

## AORC WEBINAR - 30 JANUARY 2024

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### Aligning customer service with organisational goals, recognising the impact of customer satisfaction on operations.

*“A satisfied customer is the best business strategy”-Michael LeBoef*

In today's dynamic business environment, customer service must harmonise with the organisation's goals, mission, and vision. This harmonisation assists in creating an effective approach to serving customers and contributes towards the overall success of the organisation.

Ombudsman institutions are seized with the mandate of independently and impartially investigating acts of maladministration, and violations of human rights, corruption etc depending on their mandate. In executing their mandate, these institutions should strive to be customer-centric, and provide an efficient and effective service to their customers (members of the public and public institutions). Hereunder are examples of organisational goals and how aligning them to customer service benefits both customers and Ombudsman institutions;

#### **1. Goal: Resolve complaints timely**

Timeliness in handling complaints refers to the speed and efficiency with which a complaint is addressed and resolved. It means that the complaint is acknowledged promptly, investigated thoroughly, and resolved within a reasonable time frame. Timeliness is crucial as it shows that concerns are taken seriously and there is a commitment to providing excellent customer service.

##### *1.1. Alignment with Customer Service*

- Setting service standards and turnaround times within which complaints should be resolved and quality decisions made.
- Periodic meetings with Ministries and Departments (MDAs) to discuss matters before the Ombudsman, track implementation of Ombudsman recommendations, and come up with options and solutions to issues and concerns by both

complainants and public institutions. This strategy enhances speedy responses from the MDAs.

- Utilising alternative resolution mechanisms e.g. Mediation, arbitration, and reconciliation where applicable to curb the long process of normal investigations.
- Systemic approach to investigations. Adopting a systemic approach to investigations can expedite the resolution of normal enquiries once the underlying root cause, system, or behavioural issues have been effectively addressed, thereby enhancing the timely resolution of complaints.
- Proper resourcing. Institutions should invest in training staff to carry out investigations professionally, comprehensively and on time. Staff should also be provided with materials and equipment to enable them to conduct investigations diligently.

#### *1.1.2. Benefits of timely resolution of complaints*

- Customers are less frustrated
- Escalation of issues and the need for extensive resources to address prolonged problems is reduced/prevented.
- There is trust and confidence created between the organisation and customers.

## **2. Goal: Increase visibility and accessibility of the office to the customer**

For the Ombudsman institution to deliver service effectively it must be accessible and visible to the public.

### *2.1. Alignment to customer service*

- Decentralisation of services by way of constituting office branches/satellite/centres across the country to enable customers to lodge complaints at their convenience.
- Supply of adequate telephone access, preferably toll-free, e-mail and other media. This enables customers who cannot

make it to the points of contact to lodge their complaints and make enquiries at no cost. Staff attending to the toll-free calls and e-mail service should be trained to handle initial complaint screenings.

- Conducting Ombudsman mobile clinics/road shows in areas where there are no offices, particularly in remote areas. Members of the public can have their complaints lodged and sometimes even resolved on the spot.
- Automation of the investigation process e.g. with the use of a case management system customers do not need to come to the office physically. They can lodge complaints and track progress through the system at any time and no cost.
- Catering for people with disabilities e.g. wheelchair-bound, people with hearing or sight disabilities, illiterate customers as well as those who have language barrier problems.
- Public Education and outreach programmes. This strategy ensures that the public knows about the Ombudsman institution and its services, as well as sharing good practices and lessons learned. If people do not know about the institution they will not lodge complaints with it.

#### *2.1.2. Benefits of Visibility and Accessibility to the Customer*

- Walk-in customers and those unfamiliar with a particular area benefit from a visible office location.
- Customers who cannot come to the main office can be assisted through the regional points and online and toll-free services.
- Office awareness is enhanced. If the office is easily accessible and is located conveniently the public is likely to be aware of it and its services.
- Vulnerable people (disabled, marginalised etc.) are likely to feel free and confident in the office if they find it adequately accessible.

### **3. Goal: Improve customer satisfaction**

Improving customer satisfaction entails understanding, communicating, and delivering what customers need and want.

#### *3.1. Alignment with customer service*

- creating a customer-centric culture within the institution, emphasising the importance of addressing the needs and concerns of customers. Staff should be trained to empathise with customers and prioritise their satisfaction. Leadership should set the tone and offer support.
- Customer feedback surveys. Gathering (and acting on) feedback from customers to assess satisfaction with service and various aspects of operations. The survey can be done after consultation with the customer or at the end of investigations.
- Availing of services online is helpful for customers who are far from the office and regional points, as well as those who prefer self-service. Of course, still realising that some prefer offline support.
- Setting appropriate customer service KPIs e.g. number of complaints resolved within turnaround times, total number of complaints received, and number of complaints resolved, etc.
- Own motion investigations. This initiative shows a customer that ombudsman institutions are proactive, independent and neutral in carrying out their functions. This assures the public and further buttresses the fact that the Ombudsman is neither an advocate nor an apologist for any party.

#### *3.1.2. Benefits of Improved Customer Satisfaction*

- The institution is made aware of customer preferences, pain points and trends which it can then work on to achieve more customer satisfaction.
- Reduced customer complaints (grievances). As customer satisfaction improves the number of complaints and negative

feedback decreases thereby saving time and resources spent on addressing issues.

### **Impact of customer satisfaction on operations**

Customer satisfaction and customer service are closely intertwined. Improvement in customer satisfaction is a primary objective of customer service efforts. Customer satisfaction has a profound impact on operations as shall be seen hereunder:

- i. Feedback from customer service interaction can be used to identify areas of improvement and implementation of changes where necessary. For example, regular reviewing and updating of strategies and processes to ensure alignment with any changes in the organisational goals.
- ii. A customer-centric team that listens, understands, and resolves complaints timely enhances satisfaction levels thereby positively impacting the reputation of the institution.
- iii. Positive customer feedback boosts staff morale and motivation as they realise the impact of their efforts. This can lead to a positive work environment and reduce or prevent attrition.
- iv. Customer satisfaction can influence how resources are allocated, how the staff is trained and capacitated, leveraging technology and infrastructure, improvement of the work environment, and the overall strategic direction of the organisation.
- v. Feedback on customer satisfaction can prompt an organisation to establish a customer grievance management system that will cater for customers' grievances and make customers aware of various redress avenues at their disposal. An effective customer grievance management system assists the organisation in addressing issues promptly and building relations with customers.

In conclusion, as has been demonstrated above, the alignment of customer service with organisational goals is not a mere strategic choice but a fundamental necessity. The foregoing examples highlight that with such an alignment organisations tend to achieve a multitude of benefits. It must further be emphasised that this alignment is not a one-time effort

but an ongoing process that demands vigilance, adaptability and commitment to continuous improvement.

It has also been seen that customer satisfaction is intricately connected to the efficiency and effectiveness of various operational functions within an organisation. Customer service must not only be prioritised, but should also be actively managed. Doing so will increase the overall success of the organisation.