

Customer Focus and the Implementation of Compassion International Assisted Projects

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of the study is to investigate the influence of customer focus on the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects.

Design/ Methodology/Approach: The study focused on the 8 Compassion International assisted projects. The population was sampled using stratified random sampling. Therefore, the study sampled 110 respondents using proportionate allocation method. The study used structured questionnaires to collect primary data. The questionnaires with closed questions were answered using a 5-Point Likert scale where (5- Strongly agree, 4- Agree, 3 – not sure, 2- Disagree, 1- strongly disagree). Testing for completeness, consistency, and authenticity of the information provided was then assessed and the data triangulated using SPSS v26.0.

Findings: The study found a positive correlation between the degree of customer focus, encompassing donor and beneficiary needs, and the success of Compassion International assisted projects. Projects that are aligned with the preferences and requirements of donors and beneficiaries demonstrate higher levels of effectiveness, measured by key performance indicators such as community impact, child well-being improvements, and sustainable development outcomes. An outcome of the study reveals that a customer-centric approach positively influences donor engagement and funding levels. Donors who perceive their preferences and expectations are considered in project design and execution might be more likely to continue their support and even increase their contributions over time. This could lead to greater financial stability and increased project scope.

Contribution to policy and practice: The findings of the study are important to the regulatory authorities in Kenya who will find the recommendations of the study valuable. They will be able to appreciate the importance of Compassion International assisted projects to the citizens of Kisumu East Constituency. Likewise, the study seeks to recommend transparency and accountability of project funds to various compassion projects which is a resource that determines the success/implementation of community projects. Since projects are the baseline of improving the economic and social capacity of the community, the study informs the community and various stakeholders of the Compassion International Organization to ensure their full participation and dedication to ensure the interests of the projects and the public are put into account. Their involvement in project management helps to ensure that the agendas and goals of the projects are implemented to success.

Background

The concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) practices and the implementation of projects is built upon the theories that strive to build a hypothesis around quality management. TQM is a management concept based on the notion that an organization may achieve long-term success by having all of its members, from entry-level workers to top management, focus on increasing quality and, as a result, achieving the satisfaction of customers (Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994). Such theories include Deming's theory of total quality management, Peter Drucker's theory, Juran's Theory of Quality, Crosby's quality theory and Transformational Leadership Theory among others.

This approach to the management of quality throughout the entire organization has evolved into what is referred to as total quality management or TQM (Evans & Lindsay, 2009). TQM embodies the same basic principles as quality assurance, total quality control, and company-wide quality control (Firman & Thabrani, 2018). TQM, therefore, comes into existence as a management philosophy which focuses on the work process and people, with the major concern for satisfying customers and improving organizational performance (Permana, Purba & Rizkiyah, 2021). It involves the proper coordination of work processes which allows for continuous improvement in all business units to meet or surpass customers' expectations. It emphasizes the totality of quality in all facets of an organization to reduce waste and rework to reduce cost and increase production efficiency (Tiwari, 2016). Therefore, TQM is grounded on the principles of customer focus; planning process where leadership is highly required; process management involving supply quality management; process improvement where evaluation and process control are involved as well as employee recognition (Suleman & Gul, 2015).

Today, the business world demands corporations as well as projects to sustain themselves under a dynamic market environment regardless of how the waves hit the businesses. Under such circumstances of highly dynamic conditions and stiff competition in the respective industries, firms, businesses as well as projects have been forced to intensify their innovative operations to become one of the top services and product providers to their customers (Owusu & Duah, 2018; Chau, 2017). This is because dynamic capabilities and innovations have a positive and significant impact on the competitive advantage (Firman & Thabrani, 2018).

Achieving this quality has been proposed as a way of managerial improvements in terms of the process rather than the end product (El Khatib et al., 2020). The success/failure of these projects is influenced by the associated project management process. At that point of failure, project management becomes a real challenge for enterprise projects. Quality is the aspect of a product that catches the eye of the customer; that is, the total sum of features liked by the consumers while purchasing a product or service (Hashmi et al., 2021). That is, to make sure that products and services have the quality they have been designed for, a commitment to quality throughout the organization is required.

Successful TQM implementation results in improving overall organizational performance such as improved employees' participation, better communication and improved enrolment of learners, better quality and improved competitive advantage (Singh et al., 2018). In Malaysia, Khalfan et

al. (2020) indicate that quality management practice can be effectively triggered in operational performance resulting in the successful completion of construction industries. Likewise, the relationship between TQM practices and flexibility performance in manufacturing companies has been found to correlate positively in Chinese, Finland, German, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, Swedish as well as UK high-performance Manufacturing Projects (Phan et al., 2019). Magd & Karyamsetty (2020) also approved that different TQM practices such as employee involvement, employee commitment, firm structure, and availability of resources significantly affect different performance outcomes.

