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IDENTIFYING THE NEED AND DEVELOPING A TRAINING PACKAGE FOR CONTACT CENTER AGENTS

– A Case Study: Turku manufacturing site, Polish contact center
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Firms are increasingly outsourcing customer support as an economical solution. However, the quality of service is not always a reflection of the standards of the client company. This then negatively impacts customer experience. Total Quality Management is a theory that promotes quality in an organization and how to sustain that level of quality. The aim of this thesis is to study the needs for training customer care agents in order to improve the quality of service and in turn, improve customer experience for the case company.

The case company is a manufacturing site that does not have the capacity to provide customer support for their customers within Europe with the appropriate linguistic skills. This thesis aims to answer four research questions:

1. What kind of training support does the service provider need in order to equip the CSR with the necessary order handling skills for the products from the case company?
2. How effective was the training package provided in terms of the frequency of errors?
3. What effect did the training package have in the overall performance of the CSR post training?
4. What kind of improvement plan needs to be implemented to ensure a satisfactory level of performance, and ensure customer satisfaction, when taking into consideration the employee turnover rate?

Prior to this study, the manufacturing site had not provided customer care with order handling training. The need for training was observed over a period of time and a training package was created. One of which would be comprehensive for the customer support team, no matter what their tenure was.

The thesis will take a quantitative approach to the research of the study. The research is based on the data collected connecting the fact that training is needed and the result and impact of that training on customer support. A quality monitoring list was created. This was the manual collection of errors made by the customer support team. The data collected was used to identify the frequency of errors made along with identifying the most common sources of errors.

A questionnaire was provided after the training session to the participants in order to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and to receive feedback on how to improve the content and delivery of the training program.

The research shows that total quality management tools are needed in the customer support team. Training is needed on different levels of technical and soft skills. Employees find that the training program was effective and comprehensive enough to be used in their everyday work. Training is a tool to ensure continuous customer satisfaction and employee development.
KEYWORDS:
Total Quality Management, Continuous Improvement, Contact Center, Training, Employee Development, Turnover Rate
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS (OR) SYMBOLS

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSR</td>
<td>Customer Service Representative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMEA</td>
<td>Europe, the Middle East and Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERP</td>
<td>Enterprise Resource Planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAP</td>
<td>Systems Applications and Products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOP</td>
<td>Standard Operation Procedure</td>
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<tr>
<td>TQM</td>
<td>Total Quality Management</td>
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1 INTRODUCTION

Outsourcing services is a growing trend which has developed into a wide scale industry as firms are increasingly outsourcing customer support. Outsourcing refers to the practice of “the operation of shifting a transaction previously governed internally to an external supplier through a long-term contract and involving the transfer to the vendor” (Quélin & Duhamel, 2003). Outsourcing is intended to be a more economical solution. The trend is to outsource customer support in emerging markets (Raassens, et al., 2014). Call centres are an external supplier that provides, among other things, customer support services. 70 percent of business interactions are done via customer care centres (Saberi; Hussain; & Chang, 2017).

Often, outsourced customer service centres are referred to as call centres. However, there are differences between call centres and contact centres. A call centre focuses on processing inbound and outbound calls. A contact centre manages the inquiries of their customers using various tools. These tools include voice calls, email, instant messaging, and other data application tools. The customer service representative at a contact centre is expected to use various types of communication tools. (Taylor & Hettick, 2006)

The role of a customer service representative (CSR) is to maintain a relationship between the contact centre, the customer, and the case company. CSRs provide a customer service experience through answering questions, solving problems, getting information, and empathizing with the needs of their customers. The CSRs skills are positively related to their success and performance. They must be able to access knowledge quickly and efficiently in order to effectively share that knowledge. (Saberi, et al., 2017)

One of the advantages of a contact centre is the ability to offer CSRs that speak the language of the customer. Language abilities are related to the ability to communicate and understand culture. This helps to provide a service to customers within Europe that they feel familiar with. (Forey & Lockwood-Lee, 2010)

Companies have been using outsourcing services for various reasons. Some being financial in nature and others may be due to the capacity of a company to provide the tools and services they need to be profitable. Contact centres have grown to be an essential partner in providing an organization with quality customer care services.
Customer care is the point of contact for customers and is a representation of the client company.

The case company of this research is a manufacturing site that provides goods and services on a global scale. The case company is the largest manufacturing site for the company. The products manufactured includes chemical reagents, instruments and software. The company has outsourced their customer care services to a contact centre in Krakow, Poland, for their European customers. By doing so, the case company provides their European clients with the linguistic capabilities that their customers demand. The customer care centre is the first point of contact for the customers of the case company. All purchase orders, complaints, and inquiries go through the contact centre. The Finnish manufacturing site is the largest of the case company. It has over 500 employees. The site caters to one of the product lines of the company and accounts for one third of the production for the said product line.

For customers within Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) region, customer service has been outsourced to a third-party contact centre. The purpose of having outsourced the customer care function in the EMEA region is to provide a tailored customer experience. This not only includes linguistic skills, but it also includes knowledge of the different governmental and tax requirements of a specific region. The local manufacturing site in Finland does not have the capabilities to provide this kind of service.

Contact centres have their advantages but they also have their disadvantages. The disadvantages are multi-fold. There are disadvantages from the perspective of the customer, the client company and the contact centre itself. Some of the challenges the contact centre faces are the high attrition or turnover rates of its employees (Saberi, et al., 2017). This can directly affect overall customer experience and cascade into affecting the way customers see the client company. Though providing customer service in the mother tongue of the customer may be beneficial, there are other factors to consider when looking at the benefits and functions of outsourcing a customer care team.

