

Conference/Placement

Assignment 2

Introduction

My placement was within XXXX, a women's clothing retailer catering for sizes 12-24, which values itself on providing reasonably priced good quality products. I worked part-time in the XXXX branch for XXXX. In XXXX, I became a supervisor therefore I needed to learn and further develop new skills. In my learning agreement (APPENDIX 1), I outlined the following aspects as areas that I wanted to develop:

- Acquire an understanding of the organisation's activities.
- Investigate how the organisation deals with different management styles.
- Investigate how the organisation communicates with its staff.
- Investigate how the organisation communicates with its customers.

Management styles within the organisation

During my placement, I had the opportunity to work closely with key staff members in order to compare their management styles, as well as being able to review my own managerial style. These staff members included:

- Regional Manager.
- Store Manager.
- Assistant Manager.
- Key Holder/Sunday Supervisor.
- Key Holder/Sunday Supervisor.

McGregor (1960) stated that there are two distinct styles of leadership, theory X and theory Y. Theory X leaders assume that people dislike and avoid work and need to be tightly controlled whilst theory Y leaders believe that people like to work, will accept responsibility and will work hard if treated fairly. Whilst it was apparent that none of the staff were theory X leaders, the regional manager demonstrated theory X tendencies at times, especially when her stores were

underperforming. Having recently taken over the role, it was essential for the manager to mark her territory, hence her theory X tendencies.

Huneryager and Heckman (1967) introduced four different management styles; dictatorial, autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. The manager demonstrated signs of being an autocratic leader – obedience was expected and she made the final decisions. This reflected her role as regional manager as she controlled the layout of the stores that she was responsible for, even when the layout was the responsibility of the store managers.

The store manager and assistant manager had very different management styles. From my experience XXXX was far more autocratic and strict, whilst XXXX sometimes displayed elements of laissez-faire management as she left the workers to get on with their jobs, and trusted the staff to make some decisions. She was most likely to leave staff on the shop floor whilst she was upstairs doing paperwork, however was easily accessible if you needed her.

Blake and Mouton's (1964) leadership grid (APPENDIX 2) assesses a manager's concern for production (X axis) and the people (Y axis). The optimum result for this grid would be (9,9), the Ideal Manager, however it is very difficult to find someone with such strong concern for both people and the task at hand. I would place XXXX as (5, 8) as she was more concerned about her staff than the importance of completing tasks however Kelly would be placed at (9, 5) as she was very focused on completing tasks, and was unhappy if people did not complete them on time.

XXXX, my predecessor as Sunday supervisor, shared a similar management style to. Her concern for the staff was placed above the need to complete every job on the list. Whilst she attempted to complete all tasks, she also tried to finish in a timely manner so that staff did not have to work on. In comparison to XXXX, as a manager I was focussed on both the tasks and the staff. I detested leaving jobs undone and motivated the workers to complete tasks in a timely manner so that they could leave as soon as the store closed. XXXX was keen on delegating tasks to others, giving freedom as shown on the Tannenbaum-Schmidt Continuum (APPENDIX 3) and therefore edged towards theory Y. However, I preferred to undertake tasks myself, as I am a perfectionist. One element I found difficult whilst managing staff was to give orders to someone who was older than myself. Whilst XXXX had experience of dealing with people of all ages, it was a strange experience for me. I found that the younger members of staff would come to me for advice and ask questions, whilst giving the older members some authority, for example, being in charge of the security walkie-talkie, ensured that they performed better.

During my placement, we were told that we were being made redundant due to store closure. Whilst this decision was eventually reversed, during this period the management were under a lot of pressure and management styles deteriorated. It was extremely difficult for all supervisors as other staff were very demotivated. Their basic and safety needs were not being met, as their jobs were at risk, therefore Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs were strongly affected (APPENDIX 4). The supervisors were unable to answer any questions from staff, which affected relationships between the branch and Jan, as she had to deal with numerous stores facing closure, as well as potentially losing her own job. Communication was strained and virtually non-existent.

Whilst all the key staff are varied in their management styles, Rollinson et al (1998) said that "no approach is redundant – they all have something to offer" therefore all staff members can have a positive effect by managing in their own style.

Communication with its staff

Regional staff to branch staff

During my placement, I had the opportunity to further develop my knowledge of communication between staff, both in-store and regional. I went to a key-holder meeting with XXXX in XXXX where I met other key-holders from XXXX, XXXX, XXXX and XXXX as well as learning how to enhance the store from XXXX.

XXXX contacted the XXXX store weekly via conference calls which also included other stores in the region. Unfortunately I never got the chance to participate, however I learnt that the managers used the calls as a motivational tool, as XXXX would relay any areas of improvement for your store in front of all the participants. 'Ring arounds' were a vital communication tool within the stores, as Jan would ring one store with a message and then expect you to relay the message to other stores within the region. I had the opportunity to relay a message to the XXXX store and learnt that it was imperative to understand the initial message and relay it correctly so that the other store received the correct message. The area manager also visited regularly, to amend store layouts and give general guidance.