In Nigeria, Oni and Akinbile (2019) indicated that effective project quality management in the construction industry is affected by Client satisfaction, quality control plan, adequate supervision and employee participation. In South Africa, level of skill acquisition, project planning and control techniques, project construction design, process implementation and process improvement; financial management; organizational structures; involvement of people; and quality standards and measurements were found to influence the implementation of projects (Nyakala et al., 2019). In Kenya, Nyaga and Gakobo (2017) confirm that quality management practices such as customer focus, top management commitment and support and employee involvement through training are positively related to organizational performance. Momanyi and Kamau (2020) showed that housing construction projects are affected by contractors' management practices which include planning practices, conformance to industry standards, implementation of designs, and financial management practices respectively which were found to have a positive influence on projects performance.

Project Implementation

Effective implementation of projects is thus a derivative of TQM practices. The principle of measuring project implementation has gotten a lot of interest since it is a significant task that companies must do to accomplish their corporate objectives (Neely et al. 2005), particularly when both company and project objectives should be achieved (Bassioni et al. 2004). Therefore, when discussing project performance, it is paramount to discuss its implementation (carrying out the activities described in your work plan) (Leu & Lin, 2008). The conclusion of an initiative is commonly conceptualized in its success or failure, however, defining exactly what comprises the above can be difficult. There is no agreement on ways to measure the accomplishment or failure of a project (Frese & Saucer, 2003). Silva et al. (2016) discuss that they (success and failure) are neither immutable nor binary concepts (Liu et al., 2015). Therefore, given that projects have a definite budget, a timeline of completion and objectives to be met, it is paramount for project managers and stakeholders to hold the project to account and accomplish the above.

Tam et al. (2020) defined success using four attributes: Quality (delivering a good product or project outcome), Scope (meeting all requirements and objectives), Time (delivering on time), and Cost (delivering within estimated cost and effort). According to Badewi (2016), time and cost are still being used as attributes to assess project performance. The time attribute refers to on-time delivery, while cost emphasizes compliance with the estimated budget (Toor & Ogunlana, 2010). Project success includes consequences over a shorter and longer period, and some of those consequences are the efficiency of the project, success within the business, and preparation for

future events (Shenhar et al., 1997). According to Syamil (2021), there are challenges – usually called project constraints – that that will impact customer satisfaction and can be measured as the project performance achievement. These include scope, quality, schedule, budget, resources, and risks.

In addition to finishing on time and within budget, project stakeholders also need to extract benefits from the project's output to justify their investment, which leads to customer satisfaction (Badewi, 2016). That is related to customer satisfaction - how the customer perceives the performance of the final product which involves its adherence to a pre-defined set of goals; if expectations were lower than the actual performance, then customer satisfaction would be reached (Haverila & Fehr, 2016). Thus, a technically well-accomplished project assures greater importance being placed on the client-accepted projects as Lester (1998) states that success is dependent on the project stakeholders, involving constant interaction between organisations. Stakeholder involvement can also help to decrease project risk since the process of managing their needs is facilitated, which impacts project success.

Success criteria should be agreed on with the stakeholders before the start of the project, and repeatedly at configuration review points throughout the project. A collaborative working relationship should be maintained between the project owner and project manager, with both viewing the project as a partnership (Tam et al., 2020). This current study, therefore, applies the elements of quality, scope, time, and cost to measure the success/implementation of compassion projects. Therefore, the concept of TQM has been regarded as a competitive advantage tool among many projects in firms, and businesses across the globe. Based on the above, the current study seeks to shed light on the influence of total quality management practices on implementation of compassion assisted projects.

Research Problem

For the success of the projects, it is necessary for a very good project management process that has to be adapted to their specific characteristics. However, given the advantages that ride along with the TQM practices, its link to the implementation of compassion projects at Compassion International, has not shown great benefits. Studies have recorded a high failure rate of many projects more than 50% among them compassion projects. Few of them succeed in their operations within the first year of operation. This could be tied to inadequate equity balances, revenue concentration, low administrative costs and low or negative operating margins among others. This prevalence of the compassion projects has yet to optimize their operations and delivery of quality services to the community in poverty alleviation, given the 8.3% of poverty gap and 3.3% severity of poverty in Kisumu County. With the high prevalence of TQM issues, the implementation of compassion projects is hindered, making them (especially newly established projects) not realize their intended outcomes and sustainability in the long run. This begs the question: What are the effective TQM practices in the compassion projects especially Compassion International? And how do the TQM practices affect their implementation?