1.1 Customer care functions
Customer care is required to perform a number of functions for the customers. There are standard operating procedures (SOPs) used by both the manufacturing site, and the customer care centre. This helps to align the processes between the different offices. The business expects its employees to be familiar with the SOPs which are directly related to the work they do. The SOPs used by customer care are informative and extensive however, they are not very comprehensive to new hires and they are very technical and require a good understanding of the processes and tools being used.

Their responsibilities include customer care process, handle orders, and take ownership of the order. This means that they are to ascertain how the order will eventually be completed and the customer can receive their shipment. Order processing and handling are core customer care functions. It is vital that these core functions are handled well as they affect both internal performance matrix and customer satisfaction.

1.2 Performance matrix

Challenges in the core functions of customer care directly affects the performance matrix of the manufacturing site. The performance matrix is measured is by the fill-rate. The fill-rate is measured by the amount of time that it takes for the site to ship the orders to the customer. The fill-rate directly affects the compensation bonus system of the company. Factors that can affect the fill-rate are order handling and stock levels.

Orders are processed using SAP, which is the Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and data management program used by the company. The fill-rate is measured by the amount of time that it takes for the site to ship the orders to the customer. When measuring the fill-rate, the goal is to achieve 98% fill-rate within 24 hours and 96% fill-rate within 36 hours. The fill-rate are to indicate that there are enough of the right products that are needed by the customers and that we can fulfil their orders as soon as their orders are placed.

In light of this, there are factors that can affect the fill-rate. As customer care is the entity responsible for entering the customer order, it is also their responsibility that all factors that can affect the shipping of an order are reflected in the estimated shipping date. There are situations where stock is available, but the shipment cannot take place within the measured period of the fill-rate due to a number of factors or circumstance. Customer
care is supposed to take this into consideration when indicating the first date on the order of the customer.

The product line of the case company is unique in the sense that, there are many factors to consider before shipping an order to the customer. This includes everyone from the sales team, to customs, to the production line, all the way to the customer. There are expiration requirements, storage requirements, regulatory requirements and the like. There are numerous stakeholders, each with their own requirements. Each affects the fill-rate.

1.3 Research description

This research assesses at the effect and development of an SAP training program for customer service representatives (CSR) conducted by the case company. The purpose is to look into the induction and continuous learning process within the contact centre and how the case company can support that process. The competencies of the contact centre as a service provider will be studied. An assessment of the kind of training program would be needed in order to support customer care will also be conducted.

Although both sites use the same tools, there is a significant difference in the level of expertise when understanding how to use those tools. The effectiveness of the work done by customer care is based on how well they read the ERP System.

Key persons from the manufacturing site visited the contact centre in the Spring of 2018 and 2019 with the purpose to conduct training on using SAP specifically from a customer care stand point. In 2018, it was the first time such a visit was organized, and it was a very educational experience on both sides.

The products manufactured by the case company are sensitive which makes order handling that more complicated. Customer care must be diligent in making sure an order goes on delivery as expected. This is not always the case and it leads to dissatisfied customers. The SOP of the company dictates that the person who enters the order in SAP claims ownership of the order. This is where the most challenges begin.

It is the responsibility of the CSR to enter the customer purchase order into SAP. SAP is designed to be an automated order processing tool. Provided that the order is entered
into SAP correctly, customer order lines are expected to be released for automatic delivery.

If an order is not released automatically for delivery, the manufacturing site is forced to intervene and assess the problems within the customer order. In most cases, simple troubleshooting measures could help solve the problem and the order moves forward as needed. It is essential that order handling is performed efficiently and effectively. Delays can cause great consequences for customers such as government penalties or a cease in conducting their business.

Training customer care in SAP usage has proven to be essential. It allows the customer care representative (CSR) to feel more confident in their abilities and be more self-reliant. Not only is the CSR to receive training upon joining the company, continuous training allows the CSR to keep on developing their skills. This way, the questions directed to the manufacturing are fewer and the order processing timeline moves more smoothly.

1.4 Research Questions

The objective of this research is to assess the development and effect of SAP training provided by the case company to the customer care team of the outsourcing service provider. To address our objective, this study raises the following research questions:

1. What kind of training support does the service provider need in order to equip the CSR with the necessary order handling skills for the products from the case company?

2. How effective was the training package provided in terms of the frequency of errors?

3. What effect did the training package have in the overall performance of the CSR post training?

4. What kind of improvement plan needs to be implemented to ensure a satisfactory level of performance, and ensure customer satisfaction, when taking into consideration the employee turnover rate?

To address the research questions, this research looks at a number of theories that shows support for training of personnel. It looks at how certain principles of Total Quality
Management (TQM) form the foundation of customer training. Although TQM as a theory supports employee training as a whole, to address the specific research questions, this research looks at continuous improvement in more detail and how training customer care supports this TQM principle.
2 TOTAL QUALITY MANAGEMENT

Total Quality Management (TQM) is described as the approach of management to long term success through customer satisfaction. TQM refers to the efforts of the whole organization to improve the processes, products, services and culture in which they work in. It is a management system that involves employees in continual improvement. (Anon., 2019)

TQM is a continuous and structured effort by management and employees to improve the quality of products, services and feedback to achieve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Some of the key elements includes continuous improvement, customer focus, employee empowerment, the use of quality tools, process management and quality. TQM affects all employees within the organization. Responsibility lies on all members. It is an effort to build a learning organization which implies that emphasis is made on continuously building effective policies to drive results. Management needs to look at TQM as a unified system. (Joshi, et al., 2017)

