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The Discussion of the HRM Practices and Procedures in Non-Profit Organization: A Case Study of Sunshine Consulting Call Center

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Abstract

Sunshine Consulting Call Center (SCCC) is a call centre (CC) which offers consulting service to women who are suffering domestic violence. It is a non-profit organization that provides high quality service with low cost. All of SCCC's operators are volunteers. So, the Human Resource Management (HRM) practices and procedures in SCCC are different with that of profit CC. The recruitment process lays emphasis on recruits' emotional intelligence; performance management uses more informal evaluation rather than hard monitoring; training should not only offer to new recruiters, but also old volunteers; employees well-being consideration, which include stress management, work-life policies and occupational health and safety (OHS) also offered to retain and motivate volunteers.

Key words: Non-profit organization; Call center; Volunteer; HRM practices

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INTRODUCTION

Nonprofit organizations everywhere rely on volunteers to keep their organizations going. While high staff and volunteers turnover and poor performance has been persistent issues for both international and local nonprofit organizations (NPOs). Financial constraints in NPOs with the increasing demanding from the clients made the situation more complex and hard to tackle. The issues have often been connected to the difficulties for HRM in NPOs in motivating staff and volunteers. This paper is going to take an non-profit organization "Sunshine Consulting Call Center (SCCC)" as an example, aiming to identify the proper HRM practices and procedures in NPO, especially regards to volunteers. So, the first part of this paper is an introduction about SCCC. The second part is a comprehensive one which will discuss the issues of the HRM practices in SCCC, including recruitment and selection, training and development, performance management, and employee well-being (stress management, work-life balance, and occupational health & safety). Then, conclusion will be made toward the HRM in Non-profit organizations.

1. THE INTRODUCTION OF THE SCCC

SCCC is a non-profit organization which affiliate with a university in Chongqing city, China. SCCC's mission is to raise women's welfare by helping them to cope with domestic violence in their marriage life. So, providing telephone counseling for women who are experiencing domestic violence is its routine responsibility. In setting SCCC's operations, there are several issues that need to be dealt with. The first issue is about its location. It will be located in the neighbour of the university for it's convenient transports service and its significant advertising effects on passing people

The second issue is about the strategy of SCCC. As a non-profit organization, SCCC will offer high quality

service with low cost. The low cost strategy is due to the characteristics of SCCC's workers which will be dominated by volunteers. And the high quality will be guaranteed by SCCC's HRM practices for volunteers, such as recruitment and selection, training, performance management and their well-being. In order to attract, retain and motivate volunteers, SCCC will apply 'soft' HR approach which not only aware of employees' needs and foster their commitment (Roan et al, 2001), but also treat employees as "a key strategic resource and act as the company's ambassador" (Frenkel et al, 1998, p. 958). Furthermore, 'soft' HR approach can be valuable to volunteers because it consists of HR practices which incorporate motivation and reward systems, training and development, and also career development programs (Armistead et al, 2002).

The third issue is about the employees' formulation and job arrangement. SCCC will employ both paid workers and volunteers. All of them will be selected by using several approaches which are discussed later in this paper. There will be 80 volunteers as call operators totally, 4 permanent full time workers (managers of HR, finance, IT, and the Head of SCCC call center), and 2 part-time permanent workers (expert consultants). 80 volunteers will be divided into 16 groups and each group has one leader who may be played by a senior volunteer with more experience and knowledge. In regard to the working hours, SCCC operates for 6 days in a week, with 3 shifts in a day (9:00am-12.30 mid-day, 13.30pm-17:00pm, and 18:00pm-12pm). The rationale for having these particular timetables is based on the assumption that there will be more women to call during those periods and the volunteers' demands for flexible time. However, SCCC will conduct a research to gather reliable data on this issue. So, these work time tables are still subject to change in the future. The following paper is the discussion of HRM practices and procedures in SCCC mainly focusing on recruitment and selection, training, performance management and employees well-being.

2. RECRUITMENT AND SELECTION

As for the mission of energizing women's welfare who is suffering domestic violence, recruiting suitable and high-quality volunteers and retaining them in SCCC play a significant role in ensuring the success of the operation.

First, in addition to advertisement, the recruiters pay attention to referrals or personal contact by friends or individuals already involved in the organization. This is because referrals tend to have long-term effects on employee attachment to the organization and on performance (Castilla, 2005). Particularly for this non-profit organization, good relationship is obviously conducive for attracting and keeping employees (Volunteer Management, 2000; European Volunteer Center, 2012). Referrals may give more realistic expectations to potential

recruitees, and the social support and interactions that occur between referral and referrer can enhance an employee's productivity and attachment to the firm (Bussell & Forbes, 2002; European Volunteer Center, 2012).

