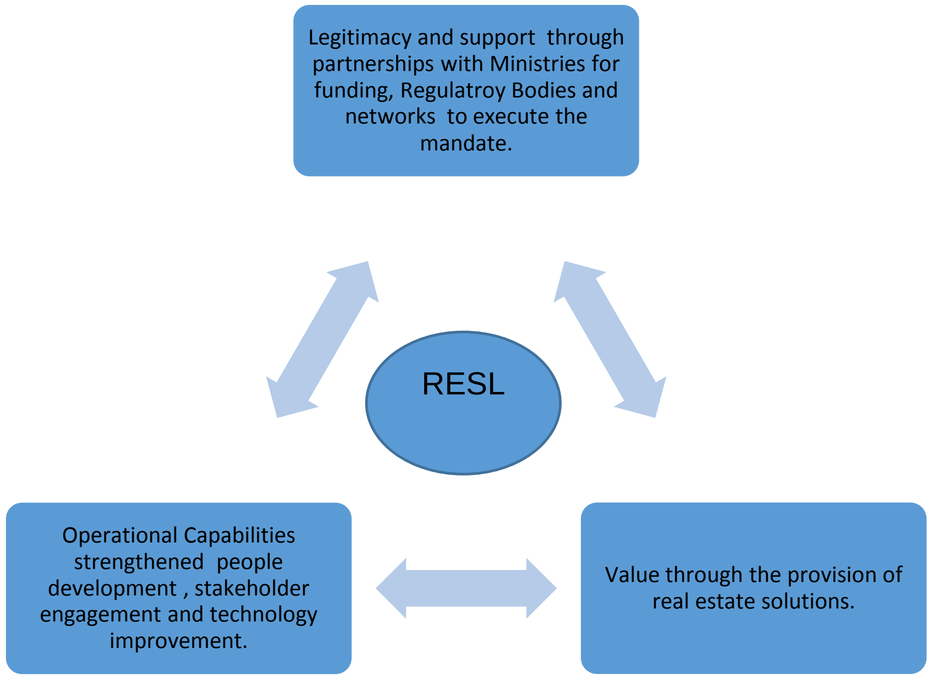
A review of the company's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan was also undertaken in order to assess whether there was any change in the company's linguistic fingerprint and context within which the words tenant and customer were used.

Review of 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

The rationale for the new Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 was anchored in the fact that with the global economic downturn, there was the need for Small Island Developing States (SIDs) such as Trinidad and Tobago to diversify their economy away from oil and gas dependency. Returning to Moore's (1995) framework of public value to analyse the pronouncements in the company's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the company tasked itself with providing real estate solutions to businesses in the non- oil and gas sector.

Figure 4.2 maps the elements of Moore's (1995) framework against how RESL proposed to create public value for its customers as enunciated in the Strategic Plan.

Figure 4.2: Moore's (1995) Public Value Mapped against RESL's Propositions



In the discourse of the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan, the company committed to develop sustainable real estate solutions of land and built assets. In developing these assets, the entity saw itself as delivering lasting value to its tenants, shareholders and society. Despite the downturn in the economy, RESL aligned itself with the Government's strategy by becoming a catalyst for action. Given its public nature as a SPSE, its legitimacy and support would be derived from the Ministry of Trade as well as other Government Ministries and Regulatory Bodies to execute its mandate.

Having undertaken a SWOT analysis as part of the strategic planning exercise, RESL recognised that in order to create public value for its customers there was the need to become financially self-sufficient, engage in stakeholder management, become better at real estate management, improve its CRM technology and develop a customer service excellence policy and framework. All of these strategic initiatives were aimed at strengthening the company's operational capabilities for better service delivery.

Despite the fact that Moore (1995) called for the alignment of the three elements of the framework, such an undertaking is challenging given the very political nature of public organisations caught up in five year election cycles.

Recognising the role of RESL as a catalyst for providing real estate solutions, the vision of the organisation was changed to speak to delivering "value to *tenants* (my italics), shareholders and society". [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan 2018-2022 p.2], as consumers of public value.

One of the strategic themes was Customer Service Excellence. Under the explanation for the strategic theme of Customer Service Excellence, the word "customer" was used on six occasions, however as the next theme of Populating New Sites and Optimising Existing Ones was discussed, the language reverted to the use of the word" tenant". The linguistic fingerprint then of the Strategic Plan continued to be reflective of a legal relationship of landlord and tenant in an arm's length transaction devoid of customer orientation.

Different Context, Different Language?

Under one of the company's core values of collaboration which is necessary for engendering legitimacy and support, there was reference to satisfying the needs of external "customers". It was noteworthy that one of the organisational weaknesses identified was the fact that the organisation did not fully understand the needs of its "customers". Clearly, if the organisation did not fully understand the needs of its customers, then it would not know if it was in fact creating customer value.

In speaking about threats as part of the SWOT analysis, the language again changed to speak to "tenants" within the context of their inability to remit rent given the country's challenging economic situation. The ultimate action that a landlord such as RESL can take for non-remittance of rent is re-entry of premises. Given the serious legal implications of this act which can result in commencement of legal proceedings against the entity, the terminology used was that of "tenant". This is demonstrative of the fact that depending on the context of the discourse, the term "customer" was used and in others" tenant" was used.

Similarly to **table 4.1**, **table 4. 2** provides the keywords-in-context and an overview of the narratives based on the context.

Table 4.2: Analysis of keywords-in-context: Two Narratives from the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan

Context for use of Tenant	Context for use of Customer
Delivering value	Collaboration
Populating new sites	Innovative solutions
Optimising existing sites	Service oriented culture
Improving networks and partnerships	
Legal title	
Remittance of rent	
Regaining possession of property	
Beneficial occupation	

Source: Researcher's Journaling (2018)

In comparing the language in the 2013 Plan to that of the 2018 Plan, very little has changed in the manner in which the company viewed its occupiers. Using the same approach to count the number of times that ‟tenant” as opposed to ‟customer” was used, in the latter Plan, ‟tenant” was used 56 times while ‟customer” was used 54 times. Despite the increased usage of the word ‟customer” in the 2018-2022 Plan, the context remained the same.

I also noted in the 2018-2022 Strategic Plan that a customer was not viewed as a stakeholder. It was stated that the organisation aims ‟to meet the needs of not only the company's customers, but also its stakeholders" ([Real Estate Solutions Company Limited Strategic Plan 2018-2022 p.17]).

REFLECTIVE PAUSE

Being a contributor to the 2018-2022 Strategic Planning exercise, I felt that the company was making a concerted effort to be customer focused, however as I step back and use the lens of action researcher, I am convinced that the relationship is one still heavily focused on landlord and tenant and leasing arrangements flavoured with customer centricity. The evidence can be seen from the overwhelming number of references to tenants as opposed to customers in the earlier Strategic Plan, which found its way into the current Plan.

Synthesis of Meanings

Having examined the company's two Strategic Plans, even though there were pronouncements around public value creation through service delivery, the language was not rooted in customer centricity to match the strategic theme of customer service excellence. This was compounded by the fact that based on the linguistic fingerprint in the documentation, a strict legal relationship of landlord and tenant prevailed. This legalistic relationship permeated all of the company's processes and procedures and could have stymied the company's ability to deliver the highest level of customer value. The following section will discuss the main finding from the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey and the main messages which emerged.

2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey Findings: Tenants' Experiences of the Landlord-Tenant Relationship

In 2015, the company hired an advertising firm to undertake a tenant satisfaction survey aimed at assessing tenant satisfaction levels based on the services delivered by RESL, as well as to recommend priority areas for service delivery improvement. The questionnaire included categories namely, queries, complaints, maintenance and repairs, communication, behaviour and relationships. The sampling frame comprised 303 tenants and 181 questionnaires were administered. This resulted in responses from 169 tenants from the 37 question survey. Of the 169 responses obtained via telephone and face to face interviews a summary of key findings is presented in **Table 4.3**

It is to be noted that RESL was not in possession of the raw data as the survey was administered by an external party.

Table 4.3 Summary of Key Findings from 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

60% described the relationship with [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] as "transactional (cordial)". 55% generally satisfied with [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited]. 52% satisfied with the way [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] addressed their complaint. 43% satisfied that their query was addressed within a reasonable timeframe. 57% dissatisfied with general park maintenance. 54% dissatisfied with how the company deals with repairs.

Source: 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey of Findings [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited]

The question posed in the company's 2015 tenant satisfaction survey to ascertain the relationship between landlord and tenant was‟ [h]ow will you describe your working relationship with [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited]"? The response categories were transactional (cold distant), transactional (cordial) and partnership (committed to mutual gain). Based on the table above, the most telling was the fact that the tenants viewed their relationship with their landlord as transactional. This is understandable given the legal and contractual obligations entered into between the parties. This tenant's perspective confirms the company's linguistic fingerprint as documented in the two Strategic Plans discussed above. Referring to the study's conceptual framework at **figure 3.3**, there is a direct relationship between CRM, customer care and complaint management. Complaints such as those documented from the survey needed to be taken seriously by the Executive Management of RESL as these complaints would have provided the organisation with significant information for strategic decision making around customer service excellence.

Only one in five tenants was satisfied with the timeline between lodging a complaint about repair works and completion of the said works. This statistic is significant given the landlord's responsibility to ensure that it leases properties which are in a habitable condition. Sanderson (2016) in her research on office tenants in the UK, showed that an important factor in ensuring that occupiers are satisfied and deriving value was as a result of the physical condition of their property. It follows that if a tenant is dissatisfied, RESL had a responsibility to ensure that the mechanism for lodging complaints was effective and the timeline for effecting repairs were reduced. Additionally, there was dissatisfaction with the quality of repair works. One respondent stated "complaint issues should be resolved within a reasonable timeframe-months not years, not swept under the carpet".

A snapshot of other feedback from tenants as documented in the survey results included the following:

> "Relationship has improved a lot. Keep Cordial. More meetings with [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] will help".
>
> "First took to [sic] long for work to get started then when it did it was not up to par".
>
> "Problems are very slowly dealt with and tenants are losing their money and business".

With respect to behaviours and competencies, the survey findings revealed that approximately 60 % of the respondents were of the view that the technical officer assigned to their location was effective in resolving their complaints, was solutions oriented, knowledgeable about the company's processes and procedures and nurtured a relationship with them but had limited authority to resolve certain issues.

Comments as cited in the survey report included the following:

> "Does an excellent job; Doesn't say no for anything; no problems with [PO]; [PO] is excellent; Basically satisfied with the present service".
>
> "Don't know PO's Level of Authority in Organization; Have more authority; They are limited in making decisions; PO needs support internally".

Based on the results of the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey, it is evident that the tenants were generally satisfied with the efforts of the technical officers assigned to the industrial parks where their businesses were established. However, the criticisms were the manner in which the landlord treated with repairs, the delays in effecting repairs and the poor quality of repairs. It is in this context that my second research question into the impact of publicness on customer care delivery is relevant. Given the fact that SPSEs relied on State funding, the quantum and timeliness of release of funds severely impacted its ability to execute works to the satisfaction of its occupiers.

Actions Taken Post 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey

In the light of the findings of the survey, an executive decision was taken to implement a customer care project led by the Corporate Communications Department. The purpose of the project was to "Develop and Implement a Customer Care Management Plan which targets [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited's] existing tenants of the legacy parks to improve the landlord/tenant relationship and customer service delivery".

At that time, the champion of the project was the President of the company who mandated the Corporate Communications Department to lead the project. Cross functional teams were established and the major pillars of the project were building human capacity in customer service; integrated customer service delivery; complaints handling and customer service assurance, communications and ICT. Team meetings were held and key customer facing processes were reengineered. These included the lease administration process aimed at reducing timelines for tenants to receive title to their properties and better streamlining of the park maintenance process.

In addition to the above, customer care performance standards and KPIs were developed for frontline employees in conjunction with the Human Resources Department however these standards, KPIs and complaints handling process were never implemented. From my perspective, the lack of implementation can be explained by the absence of an overall customer care strategy and mechanisms to embed the new culture of customer care within the organisation.

4.3 INTERVIEWS WITH KEY PERSONNEL IN THE ORGANISATION

Planning the Interview

During March to May 2018, three semi-structured interviews were conducted. As a data collection method, interviews allow the researcher to explore deeply the interviewee's perspective on phenomenon and also to facilitate their sharing of experiences relevant to the matter under investigation (McGrath, Palmgren, and Liljedahl, 2019). The design of the interview questions was based on the findings of the literature search on CRM, customer care and complaints handling. The overall objective of the interviews was to explore with the interviewees their perceptions of these matters, while assisting in addressing my three research questions in section 1.6. Given the research questions to be answered, general topic questions, core probing questions and follow up questions were drafted and subsequently refined. The finalised questionnaire is at the **Appendix**. **Table 4. 4** maps the type of question against the purpose of the question.

Table 4. 4: Interview Questions Mapped against Purpose

Type of Question	Purpose	Question Number(The Appendix refers)
General Topic	To start the conversation and obtain data on the general content of the research questions	1,2,3,5
Core Probing	The data I wanted to collect to help me answer the research questions	4,6,7,9,10,12,13
Follow up	To solicit more details in keeping with the response	8,11,14

The interviews were with the Vice President, Real Estate Assets, my immediate Supervisor; the Manager Human Resources and Administration and the Manager, Facilities Maintenance. I was able to collect new and insightful data from the perspective of Senior Officers in the organisation in order to draw conclusions and better understand the required inputs for drafting the Policy and complaints handling process as I entered the other phases of the inquiry.

Starting and Managing the Interviews

All of the focused interviews took place in a single sitting, lasted approximately 30 minutes, and the three employees were interviewed individually. All interviewees were provided with printed copies of both the Participant Consent Form and Participant Information Sheet for perusal and signature prior to the interview. They were all asked the same questions in the same sequence. Before the interview, I specifically enquired of the interviewees if they had any reservations with me taping the interview on my mobile device. Only the Manager Human Resources and Administration did not want the interview taped.

In this regard, the pace of this interview was much slower to allow me to document the deliberations of the interview, the other two interviews were taped as voice notes on my mobile device and later transcribed. Even though they were recorded, I took notations during the interviews. To familiarise myself with the responses from the interviews, I replayed the recording while augmenting the notations that I had taken during the interviews for proper transcription and meaning. As indicated above, a copy of the interview questions is at the **Appendix.**

As an insider action researcher, I ensured that ethical standards were upheld. In the interview with the Vice President, Real Estate Assets, the data I wanted to collect was related to whether he viewed the company's tenants as customers or from a purely landlord-tenant relationship. As one of the senior executives in the organisation, gaining his perspective on this and other matters sought to corroborate my findings in the company's two Strategic Plans where the words "tenant" and "customer" were being used interchangeably depending on the context.

I was also interested in soliciting his opinion on his role in relation to CRM, customer complaints handling and the place for technology in customer care delivery. The interview approach was focused on themes in the critical literature that were reviewed on CRM however room was left for the interviewee to interject any other interpretations based on his functional role in the organisation.

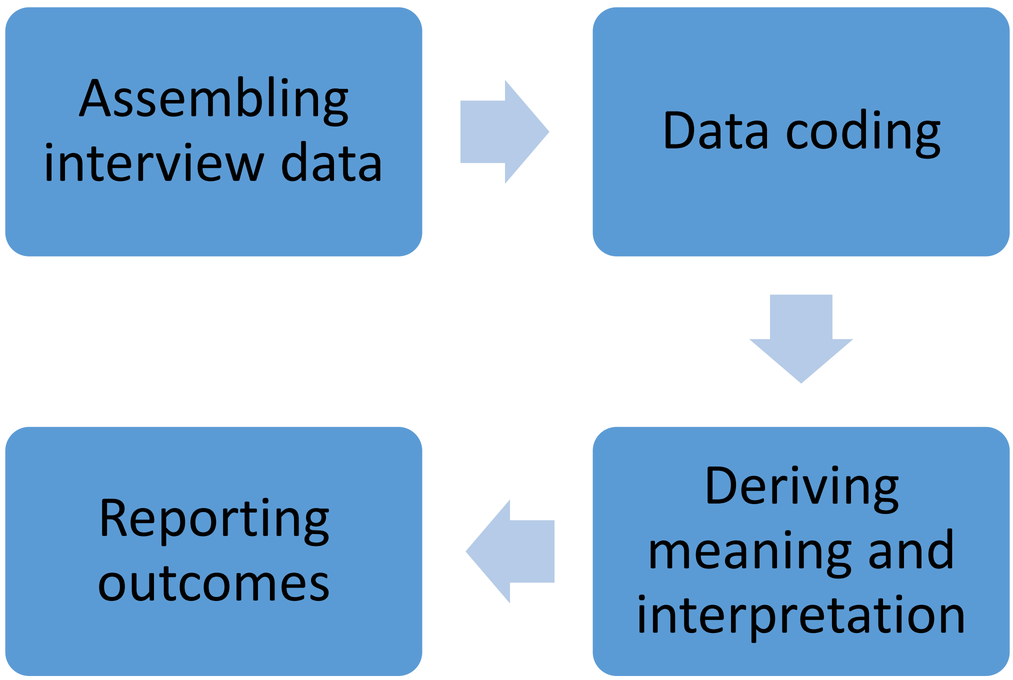
Yin (2009) has opined that interviews are a very important source of information, and the interviewer has to execute on two levels, firstly to adhere to the researchers' line of inquiry and secondly to pose questions to the interviewee in as unbiased a manner as possible. The conduct of this interview which comprised only open ended questions was a critical part of this action research cycle as it allowed me to gain knowledge of the Executive's view of the company's‟ tenants". For the purpose of this inquiry, the company's main stakeholders were called ‟tenants".

The aim of the interview with the Manager, Facilities Maintenance was to collect data on the operations of the Department and its handling of complaints received from the READ, additionally, whether any data were kept on complaints and if a tenant was viewed as a customer or a tenant. The interview with the Manager Human Resource and Administration was aimed at understanding her perspective on customer care delivery in the organisation as a member of the Committee which originally worked on the 2015 customer care handling project which was not fully implemented.

4.4 THEMATIC ANALYSIS OF INTERVIEW DATA

In order to analyse the interview data, a framework which was comprised of four steps was used. The framework comprised the assembly of the interview data, data coding, deriving meaning and interpretation and reporting outcomes. **Figure 4.3** is relevant.

Figure 4.3 Data Analysis Framework



Source: Adapted from Burns (2010)

Having collated all of the responses from the interviews, the data were analysed based on themes which emerged using a coding method. The steps taken in undertaking thematic analysis were as recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006). I started by becoming familiar with the data, I re-read all of the responses that I documented from the three interviews and also the recordings from the two interviewees who allowed me to record them.

Codes and Themes

As I re-read the responses to familiarise myself with the data, I began to develop codes by looking across the data set. All of the coding was undertaken by hand, marking through the notes with a highlighter. There was no need to use data analysis software as my data set was manageable.

The coding method was determined by the three research questions that I set myself to answer in section 1.6. It was not possible for me to undertake line-by – line code for every item of text given time constraints. I did not develop codes before the interviews, but allowed codes to be developed and adjusted from the data of the interviews as I engaged in an iterative process. The codes were developed in-vivo using the words of the interviewees as active participants in the research. Chunks of data were coded for conceptual meaning in alignment with the data. An example of how coding was done, is at **Table 4.5.**

Table 4.5 Example of Coded Text

Text	Code
"There is need for a two way flow of information however the focus is on lease covenants and as such there is no ambiguity".	Lease covenants
"If we were privately managed we could do so much more, there is no subvention".	Constrained by guidelines, funding issues

Having re-read the transcripts from the three interviews, I developed 21 codes related to the research questions. An example of the codes is presented in **table 4.6.** These codes were further refined and combined into five themes which were used as the basis for my deriving meaning and interpreting what was happening at RESL as it related to CRM, customer care and complaint handling.

Table 4.6 Codes and Themes

Codes ⇒	Themes
1. Focus on lease covenants 2. It is a landlord tenant relationship 3. Partner not tenant 4. Unstructured to deliver customer care 5. No landlord-tenant synergy	Purely Transactional Relationship
1. Reengineer complaint process 2. Gaps in handling queries 3. No structured approach for complaints 4. Complaints not logged, no standards	Just a Complaint
1. Adherence to policies 2. No flexibility to act 3. Constrained by guidelines 4. Can't raise own capital 5. Spread thinly	Fetter of being a SPSE
1. No seamless process between Departments 2. No alignment of systems	Guarding Territory
1. No subvention 2. Funding issue 3. Bare bones 4. Project failure due to funding 5. No follow through by executives	Failures due to lack of funding and executive inaction

My rationale for undertaking thematic analysis in the diagnosis phase was to collate significant data from the respondents in order to allow me to answer the research questions. As action researcher I also wanted to add meaning and draw conclusions from the pronouncements in order to guide the actions to be taken in the ensuing phases of the inquiry.