The implications for TQM emphasize cooperation between employees along with self-control, autonomy and creativity. This leads to employee involvement which is a process wherein the employee is able to make decisions at their level within the organization. In order to make these decisions, training is vital in TQM because with greater decision power, there needs to be a greater skill set for the employee. (Syed, 2008)

2.1 Characteristics of TQM

Al-Qahtani, et al. (2015) state that the general approach of TQM aims to create cooperation between departments within the organization with the goal to satisfy customer demands efficiently resulting in achieving organizational goals. There are 8 characteristics of TQM:
As shown in Figure 1 above, all 8 principles work together to achieve TQM. TQM is customer-focused. It is the customer that determines the level of quality that is acceptable. There should be total employee involvement. This is where all employees are empowered and there are continuous improvement efforts in place to support business operations and to work towards a common goal. It is process centred wherein the steps carried out are properly defined and performance measures are monitored. There is an integrated system where processes are carried out horizontally within the organization. It is a system that connects business improvement factors to continually improve the expectations of both internal and external stakeholders. There is a strategic and systemic approach to achieving the mission, vision and goals of the organization. A major factor in TQM is continuous improvement. It drives the organization to be innovative and analytical in finding ways to be more competitive in the market and, in the end, meet stakeholder expectations. Decisions should be made according to facts. There should be relevant data collected in order to make accurate decisions. Due to the fact that TQM involves cooperation across different levels and departments within the organization, communication is key. Communication helps to motivate employees, it also supports strategic efforts. (Anon., 2019)

2.2 Importance of Quality

TQM involves implementing various quality management tools and processes into place. Continuous improvement means that improvements should not only be continuously
sought after, but it should also be monitored. This supports the need for quality improvement as an important factor when considering TQM factors. Quality improvement is the actions that need to be put into place to increase effectiveness and efficiency in activities and processes. This will in turn provide added benefits to the organization and its customers. (Dale, 1996)

Customers are increasingly demanding better quality of service. If the service they receive is not up to their expectation, they will switch to an alternative provider. Organizations are using not just price as their competitive advantage, but also quality. Quality is one of the four key objectives in operations management along with cost, flexibility and delivery of goods and service. (Bhat, 2009)

Bhat (2009) lists factors that determines service quality. These factors are:

- Reliability
- Responsiveness
- Competence
- Access
- Courtesy
- Communication
- Credibility
- Security
- Understanding and
- Tangibles

All the factors listed here are important when determining how to make the service provided as customer focused as possible. This study aims at providing quality customer service. The factors Bhat (2009) lists serves as a guide to achieving quality customer service. Reliability means that our CSRs perform at a consistent level of service and are a dependable source of support to the customer. This leads to the CSR being responsive and willing to assist the customer in their queries. In order to provide quality customer service, CSRs should be competent in both their soft and hard skills and knowledge. The tangibles, or the tools used, must be mastered by the CSR. The soft skills of the CSR should reflect a courteous and accessible manner wherein the customer finds contacting
the contact centre a positive experience. Communication is key. Not only with regards to language skills, but also in the credibility of the CSR to make the customer feel like they are important and their concerns matter.

Providing quality service is important in the continuous growth and success of a company. Figure 2 lists the benefits that quality brings to a firm.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Benefits of Quality to a Firm</th>
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<tr>
<td>It gives a positive company image.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It improves competitive ability both nationally and internationally.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It increases market share, which translates into improved profits.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall, it reduces costs, which also translates into improved profits.</td>
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<tr>
<td>It reduces or eliminates product liability problems, avoiding unnecessary costs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It creates and atmosphere for high employee morale, which improves productivity.</td>
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Figure 2. Benefits of Quality to a Firm (Waller, 1999)

The list of benefits in Figure 2 explains how quality can positively affect a firm. For the purpose of this study, we can apply these benefits to the contact centre operations. Providing quality customer service will give a positive company image to external stakeholders. The case company is a multinational and quality can support the competitive advantage on an international level. By gaining the trust and business from customers, resulting from quality service, market share can increase and improve profits. Quality service includes a reduction in errors by CSRs and ultimately complaints from customers. This reduces the costs of correcting errors by sending replacement products or spending more time on fixing the errors, which leads to less unnecessary costs. Working in an organization that values quality helps to improve the atmosphere and moral of employees making them more productive.

Considering the benefits that quality service brings to a customer focused company, the level of quality can be assessed on three different levels. The organization level standard, the core concern is meeting customer expectations. This can be determined by customer input which is to be gathered on a regular basis. This sets the foundation for customer driven performance standards. The process level standard is classified into different departments within the organization. The performer or job level quality
standards are based on the customer service requirements that originates from the previous two levels. At the performer level standard, the standards required are accuracy, competitiveness, innovation, timeliness and cost. (Bhat, 2009)

2.3 Continuous Improvement

For the purpose of this research the focus is on the principle of continuous improvement. By implementing TQM, various quality management tools and processes are put into place. These tools and processes must be monitored. One of those tools is providing training to employees. In addition, quality improvement is an important factor that needs to be considered. Quality improvement is the actions that need to be put into place to increase effectiveness and efficiency in activities and processes. By providing a robust and comprehensive training program to employees, it equips the CSRs with the skills and knowledge they require for performing their work. Continuous improvement is an ongoing process. With changes in the products, services, tools used by the manufacturing site, the contact centre should aid in supporting these changes by providing CSRs with the proper training. Both continuous and quality improvement provide added benefits to the organization and its customers. (Dale, 1996)

According to Dale (1996), there are three features that sustain a process of continuous improvement:

1. Individual elements of TQM;
2. Overall process of improvement;
3. Gains made.

There is a need for continuous improvement in the contact centre environment. Research shows that there are many definitions for continuous improvement. The general theme revolves around TQM and lean techniques. Caffyn (1999) provides an all-encompassing detention for the theory. She defines continuous improvement as “the term has become associated with a variety of organizational developments including the adoption of “lean manufacturing” techniques, total quality management (TQM), employee involvement programmes, customer service initiatives and waste reduction campaigns.”
The purpose of continuous improvement is to build and implement ongoing improvements to continuously raise the performance of the organization. With the current challenges faced by the contact centre and the CSRs, the principle of continuous improvement will support the need to provide better customer service. It will also address the bottle necks where CSRs face difficulties and create errors. The goal is to have a process that gets better, becomes more competitive and eventually more profitable over time (Fishman, 2006). This goal coincides with the changing market place where competitors are constantly looking for the competitive advantage. By improving processes, the contact centre and its functions can support these changes.

