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# The Effect Of Trust Building On The Service Reliability Of National Water And Sewerage Corporation

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*Abstract: Trust building is a key component of service delivery in public utility organizations where building and maintaining stakeholder trust and delivering consistent services are essential. This study aimed to investigate the effect of trust building on service reliability in the context of the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC), with specific reference to the Kampala Service Centre. The research design was cross-sectional, and both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used. Data was collected from 79 NWSC employees using structured questionnaires and key informants from NWSC management and business partners through interviews. Quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and regression analysis. The findings revealed that NWSC stakeholders perceived NWSC positively in terms of confidentiality, transparency, stakeholder involvement, consistency of services, and responsiveness to customer concerns. Correlation analysis revealed a moderate positive and statistically significant relationship between trust building and service reliability ($r = 0.581$, $p < 0.01$). Furthermore, the results of the regression analysis revealed that the effect of trust building on service reliability was both positive and significant at a moderate level, explaining a substantial variance of the dependent variable. Therefore, the hypothesis that trust building has a positive and significant effect on service reliability was accepted. It is concluded that trust building is an important determinant of service reliability in NWSC. It is, therefore, recommended that NWSC improve its confidentiality, ethical behavior, transparency, and stakeholder engagement in order to improve service reliability and long-term stakeholder relationships in public utility organizations. It is recommended that NWSC improve its data protection mechanisms, transparency, and ethical behavior; intensify stakeholder engagement in decision-making processes; and improve employee training on the importance of trust-based service reliability in public utility organizations. It is also recommended that NWSC develop frameworks of trust building in order to sustain service reliability and long-term stakeholder relationships in public utility organizations*

**Keywords: Trust Building, Service Reliability, Public Utilities, Stakeholder Engagement, National Water and Sewerage Corporation**

## Introduction

The reliability of services is a key element of successful performance for public utility organizations, especially those that operate in key sectors such as water and sanitation services. Reliability in service delivery means that a utility is always available, responds promptly to any disruptions that may occur, delivers quality services, and addresses customer concerns (Taylor, 2022). For public utility organizations such as the National Water and Sewerage Corporation (NWSC) in Uganda, reliability is not only a technical requirement but also a relational and managerial requirement that affects trust and legitimacy.

Trust building has been increasingly seen as an essential factor that determines service reliability in public and private sector organizations. Generally, trust is defined as the confidence that an organization's integrity, competence, transparency, and reliability inspire in its stakeholders. In the context of public utilities, trust is influenced by factors such as confidentiality of customer information, ethicalness, transparent communication, involvement of stakeholders in decision-making, and reliability of service over time. Where trust is established, there is a likelihood that the stakeholders will work together, bear with service disruptions, and sustain relationships with service providers.

For instance, NWSC has undertaken various reforms in Uganda with the aim of enhancing operational efficiency and customer service. Despite such efforts, issues of service reliability, customer complaints, and public perceptions of accountability and ethical conduct continue to exist in some of the service areas (Kirabo et al., 2019; Ongom & Sserwanga, 2021). Although the role of infrastructure and technology has been extensively researched in relation to service reliability, the role of relational factors such as trust building has not been sufficiently explored in empirical research in public utility organizations.

Previous studies have shown that trust promotes cooperation, minimizes conflicts, and improves service outcomes through positive stakeholder relationships (Mayer et al., 2018; Deferne et al., 2023). In the context of business relationship management, trust has been proven to improve collaboration, information sharing, and service reliability (Nyongesa & Wanjala, 2021; Hernández et al., 2020). However, there is a scarcity of empirical studies on the impact of trust building practices on service reliability at NWSC, particularly at the Kampala Service Centre.

The study thus aims to investigate the effect of trust building on service reliability at the National Water and Sewerage Corporation. The objectives of the study include assessing the perceptions of trust building practices at NWSC among its stakeholders, exploring the relationship between trust building and service reliability, and determining the extent of influence of trust building on service reliability. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on public utility service management and provides valuable insights into trust building practices for improved service reliability and stakeholder satisfaction.

**Results**

**Table 1: Showing descriptive results on trust building**

| Statement | SD (%) | D (%) | NS (%) | A (%) | SA (%) | Mean | Std. Dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Confidentiality is considered crucial for gaining a competitive edge in NWSC | 2.5 | 0 | 2.5 | 49.4 | 45.6 | 4.35 | .769 |
| NWSC consistently demonstrates a high level of confidentiality in its operations | 2.5 | 0 | 6.3 | 58.2 | 32.9 | 4.19 | .769 |
| NWSC ensures confidentiality in handling clients' information | 0 | 3.8 | 2.5 | 32.9 | 60.8 | 4.51 | .732 |
| NWSC maintains a transparent line of communication with its customers | 2.5 | 1.3 | 5.1 | 39.2 | 51.9 | 4.37 | .850 |
| NWSC actively involves stakeholders in decision-making processes | 0 | 0 | 6.3 | 40.5 | 53.2 | 4.47 | .617 |
| NWSC exhibits consistency in service quality and performance over time | 0 | 2.5 | 3.8 | 53.2 | 40.5 | 4.32 | .671 |
| NWSC adheres to ethical standards in its operations | 20.3 | 1.3 | 6.3 | 24.1 | 48.1 | 3.78 | 1.550 |
| NWSC promptly resolves customer concerns | 1.3 | 1.3 | 2.5 | 44.3 | 50.6 | 4.42 | .727 |

