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Developing a conceptual model illustrating how HRM practices support each other in order to improve service quality

Akiko Ueno *

6 Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London, NW4 4BT, UK

Abstract

In previous work, it was found that there were six HRM practices, which are most crucial in supporting service quality. The purposes of this paper are, firstly, to clarity the individual relationships among the six HRM practices and to examine how those practices support reach other, and secondly, to develop a model which incorporates all of the inter-relationships among the six HRM practices. Previously, each individual relationship has tended to be considered in isolation in the literature. Therefore, in this paper, the various inter-relationships were unified into a single model. In this new conceptual framework, the six HRM practices are inter-linked so that each of them may have a joint function in supporting service quality. The model can therefore be used to identify problem area(s) in order to improve service quality. For example, since all of the six HRM practices are important in supporting each other, if one or more of these practices are considered to be unsatisfactory, the model will indicate potential practice(s) which may have been causing the problem(s) or which might have been affected by the substandard practice(s). Since the six HRM practices are not stand along items, it is important to pay proper attention to all six practices in order to support service quality. As these inter-relationships are not specific to a certain type of service business, the model is likely to be applicable to a wide range of service industries.

1. Introduction

Issues concerning service quality appear in a variety of literature, in particular Total Quality Management (TQM), especially the soft aspects of TQM, areas of service marketing, including internal marketing and what is

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* Corresponding author.
  E-mail address: a.ueno@mdx.ac.uk

known as the service quality literature. Within the TQM literature, especially the soft aspects of TQM have been seen a vital to the service sector (Wilkinson, A. and Allen, P., 1991), (Wilkinson, A., 1992), (Wilkinson, A., 1994), (Rees, C., 1995), (Thiagarajan, T. and Zairi, Z., 1997), (Collinson, M., Rees, C., Edwards, P. and Inness, L., 1998), work on internal marketing has highlighted its role as a means to developing a service culture and to encouraging quality service delivery (Zerbe, W.J., Dobni, D. and Harel, G.H., 1998), (Grönroos, C., 2007), and from the service quality literature, the study of strategies to close 'Gap 3'(service quality specification – service delivery gap), has also contributed to the debate on the improvement of service quality (Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L., 1985), (Kasper, H., Van Helsdingen, P. and Gabbott, M., 2006), (Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. and Gremler, D.D., 2009), (Wilson, A.M., Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. and Gremler, D.D., 2012). From a comparative study of the literature on TQM, internal marketing and the strategies to close Gap 3, seven practices common to all three areas of literature were found: recruitment & selection, training, teamwork, empowerment, performance appraisals & reward (including measurement and recognition), communication (two-way, internal), and the seventh practice was culture of the organisation (Ueno, A., 2010). All of the seven practices are drawn from three areas of literature all of which are concerned with the search for service excellence in a wide range of service industries, and each practices is argued to be critical for the management of quality in the service sector. However, although culture is one of the practices, which support service quality, it seems that culture has a distinctive function over and above the other six features. Management's HR practices which communicate standards of excellence to employees can create a service-oriented culture, and this has a direct impact on employees' behaviour/service delivery, and which in turn affects customer perceptions of the service quality which they receive (Zerbe, W.J., Dobni, D. and Harel, G.H., 1998), (Schneider, B., 1980), (Schneider, B. and Bowen, D.E., 1985), (Schneider, B. and Bowen, D.E., 1993), (Schneider, B. and Bowen, D.E., 1995), (Schneider, B., Wheeler, J.K. and Cox, J.E., 1992), (Siehl, C., 1992), (Clark, M., 1997), (Schneider, B., White, S. and Paul, M.C., 1998), (Bowen, D.E., Schneider, B. and Kim, S.S., 2000). Any attempt to improve service quality must first focus on managing service providers' performance/behaviour before customer-employee contact takes place (Mills, P.K. 1986) cited by (Zerbe, W.J., Dobni, D. and Harel, G.H., 1998). Therefore, in order to develop a service culture and to support service quality, the six HRM practices become vital. Hence, this paper focuses solely on the six HRM practices.

The purposes of this paper are, firstly, to clarify the individual relationships among the six HRM practices and to examine how those practices support each other, and secondly, to develop a model which illustrates the inter-relationships among the six HRM practices. This article begins by reviewing each inter-relationship by illustrating what has been established in the literature about how each of the six HRM practices support each other. Then, a model is developed which integrates all of the inter-relationships among the six HRM practices. This paper ends with an overview of how the model works.

2. Literature review

Based on an extensive review of the literature on each practice, it was found that there are fifteen inter-relationships among the six HRM practices. The individual inter-relationships from (1) to (15) and the way these practices affect each other will be clarified below.