For continuous improvement to work, there should be support from the different departments within the organization. In order to implement this, employees must understand the importance of their role in the process of continuous improvement. They must undergo training in which is all encompassing. This means that there is an expanded view of the knowledge and skill the employee is required to have in order to support the continuous improvement initiative. This implies that management and supervisors for the CSR should be as knowledgeable and CSRs have an expanded view of the operations. Not only focusing on their own tasks but look at the process. (Fishman, 2006)

Continuous improvement develops an environment where faults are not as tolerated. The lean organization operates on the premise that everyone works efficiently and accurately. Training is used to improve interpersonal skills in order to support this process. In a traditional company setting, the errors made by an employee could be confined to a specific department. In the lean organization brought about by continuous improvement, an error could cascade down the line of the process or organization and the consequences may be larger and more far reaching. This can be seen through the errors made by the CSR. Their errors do not only affect their job, it affects the performance matrix of the manufacturing site and other functions in the organization. These functions that errors affects includes complaints processing, production, and logistics. (Fishman, 2006)

Fishman (2006) writes that flexibility and agility are essential. There is change happening constantly. Training is important to continuous improvement because of change. Being aware of change allows the organization to adapt to the circumstance. As with most industries, the industry which the manufacturing site is a part of is constantly changing. Though they are a big competitor, with innovation, new products from different
companies are challenging their place in the market. Training of employees is one of the ways in which companies can address change. The CSR should be knowledgeable of how to address changes happening within the company. It will provide them with a sense of confidence in their work. This confidence can lead to a more satisfactory level of performance and with this comes customer satisfaction. By being skilled to address customer concerns, the CSR can be flexible in the way they work. This flexibility allows CSRs to be more efficient. They can make decisions themselves and take the necessary actions that they see fit.

2.4 Employee turnover

Despite the number of companies outsourcing their customer service and the frequency of customer interaction with a contact centre, there is a relatively high percentage of negative experiences. An 84% of consumers have had a dismal call centre experience. This is attributable to the high turnover rate in the industry. Contact centres look for efficient, effective and scalable ways of training and retaining agents. (Murthy; Challagalla; Vincent; & Shervani, 2008)

Employee attrition rate within a contact centre is high and the process of hiring new CSRs is costly. Employee satisfaction can avoid a high turnover rate. The employee turnover rate directly affects the performance of the contact centre. A contact centre with a low turnover rate benefits from experienced personnel and this, in turn, directly affects the quality of service provided to the customers. (Saberi; Hussain; & Chang, 2017)

Employee engagement is seen as the key to keeping employees and minimize the turnover rate. Employee engagement is defined as providing the employees of a company with a sense of participation, freedom and trust. This is something that is more emotional in its characteristic and involves intangible factors. It is the way an employee feels on the emotional, cognitive and physical level. Bhatnagar explains that if an employee feels engaged in all these three factors, they are more likely to perform better. More specifically, the employee has meaningful relationships with their colleagues, they understand their role and know what their goals are. The success of employee engagement lies in management. It is their responsibility to make sure that the working
environment is one that fosters value, motivation and involvement. The bottom line is a sense of belonging and the knowledge that one can continue to learn. (Bhatnagar, 2008)

The service provider is at risk of losing knowledgeable agents due to high attrition rates. Cross training can help to minimize the impact. Cross training is important in the continuous improvement process. It is critical that employees can provide value in more than one area or skill set. This allows employees to look at the process. In doing so, they can continue to improve the process. (Fishman, 2006)
3 EMPLOYEE TRAINING

Training can be described as the formal effort made by an organization to improve the performance and self-fulfilment of employees through different methods and programs. There are different types of training that an organization provides. This ranges from very specific skill training to more general training targeted on professional development. Some companies have implemented a continuous learning framework and other aspects as a way to promote employee growth and develop a highly skilled workforce. Training and continuous development of employees are vital factors in the success and profitability of firms. (Inc., 2019)

Improved productivity and profitability are some of the benefits of employee training. Proper training leads to increased revenue. By training the CSRs, the order handling process flows more efficiently. It also encourages employee retention. Trained employees feel a level of commitment to the company. They feel like they are making a contribution, and this may lead to recognition by management. This makes it less likely for an employee to search for another job. Innovation is a factor that can stem from employee training. Training fosters creativity and can lead to employees looking for more efficient ways of conducting their job. With proper training and employee development, the CSR can aim for roles with more responsibilities, leading to higher salaries. (Levoy, 2011)

Since CSRs play such a vital role in the customer relationship of a company, their skills and training must be up to par of what the company expects. They have to be equipped with both soft and hard skills. Soft skills are their interpersonal skills and hard skills are technical capabilities. The skills of a CSR are important to the success of a contact centre. CSRs must have access to knowledge quickly and efficiently. They must be able to engage in knowledge sharing, personalization and exploration. The manager of the CSR must ensure the quality of performance. (Saberi; Hussain; Chang, 2017)

