

Customer care in Organisations in Bangladesh: Lessons to be learned from Britain

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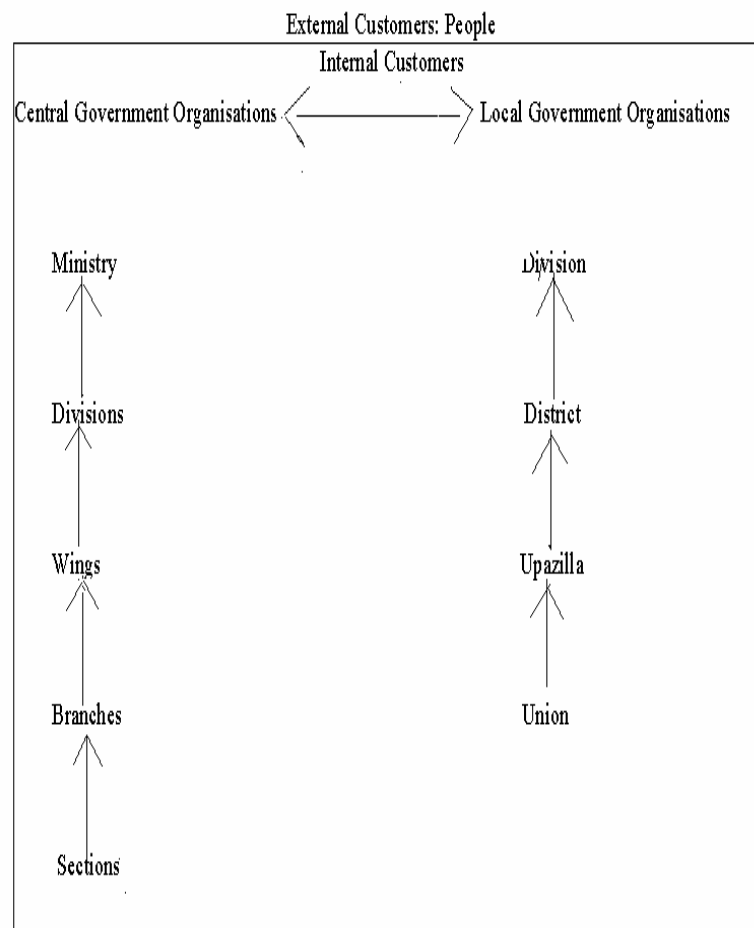
Abstract

Managing customers/clients considers to be a Herculean task of an organisation in all ages. The relationship between management and customers is always central to the development and smooth running of an organisation. Customer may be internal or external. Both internal and external customers have to be recognised for organisation to run smoothly. But the problem is when the communication between internal and external customers suffers from a variety of reasons it has an effect on the entire system of the organisation on the one hand and the ethos of customer service on the other. My case study derives from the history of customer care in organisations in Bangladesh. It is Bangladesh whose history of public organisations indicates that clients / customers have never been treated fairly and properly. The reasons include: apathy, narrow vision, unprofessionalism, lack of commitment, lack of ability to solve problems, lack of positive communication. Researchers have shown that above noted reasons are potential barriers to building a good relationships with clients / customers (Smith, 1996, Younis and Mostafa, 2000).

Studies of customer care in Bangladesh have generally not had much to say about whether solutions found in other countries are feasible or how conditions for customer care can be created and positive lessons be applied in Bangladesh. I have chosen Britain for the purpose of comparison for a variety of reasons: Bangladesh was ruled by Britain for a considerable period of time. The impact of British rule is still significant as the machinery of the government of Bangladesh is fundamentally British (Smith, 1996). Besides, commonwealth relations are still playing a supremely important role in the government of Bangladesh (Jennings, 1951:ix). Despite the fact that Britain itself is running into problems of customer care, the subject has been the focus of considerable and growing academic attention in the UK (Andrew et al., 2001). Britain is following some procedures which are working reasonably well and in light of these procedures Britain is producing some solutions to customer care problems. Therefore, the purpose of this article is also to see what more can be applied from Britain to improve customer care in Bangladesh.

Customer care in Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, staff and management of the central and local government organisations constitute internal customers while people outside those organisations who receive goods and / or services constitute external customers. See the diagram below:



External

Customers: People

People (outside central and local organisations) as external customers always want good service from internal customers. What really matter for people (within central

and local organisations) as internal customers is what external customers think about the service they have received.

In Bangladesh, staff and management in organisations always try to see things from their own perspectives, not from the perspectives of clients / customers. And this is why they do not treat their clients the way they themselves would like to be treated (The Daily Star, 14 September 2003). They genuinely do not want to understand or have empathy with their customers. Customers always want a very positive tone from staff. They do not want to know whether or not professional people under tremendous pressure and this is why they can let anger or frustration show in their voice. What customers want from them is a trusting relationship. It is no secret how professional people in Bangladesh always feel pride since they know they are educated, and belong to the civil and professional services. Sometimes they let pride show in their voice, even if they are actually saying the right thing to customers. Such behaviour does nothing build relationships with customers.

It is vitally important whether organisations make or lose potential customers. The importance of a customer is often overstated by the staff of the organisation in Bangladesh. As soon as the staff get involved in a customer they make a bad impression because of their narrow vision. The outcome is a damaged image and poorer sales. Therefore, the first impressions of a customer towards the staff of the organisation are the lasting impressions.

