

Effect of Work Life Balance and Ethics on Quality of Service

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Abstract

Quality of Service is a key factor for the success of any organization. One of the most important factors contributing to the Quality of Service is Human Resource or the Work force within the organization. The two most important factors which influence the employees to excel in their contribution to Quality of Service in any organization are: Work Life Balance and Ethics. This paper focuses on the effect of Work Life Balance and Ethics in Employees to achieve excellence in Quality of Service .If an organization expects to conduct its business in long term, it requires loyal brand of customers which can be earned only when organizations take care of quality in their work employees and products. It is concluded that an employee whose work life and personal life is balanced and is ethical can be fair and honest to his customers and bring about Quality of Service in Organization.

Key words: Quality of Service, Commitment, Corporate Excellence, Work Life Balance, Stress, Ethics, Customer satisfaction

1. Introduction

A service is a provider/client interaction that creates and captures value (1). Service depends on having a high degree of activities to interact with the customer. Quality of service refers to the level of quality of service, i.e. the guaranteed service quality. High QoS is a high level of performance or achieved service quality. Service quality is a key factor for the success of any organization. Constant improvement in quality is an endeavor of an organization both within the organization's climate and in the organization's products and services. Service quality in an organization focuses not only on Quality products but also on achieving Corporate Excellence. To achieve a high service quality in any organization one of the most important factors are Human Resource or the Work Force within the organization. It is very important to ensure that the work force is well motivated and efficient to achieve excellence in the quality. The 2 most important factors which influence the employees to excel in their contribution to Service Quality in any organization are: Work Life Balance and Ethics

Work life balance is a balance an individual tries to maintain while performing his responsibilities at work place and in his personal life.(2) His professional responsibilities are many juggling between meeting dead lines of boss, communicating and directing subordinates, submitting presentations in meetings, and other day to day activities of managing and organizing information, business trips etc. At his personal level he may want to pursue higher education, may want to pursue his personal hobby, or a game, have home responsibilities, taking the child to a doctor, wanting to take a leisure holiday etc. He is constantly multi tasking and has to fit into various role. A positive balance in the two can result in achieving a Work Life Balance. This Work Life Balance in an individual is an important factor which influences him to excel in his contribution to Service Quality in organization. Birla Group of companies also associated with excellent service quality is being voted the best employer in India and among the top 20 in Asia by the Hewitt-Economic Times and The Wall Street Journal study (3). Over the last five years, they have built several categories of talent management programs integrating all areas of Recruitment and staffing, Nurturing talent ,Performance management, Work life balance Rewards and recognition effectively (4). They have taken special focus on ensuring that their employees enjoy a balanced work life.

2. Ethics and Quality of Service

Ethics is the inspirational source behind quality products smooth production process, operational transparency and a concern for service quality.

Service quality is impossible without ethical employees who are committed to the cause of service quality in organization. Ethics would include honesty, integrity, respect and caring for others, Fairness, promise keeping, personal accountability in employees and in the organization. All these words mentioned are describing Service Quality also. Hence there is a direct relation between Ethics and Service quality. One of the finest examples is The Tata Group, India's largest group of companies; one name has been respected in India for 140 years for its adherence to strong values and excellent service quality. The name stands for trust, commitment to excellence and ethical business practices.(5) Tata companies, through pioneering initiatives and innovative employee engagement programmes, ensure a happy work-life balance for their people. This again brings about a positive relation between service quality and ethical environment and a balanced work life in employees. This paper focuses on the relation between Work Life Balance and Ethics in Employees to achieve excellence in Service quality. It is seen that there is definitely a positive relation between service quality provided by any organization and its employees' ethics and balanced work life.