By training the CSR, the contact centre equips their employees with the skills to handle their job and ultimately provide quality service to the customer. A successful and effective training program is comprised of different fundamentals. Technical skills being one of the most fundamental skills a CSR is supposed to possess. They need to navigate and access information correctly and understand internal processes. Another important factor in a training program is educating the CSR on product and industry-specific
knowledge. In order to correctly address the issues customers are facing, the CSR needs to be familiar with the products and services they support. (Rosenberg, 2005)

Rosenberg (2005) explains that both technical skills and product knowledge are hard skills that the contact centre is to provide their CSRs. Soft skills include human interaction skills. It has been shown that CSRs with a good foundation in this soft skill results in better job performance, reduced job stress, better customer service scores and reduced turnover. This can be helpful when dealing with irate customers and efficiently address customer concerns. Something that is normally overlooked when training CSRs is training on how a contact centre works. This includes knowing the metrics by which performance is measured against and ultimately how their performance affects the success of the contact centre. Management needs to clearly define what their targets and expectations are and how it directly translates into each level of the call centre. The CSR has to be aware of how their functions affects other members in the organization.

They need to understand that because they are the frontline members of the organization, their work matters. Production and logistics are some of the functions that depend on the direct work of customer care. How they prepare their order in SAP will trigger production and logistics on how to act.

3.1 The Learning Cycle

When creating a learning or training program for employees, the style of learning must be made to adapt to the way employees learn. Hart and Crisp (1991) have identified a simple model on how people learn. The learning cycle is comprised of three steps.

1. Presentation of the learning activity,
2. The participants’ response
3. Application to everyday life
During the learning activity, the participants are involved in the actual training activity whether it be role play or reading reference material. This can be done by taking part in role playing activities where a situation is provided, and the participants are supposed to act as they would when the situation arises in their job. The purpose is to encourage learning through experience. It provides the basis for understanding a skill. After the learning activity, the participants of the training are expected to respond by providing feedback. The response is a way for both the participant and the trainer to identify the impact of the learning activity. It is a way to analyse how the participants felt about the training program along with analysing the actual information provided to them. In the last stage of the learning cycle, the participants can apply what they have learned into their everyday work. In the application stage, it is important to review the information as it helps to augment what has been learned. Also, in the application stage, when the participant sets goals and plans with others, it can be beneficial for reinforcing what has been taught. (Hart & Crisp, 1991)

The learning cycle was used in the training program. The learning activity took place in the form of mixed learning. A lecture was provided where SAP technical skills were presented. After which, buddy-up sessions were done. During these sessions, the trainer and CSR worked together to address current orders that were on hand and discuss how to address the orders. The participants were asked to complete a questionnaire as a form of feedback separate from the open forum after the training session. During the open forum, direct feedback and questions were asked from the participants. After the training program, the CSRs were asked to apply their learning. They were made aware of the goals the manufacturing site presented, which included the fill-rate.
3.2 Training Methods

When designing a training program, input from the CSR is valuable as they are the ones that are aware of what is needed to successfully do their job. By talking to the CSR and following up on the training sessions through short evaluation surveys, the contact centre manages to get a better view on the improvements of the company. There is a trend towards using eLearning tools. It is an alternative to classroom learning, mentoring, coaching or other labour-intensive training tools. Although this may pose several benefits, it takes away from the CSR the chance to interact with the expert and engage in role playing scenarios. There should be a balance in the kinds of training provided. (Rosenberg, 2005)

Syed (2008) identifies the basic steps that makes up an effective training plan:

- The first step in training process is to make everyone aware of what the training is all about. Thoughts suggestions should be gathered.
- The second step is to get acceptance. The trainees must feel that training will be of value to them.
- The third step is to adept to adapt the program. Is everyone ready to buy into it? Does everyone feel they are a part of what is going to take place?
- The fourth step is to adept to what has been agreed upon. What changes must be made in behaviour and attitudes.

Training includes basic contextual knowledge of the products of the company, the tools and computer systems being used, and company policies. Also, there is a process wherein the new hire buddies up with a more experienced employee. Contact centres also use the coaching method in their training programmes. This is where managers monitor their employees and provide feedback on their performance. In general, training is used for developing and ensuring that the CSR has the right skills for the job. (Townsend, 2007)

There should be a balance in the type of training provided. Role-play training is widely used. Some of the restrictions are the fact that this type of learning is not scalable nor individualized. It is also dependant on the quality and expertise of the instructor. Classroom-type learning allows for an important factor in training. That is the possibility to receive and provide feedback. By learning in this type of environment, participants can
observe the role-playing exercise and address mistakes made through direct interaction with the instructor. (Murthy; Challagalla; Vincent; & Shervani, 2008)

Rosenberg (2005) stresses that training is a process, not an event. A broader view needs to be applied when it comes to training programs. It is an ongoing process that develops as different needs or challenges arises. It is noted that training is most beneficial when spread out over time. It leads to better morale and ultimately reduces turnover and the added costs of the new hire process.

Mitranescu (2019) identified the best practices for CSR training. The approach in which training can be made successful. It supports much of the areas discussed in this chapter. She goes on to state that management needs to acknowledge the fact that CSRs need consecutive training in order to succeed and provide quality customer service. Training should be provided whether for a newly launched product or even for changes in existing products, services or functions in the tools used by the CSR. Any type of change should come with the appropriate training.