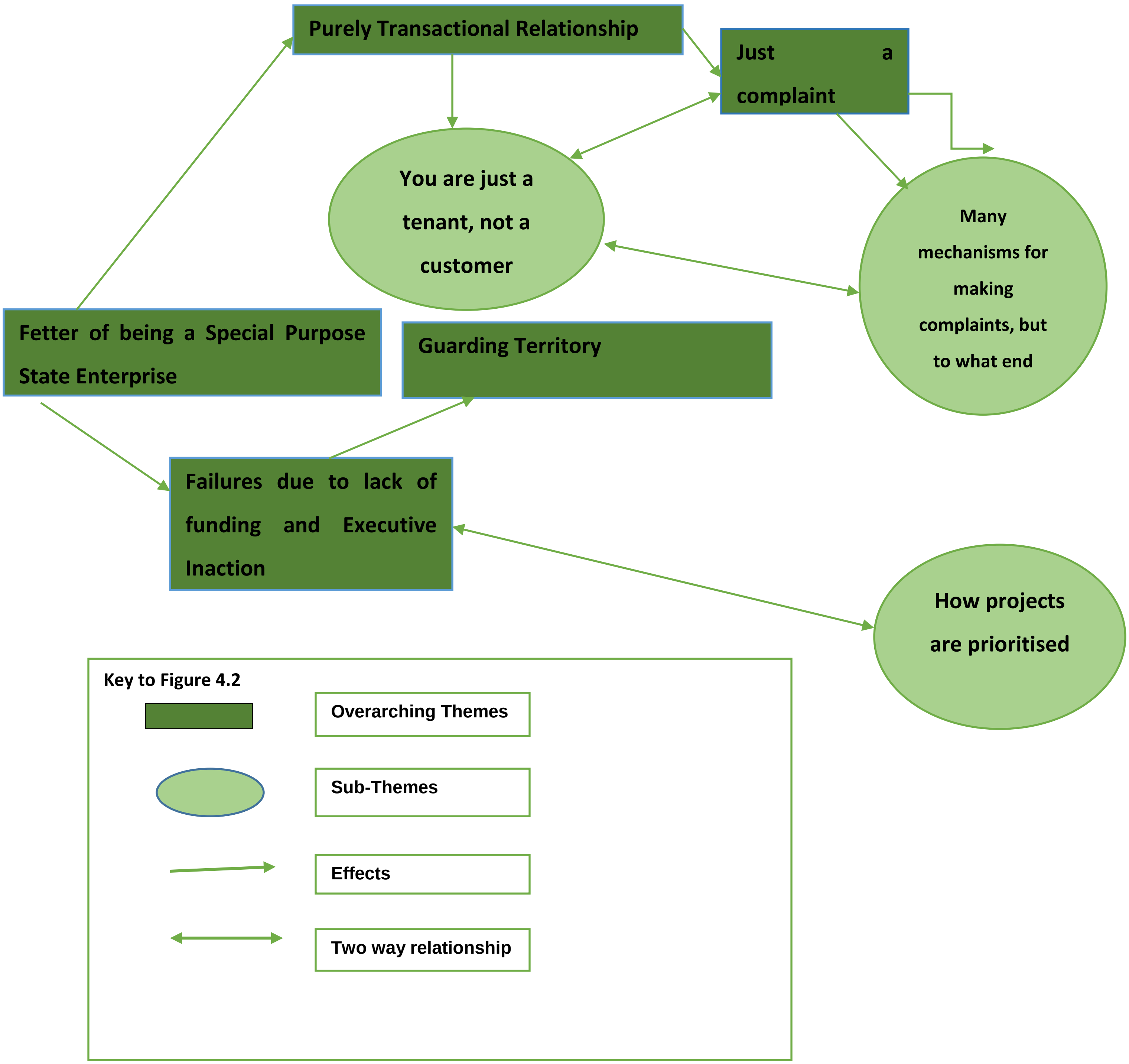
I reviewed the data codes in association with each theme and highlighted quotes which supported the themes. The themes were examined within each interview and across the three interviews for frequency of occurrence of certain statements.

The high level thematic map at **figure 4.4** was developed after the five themes and the sub themes were reviewed based on supporting data from the preliminary inquiry as well as my intimate knowledge of the workings of RESL.

The relationships and interactions between the themes and subthemes were identified and irrelevant themes were discarded. The thematic map served to summarise the different perspectives of the interviewees on the operations of RESL within the context of customer care and complaints handling.

Additionally, the thematic map allowed me to summarise the most important features of the data set having interviewed senior persons in the organisation. It forced me to make inferences and better structure the many pages of data from the respondents.

Figure 4.4 Thematic Map of Coded Interview Data



Analysis and Synthesis of Themes Based on Interviews

Analysis of Themes

In the section below, I discuss the main themes from the interviewees' perspective as well as the implications of the themes for the inquiry. Quotations from the interviewees were used to add significance to the outcome of the inquiry.

Theme 1: The Fetter of Being a Special Purpose State Enterprise

Were RESL a private real estate company it would have been better positioned to satisfy the many requests from tenants for better customer care and more efficient complaints handling. It is considered that because RESL is a State Enterprise, its "publicness" acted more as a fetter than an enabler. This position was shared by the Vice President of the Division when he stated that "If we were privately managed we could do much more, however we are constrained by guidelines and there is no subvention". He further added " The company does not have the flexibility to offer the tenants what they want as we must adhere to policies".

In contrast, the fetter of being a SPSE was viewed differently by the Manager, Human Resources and Administration. She argued that because the company is a SPSE, it is subject to the vagaries of changing politicians every five years which resulted in changes of executive management and Board Directors whose instability impacted full implementation of projects such as the customer care project which started in 2015. On the other hand, the Manager Facilities Maintenance saw an opportunity in the company's "publicness" and identified a role for the tenant. For him, the tenant knew what can affect their revenue stream. Once their revenue stream is impacted, so will RESL's. He added that the State has asked the company to be self-sustainable and as such the level of returns from the tenants was critical to the life of the company. In essence, this opinion challenged the company to work collaboratively with tenants in identifying relevant projects to ensure business continuity.

The weight of evidence based on the interviewees' responses would suggest that RESL was constrained by the kinds of strategic initiatives that could be implemented. The had to obtain the prior approval of its line Ministry before it engaged in any activity that had the potential to breach the rules related to the operation of SPSEs. Given the highly restrictive framework within which the company operated, arguably, the priority was not on delivering better customer care, but on engaging in projects as mandated by the political directorate.

Theme 2: Failures Due to Lack of Funding and Executive Inaction

Funding constraints significantly stymied the ability of RESL to execute on projects in accordance with its mandate. This theme of a lack of funding was inextricably linked to theme 1 above from the perspective that given budgetary cuts to State Enterprises, RESL would have inevitably fallen victim. The Vice President defined the company's position stating "We are relying on bare bones, we are State and spread thinly. Initiatives such as CRM failed due to funding and the focus of the organisation shifted".

The Manager, Facilities Maintenance mirrored the stance of the Vice President when he articulated that "there is little preventative maintenance, there is room for improvement and making it more robust". He underscored the fact that because of limited Government funding the proper prioritisation and execution of projects proved to be even more challenging. These pronouncements were at the heart of the inquiry and the issues which emerged from these statements were the fact that given that RESL is fettered by its status as a SPSE, coupled with its financial challenges, excellence in customer care delivery and proper complaints handling would be difficult. Both interviewees have clearly identified the challenge of a lack of preventative maintenance resulting in tenants' built accommodation not being repaired in a timely manner. This evidence would suggest that as the built accommodation under the company's portfolio aged, the tenant's operations would be affected which in turn affects the revenue stream of the company as tenants withhold rent as a sign of protest due to the poor state of buildings.

A lack of funding was not the only reason why projects failed in the organisation, as alluded to by the Manager, Human Resources and Administration, project failure was also attributed to the actions or inactions of executive management. The Manager advised during the interview that "the past initiatives were not brought to full completion but triggered sensitivity, we looked at JDs, KPIs to align to outcomes; discussions started but were not followed through, a phase was started". In pressing to obtain a reasoning as to why there was no follow through, it was revealed that "leadership changed and no one to follow through, there was no presentation to the Board".

The above findings provide further support for the need for a clear policy on customer care and a complaints handling process which has a robust feedback mechanism to tenants so that they are always informed as to the status of their complaints. Additionally, there was the need to adopt measures to sustain change initiatives so that they do no loose significance when changes in leadership occur.

Theme 3: Purely Transactional Relationship

It was only the Manager, Human Resources and Administration who viewed the tenant as a customer. Her position was that the tenants would have come to RESL for a service and from that perspective, they should be viewed as a "customer" and not a "tenant". The other two interviewees related to the theme from a strictly legal perspective. The Vice President defended his position when he indicated that "We manage just the lease, it is a landlord-tenant relationship. The tenant must honour the covenants".

The Facilities Maintenance Manager, mirrored this position when he expressly indicated that "to be honest based on previous experience how we deal with tenants we do not treat them as a serious stakeholder, that's my personal view. We should see them as a customer and a very important customer and I can be wrong".

The implications of this purely transactional relationship between landlord and tenant is that the tenant is not viewed by the company as a customer and as the Vice President indicated "the organisation's focus should be on the leasehold covenants in order to erase any ambiguity in the mind of the tenant". This perspective is in keeping with the language of the company's Strategic Plan where the term "tenant" and "customer" was used interchangeably, and as previously highlighted, the preferred label in a legalistic context was that of "tenant".

Subtheme: You are Just a Tenant Not a Customer

To view the tenant not as a customer has implications for the nature of the relationship and interactions between landlord and tenant and the course of action pursued by RESL if the "tenant" breaches a leasehold covenant. Breach of a leasehold covenant can result in repossession of the property by the landlord and eventual litigation.

As insider action researcher, some of the issues which emerged from this theme related specifically to the best approach to shift the organisation to a customer centric one and embed the said culture. The challenge is achieving this in spite of all of the impediments impacting the organisation due to its publicness rendering it challenged to deliver better customer care and to treat expeditiously with customer complaints.

Theme 4: Just a Complaint, Nothing More

The proper logging and tracking of customer complaints has never been accorded much priority at RESL. Based on the interviewees' responses, this is an area of the company's operations which required attention. The Manager, Facilities Maintenance was clear in his position that "Since taking up the position, I did not see any real structured approach in terms of how we collect complaints, how we log it, how we inventory it". With respect to my question on whether there is formal logging of the complaint, the Manager responded by saying "once the information is gathered, a memo is prepared whether funding is allocated or not, to seek approval to proceed based on the type of work to be executed".

To emphasise his position on the importance of logging and tracking complaints, the Manager, cited the possibility of a tenant's factory shell roof being repaired and if the Manager or technical officer is no longer with the company, one could not attest that the works were completed especially if further repairs needed to be done within a certain defects liability period. He added that poor complaints handling can result in RESL expending money unnecessarily.

In posing a question on whether there are established customer care standards in the organisation, the Manager, Human Resources and Administration also cited the fact that "there are no established customer care standards, it was done and never saw the light of day due to the project surrounding one Executive". She stressed the need for continuity in leadership as the lack thereof is a limitation of State Enterprises and the risk of political changes results in little or no follow through on strategies.

The issue of the implications of five-year political cycles on the work programme and achievements of Government institutions and SPSEs cannot be over emphasised. Given the absence of a structured customer complaints handling process, there continued to be many instances of tenants escalating complaints to the political directorate seeking redress. In instances such as these, the tenant's complaint looms in importance and priority attention is accorded these complaints.

The weight of the evidence from the interviews would suggest that RESL needed to revisit its entire approach to handling customer complaints and not merely define all complaints as maintenance issues, as this resulted in escalating them to the Facilities Maintenance Department who themselves have no mechanism for tracking and closing complaints.

Subtheme: Many Mechanisms for Making Complaints, but to what end?

RESL afforded tenants many avenues to lodge complaints however, the findings from this inquiry suggest that the complaints remained unaddressed for extended periods of time due to a multiplicity of reasons ranging from a lack of tracking to a lack of funding to undertake works requested by tenants to bring their structures back to an acceptable standard.

One interviewee confirmed that retrieval of complaints was difficult as the complaints were not captured in a centralised electronic database accessible by all so that if a work order was opened, any customer facing employee could access the database and update the tenant in a timely manner.

Theme 5: Guarding Territory

Territory was guarded due to the silo behaviour and thinking. In response to a question as to whether feedback was provided to the requesting Department on completion of building works, the Manager, Facilities indicated that " I do not think that happens right now. The only place it goes to is Finance".

One of the issues that emerged from this theme was disconnect between Divisions and Departments at RESL and a lack of communication which translated in no feedback being provided to tenants after maintenance works were completed. This pronouncement provided further support that there was little collaboration and feedback with the Department which requested action to be taken on a tenant's property. In the absence of this feedback or a centralised digital space where all persons could obtain updates on a work order, rendered persons incapable of providing tenants with feedback on completed works. Further implications pointed to the fact that there was the need for greater collaboration between all internal stakeholders who interact along all of the tenant touch points.

4.5 SYNTHESIS OF THEMES AND MAIN MESSAGES

Having discussed the themes and their interrelatedness in the sections above, I now engage in further discussion to elaborate upon the interrelatedness between the themes, the main messages and the implications for the inquiry.

The main messages from the interviews so far are that RESL operates within a very rigid organisational structure governed by strict rules of engagement as enunciated by the Government. It can be assumed that the company will continue to be faced with funding challenges given the state of the global economy and more so as the country's economy is impacted by heavy reliance on natural gas and oil exports.

Given its entrapment in five-year political cycles, it is almost certain that its programmes and projects would be dictated by the political directorate and may not be specifically targeted to benefit its tenants. This position has implications for the prioritisation of projects and as such tenants' expectations may need to be managed if projects are not implemented in accordance with their request.

As discussed earlier, the relationship is of a transactional nature and because of this, tenants are not viewed as customers resulting in a proliferation of complaints. The sub theme of *you are just a tenant, not a customer* interacts and relates to one of the main themes from the perspective of the transactional nature of the landlord-tenant relationship and the publicness of RESL. The subtheme of *many mechanisms for making complaints, but to what end*, relates to a main theme which places little significance on complaints made by tenants. These complaints, even though they are acknowledged are not properly handled given the non-existence of mechanisms for customer journey mapping along touch points and proper complaints handling.

Another main message was that given this view of the tenant, and the quagmire in which the tenant is caught, RESL's business processes in no way supported the tenants or were structured to be customer centric. This suggested that a strong link existed between the first four themes as displayed in the high level thematic map. With the many hurdles facing RESL, namely weak business process and a focus away from customer centricity, it was not difficult to conceive that Divisions would guard their territory, ignorant of the negative fallout that the thinking and behaviour have on one of the company's key stakeholders, its tenants.

4.6 PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR INQUIRY

Taken together, the discussion of the themes and subthemes had implications for the plan of action to be developed in phase two as these themes were entrenched in the organisation. In approaching phase two, surfacing of these themes was important for better understanding of what should be the guiding principles in the Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process as they related to how customer facing staff interacted with tenants.

With the knowledge that RESL was cash strapped, there needed to be clear understanding of what should be the preferred behaviours and information communicated when a tenant lodged a complaint and the company could not execute the project.

Another challenge included the most simplistic yet effective method to handle complaints which would encourage consistency of certain behaviours and prevent staff from regressing to old methods of conducting business. In attempting to discourage employees from guarding territory, this theme had implications for consistency in service standards by Division all aimed at recognising that customer care is every employees' business.

4.7 THE PRESENT STATE OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS HANDLING

In the conceptual framework at section 3.8, the framework pointed to a direct relationship between CRM, customer care and complaint management. For Stauss and Seidel (2019), complaints management has strategic importance within the context of a company's customer care policy.

Based on my review of RESL's corporate documents and my work experience, the company had no formally documented Customer Care Policy or Customer Complaints Handling Process. Given the external forces in the economy which have driven RESL to be commercially viable, there was the need for first order change in the organisation. Coghlan and Brannick (2010 p.67) have defined first order change as "an improvement in what the organization does or how it does it".

Absence of Complaints Handling Data

In an attempt to better understand how complaints were handled by RESL and to triangulate the results of my review of the company's documentation of complaints, I convened a meeting with the Manager, ICT. I wanted to collect other data to assist me in better understanding complaints management in the light of one of the interviewee's pronouncement that complaints are not logged or tracked through to resolution.

Another reason for convening the meeting was due to the importance of ICT as an enabler in facilitating the analysis of customer related data and obtaining a 360 degree view of the customer. At the meeting, the aim of the customer care initiative was highlighted. I underscored the fact that the Department had no data on complaints, whether they were resolved or not. This sparked a response from the Manager, ICT that the mere fact that there was nothing showed the need!

This statement correctly described the situation at RESL with respect to customer complaints which my inquiry sought to address. In this regard, I indicated to the Manager, ICT that what was needed in the first instance was the ability to log complaints from customers, direct the complaints to the appropriate employee and track the status of complaints through trigger alerts, close complaints and generate reports.

Throughout the literature, authors such as Išoraitė (2017) and Hsiao *et al*., (2016) speak of the need for any complaints management system to be simple as complaints should be viewed as strategic tools which can help the organisation improve its level of service. During the diagnosis phase, I noted that 25 maintenance related complaints were documented during a three month period however the Department had not kept up to date statistics on the number of complaints resolved, those unresolved or resolution rate.

Having documented and forwarded the complaint to the Maintenance Department, there was no structured approach to the Maintenance Department communicating with the READ on the progress of the complaint. Electronic mails were sent by either the Manager or the technical officer to the Department seeking updates in order to advise the tenant. Yet again the key messages based on my meeting with the ICT Manager and the review of the company's handling of complaints was that given the structure of the organisation, silos continued to be perpetuated as each Department accorded priority to projects depending on instructions received from Executive Management to the detriment of delivering good customer service. What these data were telling me was that some of the issues raised by previous interviewees surfaced again in the interview with the ICT Manager, demonstrative of a problem endemic to the organisation.

Case Example and Analysis of Complaint of Leaking Roof by Tenant

In order to obtain a broader perspective of the issues related to customer care delivery and complaint handling at RESL, another of the data collection methods used was that of a case study. I chose this negative case from the company's records if only to provide a better understanding of the issue at hand and also to assist me in answering my research question three related to the relationship between embedding proper complaint handling in the organisation and how this impacts the bottom line of the organisation. When I speak of the bottom line of the organisation in the context of CREM, I make reference to commercial viability indicators such as reduction of voids, on time remittance of rent and service charges as well as acceptance of rental increases by occupiers.

Case Example and Analysis of Complaint of Leaking Roof by Tenant

Table 4.7 provides a typical example of a case of a tenant with a leaking roof and the exchanges between staff on the matter.

Table 4. 7 Complaint of Leaking Roof

The Technical Officer In March 2017, the Technical Officer for a Park located in the south of the country wrote the Manager, former Manager, Maintenance and Maintenance Officer and stated as follows "On a recent site visit it was confirmed that the ceiling installed in the reception area has collapsed. The tenant advised a block of ceiling material was merely taped to an existing ceiling to cover the hole that had developed, so over time the tape gave away and the section collapsed. Additionally, they indicated a more serious problem exists with continuing leaks in the roof above their server room (which risks damaging their ICT infrastructure).I am a bit concerned about the quality of repair work carried out by the last contractor. I was advised that the entire roof may need to be replaced as the supports are badly corroded. Given the shortage of funds available for Maintenance works this year, is it possible to consider the alternative option of devising an in-house estimate and allowing the tenant to engage a contractor to repair on its own(subject to approval by[Real Estate Solutions Company Limited] once within the in-house estimate) in exchange for some concession on the rent? This problem has been continuing for over 6 years and requires a definitive resolution".

The Manager wrote to the Vice President of the Division in March 2017: "Given the fact that the Maintenance budget for factory shell repairs has been significantly reduced, I think the suggestion is a feasible one. Please advise if you are in agreement with the suggested approach". The tenant wrote in July 2017 There is no clear agreement of the way forward on the file however on 19 July 2017 the tenant forwards an electronic mail and said" Mr. [Vice President], as discussed, please see quotation for repair of roof at our building. Let me know if you need anything further". The tenant wrote again in March 2018: Almost one year later There is no reply on the file to the tenant and it is unclear if the Vice President gave approval for the way forward. Obviously not, as on 26 March 2018, almost one year later, the tenant wrote again and said" Good morning Mr. Vice President, further to our correspondence on July 19, 2017(attached for easy reference), we has (sic) since spoken to the said contractor regarding his inability to guarantee the repairs to the roof. Based on his response, we have sought a quotation from another contract (sic) who would be willing to offer a three (3) year guarantee. As such, we have attached his quotation for your perusal and consideration. We trust that a decision can be made in order for works to be completed before the start of the rainy season- June 2018. We await your favourable feedback". On 26 March 2018, the Vice President wrote to the Manager and said" Can you liaise with Facilities Unit please?" Matter forwarded to Facilities Department at the end of March 2018 for action.

