
Service-Oriented Employee Motivation: Managing Self-Motivation Challenges along with Motivating Customers to Coproduce their Service Experience

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ABSTRACT: *Service-oriented employee motivation entails employees' role in motivating customers to coproduce their service experience with the company along with handling their own workplace and personal challenges. While working in a service-oriented company which believes in value co-creation with the customers, employees have to motivate customers to be a part of the company's production, value chain, marketing, and quality assurance operations. Along with customer motivation, these employees also have to manage their own attitudes, values, ethics, workplace stress, level of motivation, and other personal and professional challenges at the same time. This paper identifies and explains these internal and external challenges in the light of emerging service-dominant (S-D) logic and recommends the ways employees can effectively deal with them. The paper also suggests implications for future research in this emerging field.*

Keywords: Co-creation of Service Experience, Employee Motivation in a Service-Oriented Organization, Motivation Challenges for Service Systems, Service-Dominant Logic and Organizational Behavior.

Moving forward from the traditional Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic which entails tangibles (goods), the modern Service-Dominant (S-D) logic focuses on service which is intangible (Vargo & Lusch, 2004, 2008; Lusch & Vargo, 2006). The journey from tangible goods to intangible services has now taken a step ahead, that is: ‘experiences’ which are memorable. Experiences are memorable based on the interaction between an organization and its customers (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2012). There are organizations which only produce tangible goods to serve their customers, and the contrary; there are organizations which try to produce customer solutions through memorable customer experiences. They emphasize on experiential nature of service (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Grönroos, 2007).

In order to help customers gain memorable service experiences, organizations have to make efforts from the very first step till an unending point in time. In traditional Goods-Dominant (G-D) logic, the production was kept quite separate from the customers’ interaction and he used to get what was provided by the producer (Bowen & Hollowell, 2002). But in modern Service-Dominant (S-D) logic, the customer directly interacts with the producer, supply chain members, and all other value network partners. All these participants get together to co-create value for each other (Subramony & Pugh, 2015; Zeithaml, Bitner, & Gremler, 2005).

Now the question arises who motivates the customers to coproduce their memorable service experience and how it all happens. The emerging service-dominant (S-D) logic takes customers as an “external human resource” for the organization. In traditional HRM setups, organizations use to motivate their internal human resource (employees) to motivate their customers to buy and make repeated purchases. But now, customers are taken as the co-producers, and more importantly, a part of the organization’s human capital and value chain networks (Subramony & Pugh, 2015). Customers are the external employees of the organizations which also have certain expectations and performance standards based on which they gain memorable service experiences (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2012).

Motivating customers to co-produce their service experience has become a challenge for modern employers. They now need to motivate and encourage employees, who in return, can motivate their customers to gain memorable service experiences (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2012). In a service-oriented organization, customers are also supposed to play their role as innovators, quality surveyors, and marketers like the internal employees of that organization. These customers are attracted, motivated, and rewarded by the organization’s employees.

The purpose of this research paper is to identify the ways employees in an organization motivate its customers to coproduce their memorable service experience and the challenges which these employees face during this process. Basically, it is a shift of the traditional employee motivation to the service-oriented employee motivation. In traditional employee motivation, the employers were only concerned with the productivity of their employees along with the conventional ways to manage customer relationships. But now, customers also need to be considered an integral part of the organizational system. Now employees are expected to motivate, lead, encourage, and reward the customers in their coproduction and value co-creation process and deal with various internal and external challenges which come in their way of customer motivation (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2012). The following sections explain how employees in a service-oriented organization manage the external human resources (customers) along with handling their own personal issues and workplace challenges.

Impact of Attitude, Values, and Ethics

Literature is full of the researches which explain the impact of employees’ attitude, values, and ethical behavior on the customers’ purchase decision, repeated purchases, and overall loyalty with the organization. Employees’ attitude and behavior is among those hidden factors which are less observed by the colleagues in the same departments, but more noticed by the customers interacting with these employees (Barrick, Stewart, & Piotrowski, 2002; Kim, Kolb, & Kim, 2013). Bulgarella (2005) believes that positive attitude of employees can be judged by their level of interest in the engagement with the company and its customers. If an employee is apparently looking less engaged in his work commitments or dealing with the customers, it shows his negative attitude which turns to be harmful for the company’s productivity. Such employees fail to help company’s customers in the coproduction of their service experience. In contrast, those employees who keep themselves engaged with the customers also help them in gaining memorable service experience with the company (Tahir Naveed, 2012).