Daft and Lengel's (1986) media richness theory encompasses the fact that written media such as emails are a lean medium as you cannot hear the voice of the sender or see facial expressions. The fact that XXXX used Conference calls and 'ring arounds' was relatively rich, as you could hear the tone of voice used and whether or not they were hesitant. Face-to-face interaction was most beneficial; however as XXXX managed several stores the logistics involved meant that she had to rely on technology to communicate. Krauss & Fussell (1990) warned that a lack of social cues in lean

media can be problematic as misunderstandings can occur, which is why it is vital for messages to be relayed through telephone calls and face-to-face meetings.

Communication can also deal with motivation and management style, which also links to Fayol's (1930) five basic functions of management. These are forecasting, organising, commanding, co-ordinating and controlling. Without communication, these steps cannot be accomplished. During the redundancy scare, communication was minimal between XXXX management and the XXXX branch. Being informed of the closure without a set date being given meant that staff were unable to plan ahead. Furthermore, having later been given several different closing dates, it was impossible to control the situation and seek new employment. Eventually, the staff were told that the branch had been saved, however whilst management expected everyone to be jubilant, it had the opposite effect as several staff members had already secured alternative employment.

Local branch to internal staff

The in house newsletter was one of the key communication tools within the organisation. It notified staff of any changes to store offers, how the store was performing, changes to layout and general notices. We also received message through the till at the start and end of the day.

Communication between staff members in-store was also important. It was essential to ensure that messages and instructions were transcribed properly in order to ensure everyone performed to the best of their ability. Deployment rotas were used to notify individuals what their magazine, Bonus Card and IPB (items per basket) targets were each day, what tasks they had to do and also the key performance indicators (KPI's). This, along with a staff briefing at the beginning and end of each shift ensured that everybody knew what had to be done during the shift and they received feedback.

Communication with its customers

XXXX is an organisation that takes great care over its customers. During my placement it was apparent that customers were a priority over tasking. All customers were to be greeted and assisted if required.

The loyalty scheme was one of its main methods of communicating with customers. Kotler (2008, p476) defines relationship marketing as "the process of creating, maintaining and enhancing strong, value laden relationships with customers and other stakeholders". The loyalty card encouraged communication between the store and its customers, on a proactive, partnership level (APPENDIX 5). The customer received information based on card usage including mailers and discount

vouchers. Other advantages of having a Bonus Card included in-store Bonusdays giving cardholders 20% discount as well as a Spend and Save Scheme resulting in a £5 discount for every £50 spent.

XXXX also sold the BM Magazine for 75p. This included real life stories, new stock, recipes, pen-pal letters, vouchers, competitions and a free gift. This was a magnificent marketing tool as well as being a great communication tool to allow customers to keep up-to-date with the business.

Recently, online shopping and telephone order lines were launched allowing customers to buy without leaving the house. Discount and free postage vouchers were distributed to encourage usage. This also encouraged customers, and was supported by the launch of their official Facebook page. Social media is a fantastic communication tool and, along with their David Emanuel clothing, will encourage a younger clientele. They also recently launched their collection on the Ideal Home Channel which will again target people that prefer shopping from home.

Finally, XXXX are perceived to be a social corporation, as they show moral values by doing a lot of charity fundraising. The XXXX branch has supported Help For Heroes and Wales Air Ambulance in the past, and the organisation has supported Macmillan Cancer Support for 10 years, raising over £2.5 million (company website). Various fundraising activities are held throughout the year such as 'Go Mad, Go Green' and 'The Worlds' Biggest Coffee Morning' as well as the sale of Macmillan merchandise in-store throughout the year. Being a charitable organisation has allowed XXXX to communicate a good message to its customers and to encourage donations to a worthy cause.

During the period of threatened redundancy, communication with customers was vital. Unfortunately, as communication between the buyers of XXXX and the stores was non-existent, it was difficult to redress any worries that the customers had, as we were not fully aware of what was happening ourselves. However, this period highlighted customer loyalty as they were very concerned at the potential redundancies, and that the shop would be closing. Customer loyalty remained strong and I am confident that they will remain loyal to the store as it re-opens.

Conclusion

During my placement at XXXX, I managed to utilise my knowledge of the organisation, and was allowed more responsibility, therefore broadening my skills. Whilst I worked in the organisation for XXXX, I continued to learn and successfully understood the activities of the organisation, the management styles shown by key workers, as well as the communication between the company and the customers.

Whilst I thoroughly enjoyed developing a greater understanding of XXXX, towards the end of my placement I found it to be quite difficult as the store was under threat of closure. This demonstrated how important communication is, because the lack of communication given to the store was unacceptable, as we were left in the dark. It also highlighted how the company had built up a loyalty with the customers, as they showed concern for the company whilst we were under threat, yet continued to support us when we discovered the decision had been reversed. The management styles of key members were certainly put under strain during this period however I am sure that the experience will have a positive effect on the way that they will manage the store in the future.

2132 words.

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Another Example

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