Source: Compiled by the Author (2018)

This case provided me with a rich insight and better understanding of the issue of complaint handling at RESL. Based on an analysis of the case at **table 4.7**, my interpretation was that the evident themes which emerged spoke to the approach to escalation of maintenance related matters to the Facilities Maintenance Department. It is to be noted that this case was not documented as a complaint and no priority was given to the case notwithstanding the fact that important plant and equipment of the tenant stood to be damaged.

This issue of the non-logging of complaints was vocalised by the Maintenance Manager and evidenced itself in this case. The lack of budget to undertake the works was evident again given the state of the country's economy and this bore direct relationship to the theme in the high level map of the fetter of publicness, some of the failures that it brings and a complaint is just that, a complaint.

Decision making around a clear position as to whether the tenant will be allowed to effect the repair works was not formally communicated to all parties involved and it was evident that conversations between the Executive and the tenant took place outside of a formal process without advising all parties involved and also without proper documentation. This was gleaned from the tenant's electronic mail of July 19, 2017 and March 26, 2018. The final executive decision was that the tenant will engage a contractor in exchange for a waiver of rent for an agreed upon period of time given the company's budgetary constraints.

Tenants also complain about the quality of workmanship of contractors hired by the company as noted in the electronic mail from the technical officer who visited the tenant's building. What the data from this case revealed was that the root cause of the problem at RESL was a lack of focus on customer care and strategic decisions were not being taken in keeping with tenants' requirements. Value for the company's occupiers was not being created which resulted in the need for performance improvement. Another important message from the case was the need for dismantling silos to create synergies across business units. These issues formed the basis of discussion in phase two, planning action.

4.8 REFLECTIONS ON ORGANISATIONAL ISSUE

As insider action researcher, I reflected upon how as an employee in the company I did not attach much significance to the manner in which the term "tenant" and "customer" were used interchangeably and the context within which the terms were used. Having reviewed the Strategic Plans of the company using the lens of researcher, my pre knowledge and perceptions were removed. I assessed the documentation purely from the perspective of issues related to naming of stakeholders by RESL , and the greater challenges faced by Public Sector landlords who subscribe to a traditional citizen based view of public service delivery.

The choice and timing of maintenance projects were to the vagaries of disbursement of funds to RESL. To this was added the bureaucracy in the receipt of approvals to commence projects as a budgetary allocation within any fiscal year which runs from October to September did not necessarily mean that funds will be disbursed to undertake the project. Another critical element was the fact that many of the built accommodation have outlived their useful life and should be demolished, yet the landlord continued to limp along expending monies on repairs which may never meet and exceed the expectations of its customers. An assessment of the IT requirements and business content to facilitate CRM were undertaken however, due to limited funding, little progress was made to enhance the IT requirements to introduce a CRM solution to provide a 360 degree view of interactions with tenants.

Giving Meaning to Assertions

Given the themes and assertions emanating from the interviews, I reflected on what they all meant for the future of RESL given the imminent rollout of the company's Strategic Plan for 2018-2022, its mandate to be self-sufficient, my role as insider action researcher and lead for the customer care initiative. My initial thoughts were that there is the need to insulate the complaints handling process from the vagaries of the changing political directorate which impact the sustainability of critical projects and embed a culture of customer care in the organisation.

The changing of the narrative in the organisation around whether a tenant is to be viewed as a tenant or customer had to be addressed starting at the highest level in the organisation as the differing narratives between Divisions manifested into different treatment and prioritisation of requests from tenants. The root cause of the state of customer service and customer complaint handling stemmed from a lack of sustained attention to customer service delivery coupled with a lack of ownership by each employee that customer care is my business and forms part of my every day work. The lack of ownership can be explained by the fact that the tenant is not viewed as a customer but as cash flow (Kivlehan, 2011) or as an extension of the built accommodation circumscribed by a landlord-tenant relationship, making customer care the sole responsibility of certain employees. Given that thinking, the cycle of silo behavior was perpetuated.

4.9 KEY LEARNINGS AND TAKE AWAY

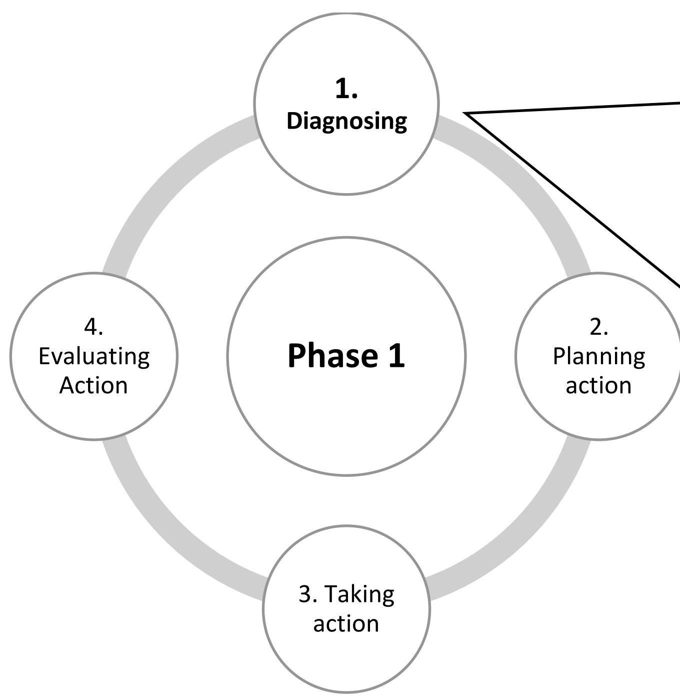
Some of the major takeaways from this first action research phase were the fact that RESL has done a poor job at customer care delivery and there was little or no sustainability of past initiatives. One of the main reasons for the state of customer care delivery stemmed from the public nature of the organisation as well as the strict legal nature of the landlord- tenant relationship due to the leasing arrangements in place. This perspective was voiced by the Vice President of the Division who held the view that were the organisation privately managed, much more could have been done for the tenants. This pronouncement suggests that if RESL had a larger budget, more could have been done, however, a larger budget does not necessarily translate to an enhanced customer experience if a shift towards customer centricity has not been embedded in the organisation. The writer is of the opinion that there are quick wins which could be achieved without a budgetary allocation for customer care. Some of these quick wins are discussed in chapter 6 of this thesis under phase three, taking action, of the macro level cycle presented in **figure 3.2.**

My action research project required me to build from the bottom up and the absence of even having a definition of what a complaint is warranted significant work. I surmised that there was no entrenched culture of customer centricity in the organisation and the landlord had a "monopoly" as there were not many other State landlords offering industrial spaces over such a wide geographical area. Given this scenario, the tenants were literally stuck with their landlord as it is extremely costly to relocate a business.

4.10 CONCLUSION

Figure 4.5 highlights the outcomes of phase one. The reflections, key learnings and takeaway have created the context and informed the actions for phase two, the planning action phase.

Figure 4.5 Outcomes of Phase One: Diagnosing



<u>Outcomes of inquiry</u>

1. The organizational issue is a lack of customer centricity which translated into lengthy delay for services.
2. A purely transactional relationship existed.
3. References to customer are by chance and not intentional given the legal relationship of landlord and tenant.
4. RESL is financially constrained due to its status as a State Enterprise.

To Phase 2:

Planning Action

Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick(2010)

CHAPTER 5: PLANNING ACTION: NOT BUSINESS AS USUAL

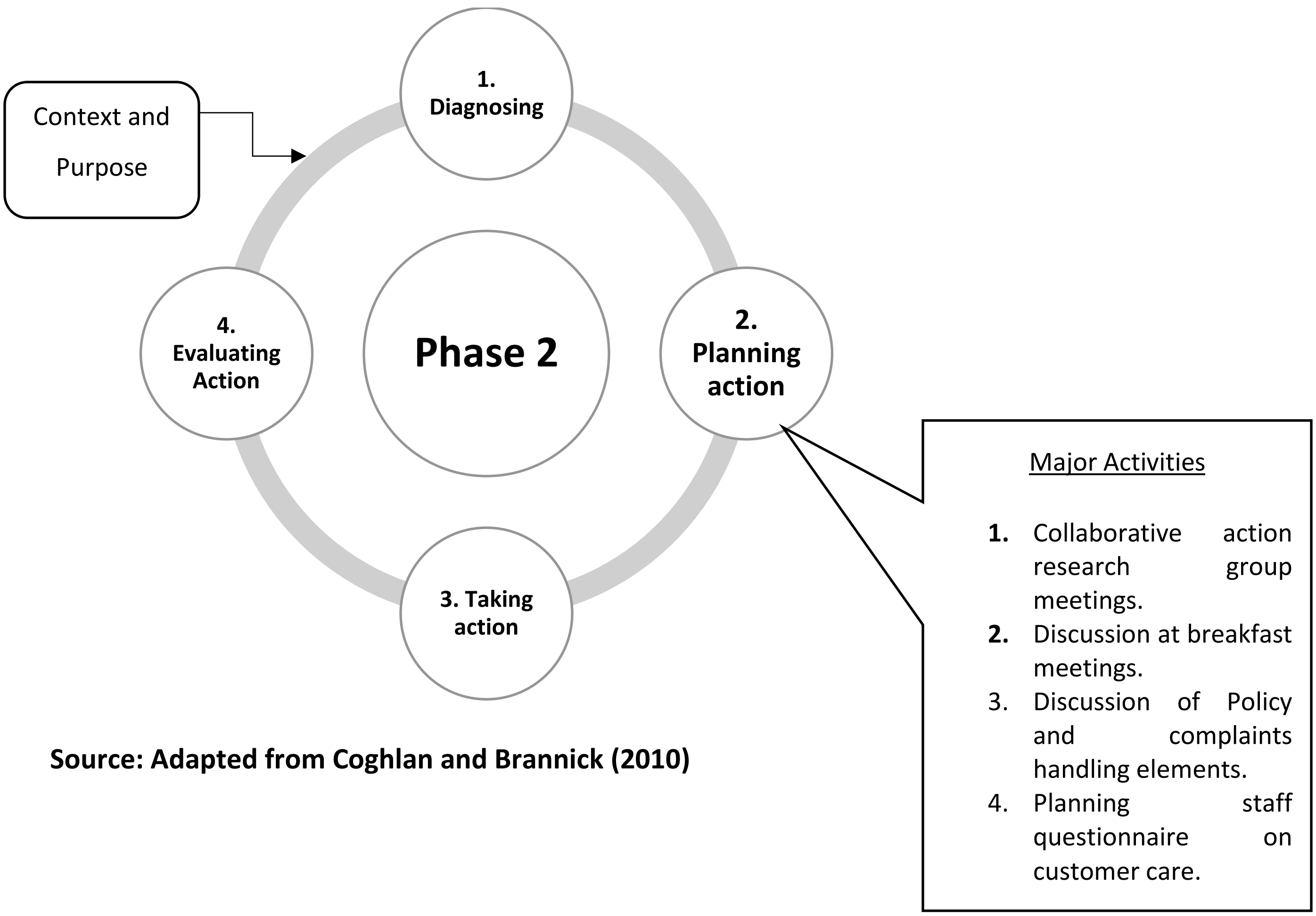
5.1 Introduction

Phase two of the Action Research Cycle saw the formation of the action research group, the conduct of meetings with the said group, as well as hosting of small breakfast meetings by the company's new President to discuss the company's new Strategic Plan. The meetings with the action research group were aimed at collecting qualitative data to answer the three research questions. A different data source was used on this occasion in order to triangulate the data. The data collection methods in phase two built upon those used in phase one where I reviewed corporate documents, conducted semi structured interviews and reviewed a practical case of a customer complaint.

In phase two, focus was placed on planning action within the context of findings from the diagnosis phase and the purpose of the thesis as stated in item 1.5 of chapter one. The planning action phase (Macro Level Action Research Cycle at **figure 3.2**) was focused on assembling the action research group members to update them on the result of the diagnosis phase and solicit their perspective on customer care at RESL. Discussion was held on whether a questionnaire should be administered to staff to also solicit their opinions on customer care. We planned on what should be the major elements of the Customer Care Policy and that the existing complaints handling process should be mapped in order to identify gaps in implementation. Actions were also discussed with respect to the rollout of the Policy and monitoring for organisational changes.

Figure 5.1 captures the major activities undertaken during the planning action phase of the inquiry**.**

Figure 5.1 Planning Action Phase of Macro Cycle



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

5.2 DISCOURSES, LEADERSHIP PRONOUNCEMENTS AND STRATEGIC ROLLOUT

In April 2018, a new President was hired soon after the Strategic Plan for 2018-2022 was completed. The new President assumed the role of champion for the rollout of the Strategic Plan and by electronic mail dated June 6, 2018 he said to staff " Let's have a conversation!".

The rollout of the Strategic Plan took place in the form of breakfast meetings on June 11, 13 and 14, 2018. Each strategic initiative leader was required to deliver a presentation at the meetings, followed by open discussion.

Each team leader elaborated on his strategic initiative and for me, it was not business as usual for the organisation. As lead for the strategic initiative Customer Care and Management every opportunity I had at the breakfast meetings I reiterated the importance of good customer care delivery. I took the opportunity to pose a question to every group if they were aware of the existence of a Customer Care Policy in the company and on all occasions the answer was in the negative. With that in mind, I was even more emboldened that integral to the planning of action with the action research group would be discussion and agreement around the first step in developing a Customer Care Policy as well as the development and rollout of a customer complaints handling process.

It could not be business as usual as tenants were making even more demands on the organisation to deliver a better level of customer care given frequent escalation of matters to the political directorate for action. As discussed in phase one, SPSEs continue to be influenced by the dictates of the political directorate and tenants were very aware if they escalated matters to the political directorate that their matter will be prioritised. This action should not be the norm but rather an exception for a tenant to receive service. One of the aspects of the inquiry then was focused on the implementation of processes to effect change in the strained relationship between landlord and tenant as evidenced by the results of the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey.

5.3 FIRST ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

By electronic mail in early July 2018 as leader of the strategic initiative for Customer Care and Management, a request was made of Vice Presidents and Division heads to nominate an employee to sit on a cross functional team. Representation from many Departments was needed as customer care is not one Department’s business but a cross- functional issue requiring the involvement of all business units.

The action research group comprised representatives from the following Divisions and Departments listed in **Table 5.1** given the fact that no one functional area in any organisation owns the customer.

Table 5.1 Action Research Group Members

1. Senior Communications Officer- Corporate Communications Department
2. Property Officer – Industrial Parks- Lease Administration Department
3. Safety and Security Officer- Industrial Parks- Lease Administration Department
4. Administrative Assistant – Industrial Parks- Lease Administration Department(Group Rapporteur)
5. Maintenance Officer – Facilities Maintenance Department
6. Administrative Assistant – Facilities Maintenance Department
7. Engineer- Capital Projects Division
8. Financial Services Assistant – Finance Division
9. Receptionist- Administration Department
10. Human Resource Officer- Human Resource Department

Representation was needed from the Finance Department as one critical element of customer care is accuracy in handling customer accounts. A representative from the Facilities Maintenance Department was necessary given the scenarios discussed earlier and the outcome of the interview with the Manager, Facilities Maintenance with respect to treating with repairs to built accommodation. A Human Resource representative was needed as any culture change required staff training. Corporate Communications had a critical role to play as one of the main deliverables of the inquiry was the development of a Customer Care Policy which takes place within the context of an organisation's marketing strategy. This group represented a mix of persons employed with the company some for 12 years and more to others with as little as 6 months service.

Conduct of First Meeting

The first meeting of the group was convened on July 15, 2018. For this meeting only, in issuing the meeting request, I specifically did not include an agenda because I wanted the group to come to the meeting starting with a clean slate. All other meeting discussions were guided by an agenda based on action items from the previous meeting. In spite of the fact that I properly communicated the purpose of the meeting to the Vice Presidents and Divisional Heads in requesting a nominee, no one at the meeting seemed to have a clear idea of the purpose of their attendance and were told by their superiors that I will enlighten them.

The employees with a long history with the company brought baggage into the room. The baggage included a level of apathy to the inquiry, pronouncements of little knowledge of the Strategic Plan rollout and defence of territory. Given that no inquiry is context free (Coghlan and Casey, 2001) and there are many versions of the reason for organisational brokenness, I welcomed the presence of all employees to the meeting if only to glean the many versions of the story and allow their voices to be heard. I gave an overview of the strategic initiative and my inquiry and asked if anyone no longer wanted to be a part of the team. In response, all persons agreed to remain.

Working Principles and Meeting Facilitation

The first order of business was to agree on ground rules for the group. The working principles were agreed upon collectively after much discussion and were as follows:

1. At least two days' notice should be given prior to convening meetings.
2. Punctual start and end to meetings.
3. Respect each other's opinions.
4. Active participation by all members.
5. Rotation of minute taking.
6. Decision making.

The group decided that meetings will be convened every first and third Wednesday from 10.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m. There was also agreement that the responsibility for note taking will be rotated and the action items circulated within a week of the meeting. As team lead, I shared on the purpose of my inquiry which focused on customer care and complaint handling, how the inquiry will be conducted as well as how the working relationship will unfold. With respect to timelines, we discussed the fact that we should aim to complete the policy by November 2018.

I advised that if we were the face of customer care then we needed a clarion call around customer care and the following suggestions were made:

1. Happy employee, happy customer.
2. Customer care starts with me. All customers matter.
3. Great customer service begins with me.

There was much discussion around the suggested clarion call of "Happy employee, happy customer". One member opined that if employees were not happy then they could not deliver good customer care. Given the time constraint, the group was provided an opportunity to reflect upon other clarion calls and forward the ideas by electronic mail for discussion at the next meeting. I wanted to then shift the discussion to speak to the major elements of the policy however there was push back. The team wanted to discuss what good customer care was and what was preventing them from delivering this care.

We shared on the positive customer service experiences that group members had and a repeated comment was the fact that the person with whom they were interacting listened to their concern and they felt valued. Another comment was the fact that if the first person with whom they interacted was unable to assist, they were not merely transferred to another employee.

Given the fact that we agreed that all meetings will last for one hour, members were asked to communicate their experiences of poor customer service and what were the factors impeding them from delivering excellent customer care. Using this approach, better use was made of time at the next meeting. Within a week of each meeting, the assigned note taker produced the deliberations of the meeting which were forwarded to me for review. On review they were disseminated to the entire group.

In this first meeting of beginning to plan action, it was important to establish relationships with all group members and arrive at a common agenda. In so doing, we were able to decide on the best way forward using a collaborative approach.

Researcher's Observations

Having convened the first meeting of the action research group, one of observed behaviours that was displayed was that of blaming and name calling of employees in various Departments. As insider action researcher and employee, name calling and blaming were not tolerated as part of the meetings. As a consequence, I underscored the fact that we were to refrain from name calling and blaming and focus on processes and procedures in the organisation which needed to be revisited as these may be hampering the quality of customer service being delivered. The persons represented in the group were a microcosm of the organisation so that there was an expectation on my part that the blame game and name calling would surface and it did.

I also noted that members wanted clarity around their involvement in the group sessions and whether it formed part of their KPIs I interpreted this to mean that employees may be only willing to contribute towards a project if they will be evaluated. This sent a strong signal with respect to employee engagement and possibly explained why past customer service initiatives may have failed.

5.4 SECOND ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

Following the discussion at the first meeting, the agenda for the second meeting which was convened on September 5, 2018 included agreement by the group on the tagline for the customer care initiative, discussion on what was preventing the members from delivering a better level of customer care and agreement on customer service principles for the company. Discussion and agreement on challenges were important as these challenges had to be surmounted if customer care and effective complaints handling were to be embraced by all employees along the customer touch points.

Given the absence at the first meeting of the Vice President of the Division who was the champion of the strategic initiative, I invited him to bring opening remarks. He shared with the group that customer care was important for all stakeholders and it was important to take the process forward.

Team members were asked to review the taglines from the previous meeting and based on a vote, the agreed tagline was "Customer care starts within. All customers matter". I then lead the team into a discussion on what was preventing good customer care delivery and as can be imagined, the energy level in the room was heightened as everyone wanted to have a say. The initiative champion was of the opinion that a lack of collaboration and tenant input as well as untimely communication were stymying good customer care delivery. He added that because RESL is State, tenants think that the company receives Government funding, as such they could not understand why the company could not fix certain problems. They were not aware that funding was in-house. The theme of untimely and closed communication channels were also identified as bottlenecks to enhanced customer service delivery by another group member.

