

Why managers must differentiate vision from fantasy



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Over the past couple of years, some organisations have seen the wisdom in investing in call centre facilities in order to enhance service delivery and customer service. Some companies have opted to establish in-house call centres which can handle both inbound and outbound traffic while others have opted for the outsourcing route.

The success of call centres and their ability to drive up customer satisfaction and sales revenue in this part of the world has not been documented extensively.

However, increasing investment in the model indicates that the leadership in companies that have opted to invest in the service delivery channel have some confidence in its ability to

meet objectives and achieve expected returns. Consumer satisfaction reports indicate that customers who have used local call centres have had a mixed experience, with some indicating that they have been delighted by the experience while others project less than happy experiences.

Customer segment

On the latter customer segment, a report highlighted how a customer of a local large utility company sought the services of the company's call centre to sort out what he perceived as a minor problem. What started off as a simple request for service delivery ended up as a 12-hour wait for a representative of the company to get to his premises. Apparently, this particular customer

had to talk through approximately five customer agents at the call centre, two senior executives at the head office, and three field technicians for his problem to be resolved. The solution to the problem ended up being the purchase of a small gadget that needed to be replaced, at a cost of Sh400. Assuming we decided to calculate the economic cost of serving this particular customer, the organisation in question probably spent about Sh40,000 to solve a Sh400 problem.

So what seems to be the problem here? Clearly, the leadership driving the organisation has been enlightened to the fact that call centres actually work. They have probably taken full expenses' paid trips to destinations like India and Mauritius to see how this service delivery channel actually works.

They probably have hired the best call centre talent and expertise in the country to manage their investments. But despite all this effort, they are probably missing out on one fundamental point — the ability of the call centre to

be part and parcel of the organisation's business delivery system.

Despite the best efforts of the call centre agents in logging and tracking the customer complaint, it was quite evident that they had no power or influence over the field technicians who would ultimately be responsible for re-

solving the problem at the customer's premises.

As far as the field technicians were concerned, their office would deal with whatever requests as they saw fit and in their own time. In this regard, the customer figured out that it was more effective

to deal directly with field technicians rather than leverage the services and so turned to the convenience of the call centre.

Over and above this state of affairs, the call centre agents were encouraging the customer to consider alternative, albeit somewhat illegal ways to resolve the problem at hand.

What does all this boil down to? Vision is not equivalent to fantasy. As our

country continues to focus on implementing the ICT strategy which is one of the core pillars of delivering Vision 2030, we all need to be cognizant of the fact that realistic leaders should be objective enough to minimise illusions and understand that self-deception can cost them their vision.

The leadership of this particular company is probably well meaning and has invested heavily in a call centre to help them achieve their vision and objectives.

The reality of the matter, however, is that a call centre cannot function in isolation and has to be integrated with the rest of the organisation to enhance overall service delivery and revenue growth.

In the same regard, our country's grandiose plans of becoming a leading business outsourcing destination have to be looked at realistically within the context of the reality on the ground.

Will customers who subscribe to our BPO service have to establish personal relationships with the country's ICT technocrats in order for their transactions to be fulfilled? I guess this should be some food for thought.

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