Source: Research findings (2024)

Based on the findings of the study as illustrated in Table 4.4 above, a substantial 92.4% of the respondents were in total agreement concerning the aspect of confidentiality in the creation of NWSC's competitive advantage. Those who disagreed and strongly disagreed comprised 5.0%. The mean was high at 4.35 with a standard deviation of 0.769. This shows a high level of agreement concerning the aspect of confidentiality. This implies that the stakeholders understand the importance of confidentiality in the creation of the company's competitive advantage. This is in line with the findings in the literature review concerning the importance of confidentiality in the success of a company. Not only does confidentiality promote trust among the key stakeholders, but it also safeguards confidential data and other sensitive information, as emphasized by different researchers (Smithson & Patel, 2018; Hernandez, 2020). In addition to that, confidentiality is vital in managing the risk of data breaches and other forms of unauthorized disclosures, which may greatly influence the reputation and competitive advantage of an organization (Adams, 2019; Bennett & James, 2020).

One informant interviewed mentioned that,

*"Trust serves as the foundation of our relationship with customers. It's what drives loyalty, fosters open communication, and ensures customers feel confident in choosing our services."* This sentiment underscores the importance of trust as a cornerstone for building and maintaining strong relationships with stakeholders.

Moving on to NWSC's consistent demonstration of confidentiality, 91.1% of respondents were in total agreement that NWSC upholds confidentiality standards. With 2.5% expressing disagreement and 6.3% remaining neutral, these positive perceptions imply that NWSC's efforts in maintaining confidentiality are widely recognized and appreciated by stakeholders. The mean value obtained was high at 4.19 and a corresponding standard deviation of 0.769. This recognition can foster trust, strengthen the organization's

reputation, and potentially attract more clients and partners who value confidentiality. This aligns with research by Hernández (2020), highlighting the importance of confidentiality in fostering trust and enhancing organizational reputation. Additionally, Bennett and James (2020) emphasize the positive impact of confidentiality on attracting and retaining clients and partners who value privacy and data security.

Further still, 93.7% of respondents totally agreed that NWSC's capability to ensure confidentiality in handling client information. With only 3.8% disagreeing and 2.5% remaining neutral, these findings suggest a strong trust in NWSC's measures to protect client data. The mean value attained was high at 4.51 with a corresponding a low standard deviation of 0.732. This high level of trust in NWSC's capability to ensure confidentiality aligns with findings from Adams (2019), who emphasizes the critical role of confidentiality in minimizing service disruptions and enhancing customer satisfaction within organizational settings. Similarly, Bennett and James (2020) affirm the importance of confidentiality in healthcare organizations, highlighting its impact on reducing medical errors and improving patient outcomes. Additionally, Hernández (2020) underscores the significance of trust in enhancing collaboration and fostering smoother interactions, ultimately leading to improved service quality and reliability. One key informant highlighted that, *"NWSC assures the utmost privacy of personal information through robust measures, including state-of-the-art data handling systems and rigorous adherence to stringent privacy policies".* The informant elaborated that NWSC has invested significantly in advanced data protection technologies, ensuring that sensitive information is safeguarded against unauthorized access or breaches.

Regarding transparency in communication with customers, a substantial 91.1% of respondents generally agreed that NWSC effectively communicates with transparency. With only 3.8% generally disagreeing and 5.1% remaining neutral, these findings indicate that effective communication by NWSC is instrumental in fostering trust, enhancing stakeholder engagement, and facilitating informed decision-making. This is supported by the mean value of 4.37 obtained and a standard deviation of 0.850. This can ultimately lead to stronger customer relationships, increased customer loyalty, and a positive organizational reputation. This aligns with research by Hernández (2020) and Bennett and James (2020), which emphasize the importance of transparent communication in building trust and enhancing organizational reputation. Transparent communication allows customers to feel informed and involved in decision-making processes, leading to stronger relationships and increased loyalty. One of the key informants had this to say,

*"While NWSC generally communicates transparently, there have been instances where clarity could be improved, especially during complex decision-making processes".*