In phase one, the theme of guarding territory and siloism were discussed. In the group meeting the said issue arose, however the contribution hinged on internal collaboration where it was highlighted that sometimes work processes change and the change is not communicated throughout the organisation thereby impacting processes in other Departments which in turn negatively impact customer care delivery. As the discussion continued, for some, effective communication was important in tenants understanding the difference between wants and needs. This perspective directly relates to the themes of the fetter of being a State Enterprise and project failures due to limited funding. In the mind of the tenant, matters escalated to the landlord need to be addressed while the landlord on the other hand is engaged in a juggling act to prioritise projects.

Having started to unpack the baggage which prevented the delivery of good customer care, the team agreed to the principles of improved communication and commitment, professionalism, respect, active listening to customers' needs and equity in treatment. Principles which the team agreed will form part of the Customer Care Policy document.

Having agreed upon the tag line for the initiative, the group identified what was preventing them from delivering better customer care. In an attempt to treat with the issue of poor customer care, service principles were agreed upon. The actions arising from this meeting were that all members would reflect on the discussions and be prepared to discuss at the next meeting public spaces in the company as first points of customer interface.

5.5 THIRD ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

The third action research group meeting was convened on September 19, 2018. As agreed at the end of the second meeting, discussion was focused on customer touch points in the company's public reception areas starting with the security desk and how as a team recommendations could be made to strengthen this touch point on the customer care continuum.

Prior to the meeting, a work plan for the customer care strategic initiative was drafted and discussed with the team. The purpose of the work plan was to refocus the team and to provide clear timelines leading towards the development and rollout of the Policy document. The team expressed the view that before the Policy was written, feedback from the entire organisation should be sought on customer care delivery. In this regard, there was agreement that a questionnaire be administered to all staff. The questionnaire was shared with team members and I was asked why was the questionnaire to be administered to only a sample of employees as opposed to all employees. I explained that the intention was to undertake a quick survey to get a sense of other employees' opinions on customer care. The consensus however was that the questionnaire be administered to all employees. The questionnaire was revisited to include more open ended questions as the team felt that ‟ they may be seeing what we are not seeing".

As the team discussed the incentive to complete the questionnaire, I wondered why there was the need for this, however, on reflection I conceded that a slight monetary incentive may increase survey response rates (Robb, Gatting and Wardle 2017). After discussion, there was agreement that the grand prize would be two movie tickets. On 24 October 2018, the questionnaire was finalised which included questions on, *inter alia*, customer centricity, one word descriptors for RESL and strategies to enhance customer care.

In parallel to planning to administer the questionnaire, the Human Resources team, a representative from the Corporate Communications Department and I met to discuss the possible update of the Protocol Manual and its relationship to the Customer Care Policy to be prepared by the action research team. I took the opportunity at the meeting to discuss why the group felt that previous policies and initiatives were not sustained and what was necessary to avoid policy documents from going into oblivion. The feedback from the team was that there was a lack of follow through on initiatives.

I probed a bit more for clarification and it was stated that the lack of accountability at the level of Departments as well as new employees quickly embracing whatever was the culture of the organisation at the time and following the practice. This pronouncement was instructive to me as it may indicate the need for second order change in order to uproot the lack of accountability and inappropriate culture.

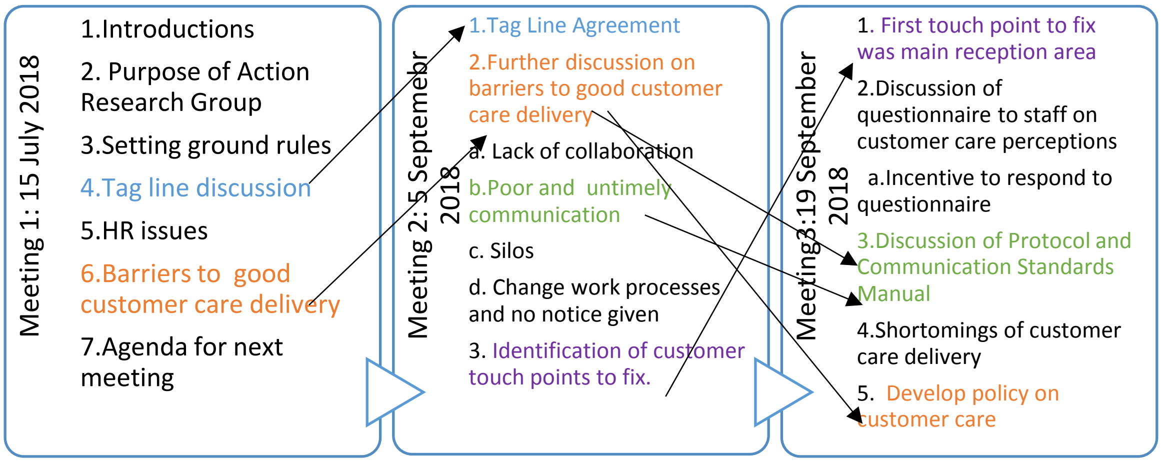
I noted the excitement in the group as they identified with some of the shortcomings in delivering a higher level of customer care and re-emphasised the need for a clear policy on customer service, understood and embraced by every employee in the organisation. This exchange was important as establishing the cause of the problem helped to place it in context of the day to day operations at RESL. I reflected on how this could be possible given past failed initiatives, the last of which was 2015. In addition, what was required to make this new initiative sustainable given the disparate uncoordinated manner in which customer service was exercised.

5.6 THEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF MEANING AND REFLECTION FROM FIRST THREE MEETINGS

As indicated in chapter three, phase two, the Planning Action Phase involved data collection through action research group meetings, breakfast meetings and researcher's observations in order to help answer the research question related to RESL's limited focus on CRM. In addition, there was the need to better understand what was preventing the company from delivering excellent customer care to its tenants. **Figure 5.2** presents a synthesis of the main discussion points at the first three meetings of the action research group.

The figure shows how the discussions from the first meeting were developed into action items as the meetings unfolded.

Figure 5.2 Discussion Points and Action Items



The reflections below were taken into consideration to be acted upon in phase three, mindful that to effect any change, work should begin from ground up as was the case with this inquiry, with executive management assuming a pivotal role in the process.

OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON PHASE TWO

As I reflected on the exchanges and information shared at the first three meetings, I noted that the main constraints to delivering a higher level of customer care were poor communication, lack of internal and external collaboration, transactional relationships and tenants escalating complaints to the political directorate. Influential tenants escalating complaints surfaced again in the discourse, this time at the level of junior employees in the organisation. Sentiments which were similarly expressed at interviews with Executive Management and Managers yet issues I thought the organisation had addressed on many previous occasions raised their heads again. The much touted words such as poor communication and lack of collaboration were reintroduced into the conversation at the next meeting. As insider action researcher and active participant, were I to apply the JOHARI learning window to my preunderstanding, I thought that I knew where the organisation was heading with respect to open communication and collaboration, with collaboration being one of the core values of the organisation, obviously I did not know that I did not know.

OBSERVATIONS AND REFLECTIONS ON PHASE TWO CONTINUED

The forces for change were emanating from internal to the organisation as represented by the cross functional team voicing the lack of proper communication and inter and intra Departmental collaboration and external to the organisation in the tenant making their wants rather than needs known to the organisation. There was never clear communication to the tenants with respect to what the landlord is able or unable to provide and as such the management of tenants' expectations must be factored into the drafting of the customer complaints handling process and the policy document. Evidently, the organisation has not been responding well to these pressures given the less than favourable feedback from the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey. This signalled to me as insider action researcher, the need for second order change to manifest as companywide change in how the organisation conducted its business if it were to achieve its mandate of self- sufficiency as a SPSE.

The issue of a lack of funding, how this constrained the work of the organisation surfaced again as a fetter to delivering good customer care coupled with the perception that all tenants were not treated equally.

5.7 CONCLUSION

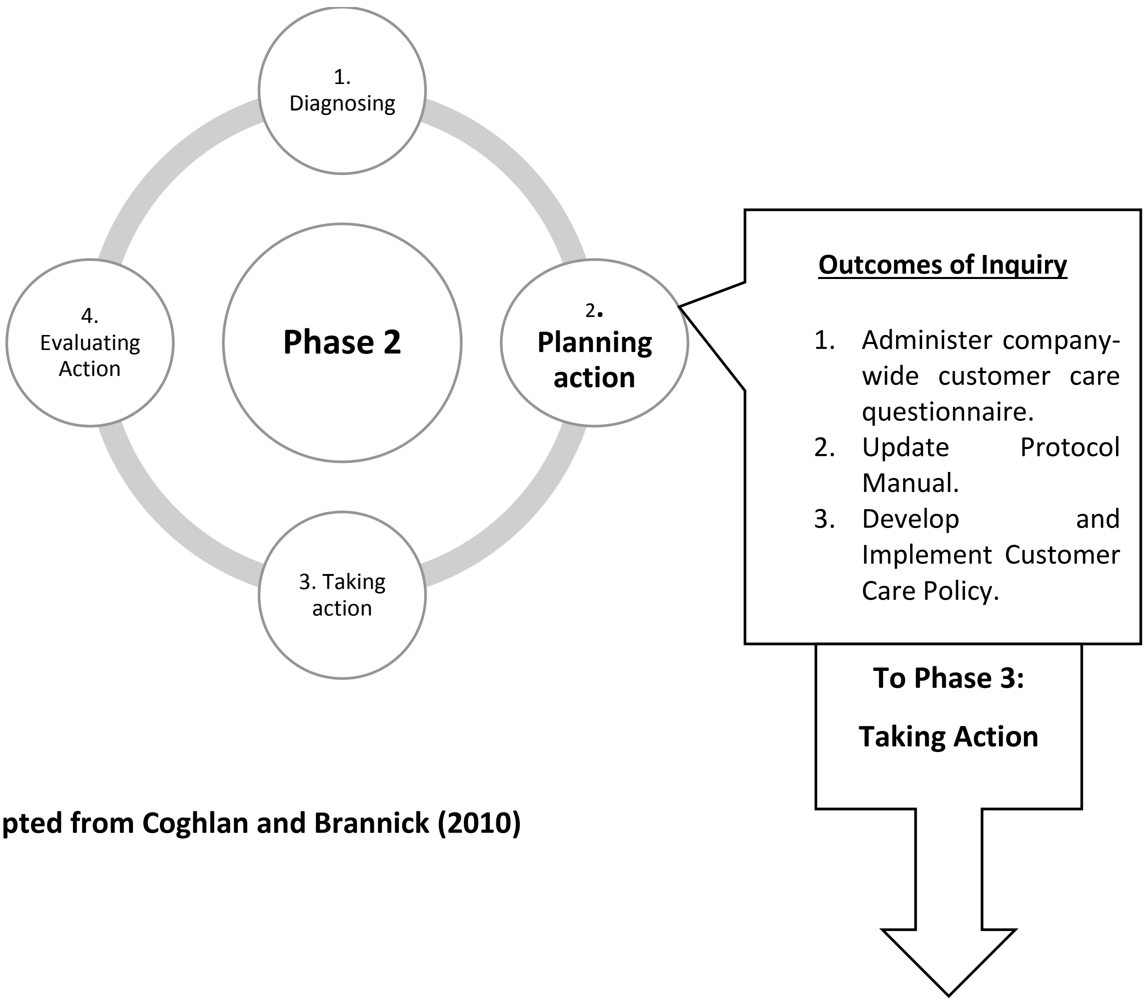
When compared with the themes which emerged from the interviews with Executive and Managers such as publicness and lack of funding, what was evident from the three meetings with the action research group was that there were human resource and procedural matters which were preventing them from delivering better customer care. In addition, there was no clear policy to direct their interactions with customers. This shared opinion which emerged from the group conversations has basis in the literature on some of the factors which stymie successful CRM implementation and customer care delivery.

What mattered most and the story which emerged from these initial meetings was for customer care to be embedded in RESL, there was the need for the company to address employee's level of satisfaction so that these employees can in turn develop a service orientation stance towards the company's customers thereby fulfilling the company's value proposition.

In the planning action phase, the team identified a series of steps to be taken leading towards Phase Three, Taking Action.

A summary of the outcomes of phase two is documented in **Figure 5.3**.

Figure 5.3 Outcomes of Phase Two: Planning Action



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

CHAPTER 6: DEVELOPING THE CUSTOMER CARE POLICY AND COMPLAINTS HANDLING PROCESS

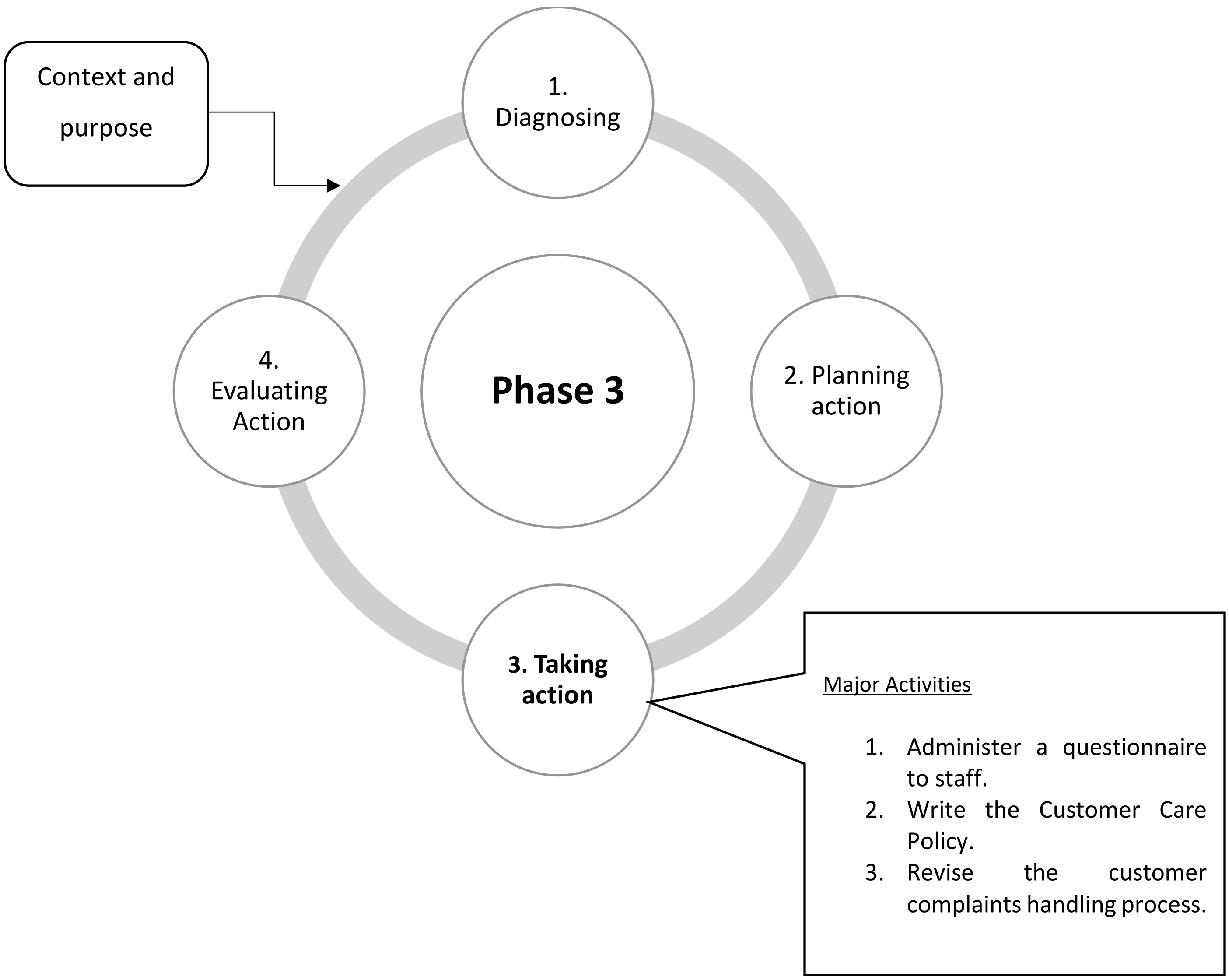
6.1 Introduction

As indicated in chapter 3, the data collection method for phase three, the taking action phase saw the administration of a companywide questionnaire to collect qualitative data on employees' perspective as to whether the company was customer centric or not. In that phase, three other action research group meetings were held to revise the process for customer complaints handling. The responses from the questionnaire allowed me to collect data on the employees' practical experiences and perceptions to answer research question one on the limited focus of the company on CRM as well as question three on the impact of embedding customer complaints handling on the bottom line of the company.

Similar to the data from the interviews conducted in phase one, the method of analysis used in this phase was thematic analysis as well as reflection to derive meanings specifically related to customer care delivery and complaints handling.

Figure 6.1 depicts the major actions undertaken in this phase of the inquiry as a result of the outcomes of phase two.

Figure 6.1 Taking Action Phase of Macro Cycle



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

6.2 FOURTH ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

Discussion on the issuance of a companywide questionnaire to collect data on staff perception of customer care delivery began during the third action research group meeting. Section 5.5 of chapter 5 is relevant. The questionnaire was finalised during phase 2, planning action. The primary unit of analysis in the questionnaire was the individual employee and of the 10 questions, three were close ended. The questions were developed based on variables in the breadth of literature on customer care. By using mainly open ended questions, an opportunity was afforded the employees to engage in reflection on customer care and complaints handling in order to compose a brief response.

As I look back on the group discussions, the insights that I gleaned about the core issues at RESL were that certain behaviours such as name calling and blaming were engrained and appeared to stymie excellent customer care delivery. Baggage which I thought was already unpacked, was brought to the action research group meeting, however the group dynamics created a safe space where members debated the reasons for poor customer care. As a result, the team felt it necessary to survey the wider organisation, in order to obtain their perspective on customer care, so that when the writing of the Policy started, the team will be sufficiently satisfied that all views were captured.

In collaboration with the ICT Manager and the Corporate Communications Department, on October 31, 2018, the questionnaire was issued over the company's intranet to all employees with a closing date of November 2, 2018. The Corporate Communications team monitored responses and at the original closing date only six employees from a staff of 74 had responded. Given the low response rate, the team decided that the timeline for responding be further extended until November 5, 2018. As a member of the action research team, the representative from the Corporate Communications Department issued electronic mail reminders to encourage persons to respond to the questionnaire.

At the close on November 5, 2018 only 18 employees (24%) of a staff population of 74 responded to the questionnaire. Nine of the 18 employees provided their names to qualify for the grand prize.

Based on international benchmarking of survey responses administered to employees, the response rate is usually between 30 to 40 % (Fryrear, 2018). Given the very poor level of response below the benchmark, this may indicate organisational disinterest in the issue of customer care. On November 8, 2018 the results of the survey were received from the Corporate Communications team in the form of a Graphical Summary. The Graphical Summary cannot be annexed to this thesis given the fact that it contains the name of the organisation in many of the questions. Due to the Conflict of Interest Form that I was required to execute by the company on September 16, 2016, I cannot reveal the name of the organisation under any circumstances. The Graphical Summary contained the responses to all of the questions, the number and corresponding percentage of respondents who answered each category question.

The summary was carefully reviewed by the action research group to gauge the thinking of the employees on customer care and CRM. My focus was on answering the first research question as to why at an enterprise level there has been limited focus on CRM at RESL. As we began to analyse the responses from the Graphical Summary we were looking for certain key words and phrases which captured the employees' views on customer care at RESL. One question was "Do you think that [RESL] is a customer centric State Enterprise?" From the Graphical Summary Report of the 18 respondents, 11(61%) were not of the view that RESL was a customer centric State Enterprise. The follow up question sought an explanation as to the reason for the answer. From this and other responses we formulated meanings and established common themes similar to the thematic data analysis approach that I took in analysing the responses from the interviews conducted in phase one.

Given the small number of respondents and the anonymous nature of the questionnaire, the team could neither validate the findings nor clarify conflicting responses. Additionally, we could not ascertain what rank in the organisation the nine anonymous employees held. These issues, among others were noted as drawbacks with self-administered web questionnaires as opposed to conducting interviews.

The distinct themes which reoccurred throughout the data set are discussed in the section which follows.

Theme 1: Broken Processes

The company was not viewed as customer centric, and the following comments support the fact that the company had many broken processes.

"The level of efficiency and follow up with internal and external customers is lacking".

"Simple feedback when customers want responses to queries is not developed".

"Customers are unsatisfied, there (sic) needs are not being met".

"Procrastination with paper work".

Theme 2: People Issues

The people issues which appeared to retard the view of the organisation as a customer centric one included the following:

"There need (sic) to be a change in employees' attitudes and behaviours which supports (sic) customer service".

"We do not have the right mind set or the right attitude. Staff are not willing to go the extra mile to satisfy our internal and external stakeholders".

Theme 3: Organisational Issues

In addition to the people issues, the following organisational issues were highlighted:

‟In the words of Richard Branson-‟Clients do not come first. Employees come first. If you take care of your employees, they will take care of the clients”. Following on this advise (sic) this approach is missing at [Real Estate Solutions Company Limited]

One respondent commented on the company’s brand strategy and indicated that ‟Our brand strategy is passive and we are a bit lagging in terms of response time/deadlines”.