Mitranescu (2019) discusses in her list of best practices that by training CSRs, the organization empowers their employees. This allows for the CSR to make decisions for themselves. This confidence in decision making can result in better customer satisfaction as problems or challenges can be handled immediately and effectively. Feedback is another factor that she points out in her article. The feedback delivered should be clear and actionable. Also, CSRs should be able to provide feedback on the training they had received. It is a way for the training provider to see where they can improve or add to the training package. Feedback should also be given and discussed between CSRs themselves. By doing so, they can discuss the quality of training provided together and discuss what they need to support their functions.
4 RESEARCH METHOD

For this research, the initial data gathered was to observe how the actions of CSRs affects the fill-rate of the case company. By using this data, we were able to identify where CSRs faced the most challenges. This data was used to propose a training package or program that would be implemented. This data was collected manually and listed in an excel sheet over a period of time.

The second type of data gathered for this research is direct feedback through the form of a questionnaire that was gathered from the CSRs that participated in the training session. The questionnaire was presented to the participants after the training session. The initial questionnaire provided by the researcher was rejected. Instead, the contact centre training team provided their own questionnaire and feedback.

4.1 Data Collection

The researcher gathered a list of errors over a set period and identified the common cause of these errors. It was discovered that the type of errors made by CSRs were repetitive. The errors were listed and observed through order handling and through communication sent between the researcher and the CSRs. Most of the errors could be found while going through our backlog file where we can check open orders and conduct a health check. This will determine why an order was not able to ship during the time indicated within the order.
The common errors found were as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reason codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wrong route</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong delivery term</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong delivery address</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipping instructions entered in SAP text fields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relevant fields from delivery address not transferred to carrier’s system</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lot overbooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong lot reserved</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No contact information for the recipient</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality complaint procedure not followed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order line unconfirmed (lot, procurement type...)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong items or reference numbers entered in SAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accidental partial delivery (complete dlv. box not ticked)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong first date (not changed after changes or when order was released from hold)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4. Reason Codes in Krakow Quality Monitoring Data

As a result of these errors, the following consequences were determined:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consequences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Issue fixed in Turku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Late delivery line(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shipment was delayed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recipient declined the delivery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address clarification with carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact info clarification with carrier</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality complaint/replacement done twice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Replacement needs to be done due to delay</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 5. Consequences in Krakow Quality Monitoring Data

The consequences listed here have a direct impact on cost. The cost may be monetary, but it can also be intangible. Monetary costs can be considered as the value of the replacement to be sent to the customer along with freight charges and the like. Intangible
costs can be considered as the loss of trust the customer experiences towards the case company for the errors made. Also, there is the cost to the brand because of negative reputation that is caused by repeated errors.

The data was collected over a period starting from February 2018 to August 2019. By covering an extensive period, we are able to see the amount of errors picked up by the researcher before and after both training sessions conducted in the Spring of 2018 and 2019.

The researcher had created a feedback from to be provided after the training session, however that was not approved. Instead, feedback was collected sent by the training team of the service centre. This is what was used as a reference for the quality and effectiveness of the training session and tools that had been provided. In support of the findings, buddy-up and shadowing sessions with the CSRs on the production floor were used to understand and observe where the challenges are.

While shadowing the CSRs, the researcher was able to gather and observe how the CSRs work. The researcher was also able to freely converse and provide immediate feedback on the areas where they felt that the CSR needed the most support in. The CSRs did not want to officially comment on this matter, but they were happy to share their thoughts and concerns personally.

4.2 Rationale for Data Collection Method

By collecting data on the errors made by the CSRs, one can deduce where most of the challenges are. Also, by looking at the frequency, one can identify if there is a trend in the number of errors made before and after the training session provided. The data collected was used to focus the training tool created on areas where the CSR struggles the most.

The researcher chose this method due to the fact that our metrics is measured by the fill rate. The fill rate is the percentage of order lines that go on delivery within 24 hours of an order being cleared. The target is at 98 percent. Errors made by the CSR can directly affect our metrics. The list gathered, looks as errors that caused delayed order lines which has a negative impact on our fill rate. Many of the errors made could have been avoided with proper knowledge of the ERP system used. It does not consider errors
made by unforeseen events, such as system errors or those errors caused by a third party.

The purpose of the evaluation questionnaire the researcher proposed was to assess and measure the effectiveness and relevance of the training provided. It was requested by the case company that an evaluation survey would be given to those that attended the training session. This request was not granted. Instead, the service provider gave an explanation as to why it is against their policies to engage in such a survey by an external stakeholder. Instead, a survey created by the service provider was distributed to the attendees of the training session. One that made internally by their own training personnel. It must be noted that the training personnel did not attend the training sessions themselves.

On the production floor, when engaging in one on one sessions with the different teams and CSRs, the feedback was positive. Hands on assistance and personal observation allowed the CSR and myself to gain trust with each other and resulted in the CSRs engaging in conversation and they managed to answer some of my questions. They would not allow the researcher to interview them formally but were willing to answer concerns personally.

The request to study and inquire about the internal training and onboarding processes was not supported by the service provider. Information on training and the quality metrics was promised but not delivered. Despite the intention to provide support and knowledge, the efforts were unwelcomed by those in management positions.
5 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis is divided into two portions. One is the analysis of the quantitative data gathered supporting the need for training and the other is an analysis of the feedback gathered from the participants of the training session.

5.1 Quality monitoring data

As described previously in this research, the case company uses a fill-rate matrix to measure efficiency, productivity and on-time delivery of goods and services to their customers. The data gathered shows the frequency errors are made within a particular month. Here is a summary of the data gathered:

![Error frequency data from Krakow Quality Monitoring Data](image)

Figure 6. Error frequency data from Krakow Quality Monitoring Data

This graph shows the number of errors noted by the researcher in a given month. As can be seen from the chart, from February to April 2018, there are a higher than average number of errors made. The first training session in Krakow was conducted in May 2018. After the first training session, it can be seen that the frequency of errors made by the CSRs have decreased significantly.