Moreover, an employee with a positive and calm attitude and good ethical behavior feels more committed to his job which ensures his long term relationship with the company (Saari & Judge, 2004). The customers also consider it a positive thing to be served by the same customer service representative whenever they visit the company’s office or outlets. A good working environment also helps employees in developing a positive attitude towards the company (Judge, Thoresen,

Bono, & Patton, 2001). When the working environment in the organization is pleasant, the employees enjoy interacting with the customers and welcome their queries more happily. Researchers also believe that a pleasant working environment enhances the sense of belonging in the minds of the employees. This sense induces them to treat customers with a smiling face, strong emotional engagement, soft attitude, and sweet voice and tone (Auh, Menguc, Fisher, & Haddad, 2011).

Cooperation with the Customers

In order to coproduce service experience with the company, the customers need full cooperation and support from its internal customers (employees). From first encounter to the selection of the products and the after sales service – the customers must seek encouragement, directions, and reward from company's employees at each and every step. It is observed that customers do not come back to the company if they feel lack of cooperation and support from the customer service representatives or other customer-contacting employees. They hate dealing with rude and snippy employees (Bowen, Siehl, Schneider, 1989).

Similar to these adverse impacts of less cooperation and support, employees also fail to achieve their individual targets when customers are dissatisfied. This thing negatively impacts the company's performance (Chang & Chen, 2008). In order to encounter this issue, managers need to motivate their employees to show full cooperation and support to every incoming customer so that he or she can coproduce a memorable service experience with the company, make repeated purchases, recommend the company's products to others, and become a brand loyal customer (Lindgreen, Vanhamme, & Beverland, 2012).

A Positive Employee Attitude Motivates Customers to Coproduce their Service Experience

Michel, Kavanagh, & Tracey (2013) believe that an employee's attitude and behavior with the company's customers can prove to be his biggest asset, or conversely, the biggest liability. Keeping organizations' motivational practices and programs aside, an employee must seek internal or self-motivation in order to develop a positive attitude and soft ethical behavior for an effective performance of his job duties (Hashim, Zaleha, Rasid, & Ismail, 2011). Organizations now also seek for employees who are self-motivated; want to work hard and enjoy it, feel proud of themselves as a part of the organization, and love to serve its customers whole heartedly (Schmit&Allscheid, 1995).

A positive attitude help employee in motivating the company's customers in gaining a memorable positive service experience. Unlike traditional customer services, the modern service-oriented employee motivation entails a deep focus on motivating customers to be a part of the organization's human capital. Service-oriented employees help customers to be their partners in the supply chain operations, production, marketing, quality assurance, and other areas of business operations (Pugh, Dietz, Wiley, & Brooks, 2002). All this is only possible when the employee has a positive attitude, values, and ethical behavior with these external human resources of the company (Awadh& Ismail, 2012; (Yasir Shafiq, 2012)).

Impact of Customer Attributes on Employees in a Service-Oriented Organization

Customer contact employees; specially working in retail, banking, hospitality, call centers, etc. have to sometimes deal with angry, plain rude, and difficult customers (Bolton & Drew, 1991). Employees need to tackle such customers effectively in order to maintain their satisfaction with the job high and stay away from workplace stress (Makarem& Al-Amin, 2014). They must make their customers feel happy and satisfied in all kind of situations. Hashim, Zaleha, Rasid, & Ismail (2011) state that customer contact employees must have traits and capabilities to deal with all types of customers with a happy and calm mood. They have to think in their feet and keep them cool during the whole encounter or interaction process. The need for a positive attitude, values, and soft ethical behavior further increases when the customer gets angry on poor customer services, bad quality of the product delivered, or any kind of misunderstanding (Long, Ismail, Zaleha, Rasid, Hwee, & Jiun, 2012; Eddleston, Kidder, Litzky, 2002).