61% of the respondents were not of the opinion that the company had clearly defined goals and targets focused on improving customer service.

The executive was not spared, as a respondent noted that ‟The mandate seems to be always muddled by persons in the executive who may not having (sic) an idea of how to run a real estate company with the strategic vision that is needed”.

Theme 4: Little or no Focus on Customer Service

A respondent clearly expressed the view that the organisation lacked ‟good communication with internal and external parties” and went on to add that this needed to be developed. Another opined that ‟As an employee I recognize that customer care is vital to the service we provide, and within the organization I haven’t seen any focus on this area”.

Theme 5: Broken Customer-Client Relationship

Of the 18 responses to the request to give one word to describe the company’s relationship with its customers, 11 employees used negative connotations such as challenged, strained, unprofessional, non-existent, and poor. Although the majority of the responses were in the negative, positive words included partnership, evolving and progression (sic).

Having reflected on the results, not even the incentive of winning movie tickets as a reward for participation mattered.

My strategy then continued to be ongoing engagement from the bottom up and facilitating the group meetings as a space for catharsis if change was to happen. A fundamental concern which was voiced at the said meeting was the lack of all staff meetings where employees could express their views in order to be heard.

Another team member was resolute in her opinion that the organisation needed to fix the cause before moving forward as customer care will have no impact if it was rolled out now. I prodded to find out the reason for the state of affairs and the response was the change in Executive Management.

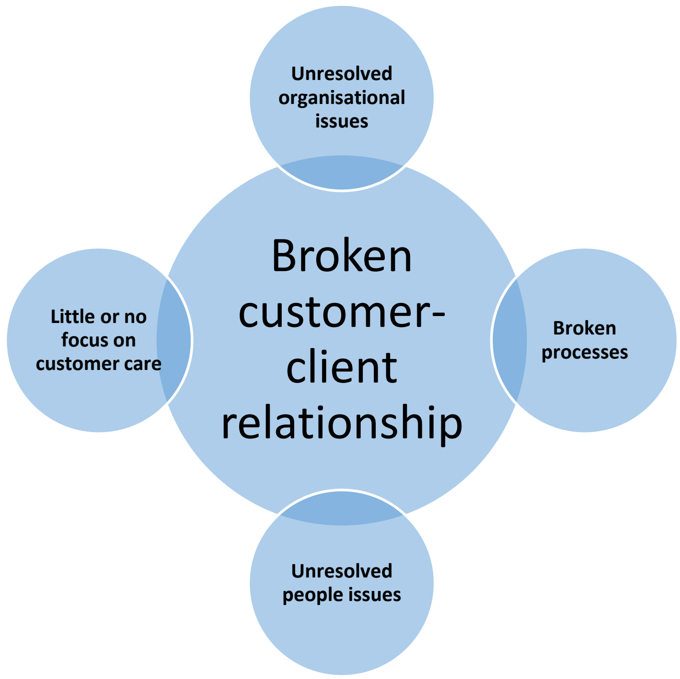
Inferring Meanings and Data Interpretation from Employee Questionnaire Results

As indicated in chapter three, the data from questionnaires were identified as one of the data sets that would be used to answer research question one as to why at an enterprise level there was limited focus on CRM at RESL. What the data said about the research question was that the company failed to focus on CRM and customer care as there were other issues in the organisation which contributed to customer care and value which needed to be fixed. These issues related to the misalignment of business processes which resulted in delays in completion of paper work. These delays in delivering customer value contributed to brokenness in the customer –client relationship resulting in dissatisfied customers.

The people issues related to poor attitudes and behaviours which retarded good customer care delivery were discussed at the first action research group meeting and were again reflected in the responses. In addition, the issue of how an organisation treats with its employees and the organisation's expectation of employees in delivering good customer care were ventilated.

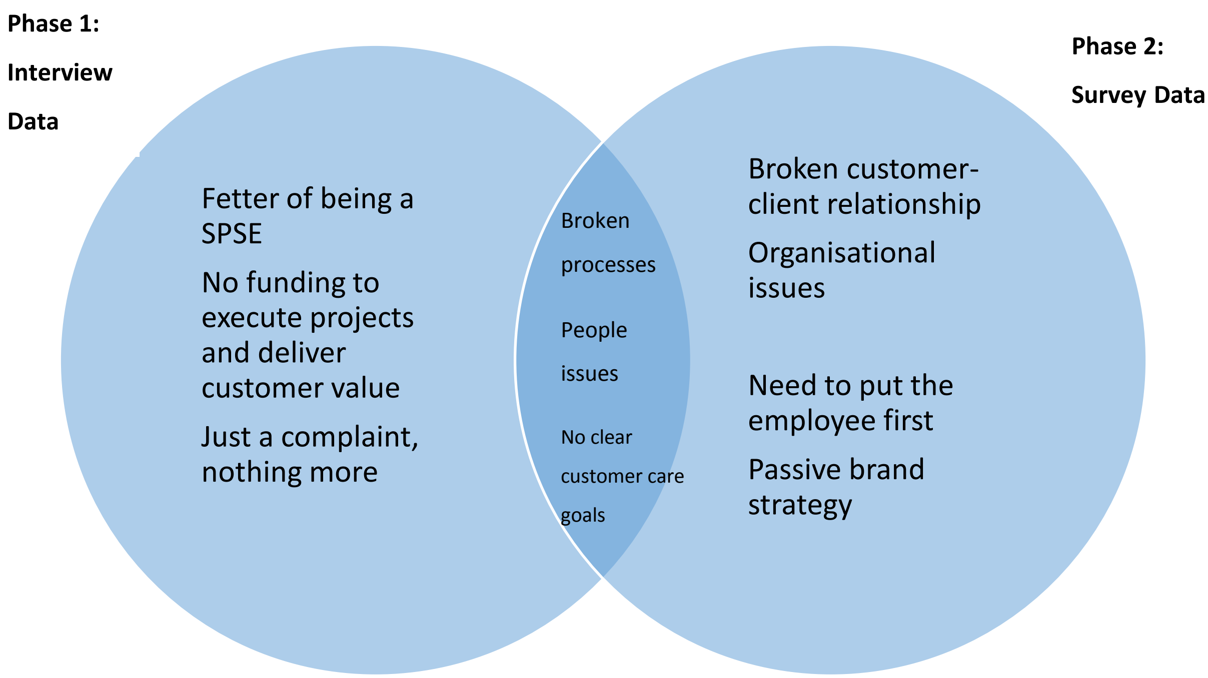
Figure 6.2 presents the factors contributing to a broken customer –client relationship based on the data from the questionnaire results.

Figure 6.2 Factors Contributing to Broken Customer-Client Relationship



When the themes from the two data collection methods, namely the interviews and questionnaire were compared, the main messages and relationship between the two data sets were captured in the Venn diagram at **figure 6. 3**

Figure 6.3: Venn diagram of Messages and Relationship between Data Sets



What the Venn diagram has illustrated is that there is a relationship between the data sets as it relates to the perspective of employees on customer care be they Executive Management or other levels of staff. What was common between the data sets was that processes and people issues as well as a lack of clear customer goals were preventing employees from delivering customer care as well as creating customer value.

REFLECTION ON SURVEY THEMES: BROKEN PROCESSES AND BROKEN EMPLOYEES

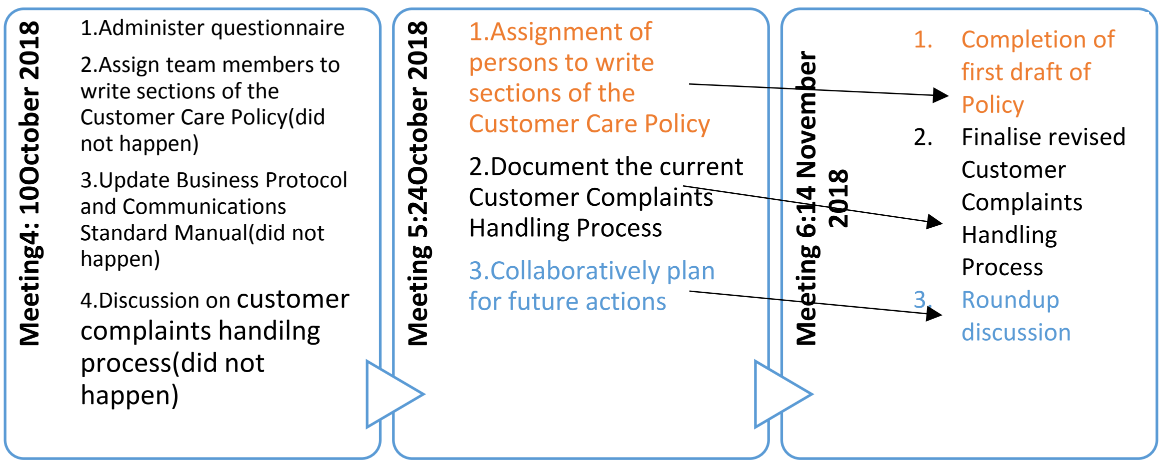
As insider action researcher, I was quite disappointed by the poor response to the questionnaire despite the extension of time to respond and the fact that the questionnaire was anonymous. Is this a signal of a lack of trust as employees felt that computer passwords could be decrypted or overridden by the IT Administrator to reveal their identity? The themes prompted other issues related to the context of the inquiry that may indicate that the employees were not fully engaged and as such did not even bother to respond. As Researcher and Manager, the magnitude of the task ahead became much more apparent and the best strategy was to work even closer with my direct reports over whom I had influence and let my work identity as Manager prevail in order to make a breakthrough.

If employees were reluctant to complete a questionnaire how will this augur for the rollout of the customer care project within the context of the Strategic Plan? The respondent's reference to the quotation by Richard Branson where‟ Employees come first" resonated with me and signalled a disconnect between Executive Management and the rest of the staff, as the rank and file appeared to feel unappreciated.

I was mindful that some employees tell you what they think you want to hear and completing a questionnaire gives an employee an avenue for expressing voice. These negative feelings further highlighted to me the uphill task as action researcher as to how to make the change to a customer centric organisation effective and sustainable. I reflected however that employees can drive recommendations for organisational change from bottom up and this may be one of the mechanisms to make the change sustainable through energising employees. I concluded that change management was ongoing and had to be institutionalised within the bowels of the organisation while forming part of the culture of the organisation through transformation of business processes to support employees.

The follow on activities which took place at the fifth and sixth meetings are reflected in **figure 6. 4.**

Figure 6.4 Actions Items at Meetings 5 and 6



Developing the Customer Care Policy

I reflected on what should be the critical elements to comprise the Customer Care Policy and the appropriate actions that needed to be taken to achieve the most success based on the implementation of the project in the light of the responses from the two data sets. As the data sets revealed, there were organisational, people and procedural issues which were preventing the company from improving its bottom line. As a team, we agreed on the various sections to be included in the Policy document given the data from the questionnaire issued to staff as well as interview findings. Important sections included roles and responsibilities of employees, customer service principles, performance standards and procedures. Each member of the team volunteered to write based on their area of competence.

REFLECTIVE PAUSE

Having observed the interactions at the team meetings thus far, and as I reflected on the issues which surfaced namely culture, power and lack of complete implementation of initiatives, these issues were in direct relation to the purpose of my inquiry at RESL of changing the process of customer care delivery and complaints handling. Action research then was the best method to be used to undertake this inquiry as sustainable change in organisations especially culture shifts enjoy greater success when implemented from bottom up and at all levels in the organisation (Aguirre and Brown 2010). In this connection, the rollout of the Customer Care Policy and the complaints handling process had to leverage on the varied experiences of employees at RESL with as much as 13 years-experience and as little as six months if the change had to stick. Firstly, changing how people in the Division interacted with tenants and addressed their complaints were fundamental to enhancing the image of this SPSE which only achieved a 55% satisfaction rating from its tenants in 2015. Since then, no further satisfaction survey was undertaken.

6.3 DOCUMENTING THE PRESENT STATE OF CUSTOMER COMPLAINTS HANDLING AT RESL

The responsible Department lacked a systemic approach to complaints handling. Complaints, though mainly maintenance related were escalated to the Facilities Maintenance Department and treated as a request for service and not a complaint. Additionally, there was no structured system for logging complaints as sources of information nor for using data to analyse resolution rates. Based on discussion at the group meeting, it was agreed that a complaint would be defined as any oral or written expression of dissatisfaction by any person especially a tenant or agency with respect to service delivery, action, inaction or delayed resolution of matters which required a timely response.

I developed the process below for the purpose of this inquiry and it cannot be found in any procedural manual of the company. It was developed based on my knowledge of the process having worked in the Department for a considerable period of time. The process related to how a maintenance complaint was handled by the company.

The main avenue of complaint was through formal written correspondence and the process was as follows:

Step 1: When a complaint is received, it is date stamped and recorded by the Clerical Assistant, acknowledged, placed in the tenant's file, folioed and passed to the Manager of the Department.

Step 2: The Manager reviews the "complaint" and depending on its nature, the correspondence is forwarded by electronic mail to the relevant Department for action. At times, due to the Manager's workload she will request that the technical officer assigned to the portfolio send the complaint to the relevant Department.

Step 3: The Manager creates a reminder in MS Outlook to follow up on the status of the complaint.

Step 4: On receipt of the complaint, the assigned Maintenance Officer, collaborates with the assigned technical officer if any additional information is required and a visit to the premises is undertaken.

Step 5: The Maintenance Officer verifies if funds are available in the budget to effect the works, if the answer is in the affirmative, scoping documents are prepared. A minimum of three contractors are invited to bid in accordance with Government procurement policy.

Step 6: On receipt of bids, an evaluation committee is established to evaluate the bids and choose the preferred bidder.

Step 7: Contract documents are prepared and the contractor mobilises on the job.

Step 8: Works completed and Maintenance Officer completes post contract evaluation documentation.

Step 9: If funds are not available, this is communicated to the requesting Department and the tenant is so advised. Once funds become available the tenant's request is revisited.

In my documenting the existing process, it was noted that there was no provision to electronically generate and share work order numbers with the tenant or the originating Department in order to be updated on work progress or closure of the work order. In acknowledging the tenant's issue, it was not possible to advise the tenant as to how long it would take to have the issue rectified as in most instances, it was a function of available funding.

It is instructive to note, as discussed earlier in the inquiry, that in the language of the organisation there was no clear definition of what the organisation considered a complaint. As such, all issues raised by tenants involving bricks and mortar were labelled and treated as maintenance issues.

As part of the feedback loop in the macro cycle, a meeting was convened in November 2018 with my direct reports to debrief on the status of the Customer Care Policy and the start of the complaints handling process. At that meeting there was some push back as employees felt that many different initiatives were being foisted upon staff while other aspects of the business operations of the organisation that were raised with Executive Management remained unaddressed, chief of which was the need for additional resources to ease the work load. I understood the frustration being experienced and the reasoning for the non-acquisition of the resources requested by staff rested with the troubling issue of funding challenges.

Given my role duality as action researcher and Manager, and recognising the staff concerns, my role as Manager of the Department prevailed. I used this role to push the implementation of the complaints handling process as to do otherwise would have resulted in another failed attempt at implementing a change initiative.

In phase one, the compelling need for change was discussed within the context of the state of complaints handling at RESL. It was recognised that if tenants' complaints were not properly addressed, one of the consequences could be withholding of rent which would negatively impact the bottom line of the company in financial terms.

Having noted the comments from employees on the broken processes in the company and their impact on customer care delivery, this further substantiated the need for me as action researcher to revisit how the Department handled complaints which are rich sources of information for organisations.

As the inquiry progressed, all of the touch points along the customer journey were examined, especially how complaints were handled, all with the intention of improving the delivery of care to the company's tenants and creating customer value.

In collaboration with my support staff, a digital Complaints Spreadsheet was developed which contained the following fields:

1. Date Complaint received.
2. How Received, by email, letter, telephone call, a report from technical officer based on field visit.
3. The contact details of the tenant making the complaint.
4. The nature of the complaint and the priority level.
5. To whom assigned and date.
6. Follow up date with Department or Officer.
7. Status update.
8. Date and nature of feedback to Tenant.
9. Remarks.
10. Date case closed or escalated and outcome.

Recognising that the introduction of any new initiative brought with it some measure of resistance, on February 11, 2019, a team meeting was convened and there was discussion and agreement on the customer care handling process to be implemented.

As the team discussed the suggested process flow, there was need to agree upon the turnaround time for treating with different levels of seriousness of complaints, mindful that tardiness in responses had the potential to impact the company's bottom line. In this connection, the theme of a lack of team work and collaboration between Departments and Divisions again reared its head. This was evidenced by one member of the team indicating that "if the action is to be taken within the Department it can be actioned faster".

These considerations were taken into account in the finalisation of the Customer Complaints Handling Process in the sixth action research group meeting.

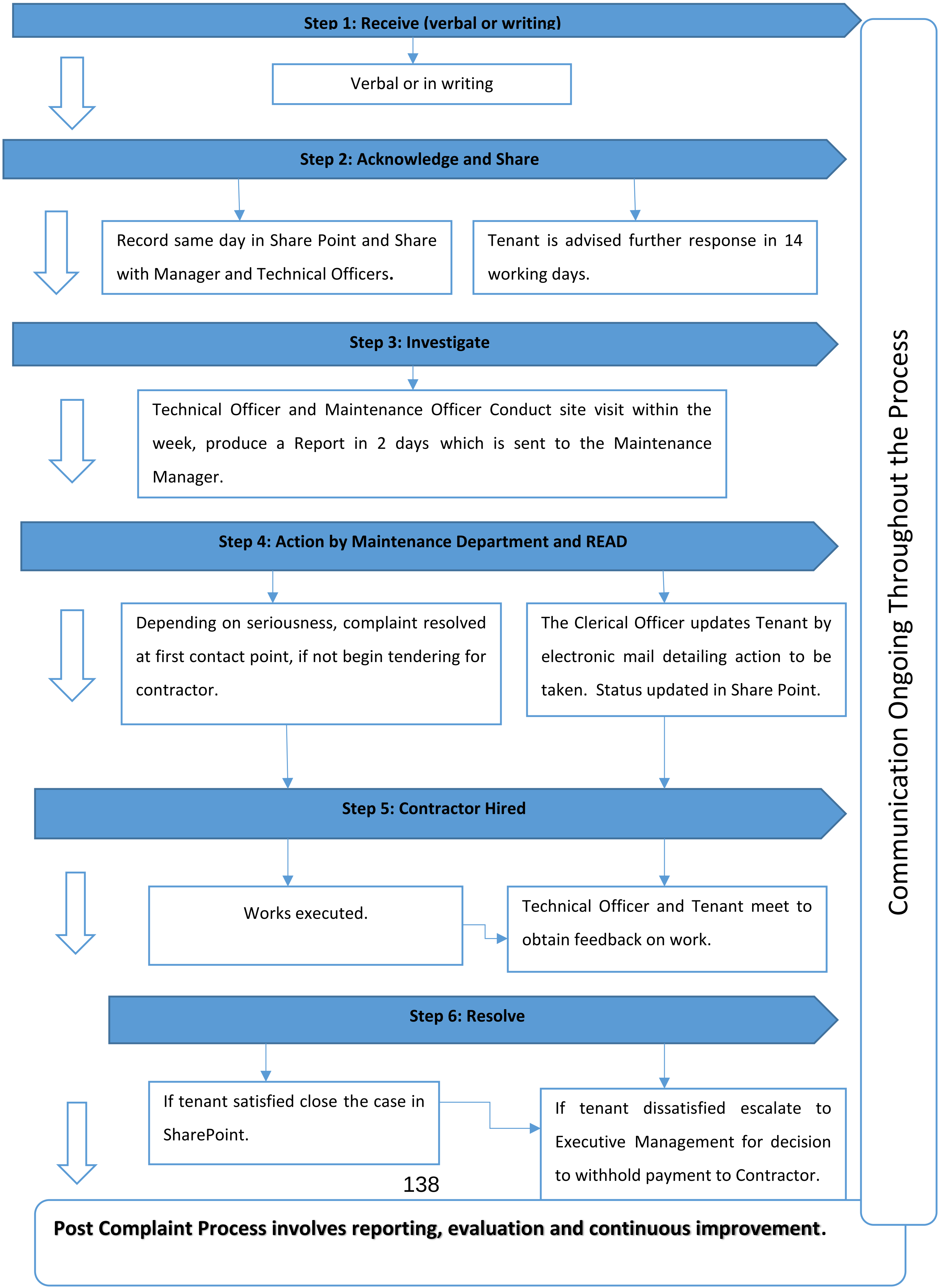
6.4 SIXTH ACTION RESEARCH GROUP MEETING

The sixth and final action research group meeting was held on November 14, 2018. At that time a first draft of the Customer Care Policy was completed as all team members provided content based on previous agreements. The major elements of the Policy were discussed at the meetings and the necessary adjustments were made. We also discussed the action to be taken having completed the draft Policy. The completion of this first draft Policy was a major milestone for the team as it marked the culmination of a series of meetings over a five month period. These group meetings allowed a cross section of employees to co-create knowledge and work together to begin the change process at RESL.