Another key informant noted, *"Transparency is key in our communication approach. We strive to provide our customers with clear, honest, and timely information to build trust and ensure informed decision-making."*

The study findings on stakeholder involvement in decision-making revealed that an overwhelming 93.7% of respondents were in general agreement on NWSC's commitment to involving stakeholders. With only 6.3% remaining neutral, this high level of agreement suggests that NWSC's collaborative approach can lead to more informed decisions, increased stakeholder buy-in, and stronger relationships. The mean value obtained was very high at 4.45 and a low corresponding standard deviation of 0.617. Therefore, this engagement can ultimately result in better organizational outcomes, improved stakeholder satisfaction, and an enhanced organizational reputation. This was supported by one of the key informants who highlighted that, *"Involving stakeholders in decision-making ensures that their voices are heard and their concerns are addressed. It leads to better decisions, increased stakeholder buy-in, and ultimately, stronger relationships…this highlights the significance of stakeholder engagement in driving organizational outcomes and reinforcing trust between NWSC and its stakeholders".*

Regarding consistency in service quality and performance, a notable 93.7% of respondents generally agreed that NWSC consistently delivers quality services. With only 2.5% disagreeing and 3.8% remaining neutral, these findings indicate that NWSC's commitment to consistent service delivery fosters trust and enhances customer satisfaction. The mean attained was 4.32 and a standard deviation if 0.671. This aligns with findings from Mayer et al. (2018), who emphasize the importance of consistency in service delivery for building trust and satisfaction among customers. Additionally, Colquitt et al. (2017) highlight the positive relationship between consistent service quality and customer loyalty. Hernández (2020) also underscores the significance of consistency in service delivery for enhancing organizational reputation and fostering positive stakeholder relationships.

A respondent interviewed shared that, *"NWSC has consistently delivered on its promises, engaged with stakeholders transparently, and taken prompt action to address concerns. For instance, during a recent service outage, NWSC kept customers informed and worked diligently to restore services in Muyenga Kampala, which significantly boosted trust."* These examples highlight the organization's efforts and effectiveness in building and maintaining trust through consistent and transparent actions.

Concerning adherence to ethical standards, the findings revealed that 72.2% of respondents generally agreed, while 21.6% generally disagreed and 6.3% remained neutral. The mean obtained was 3.78 with a relatively high standard deviation of 1.550. The relatively high disagreement percentage suggests potential areas for improvement in NWSC's ethical practices. Strict adherence to ethical

standards is crucial for maintaining organizational integrity, trustworthiness, and reputation. Addressing these concerns and ensuring consistent ethical practices can enhance stakeholder trust and bolster organizational credibility.

"*NWSC upholds good work ethics and professionalism in its interactions with customers. Employees are trained to deliver services with integrity, honesty, and competence, fostering trust through consistent and reliable service delivery*" Said one of the Stakeholders.

Additionally, key informants were also asked to recall situations where trust (or lack thereof) impacted the overall service experience with NWSC. One informant shared that,

*"I remember a situation where NWSC failed to communicate effectively about a planned maintenance activity, leading to confusion and frustration among customers. This lack of transparency eroded trust and negatively impacted the overall service experience".* This example underscores the critical role of trust in shaping customer perceptions and experiences with NWSC's services.

With regards to the prompt resolution of customer concerns, there was an overwhelming agreement at 94.9% on the effectiveness of NWSC in customer service practices. The low disagreement at 2.6% and neutrality at 2.5% also indicate that NWSC is an organization that is responsive to its customers, thereby ensuring customer satisfaction. The mean value was very high at 4.42, coupled with an equally high standard deviation at 0.727. This is in line with the research done by Bennett and James (2020), which emphasizes the need for an organization to have effective customer service practices in order to enhance customer satisfaction and organizational reputation. In addition, Mayer et al. (2018) also emphasize the need for prompt resolution of customer concerns in ensuring customer loyalty.One key informant emphasized that, *"NWSC prioritizes adherence to global standards, ensuring that the water supplied and sewerage effluent discharged consistently meet WHO standards. Through rigorous testing and treatment processes, the organization guarantees water safety, reinforcing customer confidence in the quality and reliability of the services provided."*

Furthermore, another key informant highlighted that, *"NWSC excels in handling customer issues with efficiency, fairness, and integrity. Customer complaints are addressed promptly, and feedback is provided in a timely manner, reflecting the organization's commitment to transparency and accountability. By resolving issues transparently and engaging with customers proactively, NWSC earns trust and fosters long-term relationships with its stakeholders".*

In conclusion, the descriptive findings from the study highlight a positive perception among respondents regarding NWSC's efforts in trust-building. A significant majority of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the organization effectively gathers stakeholder feedback, indicating confidence in NWSC's feedback collection methods. This positive perception of effective feedback collection resonates with Deferne (2023) and Singh (2023), who emphasize the importance of open and honest communication in cultivating credibility and transparency with stakeholders. Additionally, a substantial majority recognized the value of employee feedback in NWSC's communication strategies, reflecting the organization's inclusive approach to communication and trust-building. These findings align with Hernández (2020), Mayer et al. (2018), and Colquitt et al. (2017), who highlight the role of trust in enhancing collaboration, reducing uncertainty, and fostering positive working relationships and job performance.