Focus on recruitment & selection reduces the level of, and the cost of training

Research by Campbell, E., Lockyer, C. and Scholarios, D. (2000) found that larger hotels tend to use formal recruitment procedures and appropriate selection criteria, and recruit people with the required skills, because they suggest that training costs can be reduced. This view is also supported by Jameson, S.M. (2000). He refers to the findings of Hendry, C., Jones, A. and Arthur, M. (1991) and argues that a high level of investment on recruitment is very likely to result in a low level of training. Hence, the use of formal recruitment procedures and appropriate selection criteria for front-line staff as well as the cost of recruitment & selection will result in a decrease in the level of, and the cost of, training.

Recruitment & selection of team-oriented people enhances teamwork

The identification of candidates who can perform well in a team is an important part of the selection process since organisational success partly depends on how successful they continue recruiting and maintaining team-oriented people (Crain, D.W., 2009). In order to create effective teamwork, recruitment could be more concerned about the selection of team-oriented people (Macaulay, S. and Cook, S., 1995). Therefore, recruitment & selection of team-oriented people may affect the effectiveness of teamwork.

Training for teamwork leads to better co-operation between teams

Over the years, the way people work has changed, and there 'is a far greater need for employees to work as a team' (Goodwin, D. and Johnson, S., 2000), p1 (Hall, J. 1999). However, there seems to be only limited empirical evidence on the effectiveness of training for teamwork in a service context as research on teamwork outside the manufacturing sector is still very limited (Van den Broek, D., Callaghan, G. and Thompson, P., 2004), (Richards, J., Chillas, S. and Marks, A., 2012). One piece of evidence form Hall, J. (1999) reveals that training will help to build and improve understanding of teamwork as well as of other key issues and skills. Goodwin, D. and Johnson, S. (2000) also find a significant transformation in individual behaviour in a team environment after using a flight simulator as training for teamworking skills among airline pilots. Therefore, training for teamwork may facilitate co-operation between internal units.

Training for communication skill supports communication efficiency

In order to develop and refine as well as to maintain communication skills, appropriate training is vital (Brocka, B. and Brocka, M.S., 1992). Moreover, training for communication skills is a necessary part of staff training in order that service employees can deliver courteous, caring, responsive and empathetic services (Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. and Gremler, D.D., 2009). Therefore, training could influence the effectiveness of communication.

Adoption of teams increases the overall level of training

One of the advantages of teamwork is dissemination of good practice within a team (Redman, T. and Mathews, B.P., 1998) so that 'more able workers… may be able to teach the less able workers…' (Hamilton, B.H., Nickerson, J.A. and Owan, H., 2003 p467). Hence, team members will be able to train each other within a team. Therefore, it is also possible that those companies, which adopt teamworking practices may have a higher level of training than those companies which do not have teams.

Teamwork facilitates employee empowerment

Teams are identified as an integral part of empowerment (Shrednick, H.R., Stutt, R.J. and Weiss, M., 1992), (Randolph, W.A., 1995), (Gunasekaran, A., 1999) or teamworking results in successful employee empowerment (Gatchalian, M.M. 1997). Although teams can become a barrier to empowerment if they are held together for temporary (Dainty, A.R.J., Bryman, A. and Price, A.D.F., 2002), teams are often a form of job involvement oriented empowerment Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E. (1995) or as Rees, C. (1999), p471 cites as 'teamworking is seen …as …empowerment through involvement'. Moreover, a sense of belongingness is correlated to taking on extra responsibility (Schneider B. and Bowen, D.E. 1984). Hence, teamwork encourages and enables employees to take on new responsibilities and this aids employee empowerment (Cook, S. 1994).

Teamworking practices, and the use of performance measurement and reward for teams encourage each other

As teamwork has gained attention in the service sector, so performance measurement and rewards for teams, as well as individuals, have begun to become more prevalent. The research of Shrednick, H.R., Stutt, R.J. and Weiss, M. (1992) found that teams have an impact on performance measurement both in terms of meeting individual and team objectives, and both of these were measured by teams and/or members of a team. On the other hand, performance measurement and reward systems for teams as well as individuals are a prerequisite for successful service teamwork (Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. 1992). Therefore, these techniques should encourage employees to work together. Unless teamwork is recognised by the organisation, team members will not perceive their work within teams to be valued by the organisation (Hoffman, J.R. and Rogelberg, S.G. 1998). Hence, performance measurement and reward systems, which are designed to promote teamwork might well influence the level of teamwork.