3. Importance of Quality of Service

In today's competitive world organizations are developing competitive advantage through service quality management and can hope to survive for longer periods if they are able to satisfy their customers. They should be able to retain their existing customers and attract potential customers. This can be done only if they pay utmost attention on quality. Quality would cover quality of product, quality in service, quality in communication and quality in all aspects. Today customers demand and are aware of their rights and the organisation's duties towards its customers. Businesses manage quality to attract customers, enhance their experience, satisfy and delight them, and generate repurchase.(6) A poor quality of service providers penalizes customers, tarnishes their experience, causes dissatisfaction, and results in customer defection. Failing to take responsibility when something goes wrong is a sure way for an organization to lose a customer, or worse, suffers litigation and related costs. Thus since service quality plays such a vital role in the growth of organizations it becomes a responsibility of the employers and employees to ensure the same is maintained. Since both the factors influence the service quality in an organization it becomes imperative responsibility on employers to support and help employees to achieve a positive work life balance.

4. Work Life Balance and Quality of Service

Employees today are continually challenged by the demands of full time work and when the day is over in the office they carry more of the responsibilities and commitments at home. Stress at work has been consistently related to lack of control over the working environment.(7) In national surveys, more employed women than men have reported high levels of stress and stress-related illnesses, and 60% of the women respondents in one survey reported that job stress was their number-one problem. Working women still retain primary responsibility for dependent care and household chores, however. There are many challenges that female employees must confront in balancing their multiple roles as employees, mother, and spouse. However the male employees also face work life balance issues. They need to successfully balance their responsibilities at work place, any higher education required, pursuing their personal hobbies and interests, maintaining their good health by taking time off to the Gym, playing a sport, responsibility of home front etc.

So be it male or female employees, their lives are a juggling act that includes multiple responsibilities at work, heavy meeting schedules, business trips, on top of managing the daily routine responsibilities of life and home. Successfully achieving work/life balance will ultimately create a more satisfied workforce that contributes to productivity and success in the workplace. (8) When the work life and the personal life is not balanced it may lead to stress which may include job/task demands (work overload, lack of task control), organizational factors (poor interpersonal relations, unfair management practices, discriminatory hiring practices), and physical conditions (noise). Additional sources of stress include financial and economic factors, conflict between work and family roles, training and career development issues, and poor organizational climate (values, communication styles, etc).

This can cause psychological (affective and somatic responses, job dissatisfaction), behavioral (sleep problems, absenteeism), or physical (changes in blood pressure) reactions. Prolonged exposure to these stressors may produce psychological and physical illnesses. All these will affect the performance and quality of the employee. Employees under this stress may resort to absenteeism, irregularity at work place and may lead to low employee morale. A conflict between work and family roles may also lead to a conflict of interest in the employee. All these affect the quality of work of the employee and the quality of service of the organization as a whole.

Thus it is clear that problems caused by stress and a disturbed work life balance are a major concern to both employers and employees. Therefore, in an effort to retain employees and maintain a good service quality, it is increasingly important for organizations to recognize this balance.

5. Ethics and Quality of Service

Ethics is the inspirational source behind quality products, smooth production process, operational transparency and a concern for service quality. Quality products are almost always impossible to produce without ethical and well balanced employees who are committed to the cause of quality in the organization. Ethical conduct of a service provider is one of the determinants of service quality and thus moves ethics as a forefront consideration in service quality management. The importance of organizations is now on ethical conduct by service providers with regard to service process and industry characteristics, managerial attributes, dispersion of service outlets, and firm size which leads to customer satisfaction. It is imperative that organizations that stress high ethical standards must also stress quality service. It is the consistent, quality service that ensures success connection between ethics and quality service.(9) Ethical value in organization would include honesty, integrity, caring for others, promise keeping, trustworthiness and fairness; and, personal accountability. All these words would describe Service Quality.

Quality service would mean a high level of communication between the organization and its customers. Customers demand comprehensive information delivered in a timely fashion. By doing so, the organization demonstrates respect and caring for its customers. Good communication requires that the organization be candid, forthright, courteous and respectful of the rights of the customer as a stakeholder. Words used to describe ethical values, are also used to describe “quality communication.” Failing to take responsibility when something goes wrong is a sure way for an organization to lose a customer, or worse, suffers litigation and related costs.(10) Vince Lombardi said, “The quality of a person’s life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence regardless of their chosen field of endeavor.”

