

## **Investment in ICT Utility and Warranty for the Yearning Customer**

*by Boniface Mwirigi Kiula*

Boards of Directors and top managers in many institutions struggle to break through the satisfaction barrier with respect to their core services. The ever changing technology, economic, legal, social and political environment drives a dynamic customer culture. Customers are more sophisticated, the range of choices has increased exponentially, the old maxims about the irreproachability of public service have collapsed even as the line of distinction between public service and private sector has grown thinner. You cannot issue a “take or leave” ultimatum and still keep in business!

This is the background that informs the need to invest in understanding utility and warranty. Stretching it further into the future of ICT investments makes greater sense with the inevitability of robust ICT infrastructure, systems and services in the modern organization.

Customers of all walks of life value your business as a utility, a warranty or the intersection of both. Business in this sense represents the reason why your organization exists. Perhaps as county government, you exist to deliver services as defined in the Kenya Constitution, as a university, you exist to provide higher education, research and development or as a bank you exist to provide financial services. All institutions have some sort of business else they should be confined to the chronicles of history.

In fulfilling the reason for your existence, you must invest in the fulfillment of utility and warranty of your products or services. Utility in this context stands for the functionality offered by a product or service from the customer's perspective. This is what the customer gets or its fitness for purpose. For instance I enrolled for a course. If I got the training and graduated, I got utility. You wanted a car, you got it! You sought for seedlings, you got them! It is disingenuous to settle at the utility level! Most customers get what they want.

Unfortunately not many get the warranty! Warranty in this case is a promise or guarantee that a product or service will meet its agreed requirements. The focus here shifts from the product to how it is delivered and its fitness for use. This is where higher education has been at loggerheads with the industry. You graduated so many artists, engineers, architects, surveyors, software developers...and the industry grumbles that they are not qualified for the job market! Why yet we invested three, four, five... years of time, money and expertise to get it done?

Education institutions grapple with warranty often times with school leavers who cannot stealthily survive in the roughshod journey of life, engineers, medics, architects who cannot

meet the needs of the industry nor be registered by their professional bodies or research papers that have no correlation with the needs of the citizens that funded them.

The common sense of utility and warranty is at the very core of quality management systems that stipulate that the real assurance of customer satisfaction is the ability to meet both the objective and the subjective aspects of customer requirements. Customers cannot benefit from something that is fit for purpose but not fit for use. The converse is also true.

In ICT governance, we must invest in capabilities and resources, together referred to as information assets, to develop services that deliver value to the customer. Further, these capabilities and resources must be used properly to create the value due to the customer. In this case capabilities represent the management, organization, processes and knowledge while resources are capital, infrastructure, applications and information with people fitting in the continuum of both capabilities and resources.

Sometimes customers complain of slow services, long queues and long travels to get the services. They still get the service, the utility, albeit after pushing and shoving! We must not just invest in ICT. The investment also ought to make sense to our clients by improving the speed of service, reducing the length of the queue or even eliminating the need for the queue as well as trimming the need to travel. In this case ICT warranty may be a formal agreement such as a service level agreement (SLA) or contract or brand image or the coolness of not having to wait on the queue.

Deriving the utility and warranty and therefore creation of value for the yearning open-mouthed customer needs skillful management of capabilities and resources. This is where the potential for ICT in the expeditious delivery of services lies. *Have a merry Christmas with utility and warranty!*

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