

The Role Of Employee Training and Access to Information On Productivity For Safaricom Retail Outlets In Uasin Gishu County, Kenya

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to establish the role of training of employees and access to information on productivity in Safaricom PLC retail shops. Service systems industry play a pivotal role in modern industries' productivity today. One such system is the telecommunication industry service systems, which offer varied services that are essential to individuals as well as corporates. The productivity of Safaricom PLC retail shops is determined by business service system success which ensures increased sales and therefore higher profits. To achieve success managers adopt strategies such as employee training and access to the right information among others. Despite these measures in telecommunications industry, it has proved in some cases not to be successful in achieving high productivity. The company can take their retail traders for training but still the output remains dismal. It has been confirmed that some agents have access to the right information but still cannot deliver services to high-level satisfaction of customers. The study had a target population of 444 respondents which were from Safaricom PLC outlet in Uasin Gishu County Kenya. This study adopted a survey design based on a sample drawn from across Safaricom PLC Retail Shops in Uasin Gishu County. Further, The study used Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) to calculate the sample size of 205 which represented employees of Safaricom PLC in the study area. Questionnaires and interview schedules were then used to collect the data, which were analyzed using statistical package for social science (SPSS). The study established that training and access to information across the retail stores increased productivity levels by 70% as per the Net Promoter Score (NPS) assessments. The study recommends consistency in employee training since necessary skillsets promote personalized experience and productivity.

Keywords: Employee training; Access; Information; Productivity; Customer.

INTRODUCTION

Service systems

Service, has been described by Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2004) a time-perishable, intangible experience performed for a customer, acting in the role of co-producer. Service is important in today's transactions worldwide as has been emphasized by Grönroos (2007), where he explains that humans today live in a service economy and that service has placed itself as the cornerstone of postindustrial societies. Service, now represent the majority of the gross domestic product of developed countries.

Many businesses in the contemporary society today, heavily rely upon service systems because they provide timely, sustainable services and increase the productivity of employees in the organization. Tischner *et al.*, 2002 describes service system as consisting of 'tangible products and intangible services designed and combined so that they jointly are capable of fulfilling

specific customer needs'. The concept of service system was proposed from the perspective of economic or value view point. In their classification, Rigby and Cáceres (2001), categorised a system into agricultural systems, manufacturing systems (Smith 2003) and service systems (Spohrer et al. 2007), further, these are relevant to agricultural economy, manufacturing economy and service economy, respectively.

A definition advanced by Pinhanez (2009), reveals that a system is "a voluntary and human usable system, which is a usable system, which contains a significant level of people or organizations as components during operation and needs voluntary engagement of an external person/organization to produce value." A service system or organization or firm consists of an infrastructure, substance and management as subsystems to directly meet the demands of humans. The infrastructure consists of a network and substance "flows" over an infrastructure. Wang, (2013) has stipulated the roles of management in an organization as coordinating, leading, planning and controlling, all of which are applied to infrastructure and substance systems. Tukker, (2004), espouses that a service system business model allows firms to create new sources of added value and competitiveness, since they fulfill client needs in an integrated and customized way, therefore allow clients to focus on core activities and can build unique relationships with clients, that enhance customer loyalty, and can innovate faster because they follow their client needs better.

Zoltners, *et al* (2008) have explained that in 2006 United States firms spent over \$800 billion on sales forces. This a huge spending and as such explains the wisdom of Safaricom, a telecommunication service provider deployment of sales agents in their countrywide retail shops. The agents are meant to work as frontline employees who deal directly with the customers on behalf of the company. According to Hartline et al. (2000) frontline employees are the first and only representation of the service organization and have a large impact on both customer satisfaction and the service quality delivered (Schneider & Bowen 1995). Despite the well-known importance of managing the customer contact point, service organizations continue to lose customers due to dissatisfactory interactions with frontline employees (Schultz 2002).

Statement of the problem

The productivity of retail shops established by Safaricom company is determined by business service system success, which in turn is attributed to high profits and increased sales. In order to ensure success in sustainable service system, managers adopt several strategies including; training of employees and employee access to right information. However, it has proved in some cases not to be fruitful in achieving high productivity. The company can take their retail traders for training but still the output remains dismal. Further, some agents have been found to have access to the right information but still cannot deliver the services to the satisfaction level of the customers. These scenarios have prompted this research to be carried out to establish the effect of staff training and efficient access to information on the productivity of the retail centre agents in Safaricom PLC.

Training of Employee and retail shop productivity

Schneider and Bowen, (2009), have stated that employees are major assets of any organization and that the active role they play towards a company's success cannot be underestimated. Further, the scholars underscores the value of equipping employees through effective training as vital so as to maximize job performance. In addition, employees must be positioned strategically to take on the challenges of the today's competitive business climate. Silpakit and Fisk, 2007, allude to the fact that extensive research has been conducted in the area of Human Resource Management, the same cannot be said on employee training especially as it concerns

developing countries, (Silpakit and Fisk, 2007). According to Tharenou, Alan and Celia (2007) the goal of training is to enhance the organization effectiveness. It also demands an influence on employee's performance, as well as in relation to organizational performance which is mediated by means of employee's performance. Aguinis and Kraiger (2009) said that training improves the overall organization profitability, effectiveness, productivity, and other outcomes that are directly related to the training in improving the quality of services.