The group recognising the importance of the chain of command was in agreement with forwarding the document to the Champion for comments who in turn would forward it to the company's President for review. The Policy was discussed at one of the meetings of the Strategic Initiative teams and at that meeting it was suggested that the document be forwarded to the Management team for review. Three members of the Management Team provided comments on the document which were mainly focused on seeking clarity on the definition of "customer". This feedback was shared with the team at the last meeting and the Policy was forwarded to executive management for approval. Although the Policy has not yet received Board approval, certain initiatives were implemented and are discussed later in this chapter.

The work undertaken at the fifth meeting on the Complaint Handling Process was continued and based on a review of the disjointed complaints handling process at RESL a revised process was developed as reflected in **figure 6.5**.

Figure 6.5 Revised Customer Complaints Handling Process: Maintenance Complaint



The figure depicts the complaint handling process flow agreed upon by the team which took effect from February 13, 2019. The process has as its basis the incorporation of major elements of the recently drafted Customer Care Policy inclusive of RESL's commitment to its tenants, accountability, proper tracking of complaints, providing timely feedback, continuous improvement and evaluation. In the old complaints handling process presented earlier, nowhere in the process was there a concerted effort at providing feedback to the tenant so that the tenant was aware of the status of the request. The older process of complaint handling relied on bureaucratic processes common in Government institutions such as stamping and logging of correspondence as well as passing files around which resulted in significant time delays.

The revised process developed by the team was aimed at leveraging on existing technology at RESL where SharePoint is used to log and immediately share complaints followed by status tracking. Timeline for responses have been incorporated and touchpoints have been strengthened so that the tenant receives ongoing feedback.

REFLECTIVE PAUSE

As insider action researcher, I identified with the team member's sentiment as priorities changed depending on where persons sit in an organisation coupled with the fact that as a SPSE, RESL continued to be impacted by a lack of subvention from the Government to address maintenance related matters, the same matters which were the main source of tenant complaints. This forced me to reflect on whether the "battle" could realistically be won given the publicness of this State Enterprise and as a team we were developing a Customer Care Policy and a complaints handling process. How then do these behaviours and attitudes change and initiatives such as mine become embedded so that the company's bottom line is positively impacted?

6.5 OTHER INITIATIVES INTRODUCED

The process flow was communicated to the Manager of the ICT Department which was mapped in SharePoint to facilitate online tracking. This mapping allowed for report generation on the status of complaints. The new process was also communicated to the Vice President of the Division as well as the Facilities Maintenance Manager to whom maintenance related complaints were forwarded.

Alongside the introduction of the customer complaints handling process, a tenant site visit verification initiative was introduced whereby once a tenant is visited by a technical officer from the team, the following day a follow up call is made to the tenant in order to assess the quality of customer care delivery. The outcome of the interview is documented and communicated to the Manager for further discussion. The Tenants' Portal on the company's website was also revamped as another avenue to allow tenants to document issues and concerns, coupled with the reintroduction of a tenants' hotline.

The introduction of all of the above initiatives took into account the findings from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey of 2015 where 55% of the tenants expressed general satisfaction with the company and also felt that complaints should be resolved within a reasonable timeframe. As a result of the renewed focus on customer care in the organisation, another team was assembled to revisit and amend the company's Business Protocol document. The document contained all of the overarching procedures and processes to be adopted by employees of the company. Weekly reminders on various aspects of office etiquette are issued over the company's intranet to ensure that employees continue to remain focused on the importance of certain behaviours necessary to delivering excellent customer care.

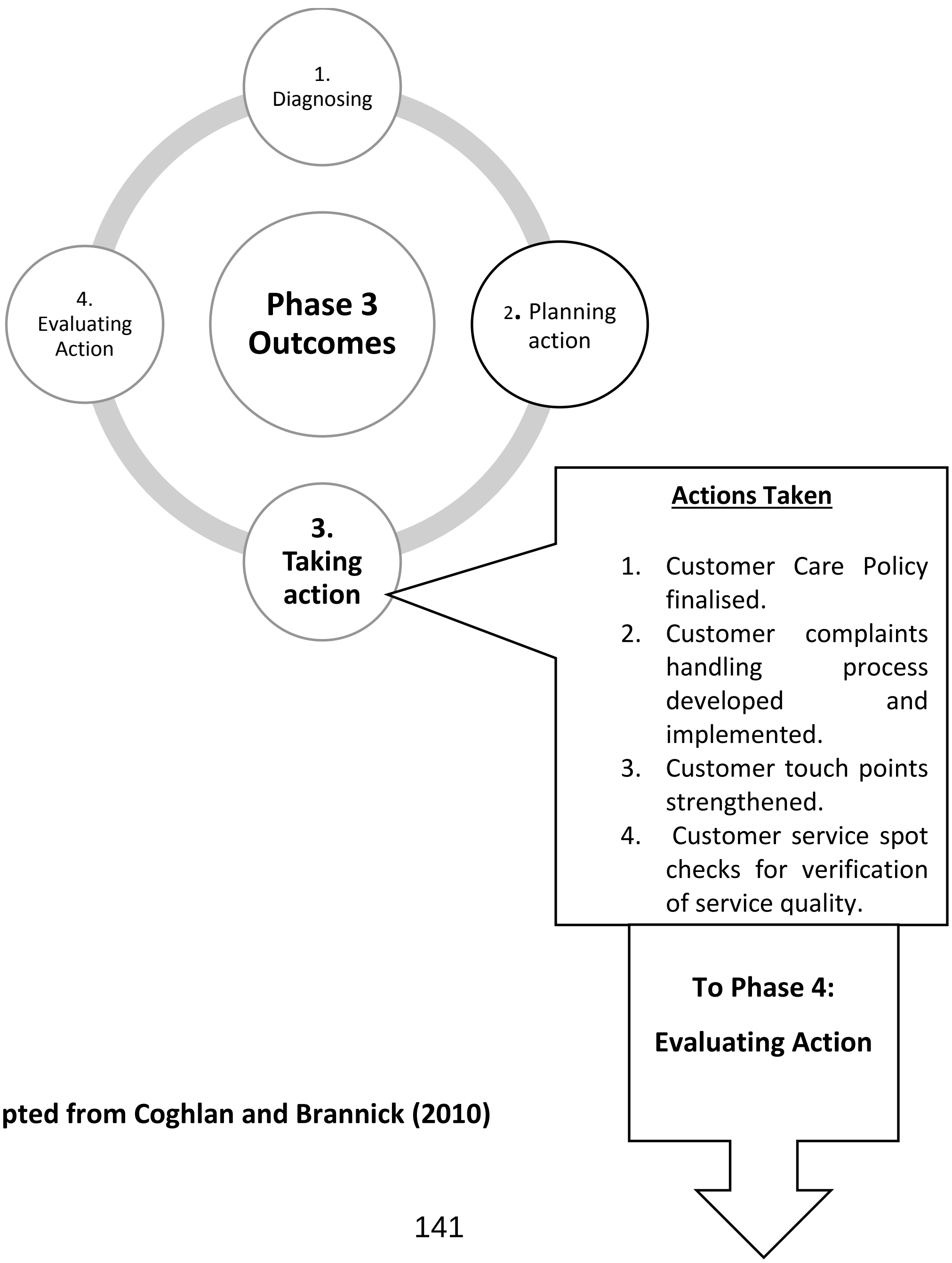
6.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter discussed five overarching themes which emerged from the questionnaire which was administered to all staff. Analysis of the themes identified some similarity to those which emerged from the thematic analysis of interview data in chapter four. The themes highlighted the areas of the organisation which needed attention, namely its processes, people and clear customer focused goals if customer care and complaint handling were to be embedded in the organisation. Given the nature of SPSEs, they continue to be cash strapped resulting in little focus being placed on projects and programmes which lack visibility for the political directorate. CRM, customer care and complaint handling must receive Executive support (Farhan et. al 2018) as a critical factor if implementation is to be successful.

This chapter also documented the revised complaint handling process to be adopted and the workings of the action research group leading towards preparation of the company's first Customer Care Policy.

Figure 6.6 below provides a graphical representation which captures the actions taken leading towards the preparation of the policy documents developed and main plans which were implemented at RESL. Phase four evaluates the actions taken in phase three.

Figure 6.6 Outcomes of Phase Three: Taking Action



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

Chapter seven will discuss the themes which emerged in this chapter within the context of contemporary literature on CRM, customer care and complaints handling.

CHAPTER 7: DISCUSSION

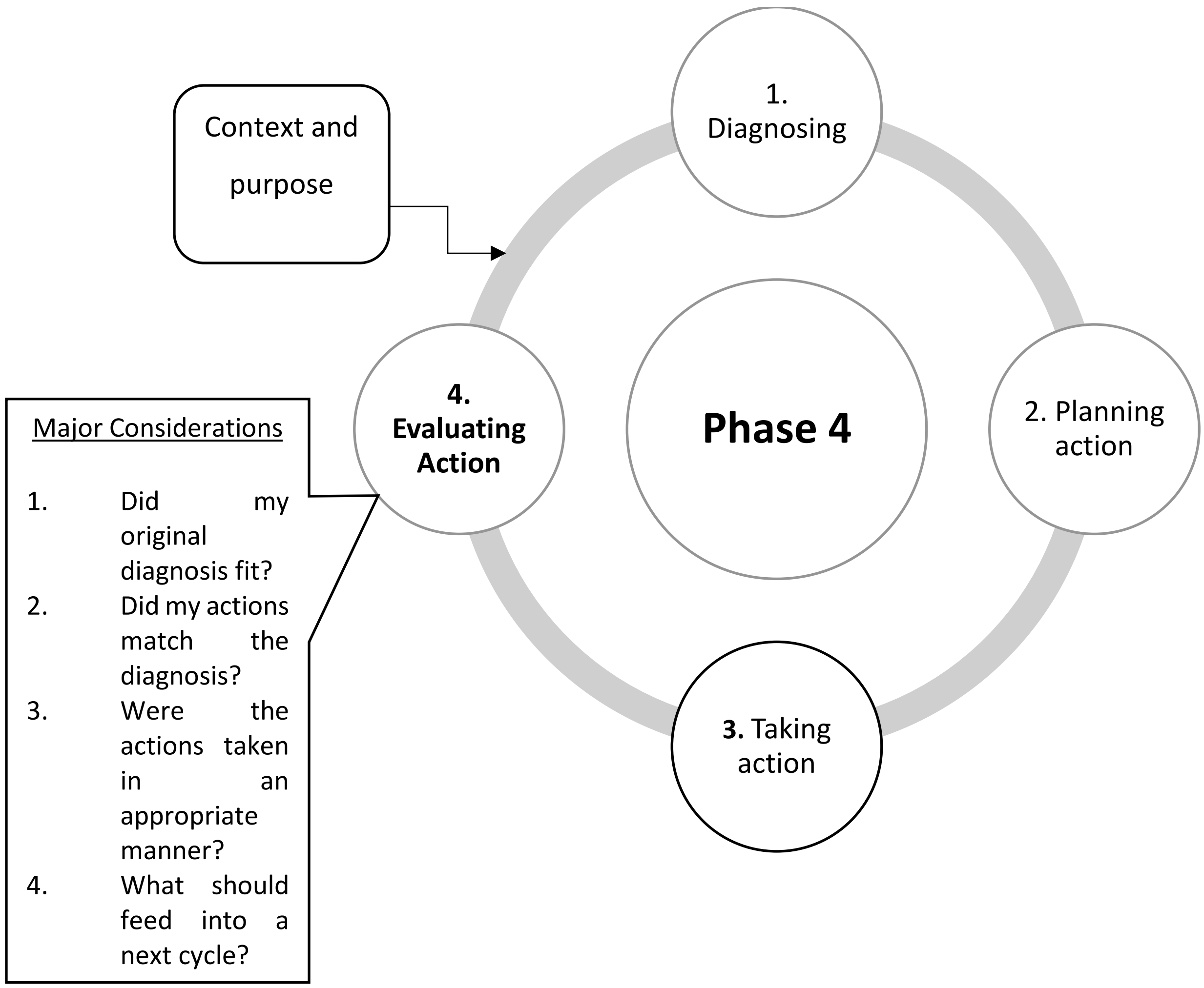
7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss implications, interpret the findings and key themes from the study in relation to the contemporary literature on CRM, customer care and complaints handling which were introduced in the literature review in chapter two. In keeping with my research findings from a variety of data collection methods, this chapter will extend the analysis in the literature review.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the main organisational issues which impact CRM implementation as postulated by Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018). I then discuss customer value creation (Moore, 1995) within the context of RESL's value proposition and assess where the company presently stands. The analysis then continues to discuss the implications of my overall results and the limitations of my practice intervention.

Firstly, **figure 7.1** depicts the major reflections undertaken in this phase of the inquiry.

Figure 7.1 Evaluating Action Phase of Macro Cycle



Source: Adapted from Coghlan and Brannick (2010)

7.2 CRM AND ORGANISATIONAL ISSUES

As indicated in the introductory chapter, the problem facing RESL was the lack of customer centricity and complaint handling which resulted in many of its tenants dissatisfied with the landlord-tenant relationship. The relationship was a very transactional one given the legal nature of the transactions. Despite the fact that the company had attempted customer care initiatives in the past, implementation was not sustained due to changing project champions and little funding being allocated due to the publicness of the organisation.

I will now turn attention to discuss the importance of proper alignment of orgainsational issues, processes and technology for successful CRM integration in the light of the literature review and my practice intervention.

Top Management Support

In the literature, CRM relates to the sum total of corporate activities engaged in by organisations in order to strengthen customer relations. CRM, customer care and complaints handling are all aimed at enhancing long term relationships between organisations and their customers (Farhan et al., 2018). For successful CRM implementation, Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018), posit that, *inter alia*, integration of organisational, processes and technological components within organisations are important.

Having noted what the literature has identified as CSFs for CRM implementation, the themes and evidence which emerged from data triangulation based on document analysis, interviews, case evidence and action research group meetings (chapters 4, 5 and 6), illustrated some of the challenges experienced by RESL which stymied its ability to meaningful change structures and processes in order to create public value (Moore, 1995).

Approximately 84% of CRM projects fail due to a lack of executive support (Farhan, Abed and Ellatif 2018). My own experience in undertaking this research was that obtaining executive buy-in was difficult. The reason for this opinion is the fact that having sent the Customer Care Policy which was developed by the action research group to the initiative champion, other Executives and Managers there was little feedback or dialogue about the document. In addition, at presentations there was very little engaging discussion on the document. Farhan, Abed and Ellatif (2018) identified the need for measurable objectives throughout the company as an indicator of top management's commitment to CRM and customer care. My findings did not reveal such objectives which I interpret to mean that the attention of top management may have been directed elsewhere in the organisation. During the intervention, the company was focused on developing green field sites for leasing and the attention of executive management was channeled in that direction thereby reducing focus on customer care and CRM.

This lack of executive support negatively impacted the implementation of the project and the fundamental changes that I wanted to engender as I could not roll out the Customer Care Policy and other initiatives in the absence of approval from executive management. Essentially, the activities that could have been undertaken could in no way create significant impact when compared to the full implementation of the Policy. This evidence then supports the findings in the literature of the importance of obtaining the backing of not only executives but senior Managers if customer care is to be embedded in organisations (Payne and Frow, 2013). The practical implication of this evidence is that if organisations are to properly implement CRM and focus on customer care, there is the need for the organisation to undergo a major culture change.

Interdepartmental integration

The literature spoke about the importance of inter departmental integration and collaboration (Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018 and Shukla, 2019) as another critical success factor for CRM implementation. What my intervention showed was that persons were more fixated on working in silos to the detriment of customer care delivery. The evidence of this was displayed in blaming and name calling at meetings of the action research group which comprised persons from different Departments in the company. In many instances, the conversation was reduced to "us", the support staff against "them" Executive Management. The hindrances created by Divisional and Departmental lines at times made conversations challenging when explaining the desired outcome of the inquiry.

This finding indicates that there was no one holistic view in the organisation of the customer as tenant. Different Departments saw themselves as being responsible for only one aspect of the tenant's business. Additionally, there was the notion that the READ was responsible for performing CRM and customer care as that Division was the main interface with the company's tenants. According to Kumar and Reinartz (2018), functional silos are not what are required for effective CRM, what is required is organisational processes which value cross functionality.

The evidence from this research showed that the start of the process when an entity submits an application for accommodation to onboarding of the entity did not totally incorporate the needs of the entity in a seamless manner. This observation extends my earlier comment that the organisation lacked a holistic view of the customer.

Decisions were made along the process flow regarding tenancies which impacted another Department that interacts with the tenant without the knowledge of the said Department. Consequentially, the silo approach at RESL in no way contributed to the culture shift to customer centricity needed to deliver better customer care and creation of customer value as postulated by Moore (1995). The current research found that the value to be derived by the customer did not drive the company's processes along the customer touch points and were not configured for sustainability. Based on this evidence, the implications are that if processes were not configured for sustainability then the bottom line of the company as reflected in its income from lease rents and service charges will be impacted.

Customer care and complaint handling

CRM, customer care and customer complaint handling are differentiated only by the nature of the tasks to be undertaken as well as the complexity (Stauss and Seidel, 2019). In the literature, the focus of customer care is essentially on resolving customers' concerns through a planned approach along the customer journey. For Heuchert (2019), customer journey mapping is a technique aimed at understanding the processes undertaken by a customer in making a decision and how that decision influences other decisions made by the customer. The results of this study did not show the existence of any customer journey maps which assessed the interactions customers had with the organisation. This result was significant for me as the implication for the organisation was that it did not know with certainty at which point along the customer journey to make an intervention in order to strengthen the landlord-tenant relationship and reduce complaints.

As mentioned in the literature review, complaint management is of strategic importance to companies as the data collected from complaints can assist organisations in enhancing their products and services (Stauss and Seidel, 2019). In order for companies to leverage on complaints, systems and processes must be established to monitor and resolve them. The aim of complaint management is to dissuade dissatisfied customers from severing ties with the organisation and taking their business elsewhere.

In the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey referred to in chapter four, it was noted that only 52% of the tenants were satisfied with the manner in which RESL addressed their complaints. Despite this 2015 result, my research did not show RESL labelling tenants' concerns as complaints. Issues brought to the attention of the company were labelled as "maintenance" issues and not complaints. This is significant from the point of view that given the labelling, the "issues" were forwarded to the company's Maintenance Department for action. In addition, the "issues" were not analysed in an attempt to place value as a source of information for strategic decision making. The implications are that the company lacked an approach to complaints management as a source of customer information (Stauss and Seidel, 2019) which could be used to enhance its offerings and strengthen tenant relationships.

Customer value creation

I now extend the discussion further by interpreting my findings on customer value creation and the value proposition as espoused by RESL in relation to the contemporary knowledge introduced in the literature.

In the literature, Moore (1995) called upon Public Officials to be more than clerical officers and create public value through creativity in managing resources under their charge. Moore (1995) noted the importance of the authorising environment as well as the need to build operational capacity in Public Organisations in order to achieve public value outcomes. Public value is created for the citizen as customer, who engages with the public system for a good or service. Consequently, a customer as citizen expects to receive quality customer service from all Government agencies (Thomas, 2012). The concept then of customer value is integral to CRM, customer care and complaint handling (Kumar and Reinartz, 2018).

As insider action researcher at RESL, the research illustrated some of the challenges faced by Public Officials such as those at RESL in their attempt to create value for their tenants. The major challenge resided with the misalignment between the elements of Moore's strategic triangle namely value, legitimacy and support as well as operational capacity. These concepts were explained in the literature review in chapter two.

Legitimacy and support, as a key driver for CRM success was not as visible as expected at RESL. This matter was discussed above in the context of a lack of executive support for the practice intervention which resulted in less than the full rollout of certain aspects of the intervention.

The data analysis in chapter six suggests that customer care was not accorded as much priority as was expected as the company's agenda was dictated by more tangible projects. The model of efficiency that Moore (1995) called for to be present in Public Organisations could not be possible given the funding challenges faced by RESL. This research illustrates that with budgetary constraints, the perceived "softer projects" tend to be the ones which experience the most neglect in organisations and suffer from budgetary cuts.

What my findings did confirm was that RESL took no concerted effort outside of this intervention to update its processes or practices to ensure alignment with the ever changing requirements of its tenants. The implications for the organisation are that the economic value of the landlord-tenant relationship by way of the tenant remitting rent was eroded. This erosion in turn impacted the bottom line of the company through voids and reduced revenue from lease rent.

