

Training Practices and Discourses in Call Centre Management Points of Consideration for Managers

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Presentation plan

- A performance analysis: the Bell Mobility marketing call centre
- A study on the phenomenon of impatience (as an emotion, a feeling, a constraint) at the Megantic call centre
- Success factors: best practices for recruitment, training and improving customer relations

1- Study on client relations management

- Study 1 : Bell Mobility call centre (*blended*)
 - Inbound calls (20%) and outbound calls (80%)
 - Increased competition led to slower growth
 - Restructuration due to the introduction of new IT systems (IS)
 - Introduction of single-bill system
 - New cross-product sales (internet, landline, mobility, etc.)
 - Difficulty obtaining information in time for the various programs
 - Performance analysis of the call centre

1.1- Performance according to Bell Mobility

- Bell Mobility: a typical case
- An analysis of the technological tools while considering organizational changes (restructuring)
- A performance analysis of the centre – both managers and agents
- A study of the impact of change on the agents' level of satisfaction

1.2- Telemarketing: une « Bell » image

- Well managed centre that satisfies its sales objectives
- Agents that work in a friendly, dynamic, stimulating environment that relies on a decentralized hierarchy
- But problems with retention and training
- Considerable control mechanisms (systems such as the *dialer*)
- Agents were experiencing decrease in performance and motivation

2- Study on client relation management

- Study 2 : « Mégantic » call centre
 - Inbound calls only
 - Restructuration due to new IT systems and new online services
 - Considerable wait time for clients
 - Complex services and products (cases dealing with death, international issues, etc.)
 - Frequently changing information
 - Analyzing the centre's performance through the phenomenon of impatience

2.1- Humanize client relations

- Well managed center aiming to humanize client relations
- Increasing complexity of IT tools: where to locate the information (wait time for clients)
- Agents experiencing difficulty representing the « organization's image »
- Feeling of isolation: each agent works in a « bubble »

3- Research objectives

- Understand what a « client relations » culture implies (Licoppe, 2003)
- Identify indicators of satisfaction and dissatisfaction (agents and clients)
- Promote a sense of belonging within the organization
- Focus on team work and training and information

3.1- Questions

- To what extent do statistical indicators (sales stats) lead to an accurate performance evaluation?
- To what extent do initial training and ad hoc training lead to performance objectives?
- How can employee involvement be encouraged?
- How can information circulation be optimized?

3.2- Questions (con't)

- What are the causes of impatience?
- What are the impacts of impatience on callers?
- What are the attitudes that can be adopted by agents to counter impatience and mitigate its impact on client relationship?

4- Originality of methodology

- Call centres deal with inbound and outbound calls
- Most studies aim to quantify such activities
- We took a qualitative approach: participant observation
 - Listening-in on calls
 - Interviews with agents and managers
 - Focus groups for retroaction

4- Participant observation

- Laperrière (2006) states that participant observation is an approach with « objectives that surpass simply describing the components of a social situation and insists on the importance of seeking its meaning, orientation and dynamics »
- 3 hours of observation per agent
- 30 1-hour interviews with each agent
- 100 hours of listening-in
- 5 focus groups
- Data analysis with Nvivo (8) program for both text and audio files

5- Establishing a client-based culture

- Being aware of client satisfaction (or dissatisfaction)
- Improving service quality
- Placing the needs of the client at the centre of operations and limiting communication breakdowns
- Placing the client at the centre of marketing strategies, to ensure satisfaction and loyalty
- « The client is at the heart of organizations and client contact centers are the first step in the development of this relationship (Simard, 2002). »

6- What determines satisfaction

➤ Feinberg, Kim, Hokama, de Ruyter et Keen, (2000)

- Wait time
- Business hours of the call centre
- Number of agents to go through before getting an answer
- Organization of calls in cue
- Level of satisfaction with previous calls
- Rate of abandoned calls by the caller
- Length of calls with agent
- Extra research needed to complete the information received
- Service customization
- Call system's level of complexity

6- What determines satisfaction (con't)

- According to the Centre d'expertise des grands organismes (GECO, 2006) satisfaction factors are linked to 1) wait time et 2) agents attitudes.
 - Capacity to speak directly with a person, as fast as possible;
 - Agents' personal or learnt qualities – professional, polite, knowledgeable, respectful, patient, articulated;
 - Way in which the transaction is handled, including responsibility, preciseness of information and timeliness.

6.1- The impact of impatience

- What is it? Dissatisfaction? Frustration? Anger? Annoyance?
- Impatience on the callers' part is directly linked to their satisfaction (Dano, Llosa et Orshinger 2003)
- Satisfaction is linked to service quality and agents' attitudes, and client behavior
- Two interrelated notions: to what extent does impatience become a determining factor in the success of sale or service ?

6.2- Satisfaction-Impatience relationship

- Measuring the level of satisfaction according to the attitude of the caller, and the caller's evaluation of the service: « Alain (2002) demonstrated that the absence of certain factors (such as courtesy) could lead to dissatisfaction but at the same time, their presence didn't necessarily ensure greater satisfaction »
- Wait time remains the most important irritant for call centre clients (Bennington, Cummane et Conn, 2000).
- These variables are linked to impatience (Davis et Heineke 1998).

6.3- Variables to consider

- *Unoccupied time feels longer than occupied time*
- *Pre-process waits feel longer than in-process waits*
- *Anxiety makes waits seem longer*
- *Uncertain waits are longer than know finite waits*
- *Unexplained waits are longer than explained waits*
- *Unfair waits are longer than equitable waits*
- *The more valuable the service the longer the customise will wait*
- *Waiting alone feels longer than when waiting with a group*

Maister 1985, Davis et Heineke 1998, Zohar et Mandelbaum et Shimkin 2002, Tom et Burns et Zeng 1997

6.3- Variables to considers (con't)

- Motivation
- Mood
- Social status (Zohar, Mandelbaum et Shimkin 2002)
- Callers' ages
- Previous experience with call centres

7- Sense of belonging

- Supervisor attentiveness
- An environment centered around client satisfaction and high quality service
- Identifying methods for recognition of employees (agents)
- Providing for the involvement and participation of agents (Meyssonnier, 2003)
- Focusing on non-material factors (organizational values, personal relationships, etc. (Ibidem).

8- Training and information: self-evaluation

- Close relationship between the level of performance and the level of training
- Frequent technological changes requires agents to be flexible
 - Ensuring accuracy of information while maintaining quick response time
- Overabundance of information leading to unnecessary or inapplicable information for clients
- Team work a part of feedback and retroaction

9- Team work

- Peer accompaniment was one of the most interesting observations during these studies
- Knowledge sharing between agents increases *savoir-faire*
- Working on issues as a group develops a sense of belonging while providing a space for problem solving
- Reinforces agents' sense of control over their work and their level of satisfaction at work

10- Points of consideration ...

- Shorter training sessions, but more frequently
- Manager attentiveness: planned meetings
- Team work : problem solving by the agents
 - Putting together « creative hubs » to break up the routine
- Providing agents with the capacity to give more time to clients

10- ... all things considered

- Increasing agent responsibility and independence within a framework acceptable for agents and managers
- Self-evaluation, self-control when there is a participatory culture within the organisation
- Promoting creativity without creating unrealistic expectations
- Anticipating change resistance through Lead User (Von Hippel)

Questions

Merci de votre attention!