**Table 2: Correlation between trust building and service reliability**

| | | Trust building | Service reliability |
|---|---|---|---|
| Trust building | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .581** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 79 | 79 |
| Service reliability | Pearson Correlation | .581** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 79 | 79 |
| **. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). | | | |

Source: Research findings (2024)

The results in Table 4.8 show that there is a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between trust building and service reliability as revealed by Pearson's Correlation coefficient, which is 0.581 with its corresponding P-value at 0.000. The correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed). This implies that there is a moderate, positive, and significant relationship between trust building and service reliability as revealed by the study results obtained from NWSC, which is the case study. Thus, emphasis on improving trust building will most likely lead to an improvement in service reliability. This is in line with the findings by Hernández (2020) which affirmed that the building of trust generates many benefits, particularly in that it helps in improved collaboration by nurturing partnerships, thereby promoting smoother interactions aimed at improving service reliability. Furthermore, Ferrin (2021) identified

a robust association between trust and reduced conflict, demonstrating that trust-building efforts lead to increased cooperation. Additionally, Abidin (2017) carried out a study on how trust building impacted by business ethics in Malaysia and the findings revealed a positive relationship between trust building and service reliability in sampled organisations.

## Conclusions

The findings also revealed that the stakeholders acknowledge and appreciate NWSC's efforts to maintain confidentiality, transparency, and service reliability. However, there are areas of concern, like ethical compliance, which need to be addressed and enhanced. Furthermore, the findings revealed that there was a positive and significant relationship between trust building and service reliability. Also, the results of the regression analysis revealed that trust building had a statistically significant impact on service reliability. Thus, trust building had a significant impact on service reliability in NWSC. Furthermore, the results revealed that by emphasizing trust building, service reliability can be enhanced further. Moreover, the results revealed that the standardized coefficient (Beta) of 0.447 indicated a moderate positive impact of trust building on service reliability of NWSC. Also, this revealed that trust building was the major contributor to service reliability. Thus, the hypothesis H2, which posited that "trust building has a positive and significant effect on service reliability of NWSC," was accepted.

## Recommendations

To strengthen trust and enhance service reliability at NWSC's Kampala Service Centre, a comprehensive approach to trust building is essential. This approach should encompass both internal and external stakeholders, recognizing trust as a foundational element in fostering customer satisfaction, loyalty, and overall organizational success.

Transparency should be a cornerstone of NWSC's operations and communications. Establishing clear and open communication channels is crucial to keeping stakeholders informed about the organization's activities, policies, and performance. Regular updates on service delivery, infrastructure development, and potential challenges or disruptions that may impact service reliability demonstrate accountability, honesty, and integrity, thereby fostering trust.

Building strong relationships with customers through personalized and empathetic engagement is paramount. Understanding and addressing the unique needs, preferences, and concerns of customers with tailored services and solutions can significantly enhance trust and loyalty. Implementing customer-centric initiatives, such as dedicated customer support teams, personalized communication strategies, and proactive problem-solving approaches, will further solidify NWSC's reputation as a reliable and customer-focused service provider.

Trust building efforts should also extend inward to the organization's workforce. Employees play a pivotal role in delivering high-quality services and cultivating lasting relationships with customers. Therefore, investing in comprehensive employee training and development programs that emphasize the importance of trust, professionalism, and ethical conduct is crucial. Empowered employees, equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills, and resources, foster a culture of trust, collaboration, and continuous improvement within NWSC.

The management and leadership of NWSC play an important role in setting the tone on the importance of building trust. By demonstrating a strong commitment to ethical leadership, transparency, and accountability through regular communication, open-door policies, and engagement with both the employees and the customers, communication gaps may be addressed, mutual respect may be established, and a culture of trust and inclusiveness may be promoted within the organization.

Lastly, the establishment of a dedicated trust-building committee or task force, comprising representatives from various departments of the organization such as customer service, human resources, and communication, may be beneficial to the organization. By working together as a team, they may be able to develop and implement strategies on building trust within the organization, while at the same time keeping track of the progress and continuously responding to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders.

By adopting this holistic and proactive approach to trust building, NWSC can strengthen its relationships with stakeholders, enhance service reliability, and position itself as a trusted and preferred service provider in the Kampala Service Centre.

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