September 2018 shows a small spike in the frequency. This could be due to the end of quarter rush. The case company makes greater effort to fulfil revenue during the last
months of the yearly quarter. The increase is possible sales may have led to the increase in errors made.

There is then a significant increase the number of errors made at the beginning of 2019. This is largely due to the change in personnel at the customer care site. At the end of 2018, a number of experienced employees had left the company and in their place, new employees were hired however, they were not able to buddy-up with the more experienced employees as extensively as needed.

The change in personnel clearly affects the number of errors noted by the researcher. The change in personnel came from the UK customer care team. Below is the data of errors made per country team:

![Figure 7. Error frequency from Krakow Quality Monitoring Data by Region](image)

As we can see from this data, the UK customer care team have the greatest number of errors made in the first quarter of 2019. Not only did experienced members of the team resign from the company and that knowledge and expertise was lost, but the amount of time and effort needed to train new hires shows in the data. With errors comes cost. For Q1 of 2019, the errors made by customer care have a direct impact on the cost to the case company. Cost can be calculated in terms of the consequences listed in the data collection portion of this research.

The second training session was conducted in the Spring of 2019. We can see from the number of errors listed, there is a significant drop in the frequency. After May 2019, there
were no recorded errors till August 2019. There are many aspects that contribute to this. The training material presented was provided to the customer care teams and it was asked that they use it as a point of reference. Also, supervisors of the customer care team were asked to join the training session so that they would be able to provide immediate support to the CSRs. There were follow up training session conducted for specific groups and the data shows that these efforts brought down the number of errors noted.

5.2 Questionnaire data

The original questionnaire created by the researcher which was presented to the stakeholders can be found in Appendix 1. The questionnaire created by the researcher was rejected by the stakeholders for the customer care centre. In its place, the training team of the contact centre provided their own feedback questionnaire. Below are the results gathered from the 23 attendees, the answers were given on a scale of 1 (low) – 5 (high).

Figure 8. Questionnaire results

**Question 1. Rate your overall learning experience on this training program and its usefulness and meeting your learning needs:**
Out of all the feedback provided from the attendees, the majority rated the question as 5. This reflects on the usefulness of the training provided by the case company to their customer care team.

**Question 2. The training program has equipped you with the relevant skills to effectively apply this learning in your job:**

As mentioned earlier in this research, there were a few participants of the training that were not at CSR level. Hence, their feedback may be reflected on the usefulness of the training in their everyday work. However, it does not take into consideration here the usefulness of the training in providing immediate troubleshooting capabilities to the CSR. In general, the majority of the attendees were CSRs and they have confirmed through this questionnaire that the training provided is directly relevant to their everyday work.

**Question 3. The training program including all component materials were easy to access:**

A majority of the attendees agreed that the training material is easy to access. This is in large part due to the fact that the material provided was disseminated to the team members directly. They were able to save it on their personal drives and go back to the material for review as needed.

**Question 4. The pace and structure of the program made the concepts easy to understand:**

The majority of the attendees felt like the structure and pace of the program was conducive to their learning. There are a few attendees that had just started working in customer care. Some of which had only been in the company for a month. This is positive feedback on the part of the attendees because it addresses the problem of the company SOP. The SOP is not comprehensive, especially to new hires. The training program provided by the researcher seems to be favourable and more comprehensive. The goal was to create material that was easy to understand and use alongside the daily tasks of the CSR.

**Question 5. You foresee an application of the concepts learnt in your job in the next 2-3 months:**

Again, the majority of the attendees claim that the concepts covered in the training session would be something that they can apply in their work moving forward. This is again, positive feedback given by the attendees. This is because, as we can see from the data in section 7.1 of this research, the number of errors made by customer care can
fluctuate. The application of the first training session brought down the number of errors made, and the current trend is, in support of this feedback, that the CSR will apply the concepts learned in their work.

**Question 6. Based on your experience, will you refer this program to your colleagues with similar learning needs:**

The majority had answered positively for this question. They would refer this training program to their colleagues. This can be seen as a positive reflection on the skills and material provided by the researcher. It also supports the TQM theory wherein communication between employees is vital. Sharing knowledge and best practices benefit the team and ultimately the company as a whole. It fosters collaboration and innovation.

Below is a list of the open feedback received from the attendees:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presenters were experts in their field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a lot of examples and tips</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>very interesting, a lot of details, useful for daily job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Helena is a very knowledgeable person and she was very well prepared for the training. The atmosphere was great. The only thing I didn’t like was that the training was too long. Three hours for that intense course is too much.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>open discussion with Turku Team/Enough time to ask questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the training was very clear</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>trainers were organized and knowledgeable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>new things to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clear overview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not really applicable for my everyday work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 9. Raw Data from Questionnaire Open Questions**

The feedback from the open-ended questions leaves room for improvement in the training package. The general message of the positive feedback is that the training was clear and easy to follow. The presenter was knowledgeable enough in the field to provide the needed support. The attendees appreciated the open discussions wherein they could ask questions and receive on the spot feedback along with the use of practical examples and hands on presenting of the solutions to their queries.
One of the feedbacks was that the training was not applicable for the attendee’s everyday work. This is expected from the individuals that attended who do not process customer orders on a daily basis. However, as the organizer, the researcher found that it would be beneficial and even necessary for those in supervisory positions to attend the meeting so as to provide back up support if necessary. Also, in this way, should errors occur and complaints be made by either the customer or the manufacturing site, those in a supervisory role would be able to understand the nature of the problem and avoid it moving forward.