Additionally, the recruiters focus on understanding the reasons why volunteers come and what they want to get from here. Volunteers are an extremely diverse group, active in a wide variety of contexts (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). So, they have different reasons to come to SCCC. For example, volunteers might hope to get the pleasure by helping women dealing with their problems (Finney, 1997). They might want to enrich their experiences to better develop their future career, particularly for university students (Bussell & Forbes, 2002). Based on this understanding, the recruiter can provide volunteers with information about the size and nature of the task ahead of volunteers' decision of committing their time and energy to the organization (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000).

Moreover, HR person highlights the corporate culture in recruiting process and selecting individuals who fit with this culture. SCCC is a non-profit organization and directed towards the promotion of women's well-being. Thus, the HR practitioner tries to let volunteers know clearly about the culture of the organization in order to instill a corporate spirit into the heart of volunteers (Schweitzer, 2001). In doing so, it would become the thing that people do and grows naturally (Finney, 1997). Likewise, the recruiters emphasize the benefits for volunteers rather than the needs of the organization because volunteers would feel valued by the organization rather than as though they are being recruited to fill a position that no one else wanted (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000). For this reason, SCCC provides detailed organizational policies, goals, vision, values and culture to the volunteers who are applying as operators. All these attempt to offer volunteers better understanding about the SCCC and enhance their willing to stay in the workplace.

As for the criteria of recruitment, the focus is emotional intelligence rather than diploma or degree of bachelors or masters (Druskat & Wolff, 2001). Firstly, the potential employees are required to have good listening skills presenting voice-to-voice services which are attentive, perceptive, and responsive to build up customers' satisfaction and trust (Ruyter & Wetzels, 2000). Secondly, SCCC uses the criteria which Higgs (2004) proposed for selecting staff in terms of self-awareness, emotional resilience, motivation, inter-personal sensitivity, influence, intuitiveness, and conscientiousness and integrity. These criteria indicate that candidates should be aware of customer's feelings and be able to manage them. Also, they know how to maintain their performance when under pressure. They have the drive and energy to attain challenging goals or targets, and show sensitivity and empathy towards callers. In addition, candidates need to have the ability to influence and persuade people to accept

their views or proposals and are able to make decisions by intuition when appropriate. More importantly, the potential employees should be consistent in their words and actions, and behave according to prevailing ethical standards (Higgs, 2004, p.444). To integrate these elements in recruit process, SCCC aims to select the right staff for the organization.

With respect to the methods of recruitment, advertising is the first step. Followed with that, is face to face interview with related questions and interaction. The selection combines the integrated evaluation of the resume of volunteers, the information from referrals and the notes of interviews, and finally selecting those who fit the culture of the organization and have greater enthusiasm in helping women. With these approaches, SCCC can find right people in the workplace and finish the first step of attracting and potentially keeping volunteers in the organization (Van den Broek, 2003).

3. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training is about teaching specific job skills whereas development prepares volunteers for future roles or responsibilities and satisfies individual needs for personal growth (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000). The training and development in SCCC is not only offered to new recruits, but also the individuals who have been with SCCC for some time. Old employees need to update their knowledge in dealing with changeable situation and managers need to gain more managerial skills in dealing with new employees. Training and development processes need to be adapted to suit the needs and educational background of individual volunteers as well as an organization's needs and level of resources (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000). SCCC's training program is introduced in this section.

As SCCC's clients are women who may have emotional problems, such as depression, nervousness and anxiety, operators should be trained with skills in dealing with those negative emotions. So, the trainers can be psychological professionals, expertise in domestic violence, social workers or experienced operators. The training presentation could use several different techniques, including a PowerPoint presentation, copies of handouts, a video, and role-playing exercises (Matthews et al, 2005). It is believed that by using several methodologies, trainers would be able to engage participants with varied learning styles.

The first step in the training program is the New Volunteer Course, a course of 8 three-hours meetings conducted at the University SCCC affiliated with, which will last 8 weeks. The course will begin with introducing the SCCC, such as its mission, operational process, and workforce formulation. The syllabus includes topics related to the women who are experiencing domestic violence, such as psychological, physiological, neurological and sociological issues, and other topics

related to the family and individual well-being. Also, the laws and regulations about women's welfare and right all should be included in the course. About halfway through the New Volunteer Course, trainees will forms groups in which they old operators will come and share experiences with them. Trainees' communicating and listening capabilities will be developed with the help of trainers and experienced volunteers in this stage. At the last stage of New Volunteer Course, simulation and role play should be largely adopted in order to help new volunteers to be familiar with the work and deal with difficult call. After the graduation, the feedbacks need to be provided to help them make more progress. It is clear that training new volunteers on a regular basis is very important for maintaining a high level of professionalism, and improving the quality of service (Vitner et al, 2005).