According to Saleem and Mehwish (2011) training is an organized increase from the know-how skills and sensations needed for staff members to execute efficiently in the offered process, as well as, to operate in underling situation. Moreover, it also enhances the capabilities of panel of employees in very effective way by motivating them and transforming them in to well organize and well-mannered, that ultimately affects the performance of organization. Khanfar (2011) argued that training is an active means to enable individual to make use of his capability and his potential capability. Training is only considered when people of an organization are looking for promotion of rank. Some employees prefer training to improve professional skills that help them to work more efficiently. Professional training enhances knowledge than otherwise (Kennedy, 2009).

In the real world, organizational growth and development is affected by a number of factors. In light with the present research during the development of organizations, employee training plays a vital role in improving performance as well as increasing productivity, Mills, Chase and Margulies, (2004). This in turn leads to placing organizations in a better position to face competition and stay at the top. This therefore implies an existence of a significant difference between the organizations that train their employees and organizations that do not. Existing literature presents evidence of an existence of obvious effects of training and development on employee performance. Some studies have proceeded by looking at performance in terms of employee performance in particular (Ostrom and Iacobucci, 2001). According to Larsson, and Bowen, (2010), in one way or another, the two are related in the sense that employee performance is a function of organizational performance since employee performance influences general organizational performance. It therefore not only improves the overall performance of the employees to effectively perform their current jobs but also enhances the knowledge, skills an attitude of the workers necessary for the future job, thus contributing to superior organizational performance, (Mills, and Morris, 2006). According to Wright & Geroy (2001), employee competencies change through effective training programs. It not only improves the overall performance of the employees to effectively perform the current job but also enhance the knowledge, skills and attitude of the workers necessary for the future job, thus contributing to superior organizational performance. Through training the employee competencies are developed and enable them to implement the job related work efficiently, and achieve firm objectives in a competitive manner.

Employee Accessibility to Information and Retail shop productivity

The value of an individual's knowledge base is assumed to be non-decreasing in the addition of new information, since procedures represent options that are only exercised when conditions are favorable (Van Alstyne 2007). Existing procedures can also be used in the creation of new procedures. It follows that sharing procedural information increases individual productivity by increasing the range of functions a person can perform. Examples of procedural information sharing include informal knowhow trading in which non-proprietary information is routinely exchanged based on norms of reciprocity (Von Hippel 2008); sharing through the networks of informal, professional or industry associations (Crane 2004); and diffusion when the information is offered at little or no cost as a complement that enhances the sale of a product.

Cellular telephone is the technology of choice in terms of bridging the information gap between rich and poor; becoming one of the most likely access devices for agricultural market information, creating economic opportunities and strengthening social networks in rural areas around the world (Pralahad, 2005). According to DIRSI (Regional Dialogue on the Information Society) 2007 report about mobile phones and poverty in Latin America and the Caribbean, mobile adoption for the poor has long become the most cost effective and accessible alternative to improve their livelihoods. Presenting an economic impact expressed mainly in terms of improved social capital variables such as the strengthening of trust networks and better coordination of informal job markets. Given their limited access to traditional fixed telephony, the poor attribute a significant improvement in quality of life to mobile access. Because of rapid improvements in ICT in developing countries, especially mobile phones, there is a growing interest in its impacts on agricultural markets, Langeard, (2009).

There is vast evidence about the positive effects that cell phone have had around the world. The widespread, voluntary adoption of ICTs for marketing by producers and traders observed in many developing countries suggests that similar gains are likely to be found elsewhere. Aker (2008), for example, studied the impact of the staggered introduction of cell phones on grain market performance in Niger between 2001 and 2006. The primary mechanism by which cell phones affects market-level outcomes appears to be a reduction in search costs for markets. The results provide evidence that cell phones reduce grain price dispersion across markets by a minimum of 6.4% and reduce intra-annual price variation by 10%. Cell phones have a greater impact on price dispersion for market pairs that are farther away, and for those with lower road quality. This effect becomes larger as a higher percentage of markets have cell phone coverage, suggesting that this improved consumer and trader welfare in Niger. Goyal (2008) identified that internet kiosks that provide wholesale price information and alternative market channels to soybean agents in India has led to an increase in the monthly market price by 1-5%. In addition the area under soybean production has increased significantly.

SAMPLE SIZE AND SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

The study used Krejcie and Morgan table (1970) to calculate the sample size. A sample is the segment of the population that is selected for investigation (Bryman and Bell, 2003). In quantitative research, the need to sample is one that is almost invariably encountered. Sampling constitutes a key step in the research process in social survey research. According to the calculations made in Krejcie and Morgan's table, the corresponding sample size was found to be 205 respondents with a target population of 444 employees. The study involved customer service 51%, sales 17%, data 7%, Mpesa champions 19%, Stores operation 4% departments and lastly the management 2%. The distribution of respondents in each department was done according the percentage each had in the target population.