5.3 Limitations of the Data and Research

There are a number of limitations to the data and research of this paper. One of the major limitations is that the data collected for quality monitoring was a very manual process. It was up to the researcher and their colleagues to extract the errors made by the CSRs and list them down. The data is not as reliable as it can be. The accuracy of the data is dependent on the diligence of the researcher. During the summer holidays, it was up to the co-workers of the researcher to pick up and take note of the errors in the data file. There is a high risk that not all errors were collected or noted.

With regards to the questionnaire, the most significant limitation is the fact that the management team of the contact centre did not agree to implement the feedback questionnaire, although anonymous, created by the researcher. There were questions presented that would have provided a more holistic view of the climate within the customer care team. For example, the question relating to the tenure of the employee would help to determine the causes and reasons for their answers. Also, a question on whether the employee had attending the training session the year before would have given insight on whether a one-size-fits-all training package would be relevant for those that have been in the company longer, or if a short, more hands-on type of training would prove to be more appropriate for more tenured employees.

Another limitation that needs to be addressed is the amount of cooperation between the researcher and contact centre. Although requested, information was not provided on the new hire program, neither on the continuous learning program of the contact centre. This information would have been beneficial to this research. It would have provided a better foundation on the type of material and training style needed to help customer care do their job efficiently and effectively.
6 CONCLUSION

There is a gap in the quality of training provided to the CSRs. The research shows that continuous training is needed. The data analysis of the research supports the theories of TQM and more specifically, continuous improvement through the use of training. The theory, as provided by Fishman, shows that training is needed because change is constant. This flexibility brought on by training helps to anticipate challenges. In the contact centre industry where the turnover rate is high, the organization has to be flexible in order to anticipate the challenges that they may face. This was seen in the data when tenured employees decided to leave the company.

CSRs are the frontline members of the organization. They are in direct contact with the customers. It is their performance that is scrutinized by the customers as they are a representative of the company. Having said this, the quality of service provided by the CSRs is a direct reflection on the standards of the company. Errors made by customer care results in customer frustration. With recurring customers, as in the case here, this can bring on even more frustration. Customers have a set standard that they expect and if the organizations involved cannot live up to those standards, customer satisfaction is negatively affected.

By enforcing the TQM strategies and principles, the stakeholders involved can work to ensure that the company puts the customer first. It also takes into consideration the employees and their professional wellbeing. TQM is a holistic practice that, despite certain limitations, works towards not only providing quality customer care, but also quality working atmosphere for the employees.

The research supports the research questions of this study. It has been shown that the training package provided directly impacted the frequency of errors made. It also brought to attention the training needs which customer care feels like they require.

6.1 Critical Evaluation

As described in the limitations portion 7.3 of this study, there were challenges in the data collection for this research. The data collected, although informative, may not be entirely accurate or complete. The questionnaire results did not wholly support the efforts made
to identify the need for continuous training or the method of training CSRs need at different points in their tenure. The questionnaire administered by the contact centre team failed to ask the attendees about the level of confidence they have in their SAP skills. A skill that is vital in their everyday job. This would have been addressed should the questionnaire created by the researcher been used.

The theories of TQM and continuous improvement have a lot to do with collaboration. It also requires that the working culture is transparent and open. One of the criticisms raised was that of the Polish working culture. It is frowned upon to speak critically of one’s supervisor. Having said this, CSRs were cautious in the feedback they provided. They were also cautious in admitting the kind of support they needed.

6.2 Further Recommendation

It is recommended that the training program provided by the researcher be used for both new hires and as a refresher for tenured agents. It is also recommended that data be gathered on needs of the CSRs with regards to their SAP skills. This way, an appropriate program or training manual can be created which focuses on specific needs and not just at a more general level.

It is also recommended that the communication flow between CSRs, their supervisors and the manufacturing site be more open. This way, concerns can be addressed, and the necessary processes can be put into place.

Due to the high attrition rate of the contact centre, it is suggested that regular training sessions be made. The sessions can be online, but the frequency needs to be increased. The sessions can be problem specific, or it can be general depending on the audience. Also, the recommendation by the manufacturing site is that there would be one or two employees at the customer care site that would be experts in the products and processes of the case company.

By providing this expertise on site at the contact centre, the CSRs have immediate access to peers that can provide them with support. This will also help the manufacturing site be more aware of the needs that customer care and ultimately the customers face. With a specific point of contact, work can be made more efficient.
REFERENCES


[Haettu 07 December 2019].


[Haettu 8 December 2019].

[Haettu 15 December 2019].

Original Questionnaire Prepared by Researcher

1. How long have you been working with GenPact?
2. Did you participate in last year’s training conducted by Turku (May 2018)?
3. What tools or material was provided during your training/induction/new hire process?

Please rate the following:

4. SAP skills (1 – weak, 5 – strong)
   a. Order entry skills?
   b. Lot reservation skills?
   c. Reading stock quantities?
   d. Troubleshooting skills?
   e. Extracting information from different transactions?

5. Turku/OTR (1 – weak, 5 – strong)
   a. Support from Turku?
   b. Support from OTR team?
   c. Quality of information coming from Turku?
   d. Turku training session in Krakow (held April 2019)?
   e. Topics handled in training session in Krakow?

6. Genpact (1 – weak, 5 – strong)
   a. Support from peers?
   b. Training received upon hiring?
   c. Induction plan?
   d. Continuous learning plan (new product training, refresher training for SAP, etc.)?

Suggestions for improvement:
7. What kind of training material would be useful?

8. For future training session, what topics would you like to have included, which are not currently covered?

9. What kind of training sessions would be most useful for you?