CUSTOMER ORIENTATION WITHIN AN ORGANISATION*

ORIENTAREA SPRE CLIENT ÎN CADRUL UNEI ORGANIZAȚII*

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Abstract: *The impact of customer orientation on organisational performance has been measured in different studies that highlighted the fact that customer orientation is a complex, multidimensional concept, that includes dimensions like: motivation of an employee for meeting the customers' requirements, abilities necessary for an employee to satisfy the customer's needs, freedom of the employee to make decisions aimed at meeting the customer's needs and desires. Customer oriented organisations offer services with a high level of quality that ensures the customer's satisfaction.*

Key words: *customer orientation, organisation, customer satisfaction, organisational performance*

INTRODUCTION

The concept of *customer orientation of service employees* represents an important research topic at present. Customer orientation is a salesperson's of assisting a customer in his or her decision making that determines the customer to buy whatever satisfy his or her needs (Saxe and Weitz,1982). Customer orientation has two dimensions: the need dimension and the pleasure dimension (Brown,2002). Developing this idea, one can add new dimensions to customer orientation: the need of pampering the customer, of reading the customer, the need of personal relationships, of delivery, of communication.

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Customer oriented organisations have different favourable psychological and social results. Research papers indicate the existence of a positive relationship between the benefits, the rewards, offered to employees and their attitude. Effort, one of the most important concepts in the theory of motivation, represents the quantity of energy spent within a behaviour or a series of behaviours. Actual performance of service employees reflects the quantity of effort made (Lock, 1981). In service organisations, customer orientation is implemented by means of service employees.

MATERIAL, METHOD, RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Customer orientation leads to a feeling of pride for belonging to an organisation in which all the departments and all the individuals work for the common aim of serving customers.Customer oriented organisations have employees who strongly believe in organizational objectives and values, who are willing to make considerable effort to satisfy these objectives.

The results of empirical studies have brought to light the fact that *customer oriented organisations offer services with a high level of quality that ensure the customer's satisfaction.*

Customer orientation has a direct impact on several results of the employees (job effort, job satisfaction, team spirit and commitment) and on organisational performance (Siddiqi and Sahaf,2009). There are also indirect effects of customer orientation on performance in the reactions of the employee to his work and his job. These direct and indirect connections of customer orientation highlight relevance for obtaining the desired results or organisational performance.

Organisational performance is a two- dimensional concept in marketing literature: subjective and objective performance. Subjective performance is based on the customers' and the employees' perception on satisfaction regarding the quality of services, the customer's satisfaction, the employee's satisfaction, and objective performance is based on financial elements.

The customers' perception on the employees' performance is influenced by the quantity of job effort made by the employee. Satisfied employees are motivated and they have motivational resources to deliver appropriate effort and care. They have enough emotional resources of

empathy, respect, interest, that influence positively their behaviour to the customer and customer satisfaction.

Esprit de corps or team spirit is important for the quality of services. Team spirit implies connections between people, support, freedom of expression, true concern within the group of employees.

Managers in services have to continuously monitor the dimensions of customer orientation, to identify training inputs relevant for the specific services they develop.

Introducing training programmes by numerous organisations means exposing employees to significant and sometimes radical changes in the work process. As a result of the training, the employees will try to transfer skills that they acquired in their work environment, characterised by turbulence and ambiguity.

Training the employees has become a key component of the effort of changing organisational paradigms or ways of doing business. The ideal of this model supposes identifying all the factors that facilitate or limit transfer in time, as well as identifying the extent to which each of these factors influence the transfer. Contextual factors regard wider situations that shape a specific climate of transfer. They include structural factors(job technology),enabling factors(leadership, team work), continuous monitoring and broad climate factors (resistance to change, stress, and ambiguity). The climates of change and of training transfer have a significant impact on the customer orientation of the employees. Thus, the research performed has demonstrated that the employees who attended trainings have higher customer orientation as compared to those who did not participate in such activities. The employees' reactions to change and role change may go beyond, but they do not necessarily eradicate the positive influence of the transfer climate. The employees are more easily convinced to accept change when the connection between the existent organisational identity and new initiatives is made clear (Bennett, Forst and Lehman,1999).

