

Customer Service and Ethics in USA and Lebanon

Ali Halawi^{1,2*}, Wael Zaraket³, Kholoud Fadel⁴

¹*Arab Open University, Muscat, Oman; E-mail: ali.h@aou.edu.om*

²*Lebanese International University, Beirut, Lebanon*

³*SBS Swiss Business School, Zurich, Switzerland; E-mail: w.zaraket@faculty.sbs.edu*

⁴*European University, Nicosia, Cyprus; E-mail: kholoud.fadel@live.com*

Abstracts: The purpose of this article is to study both customer service and ethics separately, and then conclude their correlation with personality, particularly the major five personality traits. All the way through there will be contrast made between Lebanon and United States. Literature analysis from diverse researchers on each subject, and expectations discussion of both the Lebanese and American people within each field. The main technique is studying contemporary literature. Resemblances exist among expectations in Lebanon and United States in the subject of customer service and ethics. Moreover, ethics and customer service necessitate specific personality styles where each one is studied. This article aims to understand what excellent customer service and ethics is, then afterwards relating them both to personality, supply managers with ideas on what to look for and suggestions for future testing and research, contribute in the meaning that both Lebanon and United States cultures are examined, which provides insight to a country that Lebanon highly relates to.

Keywords: Ethics, Customer Service, Personality, United States, Lebanon.

1. INTRODUCTION

Customer service and ethics are both highly significant topics within business. Without any of them, an organization can suddenly vanish. Without quality customer service organizations are no longer able to sustain customer relationships or produce new business. Though poor business ethics can destroy an organization internally or even externally, depending on the perspective viewed from. Both ethics and customer service require being a subject of concentration for management within any business aiming to be successful and prosperous. Therefore, the notion of an individual's personality contributing to both ethics and quality customer service will be examined. Personalities shape morals and values and thus mold thoughts on what is presumed ethical. From a customer service viewpoint, we've realized that some personality types are more convenient for a customer service position than others. Character qualities that are required for both ethics and customer service will be examined. Managers must be aware of how to locate these personality traits in order to recruit efficiently and effectively. There will be various comparisons between Lebanon and United States within these specific subjects (Customer service and Ethics). Realizing the amount of business between the United States and Lebanon, the comparison should be meaningful. United States is discussed because it is one of the countries that Lebanon relates to the most.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Customer Service in Business

Customer service can either build or destroy a business; gaining quality customer services signify that a company is constructing and maintaining their customers' trust in them in addition to providing a competitive advantage over companies within the same sector (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994). Without quality customer service, a business will not be able to attract new customers and keep relations with loyal customers. The primary focus within customer services should be paying attention to the customers and recognizing their wants and needs.

When a company realizes and acknowledges its customers' preferences, it will be able to serve them in a satisfactory and productive way (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994). In the context of customer service, there are at least four parts that provide a firm framework for what a customer usually anticipates from businesses:

1) Reliability: the most incremental dimension of customer service. If customers can't rely on the company to supply the promised services completely and precisely, they will lose their trust in the company. Essentially, this could be considered as an equation: no reliability = no customers (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994).

2) Responsiveness: being punctual and eager to support a customer in a suitable manner. If customers feel that their wants or needs aren't being satisfied, they will leave and search to find what they are looking for (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994).

3) Assurance: A company's employees must be assured to the customer. The latter should be capable of trusting the organization and convinced that the services provided are of value (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994).

4) Empathy: Showing compassion to a person about his/her specific situation (1994). Basically, seeing a condition from the customers' viewpoint makes them feel appreciated and understood (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994). These four aspects of customer service help the organization to recover from any mistake it may have made. Nevertheless, organizations should ease the process of filing complaints to their customers, organizations should support customers to communicate any comments they may have (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994). In some cases, customers don't complain about a certain incident to the organization itself; when customers do not communicate openly with the organization, they may talk negatively to other people about their bad experience, therefore damaging the possibility of attracting potential new clients or even existing ones. Letting customers' voices be heard lead to solving problems immediately and efficiently; consequently, supplying quality customer service (Berry, L., Parasuraman, A., & Zeithaml, V., 1994). Customer satisfaction may also be a method for determining expectations related to customer service. In Lebanon, customer satisfaction hasn't been researched thoroughly by scholars, but the information provided by small studies in the banking sector indicated a straight correlation between regional development and customer satisfaction and expectations. Customers expected more and tended to be more satisfied in the capital Beirut which is considered "more" developed compared to "less" developed regions in Lebanon. It can probably be supposed that diverse regions have dissimilar levels of customer service as well. Quite probably a similar correlation can be established, Beirut would include higher levels of customer service than regions that are "less" developed. In general, there is very little information or research on customer service practices in Lebanon. In the American culture, fulfilling the customers' needs and wants within a business is a high priority, particularly when it comes to customer service (Zeithaml, V. A., Parasuraman, A., & Berry, L. L., 1990). Most organizations in the USA consider their customers the most valuable asset. Logically, organizations worry about their competitors, nevertheless companies' business is with their customers, that is why they should be the main interest (Lindquist, M., 2006).