The data collection instruments that were used in the study were questionnaires and interview schedules. A total of 205 questionnaires were issued to the respondents. The study interviewed 2 regional managers. The questionnaires were used since it has been found that this method collects a lot of information over a short period of time while interview schedules were used to provide intense information.

VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

The research purposed to ensure validity of research instruments by using simple language so that the respondents could easily understand them. The researcher also sought the opinion of individuals who rendered intelligent judgment about the adequacy of the questions, these

included reknowned individuals with expert knowledge on validity and reliability of the questionnaires. To ensure the reliability, data collection instruments were determined from the pilot study where the researcher administered the research instruments in the City of Kisumu. The study administered questionnaires to the same respondents twice. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha was applied on the results obtained to determine how items correlate among themselves in the same instrument. The cut off level was set at 0.7. Cronbach's coefficient Alpha of 0.754 was obtained and this indicated that the tool was reliable hence was adopted for collection of data.

Data collection

The researcher obtained the required approvals for data collection in the area of study and thereafter used the method of drop and pick. Questionnaires were dropped and a span of between one and two weeks elapsed to allow time for the respondents to fill in the questionnaires then, the researcher visited the respondents to collect the filled in questionnaires. The researcher explained the purpose of the visit to the respondents and assured the respondents of their confidentiality of any information given for the study.

Data Analysis

Collected data was analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative data analysis procedures. The data from the tools were coded and entered into Statistical Package for Social Sciences where they were analysed and results given in form of frequency tables and graphs. The open-ended questions were analyzed through reporting themes and quotas emerging. The findings were therefore presented in frequency tables and graphs to show the findings of the study. Themes in the secondary data were analyzed using content analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Training of Employees and Retail Shop Productivity

The first objective of the study was to find out how training of employee influences retail shop productivity. The respondents were asked to give their opinion on how training has influenced the productivity of their respective business units and the results were as follows. The responses were to a Likert scale of agreement. This study sought to find out the role of training of employees in influencing retail shop productivity, therefore the researcher investigated how frequent employees get trained at Safaricom Ltd. The findings revealed that 51% of the respondents agreed that they were regularly trained and 27% asserted that employees were occasionally trained while 13% of the respondents said that employees at Safaricom sometimes underwent training, 8% said that they underwent irregular training and only 1% of the respondents disagreed that training was conducted for employees. From the results presented it can be deduced that employees at Safaricom are regularly trained. This therefore enhanced retail shop productivity since training is a fundamental component in enhancing work efficiency and Productivity.

The researcher further sought to establish whether all Safaricom employees in the retail shops participate in training seminars and Workshops. From the results of the data gathered all employees get regular training there by improving service delivery. This was confirmed by 76% of the respondents who indicated that all of them get regular training. When asked to respond whether the training they received had value on their jobs, 90% of them agreed that attending trainings has enabled agent outlets to sustain competition, however, 6% disagreed. Further, the study enquired how the training had affected the respondent in business growth. It was clearly confirmed from the research results that training has led to agent business growth and expansion with 84% of repondents and only 13% disagreed.

Furthermore, 93% of the respondents confirmed that employee performance were boosted after attendance of training, however, 4.6% disagreed and 3.6% were non committal. Finally, 82% of the respondents indicated that employees' skills and knowledge had improved as a result of attendance of training programs, while only 15% were of the contrary opinion and 2% were undecided. It is clear from the study that attendance of training has enabled agent outlets to sustain competition as hugely supported by 90% respondents. From the study, employers have realized the importance of training through multiple employee production that has been manifested through shop productivity. The training offer diverse skills and job knowledge that help shape employees' attitudes and desire to be even more productive. Training is a form of motivation geared towards employees.

Access to Information and Retail Shop Productivity

The research confirmed that accessibility to information about the products and services at Safaricom Ltd is very easy as supported by the response of 87% of the respondents, however, a 8% of the respondents disagreed with this idea while 5.6% were undecided. Further, findings from the research established that employees access basic customer information instantly with 79% of respondents, while 64% confirmed that information given to employees is somehow reliable and free from errors. This supports the view of Von Hippel (2008), that alludes to the fact that sharing information through networks of informal, professional or industry associations and diffusion when the information is offered at little or no cost as a complement, enhances the sale of a product.

From the study 73% of the respondents said that they have secure information delivery channel through which communication is carried out within. Regarding whether shop employees access most information online, 78% agreed that they do. In reference to access to information the results revealed that 74% of service agents, 91% of sales agents and 92% of data agents agreed that employees get access to information instantly while only 8% of the data agents were undecided.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study concludes that training of employees impart necessary skills that will ensure productivity. Training programs that incorporate all employees in accordance with their tasks is preferred to training of only top management. Conclusively this study has established that employees' accessibility to the right information spurs necessary skill development in terms of knowledge base of the company offerings. It is recommended that immediate accessibility to information is key in the present era where clients exhibit impatience and need instant solutions to their challenges. Therefore this study makes recommendations that organizations such as Safaricom PLC design necessary training programmes based on the findings of this research in areas that cause service failures. Although instant access to information has been found to help in service provision, this study concludes that access to information need to be placed in levels where the most crucial information may be accessed by top management only to avoid misuse.

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