Unprofessionalism the part of staff also cause a great discomfort for customers. Professional organisations, such as hospitals in Bangladesh, never treat clients/customers with professional behaviour and expert knowledge. As the staff do not project a professional and caring image of organisation they have nothing to gain in the area of job satisfaction. Therefore, customer relations is easily damaged through unprofessional behaviour and non verbal communication or body language. The staff are unconscious of the signal they are sending out – their ill manners and arrogance having become so much part of their behaviour.

Body language is a subconscious means of communication. In Bangladesh, body language on the part of the Secretariat organisations also communicate a negative image to the customer. Negative body language such as anger or frustration showing

in face or voice, unfriendly body contact, negative gestures / posture, lack of attention, disrespect customers', lack of sense of personal hygiene, and negative appearance often create a unwelcoming and unrelaxed atmosphere for customers' and clients.

Customers want people involved in public organisations will be able to solve their problems by listening to what they say. Listening and questioning skills are vitally important for staff and management to deal with customer problems. Without verbal and non-verbal communication effective listening can not be achieved and customers problems can not dealt with effectively. In Bangladesh, professionals and staff of Secretariat organisations are always impatient or in a hurry and have a negative attitude towards customers. Even staff have a tendency to refer customers' problems to higher ups, rather than listen to them in the first place. Also there is a tendency on the part of staff to ask questions badly, thereby limiting the quantity and quality of information they can obtain from clients / customers (The New Nation ,01 January 2004).

Lessons to be learned from the UK

Customer care is high on the agenda of organisations in Britain today. Organisations use high customer standards as part of a package, that gives customers what they want. Establishing the right tone of the professional people through training is always is a priority in public organisations. Through training people learn how to concentrate on what is being said, analyse what customers is saying to staff, and recap a positive way, making their best efforts for their customers.

Through well trained staff professional and caring image of organisations is being projected and high standards of customer services being delivered in the UK organisations. Organisations like National Health Service (NHS), Councils, Education Department, or business organisations like Tesco, Marks & Spencer, Direct Line always try to satisfy their customers' needs and wants through well trained officials and staff who have the appropriate customer care skills.

UK organisations are very careful about staff and organisations image, because they

know the fact it takes time for an Organisation to build a good image but this can be destroyed by any member of the staff. So if a customer is unhappy with the image the organisation projects they may never come back to the organisation, this will result in bad relationship with customers. Therefore, the staff use the following criteria to project a good image of the organisation:

product knowledge
approachable
good communication
clean / tidy appearance
friendly voice
politeness

Besides organisations image, body language considers to be a very important step towards customer care. UK organisations always try to create a friendly and welcoming environment for their clients / customers through the following positive body language:

- i) facial expression – staff are always motivated to smile and maintain the length of eye contact which is indicative of the degree of affiliation between people.
- ii) Body contact – staff are always ready to shake hands and be friendly.
- iii) Gestures/posture – they are careful with personal gestures and look interested.
- iv) Give the customer undivided attention – customer is always drawn to the attention of the staff.
- v) Lean forward, listen carefully – even customer is saying the wrong thing, the staff never let frustration show in their voice.
- vi) Respect customers' personal space – staff never make customers' nervous and resentful.
- vii) Take care over personal hygiene – staff try be approachable for customers to be near them.
- viii) Staff keep their arms open and relaxed to help customers.
- ix) Be careful over staff appearance – staff always try to be a good representative of their organisation

UK organisations actually encourage customer comments / complaints, so things can be improved (The Independent, 12 March, 2002). In Bangladesh, it is a problem as

the Bangladeshis are quite reluctant to complain. Besides, the culture of customer complaints has never been established or encouraged. Even in Britain today, it is calculated that only 4% of dissatisfied customers actually make a complaint. But it is also estimated that 90% of all dissatisfied customers never return. The outcome is organisations lose their business and the goodwill of their friends. However, many organisations in the UK who provide to customer service realise the value of a customer over a lifetime as well as the costs of attracting new customers. Therefore, they handle customer complaints very effectively. The following are the guidelines UK organisations use to handle complaints:

listen to the person, take notes.

Show empathy

let him/her his/her case and let off steam as necessary

use his/her name when staff talk to them.

Ask open questions to get information and clarify and particular points

apologise sincerely if organisation is at fault

explain the various options and find out the his/her preference is

confirm what he/she wants done

tell the customer what staff propose to do

take action – solve problems as promptly as possible

try to use complaint in a positive way and see if there is anyway it could have been prevented.

Conclusion

If proper customer care is to be achieved in Bangladesh, the UK lessons identified above should be considered. A fundamental question will then be asked: can we create the conditions (that we see in Britain) in Bangladesh that would provide a fertile ground for the cultivation of the notion of customer care? Applying positive lessons from the UK to Bangladesh is not easy because of our inherent difficulties. However, remedies are being sought as issues and debates surrounding customer care are becoming more and more important in the system of government. Many organisations, such as Secretariat, hospitals, airlines, and especially NGOs in Bangladesh have employed customer satisfaction surveys for some time to improve professional performance and customer satisfaction (The Daily Bangladesh Times, 30

april, 2003) . But, of course, the question of improving customer care is restricted to the actual role the government, the media, educational institutions as well as corporate marketing and information systems (Sturdy, 2001, pp. 11-12). This is very much true for Bangladesh case if we really want to improve customer care and make more efficient use of professionals and their expert knowledge.

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