7.3 RESL'S VALUE PROPOSITION

As indicated in chapter three, one of my data collection methods was the review of corporate documents in phase one of the intervention in order to understand the organisational problem and its linguistic fingerprint. One such document which was reviewed was the company's 2018-2022 Strategic Plan which contained the company's value proposition. This value proposition was not developed by me but by the team which developed the company's Strategic Plan in 2018 of which I was a part.

A value proposition according to Buttle and Maklan (2015 p.159) is " the explicit or implicit promise made by a company to its customers that it will deliver a particular bundle of value-creating benefits". A value proposition sits at the heart of any business and differentiates one company from another. Buttle and Maklan (2015 p. 43) argue that if the company's value proposition is not "affected by an investment in CRM the company is not as customer-centric as it needs to be or it lacks basic understanding of what its customer's value".

Any value proposition must then take into account the perspective of the customer, for whom the organisation commits to create value, as well as the organisational perspective based on what the organisation says it will offer the customer versus what it offers in actuality. RESL's value proposition is at **table 7.1**

Table 7.1:   RESL's Value Proposition

Attributes	Image	Relationship
• Solutions oriented • Competitive pricing of its sites • Serviced lots • Technical competence of staff	• Trustworthy organisation • Competent	• Solutions oriented • Collaborative • Compliant with performance reporting requirements

Source: RESL's Strategic Plan 2018-2022(p.16)

Based on the three elements in the value proposition, attributes captured the functionality aspect of RESL's product or service and the sub-element related to this inquiry was "solutions oriented". Image spoke to the intangible factors that attract a tenant to the organisation. The relevant sub-element under image was a "trustworthy organisation", while relationship focused on the interactions between landlord and tenant, is it "friendly, transactional or solutions oriented?"

Given the relationship among the themes which were developed from the various data collection methods as well as the three research questions that I set myself to answer (chapter 1), I specifically chose to contextualise and interpret the company's value proposition in relation to literature, as a company's value proposition forms an integral part of customer value creation (Payne and Frow, 2013). In this regard, I found it useful to examine the value proposition given the research focus as discussed in sections 1.5 and 1.6.

A closer examination of the value proposition suggests that more focus was needed on what tenants value besides reasonable lease rates and a serviced lot. The data from the Tenant Satisfaction Survey discussed in chapter four, the data from the interviews, practical case study, action research group meetings as well as the company wide survey indicate that tenants also valued timely feedback on queries, quality maintenance repairs as well as stronger landlord-tenant relationships.

What the company says it will offer its tenants and what it should actually offer must be much more than bricks and mortar (Palm, 2011) but moreso an investment in CRM, customer care and efficient complaints handling. Additionally, how the company intended to create value for its tenants was not explicitly demonstrated in the value proposition. The company is well aware of the pain areas in the company such as poor maintenance of built accommodation, lengthy delays in addressing complaints, broken processes and siloism as identified in this practice intervention. The value proposition however did not contain any pain relievers that will make a difference to the tenant or create customer value as postulated by Moore (1995).

The analysis of the value proposition also indicated that a more structured approach to its formulation could have taken place inclusive of its value delivery system. If the company wished to be viewed as one delivering customer value, then there was the need for alignment between what the tenants value and what RESL says it offers them as opposed to what it actually offers. Essentially, there was the need for the company to develop a "seamless customer experience" (Payne and Frow, 2013 p.34) for its tenants if value is to be created.

The CSFs identified in the literature for successful CRM implementation and customer centricity, the conceptual framework at **figure 3.3**, the themes which emerged during the inquiry (chapters 4, 5 and 6) and the overlapping themes displayed in the Venn diagram at **figure 6.3** were all taken into consideration in developing the evaluation criteria and measures which were mapped against the major elements of RESL's value proposition.

In developing the evaluation criteria, I took from the literature (Kumar and Reinartz, 2018; Payne and Frow, 2013) the notion that the concept of public value and customer value are critical to CRM. Having customer value at the core of CRM enables the organisation to clearly define CRM from the perspective of what the customer values and what value the organisation creates for the customer. In moving from transactional to becoming customer focused it is processes and practical businesses improvements that matter. It is in this vein that the evaluation criteria in **table 7.2** were developed by mapping them onto the company's value proposition in order to assess the organisation from a functional, strategic and customer facing perspective. **Table 7. 2** shows the outcome of the mapping exercise.

Table 7.2 RESL's Customer Value Proposition Mapped against Evaluation Criteria and Measures

Value Proposition Attributes	Evaluation Criteria	Measures
• Solutions oriented	**Process Improvement** through better linkages between key interfacing Departments such as Legal, Finance and Facilities Maintenance thereby reducing bottlenecks and solving tenants' complaints.	Collaboration between Departments and Divisions versus silo thinking and behaviour.

Value Proposition	Evaluation Criteria	Measures
• Solutions oriented	**Practice Improvement** through adherence to the process for customer complaints thereby reducing such complaints. Using complaints handling data for decision making to identify frequency and types of complaints from certain industrial sites and where best to expend Government funds.	Less escalation of complaints to Executive Management, the Board or Line Minister. Evidence of strengthened landlord-tenant relationship based on data from follow up survey. Increase tenant satisfaction score from 55% to 75%.
• Technical competence of staff	All customer facing staff adequately trained to resolve customer complaints with reduced escalations to second level.	100% customer facing staff trained by June 2020.
Image		
• Trustworthy Organisation	**Enterprise Level**: RESL can be counted on to reduce the timeline for tenant complaints, provide quality responses, increase customer satisfaction thereby being the Government real estate company by choice. Organisational learning has taken place and gaps are closed more quickly.	Increase tenants' overall satisfaction score from 55% satisfied to 75%. Less rework resulting in reduced operating expenses and greater returns on capital employed.
• Solutions oriented	**Externally:** Relationships with tenants have shifted	Fewer escalations to Executive Management and the political directorate.

Value Proposition	Evaluation Criteria	Measures
• Solutions oriented	from transactional to collaborative. **Internally**: Less blaming and name calling	 Silo Departments and Divisions work collaboratively to provide better customer care.

Source: Developed by the author for this inquiry (2019)

Customer Information Management

I will now discuss another aspect of my results related to organisational processes, CRM and customer care in the light of the literature review and my research questions in chapter one. Any organisation in moving from a transactional to a customer centric relationship with its customers must focus on people, processes and customer care (Payne and Frow, 2013). Customer information management involves collecting and collating information on customers in order to enhance customer care and create value for the customer (Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018).

Once the organisation has customer information, the organisation is better positioned to tailor its offerings to satisfy their requirements. Evidence from this study did not indicate that the company adopted a systemic approach to organising information on its tenants as a single unified view of the tenant was absent.

There was no documentation on the number, nature and frequency of complaints received by the company or whether they were specific to certain sites. These findings meant that in the absence of documented information coupled with information spread across disparate Departments, evidently, complaints from tenants will arise. The practical implication is that it is difficult for the organisation to know where to expend limited funding in order to address complaints or enhance service delivery. Other implications are that there can be many issues which remain unresolved for a long time which could explain the results of the Tenant Satisfaction Survey of 2015 as well as the responses from the company wide administered questionnaire in 2018.

Staff Involvement

If organisations are to be deemed solutions oriented and customer centric, staff must be involved in all aspects of the development of CRM strategies (Buttle and Maklan, 2015; Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018). Organisations need trained staff who understand customer needs and develop strong relationships with them. The lack of training in customer care surfaced at many of the meetings of the team which indicated the need for the organisation to ensure that staff was so trained to understand and resolve tenant needs. The contemporary literature has indicated that the connection that a customer has with a brand is very often a result of the nature of interaction with the company's employees (Payne and Frow, 2013). The implications are that RESL needed to ensure that staff, especially those at the front line are adequately trained as the nature of interactions between employees and tenants can result in either positive or negative perception of customer value.

7.4 OVERALL IMPLICATIONS OF RESULTS

A significant amount of the study's results agree with previous research in the area of CRM, customer care and complaints management. The agreement between the literature and the practice intervention were highlighted firstly in my review of the company's corporate documents where it was revealed that the company did not view its tenants as customers. The company's perspective was one of a mere brick and mortar business arrangement. Palm (2016) and Kivlehan (2011) have made the call in the literature for real estate companies to go beyond brick and mortar and view their tenants as customers.

The themes which emerged from the interviews namely executive inaction, guarding territory in the absence of interdepartmental integration were aligned with the literature on the challenges of implementing CRM and customer care in organisations (Farhan, Abed and Ellatif, 2018). The three major challenges impacting CRM implementation included lack of executive support, little interdepartmental integration and inadequately trained customer facing staff.

What my findings added is that SPSEs may be challenged in creating customer value due to their public nature. Because of their public nature they are cash strapped and the projects which are spotlighted are those with public appeal. My results challenge Moore's concept of creating public value in a public sector organisation, more so a SPSE charged with managing real estate assets on behalf of the Government. This challenge stems from the fact that the complexity that is the public sector is missing from Moore's (1995) concept of public value as the private sector hat may not necessarily fit the public sector.

The evidence from this study provides a clearer understanding of CREM in a SPSE with responsibility for exercising the function of real estate management on behalf of the Government. The findings build on existing evidence in the contemporary literature that there has been limited focus on customer care at RESL because firstly, the tenants were viewed as mere occupiers in a legalistic landlord-tenant relationship. This relationship which is governed by a leasing arrangement serves to regulate the behaviour of the parties to the contract devoid of a focus on customer centricity. The insight into why there was limited focus on CRM at RESL can be found in its "publicness" and strained financial position as a SPSE struggling to keep afloat whilst trying to implement other capital projects with greater visibility.

My results build on existing evidence that if you address a customer's complaint to their satisfaction, it is highly likely that you will have a customer who will remain loyal to the company, be it public or private sector, a real estate company is no different (Sanderson and Edwards, 2015). My study also makes a contribution to the body of knowledge on the challenges in engendering change in Public Sector organisations given the many expressions of organisational inertia, employee disengagement and push-back. These manifestations are captured in the memorandum at **figure 7.2**.

7.5 MEMORANDUM TO MANAGER ON IMPLICATIONS OF THE INQUIRY FOR PRACTICE

Despite what the contemporary literature has espoused on best practices in CRM implementation, I penned a memorandum to an imaginary Manager who is about to embark upon an undertaking similar to mine.

In **figure 7.2**, I synthesise my experiences as insider action researcher having undertaken four phases of diagnosing, planning, taking action and reflecting in order to develop and implement a Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process at RESL. My learning was gained from implementing the phases of the inquiry which required me to remove all pre-understandings, question everything and be an active listener at action research group meetings.

Figure 7.2 Memorandum to Manager, GRCL

REAL ESTATE SOLUTIONS COMPANY LIMITED (RESL)

MEMORANDUM

From: Insider Action Researcher, RESL
To: Manager, Operational Efficiency, GRCL
Date: 15 December 2019
Re: Undertaking Action Research at Government Realtors Company Limited (GRCL)

I understand that you propose to undertake an action research project at your company, a SPSE aimed at delivering a better customer experience. Having recently concluded such an inquiry at my employer, also a State Enterprise, I wish to share my experiences and then proffer recommendations.

I strongly recommend that you do not attempt this change initiative, thinking that it is a quick fix or else the desired change will not be embedded. Based on my experience at RESL, there were many previous customer care initiatives which failed when the Champion left the organisation. As such, one mechanism to achieve sustainability of the initiative can be the formation of an action research group to assist you with planning how to resolve the problem and defining the outcomes.

It is important to understand GRCL's state of readiness to shift to a culture of customer centricity, for if the action research group that you establish is not ready, you can expect to receive countless reasons why it cannot be done, as they will bring their unresolved employment issues to the meeting and use them as evidence which is hindering their ability to deliver better customer care. Essentially, they will say until GRCL attends to my needs I cannot be expected to be customer focused.
You will then need to find a way to have this issue raised with your Human Resources Manager or else the initiative will be seen to be a farce.

MEMORANDUM CONTINUED

It is highly likely that you will encounter silo behaviour, given the public nature of GRCL. I can inform you that silo thinking can impede your progress in undertaking action phases as the core of action research is collaborative inquiry. To break down the silos, I suggest that you use three strategies. Firstly, spot employees displaying customer centric behaviours and rally around them and other persons to form part of your change team. Executive support for the inquiry is critical, however begin your change efforts from the ground up. Another strategy would be to engage your counterpart Managers who have a role to play along all of your customer touch points and strengthen your relationship with them, given your new role duality as proponents of action research suggest this approach.

GRCL, as a Government institution will never have enough funding to implement all of its projects and do not be discouraged if your project is being side-lined. What the team did was to pursue the low hanging fruits which did not require money. We focused on developing the groundwork for the Policy, we reengineered processes and slowly implemented them with a view to enhancing service delivery. In the face of dwindling funds we collaborated with other stakeholders to get certain things done, all with the customer in mind. These strategies were pursued in order to minimise escalation of complaints to the political directorate and to assure Executive Management that we are attempting to "delight" the customer.

As you understand the present state of GRCL, keep its value proposition on customer care in mind and develop evaluation criteria to assess if you are making progress, aim at being able to quantify your achievements for better reporting to Executive Management. Be mindful that sustainable change requires time to be embedded in the organisation and this comes from having employees model the behaviour, in this case customer centric behaviours. Also reflect on the fact that the organisation will not be progressing at your pace, however you will still need to keep your team energised and this is where pursuing quick wins has a place. In sum, do solicit executive buy in, understand the present state, reflect on GRCL's value proposition, find a champion and start from bottom up. As one member of the team told me, there is the need to keep communication channels on the initiative open or else staff will think that nothing is happening.
Do not rush the intervention until you are sure that you have a critical mass of customer centric employees on board.

7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Appropriateness of method

The research used the method of action research which as discussed in chapter three is critiqued by positivists and academics who subscribe to the view that the method is unscientific and subject to researcher bias given the co-creation of knowledge between the researcher and the researched. Notwithstanding these criticisms, I maintained ethical standards by signing the company's confidentiality agreement as well as affording participants the option to exit the research at any time. The integrity of my research was not compromised as I used a variety of data collection methods to triangulate the data, analyse and discuss findings within the context of the literature.

In examining CRM, customer care and complaint handling at RESL, the generalisability of the results of this intervention is limited by my inability to apply the findings to any other SPSE involved in the real estate sector. This limitation is not uncommon in case study research especially using the method of action research. This did not impact the achievement of my research purpose or ability to answer the three research questions in chapter one. Another limitation stemmed from the weak executive buy-in for the overall intervention as focus was shifted to other projects.

The overall progress of the intervention and speed of implementation were negatively impacted as certain actions needed executive approval before proceeding. According to Payne and Frow (2013), in adopting the CRM strategy, executive management or a Board member must be engaged in supporting the strategy. In the absence of approval to proceed with full rollout of the intervention, action research group members began to express sentiments of entrapment in a cycle of continued failed project implementation. Once approvals are received, reconvening the team to begin implementation will require some level of rework. Another limitation related to my inability to predict the sustainability of the intervention and to convince team members to remain committed.

Despite the limitations, the results of the intervention are valid for the purpose of answering the research questions. I was able to collect and triangulate data from a multiplicity of sources as discussed in chapters 4, 5 and 6. Having collected the data, they were analysed using document and key word-in context analysis, thematic analysis and case analysis (chapters 3 and 4) which allowed me to interpret the findings within the context of the literature in chapter two.

Applicability of private sector strategies

The context for my research was a Government institution involved in managing real estate. The concept of PSREM is an emerging one where CRM, customer care and complaints management are now gaining prominence as part of New Public Management. In the execution of this action research project, concepts and frameworks from the private sector were applied to assist with analysing and discussing CRM at RESL. To apply these concepts and frameworks to a Government context bear inherent limitations with respect to applicability, however I recognised the call of Moore (1995) as he urged Public Officials to create value even if that task appears daunting in a Government environment. In this connection, my intervention was aimed at achieving just that for the tenants at RESL.

7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter synthesises all of the actions undertaken as I engaged in cycles of reflection, analysis, interpretation of findings and discussion of implications. I discussed and interpreted the meaning of the results from the series of data collection methods within the framework of the literature review. I explained the critical organisational issues which impeded successful CRM, customer care and complaints handling implementation at RESL, chief of which was lack of top management support. Focused discussion took place on the importance of a company's value proposition as the raison d'être for that company's existence as well as the promise of value that the company will create for its customers. All research has limitations, this chapter discussed the limitations as well as how they were surmounted.

What this research has shown is that in addition to the lack of top management support, other organisational factors must be in alignment for value creation. Silos must be eradicated and the company's information management system must be so integrated that customer care is delivered seamlessly resulting in one holistic view of the customer. This was not the case at RESL despite previous customer management interventions. My intervention restarted the process by recognising the importance of developing a policy position on customer care and complaints management, leading towards strategic implementation of other aspects of CRM and customer care, while recognising the importance of making a culture shift to one of customer centricity.

The penultimate chapter will be focused on reflection on my journey as an insider action researcher and my learnings.

CHAPTER 8: REFLECTIONS ON THE JOURNEY

8.1 Introduction

In this chapter, focus is placed on first person inquiry in which I share my understanding of the concept of reflexivity in the conduct of action research and the key occasions when I learnt as a Manager. Coghlan and Brannick (2010 p.5) have opined that first person inquiry is undertaken by the inquirer and challenges the inquirer to look into "his or her own life". In line with this perspective, I will speak to important moments in my journey as an insider action researcher at RESL and how my management practice developed. The chapter closes with a discussion on the implications of my findings for my professional knowledge and practice. The context for reflection on the story of this SPSE is instructive given the many different iterations which resulted in RESL as it is known today. In essence, I speak to my development and my "becoming" an insider action researcher.

8.2 THE CONTEXT FOR MY REFLECTION

The concept of reflexivity speaks to the researcher positioning himself within his writing (Creswell, 2013). As researcher, there has to be mindfulness of the norms, values and preunderstandings (Weick, 2002) that the researcher brings to the research setting. I began capturing my reflections upon receipt of approval from the Ethics Committee at the University of Liverpool, during and after interviews, conversations and action research group meetings. These reflections were documented throughout this inquiry and are interspersed throughout the thesis.

Having worked in the company for a considerable time, I wanted to delve deeply into the organisation to understand why the company was doing so poorly at customer care delivery. Based on my review of corporate documents and other research, my understanding was that the company had been through three different predecessors-in-title. As a SPSE, it was subject to the vagaries of many different Ministers, Boards and CEOs due to five-year political cycles and focus was never placed on viewing the tenant as customer.

A possible explanation might be that the Public Sector and SPSEs never embraced a culture of customer centricity and the proverbial can continued to be kicked down the road. Focus was solely placed on commercial viability in the leasing of industrial space. Despite the many tenant satisfaction surveys which were administered, plus the less than favourable opinions on customer excellence, I was still cautious and tried not to bring to the group any of my preunderstandings as there was still so much that I had to learn and gain from the inquiry.

8.3 LESSONS FROM THE INQUIRY

How to Survive and Thrive

In spite of the fact that along with the action research group we were able to prepare the Customer Care Policy and develop the complaints handling process I learnt that undertaking an action research project in one's workplace is a painstaking exercise. Change takes time. I say painstaking because I was rendered almost powerless to dictate the pace with which the inquiry progressed due to the many hoops I had to jump through. My voice appeared to be the lone one crying out to increase awareness of the importance of customer care delivery, given the poor landlord-tenant relationship.

As insider action researcher, in order to survive and thrive, I had to be patient with myself, mindful of the organisational dynamics that go with Government institutions. Survival and advancement of the inquiry required me to jump into the fray to curb the blame game which had the potential to derail progress. In those circumstances, in order to survive, the role identity which prevailed was that of the Manager and not insider action researcher resulting in me shifting between identities.

What I learnt about myself

Being new to the method of action of action research was somewhat intimidating at the onset as this was my first exposure to action research. What I learnt is that I possessed the ability to lead and effectively guide persons in dissecting and talking through difficult organisational issues to arrive at a solution.

I was able to draw upon my leadership and communication skills to guide the team and professionally present the status of the strategic initiative at the level of Executive Management for consideration of the Board. I am confident in my ability to lead a similar inquiry using a collaborative style of leadership.

As the group members were assigned different aspects of the Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process to develop, sometimes I was tempted to become too involved in guiding the outcome. I had to make a conscious decision to restrain myself and let the thoughts of the participants surface. My innate being is to lead in order to ensure the success of all initiatives, however undertaking this action research project taught me that my role was also to engender in the group members a sense of ownership of outcomes. This sense of ownership will ultimately translate into them having a vested interest in the sustainability of the practice intervention and modelling the required behaviours.

As I reflect further on my journey as an insider action researcher, the outcome for the organisation as evidenced by employees having a better appreciation for excellent customer care delivery was achieved. What I surmise is that for the sustainability of the customer complaints handling process, there was the need to closely monitor the process, as change requires people to embrace new processes, practices and behaviours which make them uncomfortable. At the centre of change is the people element which can either spell failure or success for any change initiative. I reflected on and in the action which took place and I tried to not transfer my feelings to the members of the group.