2.2. Ethics within Business

Ethics surrounds us nowadays. It is basically the conscious decision to do what is right even when no one is looking. In recent years, organizations and business schools have given a bigger emphasis on ethics within businesses. To understand comprehensively what ethics is, we must define some main terms to understand precisely what ethics means and how we establish ethical values.

"Ethics: moral principles or set of moral values held by an individual.

Business ethics: a set of moral principles for arriving at a decision within the values of the organization.

Morals: principles of behavior in accordance with standards of right and wrong.

Values: moral principles or accepted standards of a person or a group.

Principles: a standard or rule of personal conduct. Ethical business values are part of the bigger topic of business values in general (Charles Holme, 2008)."

Based on the previous defined terms, we can realize the point that ethics is embedded in us through our personalities,

morals and values taught by our parents, religious beliefs, social standards, etc... Our personal perceptions of ethics are rooted in us from a very young age. Managers and executives must realize the importance of establishing an ethics policy in an organization's business standards (Charles Holme, 2008). Creating a firm basis for the ethical values expected within an organization helps organizations keep ethical standards on a daily basis. A lot of people though are against the idea that organizations need ethical standards. Some will argue a thought like "It's easy to see why you should not lie or cheat, so what is the need for a policy?" "Ethical values cannot be managed, it's a personal thing" or even "surely business ethics is about doing what is good (Charles Holme, 2008)."

Organizations obtain many benefits by declaring their ethical standards clearly and objectively (Charles Holme, 2008). There are at least six clear advantages that result from an organization defining its ethical standards. These advantages include:

- Higher employee satisfaction. There is usually a straight correlation between employee satisfaction and unbiased management decisions. Ethical values guide management behavior by making ethical decision making a reality. Ethical values can be the dominant element defining employee satisfaction and dissatisfaction (Charles Holme, 2008).
- Sometimes there can be a clear difference between managerial ethics and general employee ethics. Creating a standard for all employees within an organization removes the confusion that may arise during business practices and decisions made across an organization (Charles Holme, 2008).
- Ethical standards offer customers a sense of trust. When an organization demonstrates strong ethical values, customers or even suppliers will feel confident in their decision to deal with or purchase from the company at hand. Trust is often the deciding element in whether business exchanges even occur (Charles Holme, 2008).
- Companies with ethical policies enjoy a competitive advantage and should always abide by those policies, even during times, when possible, advantages arise by choosing the unethical option. Being steady and showing constant ethical standards will pay off in the long run, especially during times of struggle. Selecting an unethical decision will displace any trust gotten earlier. And in a continuous shifting environment, steadiness in ethics will support an organization to keep its relationships (Charles Holme, 2008).
- And finally, it's significant to recall that in the business world perception is built on reality. Ethical values have become a key measure of how organizations are regarded in the business world. Suppliers and customers decide whether to deal with or purchase from based on the history of the ethical values put forth (Charles Holme, 2008).

Ethics is not just an important component for organizations; it is also significant for executives and employees as persons (Schwartz, M. 2007). Individuals, especially within the business world, must be aware that their ethics decide how customers, employers, and businesses identify them. It can even decide how far and successful a person will be able to progress in his/her career. The benefits for businesses, stated in the previous paragraph, can also be considered benefits for individuals.

The 1975-1990 civil war(s), the continuous instability, and the market "ethics" introduced during the rebuild period after 1990 have influenced Lebanese ethical values. Religions, which control a lot of Lebanese habits, consist of principles for appropriate behavior to retain harmonious interaction among people. It includes an emphasis on preference for in-groups (in which there is a degree of trust) over out-groups as well as the role of loyalty by subordinates to superiors in hierarchical relationships. Lebanese culture encourages loyalty to family, religion, and political leaders. During the rebuild period, focus on "incentives" (bribery) in business began to bloom. Compared to the United States, Lebanon bases decisions just slightly more on the amount of profit to be received, than on the amount and quality of service to be delivered, especially in the public sector.

2.3. Personality

Every person is different and unique. Personality allows each person to behave, perceive, and react to situations in various means. Gordon Allport defined a personality trait as, "a generalized and focalized neuropsychic system (peculiar to the individual), with the capacity to render many stimuli functionality equivalent, and to initiate and guide

consistent (equivalent) forms of adaptive and expressive behavior (Gustavsson, J., Jonsson, E., Linder, J., & Weinryb, R. 2003).” A hypothesis within psychology is that “individuals’ cognitive styles, in addition to motivational and affective tendencies, are stable over time (Gustavsson, J., Jonsson, E., Linder, J., & Weinryb, R., 2003).”

Personalities are often defined using the five-factor model. The model contains five dimensions, which include: Agreeableness, Conscientiousness, Openness, Extroversion, and Emotional stability (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991). We should define and discuss each dimension individually prior to discussing how they are related to both customer service and ethics (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).