Research studies regarding the concept of customer orientation at organisational level focused on the concept of "market orientation" that establishes elements of organisational behaviour regarding the customers and the competitors of the organisation. An essential aspect concerning customer orientation at individual level is the ability of the salespersons to help their customers, as well as the quality of the customer-seller relationship. In this context, customer orientation refers to those behaviours

of the employees that are directed to appropriately satisfying the customers. Distinction is made between attitudes and behaviours of customer orientation, a distinction that is relevant from both a managerial and an academic point of view.

One of the managers' tasks is to implement a continuous customer orientation of their employees. The distinction between attitudes and behaviours of customer orientation is essential for managers, as they have to try to understand and influence both. Attitudes are stable, as behaviours are, if the managers can establish a high level of customer orientation in the attitude of their employees, and a higher level of stability in behaviour. It is difficult to influence attitudes, but there are managerial approaches that are able to do that. Thus, managers can select employees according their customer orientation or they can try to introduce positive attitudes of customer orientation in the training for recruitment.

Previous researches on customer orientation are along two lines: the literature of individual sale and the literature of marketing services. The researchers were interested in three main issues: validating the SOCO - Selling Orientation Customer Orientation - measurements, identifying the antecedents of customer orientation and investigating possible consequences of customer orientation (Saxe and Weitz,1982). Customer orientation is regarded as the ability of salespersons of assisting their customers by engaging in behaviours that increase customer satisfaction. The consequences of customer oriented behaviour with positive effects on sales performances and on the quality of services have also been studied. Customer oriented employees deliver services of exceptional quality, creating customer satisfaction. Different types of customer orientation based on "internalising customer services" and "customer oriented behaviours" were identified.

Customer oriented attitude includes affective, cognitive and co-native elements, being complex and multidimensional. In the opinion of some authors, customer oriented attitude is something simple, one-dimensional, referring to the quantity of affect for or against an object (Hoyer and Stock,2005).

Customer oriented behaviour is the ability of the sales person to assist his or her customers engaging in activities that increase customer satisfaction. Behaviours are less stable than attitudes, and they can be influenced relatively easily by activities of the organisation. Customer

oriented attitudes, as lasting characteristics, are more stable than behaviours. If organisations desire to implement a long-term customer oriented strategy, it is important for them to focus both on attitudes, and on behaviours, seen as two dimensions of customer orientation. Empathy will strengthen the connection between the customer oriented attitude of the salesperson and his or her customer oriented behaviour. The higher the empathy of the salesperson, the stronger the relationship between the customer oriented attitude of the salesperson and his or her behaviour. The salespersons with a high level of knowledge about the services in the organisation are competent in solving problems and they know more about the offer of the company and the customers' needs.

When one approaches the issue of influencing customer orientation at individual level one must focus not only on behaviours, but also on the attitudes the behaviours are based on. In order to fully implement customer orientation, salespersons must manifest both. Employees with higher levels of empathy, reliability, and expertise, are able to transfer their customer oriented attitudes to customer oriented behaviours, thus increasing the level of customer satisfaction. Restrictions of job autonomy may inhibit transfers of customer oriented attitudes. Elimination of those restrictions will determine an increase of the probability of people engaging in customer oriented behaviours (Hoyer and Stock,2005).

CONCLUSIONS

A high level of customer orientation leads to an increase in the degree of development of relationships. The organisations that concentrate on customer orientation and identify the desires and the needs of their customers will have high performances. Customer oriented individuals act more efficiently and contribute to the efforts of the organisation of developing excellent relationships between sellers and customers. That is why organizations should concentrate more on promoting customer oriented values and behaviours. The organisation must assess periodically the level of customer orientation of its employees.

Customer orientation tends to facilitate market differentiation and leads to higher satisfaction of customers regarding the services they are offered.

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