What I Learnt about the Action Research Group

I am grateful that the participants felt comfortable to freely share their views on issues of blaming, executive inaction and leadership at the meetings. I made no attempt to silence the participants. It is important to be careful with one’s assumptions and pre-understanding as I assumed that all participants would willingly embrace the research.

On many occasions I silently asked myself where am I going with this research. It felt as if the research was not progressing and I was not receiving enough executive support, as reminders had to be sent continuously to keep the team on track. From the collaboration, it was evident that customer centrism must be embedded in the fabric of the organisation for sustainability.

What I learnt from this collaboration with the action research group was that the voice from which they were speaking was one which was screaming to executive management to be heard. They wanted to have their human resource needs attended to before they could be expected to deliver better customer care. If employees are unhappy they cannot delight customers.

What I Learnt about Executive Management

As I engaged in self-reflection and tried to better understand the context of the inquiry, I also got a better understanding of the process of organisational shifts. Depending on where the focus of the organisation rested, this dictated what was promoted to employees throughout the company. During the inquiry, customer care was given lip service at the expense of promoting more visible capital projects where executive management could highlight achievements. This was evidenced by organisational discussions being centred around project status and the return on investment.

Customer care was not accorded the level of discussion and enquiry as capital projects. The different voices and narratives were at the heart of how business was conducted at RESL and provided an explanation as to why customer care was a low priority matter. Based on the interview conducted with the Vice President of the Division during the diagnosis stage of phase one, I better understood some of the constraints faced by executive management and how they felt crippled to exercise much flexibility. As scholar-practitioner, another important aspect of the inquiry was the implications and relevance of my findings for self-knowledge and practice, these issues are discussed below.

8.4 IMPLICATIONS OF FINDINGS FOR SELF KNOWLEDGE AND PRACTITIONER DEVELOPMENT

Self-Knowledge

In undertaking this action research project, the overarching themes which emerged included the transactional relationship between RESL and its tenants, the challenges faced by SPSE due to their 'publicness' , broken processes related to customer care and disengaged employees. As I reflected on these themes and took a bird's eye view of my inquiry, I was impacted and as a consequence my practice as a Manager was also impacted.

This lack of management's attention to customer care required the full engagement and persistence of a project champion. Given the different voices in the organisation, I have become an active participant in shaping the culture of customer care in the organisation while mediating between the different voices and modelling the change behaviour.

Having undertaken this inquiry, my knowledge of the workings of organisations and the challenges of introducing change have increased. My thinking about the peculiar challenges of SPSEs has been enlarged and I have amassed analytical and reflective skills based on the phases of inquiry that have positioned me to proffer practical solutions to advance the organisation.

Development as a Practitioner

Given the findings from my inquiry, my practice will change. Having identified that silo behaviour existed at RESL, and there was push back at the thought of introducing new business processes, I recognised that a different skills set was needed. This new dispensation was necessary as a cross section of customer facing employees will be required to imbibe new behaviours which force them outside of their comfort zone. The face of my practice will shift from that of a Manager, to a change leader, armed with the knowledge of how to engender change in organisations.

The mindset of the employees in the organisation has to be one in which the tenants are viewed as more than revenue generators for the company but as key stakeholders who must be taken seriously. Consideration can be given to using the balanced score card(BSC) model to measure RESL's effectiveness from the customer, learning and growth, financial and internal business perspectives, with specific focus on the customer perspective. I am cognisant of the fact that the BSC has greater applicability in the private sector for which it was designed however it should not be overlooked as a tool for measuring improvement and change at RESL.

In leading the charge, the work of the Department that I lead will be subject to more scrutiny, as such, a sense of urgency about the change must be maintained. My practice will also change in how I relate horizontally with other Managers in customer facing Departments. Relationships with Managers in key Departments such as Legal Services, Facilities Maintenance, Finance and Administration will have to be strengthened as we build alliances to deliver better customer care. These alliances can be strengthened as my knowledge of the customer requirements will be based on the practical intervention and my role duality.

The most challenging phase of the inquiry will involve rollout out of the Policy and embedding change towards customer centricity. To achieve these goals, momentum must be sustained and continuous review take place as the rollout progresses.

8.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter I reflected and engaged in first person inquiry to reveal the many learnings from the overall practice intervention. I shared about my learnings using different lenses and most importantly how I and my practice have changed as a result of the inquiry.

In the final chapter, I answer the three research questions posed in chapter one. I reflect on the aim of the research and discuss the main conclusions from the intervention. I proffer recommendations for future research and practice along with engaging in discussion on unfinished work streams.

CHAPTER 9: CONCLUSION

9.1 Introduction

This final chapter concludes the thesis by drawing together the most important points from my discussion. The research aimed to better understand CRM, customer care and complaints handling at RESL leading towards the development and implementation of a Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process. The chapter begins by answering the three research questions in chapter one while documenting the key conclusions. A discussion follows on the contribution of the thesis to knowledge in the field of customer care in SPSEs which manage real estate, unfinished work streams are identified and the chapter ends with recommendations for future research.

9.2 ANSWERING THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research examined some of the main reasons for the lack of customer centricity at RESL given many failed projects which sought to embed customer care in the organisation. The research was undertaken in a SPSE which received limited Government funding. The mandate of the company was to lease space for industrial use thereby reducing dependency on Government funding. As an employee of the company, I used insider action research as the method of inquiry to undertake the practice intervention. Having worked in the company for a considerable time, I was very aware of the quality of customer care and that improvement was necessary if the company was to become commercially viable. It was this insider knowledge which assisted me in framing my three research questions which are answered in the ensuing section. The answers are based on the data which were collected, analysed and discussed (chapters 4 to 7).

Question 1: Why at an enterprise level has there been limited focus on customer relationship management at Real Estate Solutions Company Limited?

I addressed this question through review and analysis of the literature on CRM and customer care in chapter two, as well as through the discussion of themes which emerged from interviews with Executive Management, action research group meetings and a companywide survey (chapters 4 to 7).

These data have shown that RESL as a SPSE, could not place much focus on CRM because operationally and at a strategic level all of its efforts were targeted towards implementing more visible capital projects for which it received Government funding. In addition, as a SPSE reporting to a line Ministry, that Ministry channeled the focus and direction as to where the organisation placed its emphasis. The emphasis was on tangibles namely, leasing of land and built accommodation as a demonstration of creating public value. With a shrinking budget, the natural course of action by Executive Management was to use the funds towards publicly visible projects which would create a steady cash flow for the company.

Some of the other reasons why RESL placed limited focus on CRM stemmed from the fact that structurally, the organisation was not designed to have a single unified view of its tenants. As indicated previously, different Departments treated with different aspects of the landlord-tenant relationship in the absence of consultation. Additionally, given the nature of the company's business as a real estate company, there was a strict transactional approach in the handling of tenants' issues as opposed to viewing the tenant as a strategic partner or customer.

From a strategic level, CRM was not viewed as a process. CRM activities were not sustained from the top of the organisation, neither did they cross all organisational functions. This resulted in a lack of sustainability of initiatives once the initiative champion exited the organisation as this practice intervention has demonstrated.

Question 2: Has publicness impacted the ability of RESL to deliver excellent customer care to it tenants and if so how?

Given the context of the practice intervention, coupled with the functional and strategic issues which mitigate against the ability of the company to focus on CRM and customer care, the responses from the interview with the Manager of the Facilities Department as well as other Executives reinforced the constraints which come with "publicness". Because of its "publicness", RESL could not raise funding to engage in as many projects as it may have envisaged. In addition, public organisations have their priority projects dictated for them by the political directorate which can change based on five year political cycles.

This suggests that the behaviour of institutions such as RESL can be impacted by these political demands rather than those of its customers resulting in insufficient focus on creating customer value and delivering excellent customer care. Yet again, non-visible projects were either overlooked or never fully implemented.

Excellent customer care involves a planned approach to how customer concerns will be handled. I argue that even though RESL had adequate funding for its projects, customer care was accorded little focus as its delivery required management practices as exercised in the private sector and for which the public sector is not so structured. Customer care delivery also requires adjustments at a strategic and functional level which were non-existent.

Given the absence of customer journey mapping data (chapter 7) to identify major touch points, the organisation found itself ill prepared to deliver customer care. The company adopted a transactional relationship focused solely on the legal nature of leasing arrangements. The words "tenant "and "customer" were used interchangeably by the organisation depending on the context, unaware of the changing language. It is for these reasons that a Customer Care Policy was developed as a starting point to demonstrate to its tenants how it intended to develop and strengthen the landlord-tenant relationship.

Question 3: Will embedding a more systematic approach to customer complaints handling at RESL improve its bottom line?

The findings from the literature review, the 2015 Tenant Satisfaction Survey and discussions at action research group meetings demonstrated the strategic importance of complaints to any organisation. RESL received many complaints from its tenants and the handling of the complaints proved to be a major source of disappointment. This disappointment stemmed from the lengthy response time as well as little feedback on the status of complaints.

The data from the practice intervention showed that the majority of complaints were from tenants in built accommodation and depending on the nature of the complaint, their business operations could be negatively impacted. Once this occurs, the tenant adopts a variety of behaviours, chief of which is withholding lease rental payments. Tenants choose to vacate the premises leaving the landlord to contend with lengthy periods of void, resulting in no income or at the end of the lease term, the tenant decides to surrender the lease.

Any one of these responses by the tenant results in reduced income which impacts the bottom line. Therefore, embedding a more systemic approach to treating with complaints is the start to reducing dissatisfaction and increasing customer loyalty. Hence the reason for one of the outcomes of the practice intervention was to document and revisit the company's complaint handling process with the action research group. Documenting the complaint handling process was aimed at identifying and eliminating pain points as well as tracking the status of complaints in order to be positioned to respond meaningfully to the tenant.

Effectiveness of Method in Answering Research Questions

In assessing how effective the method of action research was in answering the research questions, I posit that while the method limits the generalisability of the results, the triangulation of the data helped to corroborate and justify my findings related to CRM, customer care and complaints handling at RESL. The method also provided me with new insights into the specific challenges faced by Government real estate companies as they attempt to deliver customer value. In spite of Moore's (1995) call to public officers to create value, in the absence of viewing CRM, customer care and complaint handling from an operational, tactical and strategic level, success will be limited. Some of the other limitations to the method of action research were discussed in chapter seven, section 7.6.

9.3 KEY CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the data from this research has highlighted the many organisational issues that RESL needed to address in order to deliver on its value proposition and create value for its tenants. Chief of these relate to greater involvement of top management in customer care coupled with a realignment of the company's business processes engineered for delivery.

RESL can be defined as a Model I company. In Model I companies, there is disconnect between what Argyris (1998) defined as "theories espoused" and "theories in use". RESL espoused the theory of the importance of customer care and management in accordance with its Strategic Plan 2018-2022, however in reality there was need for more executive support for the inquiry in order to deliver better results.

The research shows undoubtedly that the public nature of the organisation impacted its ability to place focus on customer care as its operations were dictated by the line Ministry to which it reported. As a consequence, this focus away from customer care resulted in complaints from tenants, many of which remain unaddressed given the absence of an institutionalised mechanism to document, track, address and close complaints.

Another key finding was the absence of a holistic view of the tenant which impacted the ability of the organisation to make informed decisions on tenancies. This disaggregated view of the tenant negatively impacted complaint handing. In the real estate sector, one response to dissatisfaction is withholding of rent. I surmise that RESL would have experienced substantial financial losses and a large receivables portfolio due to dissatisfied tenants.

Given the themes which emerged from the initial interviews with executive management and which are documented in **figure 4.4**, coupled with data collected from the other data collection methods, RESL needed to revisit its strategic intentions and processes so that inherent in its processes will be value added to its tenants. What was also instructive was that engendering change in organisations is difficult business which must not be underestimated. What was needed was not first and second order change whereby old ways of thinking about customer care remain, but third order change which challenges basic practices and the culture of the organisation. A mechanism which is institutionalised in the organisation to keep the change momentum going was also necessary.

9.4 THESIS CONTRIBUTION TO KNOWLEDGE

In this section, the focus of my discussion will be on third person inquiry and the contribution of this thesis to knowledge. Essentially, third person inquiry is concerned with moving away from first and second person recipients of information and disseminating research findings to a wider audience while contributing to the body of knowledge on the specific matter (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010).

With respect to the context of this inquiry, the thesis contributes by highlighting some of the challenges to be overcome by entities such as RESL in their quest to create and deliver public value. The power of the authorising environment (Moore, 1995) cannot be underestimated as the lack of financial support from the players in this environment can stymie any programme or project. The complexity that is the Public Sector within the context of public value creation has benefitted from limited discussion in the contemporary literature.

This thesis has contributed to the knowledge base of Public Sector real estate practitioners working in SIDS in the Caribbean who may be repositioning their organsiations from a functional approach to seamless processes better geared towards service delivery. The thesis further contributes by highlighting the importance of executive buy in from project conceptualisation to execution. More fundamentally, the literature on CRM, customer care and complaints handling endorse the view of the customer as a unified whole even in a Public Sector real estate company. The argument is that to view the customer otherwise can result in fragmented customer information leading to poor decision making.

The thesis also contributes by positing that SPSEs need to create mechanisms to insulate themselves from five year political cycles if only for continuity of projects and realisation of pronouncements made in value propositions. This can be achieved if there is a combination of top down and bottom up principles. With specific reference to this practice intervention, tenants need to be involved as citizens, stakeholders or customers in deciding on projects which directly impact the businesses that they lease from RESL.

They have voiced this concern to the organisation as they know what customer value looks like for them and how RESL can create that value in accordance with their business needs. If they are involved, they will ensure that they get value for the rent that they remit. In so doing, the priority projects will come from the citizen as tenant thereby embedding their involvement in governance.

Another fundamental contribution of the thesis as it relates to professional practice is that for progress to be made with project implementation especially involving perceived value to be derived by a customer, the organisation must ensure that its employees are engaged, failing which little progress will be achieved. This was evidenced by the discussions at the first action research group meeting held on July 15, 2018. In essence, if an employee is not satisfied with the employer-employee relationship, that employee will be reluctant to embrace any new initiative.

The thesis demonstrates the applicability of the method of action research to real estate practitioners who may wish to embed CRM, customer care or complaints handling in their organisations even if they are in the Public Sector. Application of the method to management of public sector real estate facilitated learnings with respect to organisational processes which need to be in place in order to achieve successful implementation. The learnings include the critical importance of support from top management, inter departmental integration and a strong value proposition which speaks to the value that the customer can expect to receive from the organisation. Additionally, the thesis demonstrates the value of reflexivity which allowed me as insider action researcher to continuously reflect on actions taken during all phases of the action research cycle thereby stimulating new insights which triggered other actions.

With respect to the research questions introduced in chapter one with respect to the lack of customer care at RESL, my research has assisted by developing the company's first Customer Care Policy as well as revising and implementing the complaints handling process. As the literature has indicated, the handling of complaints play a critical role in strengthening business relationships. In the case of this research, the landlord-tenant relationship.

With reference to the literature review in chapter two, the gap in knowledge on the specific challenges in embedding CRM and customer care in Public Sector real estate companies such as RESL has been addressed through evidence from this study. The major evidence points to the challenges of publicness coupled with five year political cycles which divert focus from certain types of initiatives such as customer care. Finally, my findings challenge the assumption that the private sector hat can fit the public sector and that customer value creation in the public sector can be easily achieved.

9.5 UNFINISHED WORK STREAMS

All organisations experience challenges, more so SPSEs due to limited funding, inertia, employee disengagement and political interference. In order to implement change projects such as CRM, it is important to implement simple fixes (Temkin, 2010) pursue quick wins, start from the ground up and make incremental changes. Had time permitted, I would have engaged in another phase with the team given other outstanding work streams which were critical to the inquiry. I delimited my inquiry to focus on a specific aspect of the operations of RESL, however additional time would have allowed me to undertake an additional phase focused on assessment of evidence of behavioural change of employees at RESL in relation to customer care delivery and complaints handling.

The work program would have included engaging the Manager, Human Resources in reviewing the job descriptions of employees. This review would be necessary so that the job requirements reflect not only the language of customer centrism but also foster cross training to tackle the silo behavior which was debated in group meetings as an impediment to improved customer care delivery. Attempts would have been made to work closely with Human Resources to fix the broken processes within Departments as the output of one Department is the input of another. Starting with front line customer facing staff and technical officers in the READ, people development through training would have been undertaken using in house resources.

Listening posts in the organisation would have to be increased in order to better understand the voice of the tenant and other important touch points. The findings from this inquiry suggest that there was a reliance on satisfaction surveys to collect data on tenants, however these tend to be expensive and occur too infrequently to properly gauge the voice of the tenant. RESL appeared to have not properly mapped the major tenant touch points beginning with an application for industrial space to executing a lease and all other after care services based on the landlord-tenant relationship. This could have contributed to the less than significant focus placed on customer complaints. My proposed action of mapping touch points would provide the organisation with information to make interventions into the broken procedures and processes at strategic points along the tenancy journey.

9.6 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The focus of this inquiry was to gain a better understanding of the challenges of embedding CRM and customer care in RESL as well as how the lack of systematic complaints handling impacted the bottom line of the company. In the light of the findings from the study and key conclusions stated in section 9.3, from a policy perspective there is the need for future research into how SPSEs such as RESL can surmount five year political cycles and insulate the organisation to ensure sustainability of projects.

From the point of view of practice, with the recognition that public sector real estate has placed little focus on customer centricity, research is needed into how this sector can incorporate customer value at the center of organisational decision making despite competing demands and the threat of reduced funding. This threat calls for in depth research into the most appropriate method of engagement to realise a hybrid top down and bottom up approach between landlord and tenant. This engagement can assist in arriving at consensus on the value that the landlord will provide and what the tenant expects to receive. Following on from this point will be the need for research to quantify the financial return to landlords as evidenced by better performing real estate assets should they embrace the hybrid approach to creating customer value

9.7 CONCLUSION

This research was undertaken in a SPSE charged with the responsibility for making industrial space available to tenants to establish businesses. The company was mandated by the Government to become commercially viable through the leasing of these spaces. Central to the survivability of any business is the strength of customer relationships or in the case of RESL, its landlord-tenant relationships. The practice intervention using the method of action research has revealed that RESL did not place strategic importance on CRM, customer care and complaints handling. At times, because of the nature of the service provided by the Government it may be difficult for customers to take their business elsewhere. In the case of RESL, its leasing rates are attractive and tenants enter into long term leasing arrangements with complaints mainly from tenants in built accommodation.

The contribution made by this study on the importance of CRM, customer care and complaints handling has its genesis in the value that the company commits to provide and whether it legitimately creates that value. For the customer to deem that value is created, there must be positive "moments of truth" and the organisation must not appear to treat with the customer in a fragmented manner. The support of top management must be visible, the work of Departments must be seamlessly underpinned by an intelligent information management system to enhance service delivery.

Value for the scholar-practitioner is derived from the ability to begin to make significant change in one's organisation despite the fact that more often than not, the organisation is not moving at the pace that you anticipate. For organisations such as RESL, the value lies in the ability to have an insider step back from the day to day organisational rhetoric and give voice to different persons who need to be listened to if sustainable change is to be embedded. Having brought this practice intervention to an end with the development of a Customer Care Policy and complaints handling process, the foundation has been set for RESL to deliver a better level of service to its customers with the action research group and I having an integral role to play in this undertaking.

In summary, the research has shed light on the reasons for limited focus on customer care at RESL. In addition, the evidence contributed to an understanding of how the company's status as a SPSE further compounded this problem. It has also argued that if complaints are properly handled, it is highly likely that tenants will remain in occupation for longer periods thereby reducing voids and positively impacting the bottom line of the company.

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APPENDIX

Development and Implementation of a Customer Care Policy and Complaints Handling Process at RESL

Interview Questions

1. Do you view the company's tenants as customers or as tenants and why?

2. What is your view on Customer Relationship Management (CRM)?

3. What is your position on CRM vis–à-vis a Special Purpose State Enterprise?

4. Customers are making demands on the organisation, do you think that RESL has been flexible and responsive to their demands? If not why?

5. Are employee training programs designed to develop employee skills in delivering customer service?

6. Do you see customer relationship as one of RESL's greatest source of competitive advantage?

7. Do you think past CRM initiatives were a success or failure and why?

8. Do you think we rush into technology before we implement policy?

9. To deliver better customer service, which processes do you think need to be reengineered and why, name one?

10. Are customer standards established and monitored at all customer check points? If not, why?

11. Are there clear business goals around CRM?

12. Does the organisation commit time and resources to managing customer relationships? If not, why?

13. Do you think the organisation suffers from a lack of systematic approach to complaints handling? How is it done now? What about response time?

14. What do you think is the reason for the transactional manner in which customer service is executed?

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