Besides, it has been noted that there is limited research intended to address the problem of implementation of compassion projects, especially. Some have presented weaknesses which

necessitate the current study. Without sufficient empirical evidence and addressing of the matter at hand, the success of the compassion assisted projects is compromised. This implies that the missions and objectives set by the stakeholders might not be met in time and the advantages might not benefit the community. This also implies that the stakeholders' investments will run at loss and thus, the projects will lack sustainability leading to overall failure in the community development. Therefore, the current study notes an existing contextual gap since most of them have not looked at how the implementation of compassion projects at Compassion International. This, therefore, presents a background of the current study to shed light and bring to perspective the influence of total quality management practices on implementation of compassion assisted projects.

Objective of the study

To determine the influence of customer focus on the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects.

Research Questions

To what extent does customer focus influence the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects?

Literature Review

In recent years, the concept of customer focus has gained significant attention in various industries, including the non-profit sector. This literature review aims to explore the relationship between customer focus and the implementation of projects assisted by Compassion International, a prominent non-profit organization. By analyzing sources from 2020 to 2015, this review seeks to understand how customer-centric approaches can enhance project outcomes and identify potential research gaps within this context.

Customer Focus in Non-Profit Organizations

Customer focus, often referred to as donor-centricity in non-profit settings, involves aligning organizational strategies and project implementations with the needs and expectations of key stakeholders, including donors, beneficiaries, and local communities (Reichheld, 2003). While the for-profit sector has long recognized the importance of customer satisfaction, the non-profit sector has increasingly adopted similar principles to maximize impact (Galindo-Kuhn et al., 2018). The application of customer focus principles in non-profits can lead to improved donor engagement, increased funding, and enhanced project effectiveness (Zopiatis et al., 2020).

Compassion International and Project Implementation

Compassion International, a well-known non-profit organization, specializes in child sponsorship programs and community development projects in impoverished regions. These projects encompass various sectors, such as education, healthcare, and livelihood development, with the goal of improving the overall well-being of sponsored children and their families (Compassion

International, 2021). Successful project implementation is crucial for achieving the organization's mission and creating a positive impact on beneficiaries' lives.

Customer Focus and Project Success

Studies within the for-profit sector have consistently shown that customer-centric strategies positively influence business performance (Verhoef et al., 2010). In the context of non-profits like Compassion International, a customer-focused approach may lead to improved project outcomes by ensuring that projects address the specific needs of beneficiaries and communities. Research by Smith and Almeida (2017) highlights that donor satisfaction is linked to their perception of the project's effectiveness, emphasizing the importance of aligning projects with donor expectations.

Research Gap

While there is a growing body of literature on customer focus in the non-profit sector, limited research specifically examines its impact on project implementation within organizations like Compassion International. Most existing studies focus on donor relations and fundraising (Sargeant & Woodliffe, 2007), neglecting the implications of customer-centric approaches on the execution and outcomes of assisted projects. This research gap suggests a need for deeper exploration into how customer focus influences project planning, execution, and long-term sustainability in the context of non-profit organizations like Compassion International.

Theoretical Framework

Schumpeter's Innovation Theory of Entrepreneurship

Schumpeter (1942) was a strong supporter of the view that innovation was essential to gaining profit from entrepreneurship. Schumpeter argued that entrepreneurs needed to pursue innovation successfully to compete effectively in a dynamic economy. Crucially, the Schumpeterian channel of thinking about entrepreneurship has been developed and expanded upon by other scholars (Drucker, 1985; Lumpkin & Dess, 2001) who emphasized that an entrepreneur is always seeking change, reacting to it, and take advantage of it, particularly through purposeful innovation. Schumpeter's theory assumes that the economic system is in equilibrium, where the Marginal revenue is equal to the marginal cost. This theory also assumes that there is no involuntary unemployment. He further says that economic changes revolve around innovation, market forces, and the activities that the entrepreneur engages in. However, like other theories in entrepreneurship, Schumpeter's theory was limited by the emphasis on innovation as the centre of entrepreneurship. Apart from innovation, multiple reasons lead to economic fluctuations (Witt, 2016).