The view that "customer is always right" also fits true in this regard. In a service-oriented organization, the customer contact employees must keep in mind that customers are not paid by the company to be a part of their human capital. Rather, they must be encouraged, motivated, leaded, and rewarded by the employees themselves in order to help them in gaining a memorable service experience (Schneider, Ehrhart, Mayer, Saltz, & Jolly, 2005). If a customer is feeling dissatisfied with the company's service, the employee must make every effort to resolve his issue in the shortest possible time (Tax, Brown, & Chandrashekar, 1998).

In no condition, the employee should lose his temperament as it will make the customer more agitated. In a service-oriented setup, the employee needs to think that customer has to coproduce value with the company with his own resources and skills. If the company loses

such customer, it will actually lose half of its resources and skills (Hennig-Thurau, 2004). And most importantly, the employee has to make his customer ensure that he has effectively understood his problem. The best way to make him ensure this is to listen to his issue properly and give him time to explain it. At the end, he must suggest him an initial solution to make him calm down (Mathe&Slevich, 2013).

Workplace Stress Management

Stress is referred to as an external pressure on the mental, emotional, and physical health of a person which tempts him responds to external environment in a different way. Stress brings an undesired pressure which restricts the person from performing his duties effectively and efficiently. At the workplace, stress brings negative impacts on the employees' performance and causes inefficiency and financial cost to the organizations. Workplace stress affects employees at all organizational levels irrespective of what are their job descriptions. A number of internal and external environmental factors cause workplace stress. These factors are often beyond the control of the employees. Generally, workplace stress is caused by poor working environment, lack of direction to perform an assigned target, tight deadline, lack of expertise in a particular area, family disturbances, and poor communication (Weinberg, Sutherland, & Cooper 2010).

In a service-oriented organization, managers must keep in view that employees not only need to stay motivated for their own performance, but also need to keep company's customers motivated to coproduce their service experience. (Ismail, Bongogoh, Segaran, Tudin, Ajis, & Ismail, 2009). It is only possible when they are stress free at the workplace. In case they are under high work burden, performing in tight deadlines, and have lack of direction, they cannot motivate customers to play their part in value co-creation with the organization. Weinberg, Sutherland, & Cooper (2010) have suggested that manager can resolve workplace stress problems for such kind of employees by assigning job tasks according to the knowledge, skills, and competencies of each employee.

Another workplace stress issue faced by employees in a service-oriented organization is negative behavior of customers. When an employee feels frustrated with a bad customer dealing, he loses his efficiency for the entire day (Ployhart, Iddekinge, MacKenzie, 2011). This is the initial stage where the manager can control this stress and stop it from becoming dissatisfaction (Ismail, Mohamad, Hussain, Zaleha, Rasid, & Rashid, 2011). The manager can keep him motivated by appreciating his work, providing a pleasant work environment and

giving flexible work options where necessary (Stranks, 2005; Koys, 2011).

Concluding Thoughts

The emerging service-dominant (S-D) logic focuses on the role of customers in the coproduction and value co-creation with the companies. Considering this role highly important in a service-oriented organizational setup, customers are now called the external human capital of the organizations who bring their skills, competencies, and experiences to co-create value with the company. But the main challenge for organizations is to motivate these external human resources to be a part of their organizational setup and play their active part in the value co-creation process.

In traditional setups, organizations motivate their employees to perform well at the workplace and provide the best customer services to attract customers. But according to the emerging service dominant logic, the employees are also expected to motivate, encourage, lead, and reward customers to play their role and gain memorable service experience. In this motivation process, the employees face certain internal and external challenges; like managing their attitude, values, and ethics, staying motivated, managing workplace stress, dealing with the negative or rude behavior of customers, etc. All these challenges have been addressed in this paper along with the management strategies to deal with them in an effective and efficient way. The challenges highlighted and discussed in the paper also have implications for future research studies. The researchers can identify other factors which affect employees' performance and customer motivation in a service-oriented organizational setup.

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