The effectiveness of teamwork, and of communication are closely inter-related with each other

The interdependence between teamwork and communication is well known. One of the key elements of teamwork is effective communication skills (Goodwin, D. and Johnson, S., 2000). Effective teamwork tends to involve sharing information and communicating well; therefore, effective internal communication is seen to be vital for successful teamwork (Macaulay, S. and Cook, S., 1995), (Shrednick, H.R., Stutt, R.J. and Weiss, M., 1992), (Ingram, H. and Desombre, T., 1999). Empirical evidence provided by Yang, S.B. and Choi, S.O. (2009), p298, that 'the more information they have, the more accurately then can make decisions, which can then improve team performance'. On the other hand, a lack of teamwork or conflict within teams and/or departments was found to cause disruption in the communication/information flow (Macaulay, S. and Cook, S., 1995), (Ingram, H. and Desombre, T., 1999). Likewise a lack of communication has a major adverse effect on teamwork (Ingram, H. and Desombre, T., 1999). Therefore, the level of teamwork and of communication will influence each other.

Employee empowerment increases the costs of recruitment & selection

It is important to recruit and select 'empowerable employees' (Klidas, A., van den Bert, P.T. and Wilderom,

C.P.M. 2007, p73) who are the right people with the required personality and ability to manage the extra responsibility caused by empowerment (Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E. 1995), (Dean, J.W. Jr. and Evans, J.R., 1994), (Rafiq, M. and Ahmed, P.K., 1998). Appropriate recruitment & selection will ensure that workers with the right personality traits and capabilities are obtained (Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E., 1995), (Dean, J.W. Jr. and Evans, J.R., 1994). Hence, empowerment will increase the cost of recruitment & selection (Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E., 1995).

Empowerment of front-line staff incurs increases in the cost of training

Empowerment necessitates training: it is essential that proper training is provided for employees. This is partly because of the necessity of managing a variety of tasks and extra responsibility, and partly because empowering front-line staff will enhance customer service quality only when employees have the right skills and knowledge to make the right decisions (Randolph, W.A., 1995), (Klidas, A., van den Bert, P.T. and Wilderom, C.P.M., 2007), (Rafiq, M. and Ahmed, P.K., 1998), (Kappelman, L.A. and Richards, T.C., 1996), (Lin, B. and Darling, J., 1997), (Martin, C.L. and Adams, S., 1999). Therefore, empowerment increases the cost of training (Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E., 1995).

Empowerment facilitates the development of teams

Empowerment is seen to play a crucial role in building teamworking (Beckhard, R. 1969), (Neilsen E. 1986) cited by (Conger, J.A. and Kanungo, R.N. 1988), and in developing team performance (Yang, S.B. and Choi, S.O., 2009). Encouragement of suggestion and involvement, which are forms of involvement-oriented empowerment, according to Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E. (1995), develop a team climate (Macaulay, S. and Cook, S. 1995).

The higher the degree of empowerment the greater the provision of feedback on performance appraisals and of rewards

Many companies utilise feedbacks to encourage employee empowerment (O'Reilly, B. 1994). Beach, A.J. (1996) also recommends that feedback on performance appraisals is a useful way of developing the empowerment process; therefore, such feedback should be frequent, regular and effective. Therefore, it can be argued that when empowerment has taken place, feedback on performance appraisals will become more frequent, regular and effective. Empowerment seems to have an impact on reward as well. It is argued that empowered employees with extra responsibility have to be rewarded (Rafiq, M. and Ahmed, P.K., 1998). Otherwise, employees may interpret empowerment as an extra responsibility, which merely increases their workload (Erstad, M. 1997), (Maxwell, G.A. 1997). Thus, reward could be used as a means of encouraging employees to take on new responsibilities.

Empowerment and communication influence each other

Communication enables empowered employees to respond to customers' requirements and complaints correctly, promptly and effectively (Melhem, Y. 2004); therefore, information sharing is one of the characteristics of the highest level of empowerment (Bowen, D.E. and Lawler, E.E., 1995). Empowered employees will be able to meet and satisfy customer's requirements as well as dealing with complaints (Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. 1992) as long as information on customers' requirements and complaints are communicated to empowered employees. Hence, empowerment promotes and necessitates effective communication (Scarnati, J.T. and Scarnati, B.J. 2002).

Use of performance appraisals to identify training needs enhances the provision of training

Evaluation on performance is regarded as crucial for training programmes (Lin, B. and Darling, J., 1997) as one of the purposes of performance appraisals is to identify employees' training needs (Nevling, H.R. 1992), (Edmonstone, J. 1996), (Manoharan, T.R., Muralidharan, C. and Deshmukh, S.G. 2012). Therefore, companies which utilise performance appraisals for an identification of training needs may have a greater proportion of staff who receive training than those companies which do not use performance appraisals for such purpose.

