# Embracing a CX 'citizen first' strategy in government

By Louise Marsland                                                                                                18 Aug 2017

How do you convince your colleagues in government to embrace citizen needs first and deliver excellent customer service and experience to citizens, meeting service delivery needs and solving their problems? This was the question posed by Phakiso Tlali, director of customer experience in the Gauteng government, South Africa's most populous province and the economic hub of Southern Africa.



Phakiso Tlali

It is this 'citizen-first programme' of giving citizens a positive customer experience and addressing their needs directly and providing the mechanisms to "listen"  to complaints, that has won Gauteng's Office of the Premier, the Omni-channel Champion Award at the customer experience awards held at the 6th Customer Experience Management Africa Summit in Cape Town this week.

The award was for delivery of services across all channels and the winners were lauded for fully understanding "their customers, their preferred channels, and the stages its customers are on the customer journey. The organisation's overall message is experienced through every interaction that the customer has with the brand, regardless of channel, department, area of the business", and so on.

## Service delivery challenge

Service delivery is one of South Africa's biggest challenges, from local to provincial to national government. The Gauteng provincial government's programme has seen 3,800 community development workers deployed to each house across Gauteng's 580 wards to find out about the most pressing service delivery needs, and then mapping these needs across the province to ensure that implementation can take place.

In an engaging presentation at #CEMAfrica2017, Tlali first sketched a scenario of protests about service delivery, with burning tyres blocking streets and chanting protestors. An all too familiar image in South Africa's densely populated 'townships' which house the poorest of the poor.

"How do we convince our colleagues to embrace citizen needs first? It is a lonely journey. Everyone is on top, we have fridges and televisions in our offices. But underneath, it is melting… People don't want to drive into the city centre (of Johannesburg) because of this," he recounted, showing images of violent service delivery protests.

But, as Tlali emphasised, the African Union Commission Agenda 2063 declares that all African governments must create "an Africa of good governance, democracy, respect for human rights, justice and the rule of law…. A continent where institutions are at the service of its people…"

This dovetails with South Africa's NDP vision 2030, where the emphasis is on harnessing the energy and experience of citizens by means of a bottom up approach in the form of public accountability.

The problem, Tlali said, is that there is a disjuncture between the communication of community grievances and the state's ability to address them.

The triggers of citizen value fall into the domain of:

- Being able to provide the minimum of basic services to the poorest households: water, sanitation, electricity, social security wages.
- Broadening economic participation: empowerment of youth, women, poor and unemployed.
- Fighting social ills: building a social movement against drugs; eradicating violence against women and children; creating clean, healthy, liveable environments, the greening of communities.

In order to respond to the needs of citizens, Tlali said government teams had to look at value based planning in order to deliver on the customer experience:

1. People: self-directed teams, values based leadership.
2. Processes: values based planning scenarios, decentralised decision making and communications systems.
3. Technology: investment in scalable information systems.

"It is about accountability… The ability to have all these business processes coming together, decentralising government systems, empowering people who are not empowered. How do we as customer experience champions in government change this? What measures are you going to use? What IT applications are we going to use to generate all of this?"

Tlali outlined the Gauteng Premier's service delivery programme, called *Ntirhisano* ("working together"), which hopes to provide a government that works with communities to find innovative and sustainable solutions, leading to improved and more equitable socio-economic development.

"

*We have embarked on a journey of defining who we are, what we want to do, on the basis of the needs of the community.*

”

"The optimal use of resources is promoted to effect a qualitative shift in how people's needs are identified, responded to and resolved. Local partnerships are strengthened and local resources mobilised to address socio-economic needs.

"Implementation is a work in progress," Tlali explained. "Our mega-service delivery programme and components were to put call centres together and decentralise centres of excellence within local communities that are responsible to serve the needs of the people, where people can go in and complain about service delivery, and that people within those offices are empowered to deal with solutions.

"The Premier then goes out into those communities once a month to engage with them and talk about service delivery."

Tlali said with this model, the Gauteng government had managed to overcome many service delivery challenges and deliver on key promises with the key components of the *Ntirhisano* model, including a public liaison hotline and integrated rapid response system; war room machinery; and outreach programme.

"We took organic community structures and combined them with ward based structures and then gave them the technology to record service delivery problems. We are mapping and looking at solutions across Gauteng corridors. We can tell, for example, on the West Rand of Gauteng, that the greatest need is water or electricity. That alone creates insight that informs planning by government."

Tlali said Gauteng has asked its citizens what they need and been able to show where resources have been channelled to those in greatest need – including showing where idealised plans were not realised.

"We have embarked on a journey of defining who we are, what we want to do, on the basis of the needs of the community, and incrementally do the little things that make people enjoy quality of life," he concluded.

## ABOUT LOUISE MARSLAND

Louise Burgers (previously Marsland) is Founder/Content Director: SOURCE Content Marketing Agency. Louise is a Writer, Publisher, Editor, Content Strategist, Content/Media Trainer. She has written about consumer trends, brands, branding, media, marketing and the advertising communications industry in SA and across Africa, for over 20 years, notably, as previous Africa Editor: Bizcommunity.com; Editor: Bizcommunity Media/Marketing SA; Editor-in-Chief: AdVantage magazine; Editor: Marketing Mx magazine; Editor: Progressive Retailing magazine; Editor: BusinessBrief magazine; Editor: FMCG Files newsletter. Web: www.sourceagency.co.za.
▪ Teaching trade: the importance of empowering the female entrepreneur - 17 Dec 2019
▪ New monetisation models for media are needed - 16 Dec 2019
▪ #AfricaCom: The many VOD markets - 25 Nov 2019
▪ #AfricaCom: TV content future will be shaped by OTT - 20 Nov 2019
▪ Africa's growth rests on economic empowerment of women - 1 Nov 2019

View my profile and articles...

For more, visit: https://www.bizcommunity.com