Also, training is necessary for old workers. Continued training might improve a volunteer's self-efficacy and increase the volunteer's sustainability (Hellman & House, 2006). However, the training of old employees should be different with new volunteers (Auld & Cuskelly, 2006; SHRM, 2011). In SCCC, old volunteers training should emphasize their personal development. Monthly/Weekly meeting is positively related to their overall satisfaction, affective commitment, and intent to remain (Hellman & House, 2006), since they have opportunities to share experiences and learn from others. The discussions among group members and between different groups also serve the purpose of life-enrichment. Error management training should be offered to help them avoid error as well as learn from error (Keith & Frese, 2005). Mentoring program can not only help new volunteers but also give old volunteers the sense of self-actualization.

Managers should be trained to equip with the general management skills, the crisis management, awareness of volunteers' needs, and the skills of retaining volunteers. HR management also should pay attention on the cultivation of new leaders, since their enhancement can lead to the whole progress of SCCC's service.

4. PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

Performance management is a set of deliberate policies and practices designed to maintain or improve the performance of individual staff. (Performance management, 2001). Due to the characteristics of volunteers and the nature of this organization, the implementation of performance management is assumed as follows:

Firstly, before the publishing of the criteria of performance appraisal, managers should communicate the expectation of appraisal with employees effectively during the orientation periods (Noble, et al. 2003). By providing a clearly defined set of measurable expectations, the employees can have a clear idea of what the expected level of performance is, and then they can work toward

the expectations. Furthermore, HR managers should align the expectations of employees with that of the center's which can ensure the achievement of the overall goals (Butler, 2004).

Secondly, the criteria of performance appraisal should be designed according to the goal of the SCCC and the nature of this call centre. Hutchinson et al. (2000) point out that there are differences between two kinds of call centre works. One is 'essentially transactional, short and highly repetitive' and another is 'quality' and 'empathy' emphasized and is more 'relational'. SCCC, a non-profit CC, belongs to the second one. Therefore, the criteria should emphasize on the quality instead of the quantity of calls. Also, it is important to create a methodology for evaluations that is based on the employee demographics and company culture (Butler, 2004). In terms of the composition of employees, all operators are volunteers. Also, the culture of SCCC is friendly, supportive and caring. So, soft HR performance appraisal practices should be applied in SCCC, which include formal and informal evaluation. Volunteers get the part of the evaluation from his/her coordinator, the team members and the team leaders belong to informal evaluation. As to the formal process, some common elements in an employee performance evaluation include:

Customer service skills/communication—ability to listen effectively and properly respond to service enquiries. Batt (2000) (as cited in Taylor et al, 2002) has argued that the 'customer-worker interface is a significant factor in defining the organization of work and human resource practices'.

Interpersonal skills—value others' contribution and are open to constructive feedback.

Attendance—timely and reliable (Taylor et al, 1998).

Thirdly, monitoring system should be developed to ensure the high quality services and good performance of volunteers (Performance management, 2001). However, considering the nature of volunteers and the culture of this organization, the monitoring system will not interfere with the private work or the break time of employees. Therefore, this system is just installed on the phone instead of in the working environment.

After formulating the performance appraisal, HR managers should consider some programs to improve employees' motivation and performance. Debriefing, can be implemented, which enhances the communication between the team leaders and employers. Through regular meetings, team leaders can figure out the problems and find the solutions as soon as possible.

Lastly, motivation is also critical in improving employees' performance. Although motivation is usually directed toward organizational goals, it is also important that volunteers feel that they are achieving their personal goals at the same time (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000). There are two types of rewards that influence motivation: extrinsic rewards that come from external sources (e.g.

verbal praise, a certificate); intrinsic rewards that come from within the person (e.g. feelings of competency and personal development) (Auld & Cuskelly, 2000). For the volunteers of SCCC, a certification authorized by government or their name are advertising in the newspaper are good motivator. Managers should emphasize the meaning of this job, and connect this work experience with the career development for them in the future. Also, the verbal praise and some monetary rewards are necessary for the volunteers who perform well in their positions.

5. EMPLOYEES' WELL-BEING

There are three major issues which should be addressed by HRM in managing the employees' well-being in SCCC. They are: employees' stress management, work & life balance, and occupational health and safety (OHS).