- 1- Agreeableness: it refers to the congeniality of a person. People that are agreeable are often called friendly, courteous, flexible, cooperative, forgiving, trusting, courteous, and tolerant (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).
- 2- Conscientiousness: Conscientious individuals are usually careful, responsible, and organized. They can also be called planners. Some scholars have proposed that this dimension also contains traits like achievement-oriented, persevering, and hard-working (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).
- 3- Openness: it is the hardest to identify. It can be referred to as intellect. It refers to traits such as being imaginative, cultured, original, broad minded, intelligent, and curious (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).
- 4- Extroversion: it refers to how outgoing an individual is. Extraverted persons are usually called sociable, assertive, talkative, and active. This component is occasionally broken up into two ranges: sociability and ambition (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).
- 5- Emotional stability (neuroticism): Insecurity, depression, anxiety, anger, sensitivity, worry, and anxiousness are often traits that are associated to this dimension (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991).

These five dimensions are independent from one another and provide much insight into individuals and their differences. Scholars have examined how these dimensions relate to job performance, which will be further argued next. The five dimensions of personality stated earlier are often used as predictors for job performance (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991). Conscientiousness and Emotional stability are considered pertinent to all job types when it comes to job performance.

- Conscientiousness relates to most jobs because it deals with traits such as being persistent, responsible, and hardworking. When people are conscientious, they are more likely to do their jobs completely, efficiently and cautiously.
- Emotional stability is related to anxiousness, worry, self-pity, anger, and sensitivity.

People showing these traits tend to be less successful at accomplishing tasks than those who show the opposite. The other traits can relate to job performance, but within the limits of the occupation. Each job within an organization requires different attributes and traits depending on the position. But when it comes to the traits that show an ethical or great customer service representative, we can clearly identify some distinctions (Barrick, M. R., & Mount, M. K., 1991). Customer service requires individuals with certain types of characteristics. Quality customer service individuals are classically described as friendly, warm, flexible, adaptive, and empathetic (Chait, H. N., Carraher, S. M., & Buckley, M., 2000). Eventually, managers must seek traits such as “being cooperative, self-controlled, dependable, and well-adjusted, and behaviors such as courtesy, consideration and tact. In their view, higher degrees of Service Orientation should be predictive of an employee’s success in any job involving public contact and requiring smooth and cordial interaction (Chait, H. N., Carraher, S. M., & Buckley, M., 2000).” Managers can let job candidates face personality tests to affirm job placement decisions. In discussing the relation between personality and ethics, McFerran, Aquino, and Duffy examined which traits would show greater levels of ethical thinking (McFerran, B., Aquino, K., & Duffy, M., 2010). Their results indicated that people with great agreeableness, conscientiousness, and openness to experience hold better ethical values and thinking. By having these specific traits, people are less likely to rationalize unethical thinking in general. Managers who consider and encourage ethical behavior among their employees will make the work environment a far better place for everyone.

CONCLUSIONS

From the literature discussed, we can certainly realize a very clear correlation between a person's personality and quality of customer service and ethics. Though, a lot of research is lacking between Lebanon and United States, more specifically Lebanon, when it comes to ethics and customer service. There could be numerous reasons for this lack of research such as cost and culture. International research can be tremendously expensive due to travel cost and usually takes more time than local research (Sherry E. Sullivan, 1994), but our personal experience as Customer service personnel in USA and Lebanon helped us to tackle the subject from an experienced point of view. Nevertheless, if research were to be done, we would like to see managers from various organizations in both Lebanon and United States examine their employees' personality traits. Furthermore, we would like to realize how correctly the individuals were placed in their current jobs. Questions like "did the managers hire accurately?" "Is there really a clear distinction between the perceptions of individuals to their traits vs. their actual traits?" "Do these traits correctly reflect their ethics and customer service abilities?" We would also like to look into the idea of mentors shaping / changing our ideology. Mentors have the capability to totally re-route an individual's career path, goals (S. Gayle Baugh, Sherry E. Sullivan, 2005). What effect does a mentor have on all of this? In the end, personalities as they relate to a person's ethical approaches and customer service quality are extremely intriguing and provide great insight to hiring strong workers. Future research should focus on incorporating recent studies (post-2020), conducting cross-cultural comparisons between the US and Lebanon, and examining the potential impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on customer service roles. As AI changes the landscape of customer service, the question arises: how will the integration of AI impact the future of these roles and the skillsets needed?

Though AI excels at routine tasks, human interaction will continue to be essential for addressing complex issues and building trust with consumers (Drenik, 2023). This is an open question that needs further research and testing. By exploring these relationships more deeply, organizations can make strategic decisions on hiring, training, and fostering a strong ethical and customer-centric culture. Empowering them to deliver exceptional customer service, build trust, and achieve sustainable success in today's competitive landscape.

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