Feedback on performance appraisals improves (two-way, internal) communication

Performance appraisals inform employees how their performance compared with management expectations (Elmuti, D., Kathawala, Y. and Wayland, R. 1992). Hence, performance appraisals (through feedback) improve communication, between management and employees (Edmonstone, J. 1996), (Omachonu, V.K. and Ross, J.E. 2004) and, throughout the company (McCarthy, A.M. Garavan, T.N. 2001).

3. Model development

A model has been developed which illustrates the fifteen inter-relationships among the six HRM practices (Figure 1). Recruitment & selection are placed at the top of the model as it has been argued that they are the starting point of service culture/organisation (Zeithaml, V.A., Bitner, M.J. and Gremler, D.D. 2009), (Redman, T. and

Mathews, B.P. 1998), (Berry, L.L. and Parasuraman, A. 1992), (Zeithaml, V.A., Parasuraman, A. and Berry, L.L. 1990), (Snape, E., Wikinson, A., Marchington, M. and Redman, T. 1995). Training and teamwork are placed below recruitment & selection, because of their influence on other features, and because they are influenced by recruitment & selection. The positions shown here, with training at the left and teamwork at the right, can be interchangeable. Empowerment is placed in the middle of the diagram, because empowerment is related to recruitment & selection, training, teamwork, performance appraisals & reward, and communication. As for performance appraisals & reward, and communication, these are placed at the bottom of the diagram, because they do not appear to be directly affected by recruitment & selection. In this figure, each arrow has a number, which represents each of the inter-relationships. There is no reason to suppose that the model should be specific only to a particular type of service business. This is because, as has been stated that the seven managerial practices are drawn from TQM, internal marketing and strategies to close Gap 3, all of which are concentrated on the service excellence in a variety of service businesses, and the fifteen inter-relationships are appeared from literature examining each of six HRM practices. Therefore, the literature is not restricted to one particular industry. Therefore, the model is treated as a representative of a wide range of service businesses.
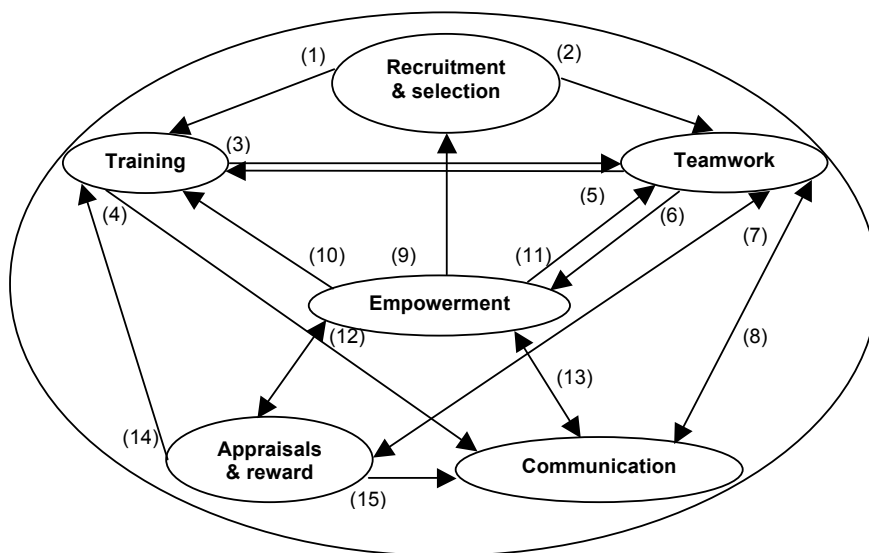

Fig. 1. The fifteen inter-relationships among the six HRM practices

4. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

These inter-relationships have tended to be discussed in isolation in the literature. Here, these various inter-relationships were combined into a single model (Figure 1). The model can be used to identify problem area(s) in order to develop service culture and improve service quality (further). For example, since all of six HRM practices are important in developing service culture and improving service quality, and in supporting each other, if one or more of the six HRM practices are considered to be unsatisfactory, the inter-relationships will indicate potential practices which may have been causing the problem(s) or which might have been affected by the substandard practice(s). Since six HRM practices are not standalone items, it is important to pay proper attention to all of the practices in order to develop a service culture and to improve service quality.

From the literature review, these fifteen inter-relationships were identified among the six HRM practices. It is possible that inter-relationships are not restricted to the fifteen discussed here. Yet, the fundamental aim of this research is to demonstrate how six HRM practices are inter-linked so that each of them may have a joint function in developing a service culture and in supporting service quality. Hence, these fifteen inter-relationships are sufficient to provide evidence that six HRM practices are all inter-linked. As the fifteen inter-relationships were not specific to

a certain type of service business, the results here can be regarded as applicable to a wide range of service industries. The six HRM practices have a distinctive function in the development of a service culture and in the promotion of service quality (Ueno 2010).

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