This theory presents a very instrumental and critical element that the current study finds relevant. The theory advises entrepreneurs to embrace the element of creativity and innovation in order to stand at a competitive platform in the market. For instant by use of new knowledge, processes, products, and/or technologies in the entrepreneurial process goes a long way in equipping the internal resources of a firm into becoming superior performers in the external market. In conjunction with the dynamic capability theory (Teece et al., 1997) as well as the resourced based view theory (Barney, 1991), Schumpeter's theory informs the current study to the point that real

estate companies in Nairobi can manipulate their resource base, by combining them in a dynamic way to help the firms to adopt effectively and more quickly to ever-changing business changing environment.

Conceptual Framework

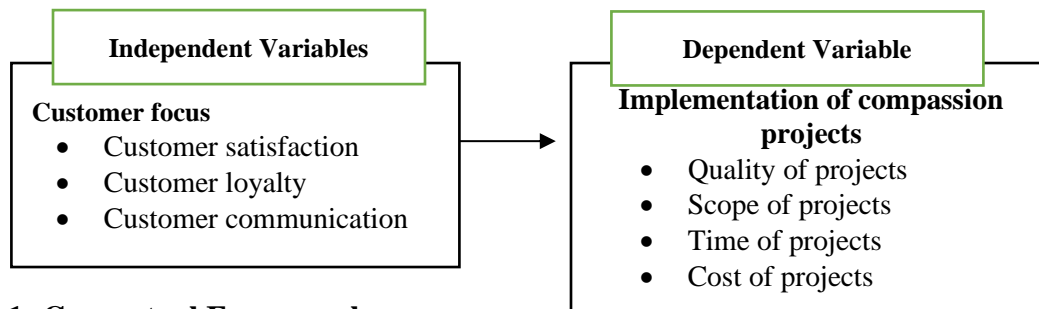


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Findings and Presentation

The influence of customer focus on the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects

Polong and Kimutai (2022) sought to establish the influence of TQM on the sustainability of smallholder dairy farming projects in the Kajiado District. That is, how leadership, customer focus and ICT affect the sustainability of smallholder dairy farming projects in Kajiado County, Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive design and targeted a total of 125 managers using a census survey. The study established that leadership and customer focus have a significant influence on the sustainability of smallholder dairy farming projects. Likewise, managing people and processes have an insignificant influence on smallholder dairy farming projects. The study concludes that leadership and customer focus are significant TQM components influencing the sustainability of smallholder dairy projects.

King’oina et al. (2022) assessed the influence of the strategic management drivers on the competitiveness of large manufacturing firms in Kenya. A descriptive survey research design was employed in the study and the population consisted of large manufacturing firms in Nairobi, Kenya (454) which were sampled using stratified random sampling to obtain a sample of 384 respondents. The findings from the descriptive analysis revealed that most of the firms surveyed offered feedback to their customers’ queries but they did not hold interactive and engaging meetings with the customers. This implies that the relationship between the companies and their customers could deteriorate as a result of a low level of engagement which in turn could affect the competitiveness of the manufacturing firms. The study concluded that customer focus was partially embraced in the large manufacturing firms and this could negatively affect their competitiveness.

Syamil (2021) assessed the relationship between Project Performance and Customer Satisfaction. The research used a quantitative approach where the data was collected through questionnaire distribution to companies in Jakarta and Bandung. The study surveyed 112 companies sampled from 400 companies using questionnaires. The research found that, in Indonesia, project schedule,

cost, human resources and risk management performance significantly affected customer satisfaction. One of the most acknowledged reasons for this is because most of the projects in the respondents' projects were triggered by senior management decisions rather than fulfilling the organizations' needs or the project deliverables' users.

Tam et al. (2020) investigated the factors influencing the success of ongoing agile software development projects. The study proposed a model consisting of five people factors and success is measured in terms of cost, time, and customer satisfaction. The study surveyed 216 agile practitioners and the methods were triangulated with the mixed-methods approach of a focus group. The results suggested that team capability and customer focus are the main factors contributing to the success of ongoing agile software development projects. By knowing which factors are truly important to achieve success, managers and teams will be able to establish priorities, thereby improving project outcomes.

Oluoch (2019) focused on the implementation of total quality management in public printing firms in Kenya. The study adopted a descriptive research design. The target population for the study consisted of 390. The researcher employed a probability sampling technique by applying stratified random sampling. The study sampled 117 respondents. Data was collected through questionnaires and analyzed using descriptive statistics and multiple regression. The study found that there is a significant relationship between top management commitment, customer focus, continuous improvement, employee involvement and total quality management implementation. That is, total quality management implementation had a strong relationship with the project success of public printing firms in Kenya.