5.1 Stress Management

Many researches have reported that stress has significant effects on employees' attitudes, performance and productivity (Chang et al, 2003). In SCCC, managing employees' stress is critical because it deals with women's negative emotion, such as depression, nervousness and worries. As for the nature of SCCC, many strategies which could be used to reduce stress in profitable CC, such as being not really friendly, monotone voice, not laughing at clients' jokes (Taylor & Bain, 1999) and switching off the phone (Noon & Blyton, 2003), can not be used in SCCC. In contrast, operators could not control the length of the calls they are receiving, since the SCCC offers services which based on counseling and have a goal to help the callers by calming them down and giving some recommendations for them to deal with their personal problems. As supportive management can create a stress-free work environment which will increase workers' performance and productivity (Chang et al, 2003; Grant, 1999), HRM should take on the responsibility of helping workers to reduce their stress. Besides training which has been discussed in the above, there are three ways for reducing stress can be used by HR managers in SCCC.

Conducting simulation is a stress reducing method by giving operators the chance to face true environment and take stock of the results (Dawson, 2006). In other words, operators will learn much of how to deal with different kind of callers with a wide range of problems by having simulations. Furthermore, they will be familiar with methods that should be used to deal with callers and their problems. In planning and setting up the simulation, SCCC's HR division can work together with psychologists and experienced workers from crisis centers to gain comprehensive approaches and understanding.

The second way is arranging team work among the operators. By allocating operators into teams, there will be opportunities for operators to learn from each other. This

is especially important for newly joined operators since they are most likely lack of experience. Furthermore, the job rotation among team (Holman, 2002; Mulholland, 2002) and the support from team leader (Holman, 2002) are crucial in decreasing employees' stress in SCCC. Team work in SCCC will foster peer learning among the operators which will surely leads to the increased performance as well as reducing their stress level.

The third way is to create conducive work environment. Fleming (2005) argues organizations' productivity will be significantly increased by having relaxing working environments. To establish this environment, SCCC provides comfortable set of desk, chair, computer, and headset for each operator. SCCC will also set up a lounge with cozy and relaxing atmosphere. This lounge will have sofas, free coffees, computers with internet access. These facilities can be used by all the operators when they are off duty.

5.2 Work & Life Balance

Researches have reported that work-life balance programs give many positive impacts toward productivity, including: reducing absenteeism and turnover (Lobel, 1999), reducing work-family stress (Felmler, 1995), increasing work flexibility (Greenhaus & Parasuraman, 1999). De Cieri et al (2005) state that family friendly programs in Australia include "...flexible work hours, job sharing ... and employee assistance programs..." (p. 314).

Since SCCC's workers are dominated by volunteers, one of the best method that can be used as a work & life program is the flexible working hour (please refer to Appendix 1 for further details). This will give them freedom to manage their workload between volunteering for SCCC and family. Also, this will also reduce stress level. Eventually, this will lead to the increase of workers' motivation in doing their job.

5.3 Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)

It is essential for SCCC to give attention for their workers' health and safety. The health of a company is "a direct reflection of the health of its employees" (*Raising healthy concerns*, 2005, p. 12). De Cieri et al. (2005, p. 109) define OHS as "the physical, physiological, and psychosocial conditions of an organization's workforce, related to aspects of work and the work content". Based on this definition, SCCC should firstly analyze the physical, physiological, and psychosocial conditions in its workplaces to identify the physical hazards, which are generally quite apparent (*Raising healthy concerns*, 2005), and mental hazards, which are intangible.

In SCCC, the most significant hazard maybe the mental hazards. "Traumatic and stressful incidents in workplace that intensely happened in the workplace and without proper counseling or provisions by the employers, may lead to signs of mental illnesses as the results" (*Stress liabilities increase*, 2000). Traumatic and stressful

incidents that become threats for SCCC's workers come from the callers. These may include lengthy conversations and unpleasant stories. Moreover, the conversations could also be monotonous and very repetitive. To anticipate this, SCCC should have counseling service for their operators. This service will be conducted by two professional psychologists who also can give some tips and tricks on how to deal with depressed callers. Furthermore, the psychologists could be also involved in making emotional management training for the workers as another option for anticipation.

CONCLUSION

SCCC is a call center which has the mission of improving the welfare of women who are experiencing domestic violence and enhancing their well-beings. In order to offer high quality service to clients with low cost, most workers in SCCC are volunteers. SCCC treats volunteers as valuable and essential members. So, the soft HR approach SCCC adopts aims at recruiting, motivating and retaining them. Recruitment emphasizes their emotional intelligence rather than intellectual intelligence. Performance management system integrates formal and informal evaluation, such as the appraisal from peers and the phone monitor. Training and development aim not only to improve volunteers' consulting skills, but also enhance their personal growth. Finally, employees' well-being is fostered by setting and applying proper stress management, work-life balance and OHS policies in SCCC. In all, SCCC wants to enhance the welfare of women and make contribution to the community by getting the utilization and the satisfaction of the volunteers via designing well-developed HRM practices and procedures

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