In view of this an effort is made by employers to nurture and imbibe and encourage ethicality in employees. An ethical employee leads to ethical organization. Thus an effort is to be made by employers to encourage ethical employees and an ethical climate in organization to achieve an excellent Service Quality in Organization. In order to reduce work stress and lighten up the pressure at work some organizations have created an ambience with soft music. It is believed by all that music acts as a stress buster. Employers can help to create an environment that encourages work-life balance by offering flexible arrangements, such as part-time work, flexible hours, generous parental leave or telecommuting. Offering child care arrangements can also relieve stress on parents in the workplace. More proactive employers can provide compulsory leave, strict maximum hours and foster an environment that encourages employees not to continue working after hours. The European Union has gone quite far in assuring a legal work-life balance framework, for example pertaining to parental leave and the non-discrimination of part-time workers.(11)

Texas Quick, an expert witness at trials of companies who were accused of overworking their employees, states that “when people get worked beyond their capacity, companies pay the price.” Although some employers feel that workers should reduce their own stress and maintain a work life balance by simplifying their lives and making a better effort to care for their health, most experts feel that the chief responsibility for reducing stress should be management. Research conducted by the Kenexa Research Institute (KRI), a division of Kenexa, evaluated how male and female workers perceive work-life balance and found that women are more positive than men in how they perceive their company’s efforts to help them balance work and life responsibilities.

The report is based on the analysis of data drawn from a representative sample of 10,000 U.S. workers who were surveyed through WorkTrends™, KRI’s annual survey of worker opinions. The results indicated a shift in women’s perceptions about work-life balance. In the past, women often found it more difficult to maintain balance due to the competing pressures at work and demands at home. For many employees today—both male and female—their lives are becoming more consumed with a host of family and other personal responsibilities and interests. (12) Companies are beginning to realize the importance of helping employee’s better handle the pressures of their jobs as well as their families. Research by Kenexa Research Institute in 2007 shows that those employees who were more favorable toward their organization’s efforts to support work-life balance also indicated a much lower intent to leave the organization, greater pride in their organization, a willingness to recommend it as a place to work and higher overall job satisfaction.

So according to this research it is seen that the employees value those organizations which makes effort to support work life balance and they enjoy a higher job satisfaction. Their morale is high and it boosts work place ethics. It is seen that when employees are satisfied they put in their best for the organization and make good decisions. Organizations are seen to organize picnics and staff party to promote a feeling of family in employees. This also helps in reducing work stress. To encourage ethics in employee and an ethical climat, organisation resort to external controls like complainece of ISO(International Organisation for Standardization) , Quality audit, International Accounting Standards etc.

Internal controls in organizations through a strict monitoring of Code of Conduct are carried out by employers. This can be done by installing an Ethics Office headed by Ethical officer and an Ethical Committee keeping a vigil on employees and taking suitable actions for non compliance of Code of Conduct. (13) Many organizations have started regular workshops for their employees in Team Building, Effective ethical leadership, Positive attitude towards work and promoting human values in employees. This would make employees self aware and self conscious about their behavior and attitudes.

6. Conclusion

The social expectation is that bigger the organisation grows; greater are the responsibilities it is expected to assume. Since the business exists in the society and takes so much from the society, it needs a sanction and approval to function. This can be achieved only if quality is assured to the customers in the society. If an organisation expects to conduct its business in long term it will require loyal brand of customers, repeat customers and customers with good will. This good will cannot be borrowed, begged or bought, but it has to be earned. It can be earned only when organizations take care of quality in their work quality in their employees and quality in their products. It is concluded that an employee whose work life and personal life is balanced and is ethical can be fair and honest to his customers and bring about Quality of Service in Organization.

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