Murunga and Kisimbii (2019) investigated the influence of total quality management principles in the context of project performance in the construction industry in Mombasa County. That is, to establish the influence of customer satisfaction and supplier relationship on the success of project performance in the construction industry. The target population for the study is 60 active contractors' firms registered by the National Construction Association (NCA) in Mombasa County. The sample size was established at 5 contracting firms. A structured and semi-structured questionnaire was used to collect data. The findings showed that supplier relationships significantly influence the success of project performance. The study concludes that supplier relationships have a positive impact on TQM practices in the Mombasa County construction industry. It was thus, recommended that customer focus management should be the focus of suppliers in practicing total quality management in their work.

2.6.1. Deming's theory of total quality management

The theory was originally coined by a prolific author, W. Edwards Deming, considered as the father of the total quality management movement (Stensaasen, 1995; Anderson, Rungtusanatham & Schroeder, 1994). According to him, if a company is to focus on costs, the problem is that costs rise while quality deteriorates (Deming, 1991; Hillmer & Karney, 1997). Deming's theory is based on the simple concept that continual improvement can help increase quality while decreasing costs, or what we can call total quality management. In an extension, the theory bases its argument on 14 principles: to create constancy of purpose for improving products and services; adopt the new

philosophy; cease dependence on inspection to achieve quality; end the practice of awarding business on price alone; instead, minimize total cost by working with a single supplier. improve constantly and forever every process for planning, production and service; institute training on the job; adopt and institute leadership, drive out fear; break down barriers between staff areas; eliminate slogans, exhortations and targets for the workforce; eliminate numerical quotas for the workforce and numerical goals for management; remove barriers that rob people of pride of workmanship, and eliminate the annual rating or merit system; institute a vigorous program of education and self-improvement for everyone and put everybody in the company to work accomplishing the transformation (Hillmer & Karney, 1997; Deming, 2012; Murunga & Kisimbii, 2019).

These total quality management principles can be put into place by any organization to more effectively implement total quality management. As such the current study likewise seeks to theorize the relationship between quality management practices and implementation of compassion projects with the same principles and seek to practically validate its applicability in the current context. The theory becomes relevant especially when meeting the needs of the customers. That is maintaining the quality as required by the client and focusing on the specific qualities requested by specific customers. Therefore, the theory in the current study is used to link the relationship between TQM and the implementation of compassion projects at Compassion International, Kenya.

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive survey design, which is a kind of research conducted to describe variable characteristics in a situation. The design involves a survey testing method, questionnaire survey method, and Interview survey method (Asenahabi, 2019). That is direct exploration, analysis and description of the particular phenomena, as free as possible from unexplained presuppositions, aiming at maximum intuitive presentation (Schoonenboom et al., 2018). The descriptive survey method allows data collection without altering the research variables. The definition optimizes both the strengths of quantitative methods of the study and qualitative research. The survey approach allows data to be obtained from a large sample population, and results that reflect the entire population and lower costs (Dannels, 2018).

Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature indicates that customer focus, a concept well-established in the for-profit sector, holds potential for enhancing the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects. By aligning project strategies with the needs and expectations of beneficiaries and donors, non-profits can improve project outcomes and overall impact. Despite the growing importance of customer-centric approaches in the non-profit sector, there is a distinct research gap concerning their influence on project implementation processes and outcomes within organizations like Compassion International. Addressing this research gap can provide valuable insights into optimizing project management practices and achieving greater effectiveness in non-profit initiatives.

Contribution of the study

The findings of the study are also important to the regulatory authorities in Kenya who will find the recommendations of the study valuable. They will be able to appreciate the importance of Compassion International assisted projects to the citizens of Kisumu East Constituency. Likewise, the study seeks to recommend transparency and accountability of project funds to various compassion projects which is a resource that determines the success/implementation of community projects.

Since projects are the baseline of improving the economic and social capacity of the community, the study informs the community and various stakeholders of the Compassion International Organization to ensure their full participation and dedication to ensure the interests of the projects and the public are put into account. Their involvement in project management helps to ensure that the agendas and goals of the projects are implemented to success.

Academicians, scholars and researchers in various institutions including the University of Nairobi as well as other academic institutions, will appreciate the wells of knowledge from this study and be able to update the existing body of knowledge on the subject matter. In addition, scholars and researchers across borders will be able to critique the study and extrapolate on the limitations to boost the well of quality management practices concerning the implementation of Compassion International assisted projects.

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