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HR Report: Enhancing Customer Service Assistance at Tesco Express

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1. Introduction

Human Resources (HR) departments in the UK retail sector face increasing pressure due to rapid technological change, workforce expectations, and social accountability. Tesco Express, as a convenience retail format at Tesco, relies heavily on frontline Customer Service Assistants (CSA'S) to deliver efficient service, maintain customer satisfaction, and uphold brand reputation. However, challenges such as adapting to technological advancements, attracting and retaining talent, and promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) significantly impact workforce performance and organisational success.

This report analyses key HR challenges affecting CSAs at Tesco Express and evaluates contemporary HR practices designed to address them. Furthermore, it critically examines how departmental managers can ensure the effective and urgent implementation of these practices. The report draws on academic literature and industry insights to provide evidence-based analysis and recommendations.

2. Expanded Factors Affecting HR in Tesco Express

Technological Advancement

The retail sector has become increasingly digitised, with Tesco Express integrating technologies such as self-service checkout, AI-driven stock control systems, and mobile-based payment solutions. These technologies improve operational efficiency but significantly reshape the role of Customer Service Assistants (CSA's). Rather than performing repetitive checkout tasks, CSAs are now expected to troubleshoot machines, assist customers with digital tools, and deliver personalised service.

The shift reflects the broader concept of "job enrichment" where employees take on more complex responsibilities (Hackman and Oldham, 1976). However, the transition can create role ambiguity, particularly for employees who lack confidence in using digital systems. Cascio and Montealegre (2016) argue that technological change often increases job demands without immediately increasing employee's capability, leading to stress and reduced job satisfaction. However, Tesco acknowledge that ongoing investment in colleague training is necessary to ensure to employee can effectively use new system (Tesco plc,2023).

Additionally, the pace of technological change presents a continuous challenge. Tesco must regularly update systems, meaning training is not a one-of activity but a ongoing requirement. Whiteout structured leading strategies, employees may experience "digital fatigue" reducing productivity and engagement.

Talent Acquisition and Retention

Employees turnover remains one of the most pressing HR challenges in retail. Roles such as CSA's are often characterised by relatively low pay, shift work, and limited perceived career progression. According to CIPD (2023), high turnover in retail sector is linked to both job design and external labour market conditions.

At Tesco Express, the reliance on flexible and part-time contracts can be a double-edged sword. While flexibility attracts students and part-time workers, it can reduce organisational commitments. The psychological contract-employees' expectations of their employer -may

be weaker in such roles (Rousseau, 1995). When expectations around hours, workload, or development are not met, employees are more likely to leave.

Furthermore, the UK labour market has tightened in recent years, with fewer EU workers available post-Brexit (ONS, 2023). This has intensified competition for entry-level workers, focusing organisations like Tesco to rethink their recruitment strategies.

Retention is also influenced by employee experience. Poor management practices, lack of recognition, and limited communication can quickly lead to disengagement. As Kahn (1990) highlights, employees are more likely to remain in roles where they feel valued and psychologically safe.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Tesco Express stores operate in diverse communities, meaning CSAs often interact with customers from varied culture, linguistic, and social background. A diverse workforce can enhance service delivery by reflecting the customer base, but it also requires effective management.

DEI challenges in retail often stem from unconscious bias, lack of representation in leadership roles, and inconsistent implementation of policies. Roberson (2019) notes that diversity alone does not improve performance; inclusion is necessary to ensure employees feel respected and able to contribute.

In Tesco Express, inclusion is particularly important due to the team-based nature of store operations. Poor inclusion can lead to conflict, miscommunication, and reduced collaboration. Additionally, employees who experience discrimination or exclusion are more likely to disengage and leave the organisation.

Another challenge is translating corporate-level DEI strategies into everyday store practices. While Tesco may have strong policies, their effectiveness depends on how well they are implemented at the store level.

3. Future Expanded Evaluation of Contemporary HR Practices

Technological Adaptation Practices

While training and development are essential, a key issue is whether these practices are proactive or reactive. Many retail organisations, including Tesco Express, adopt training only after new technologies are introduced, rather than preparing employees in advance. This reactive approach can create short-term performance gaps and employee anxiety.

A more effective approach is strategic workforce planning, where future skill requirements are anticipated and integrated into HR strategy (Cascio and Montereale, 2016). For example, Tesco Cloud implements digital readiness programmes that prepare CSAs for upcoming technological changes rather than focusing solely on current systems.

Additionally, the concept of learning organisation (Senge, 1990) is highly relevant. Tesco must foster a culture where continuous learning is embedded into daily work practices. However, in a fast-paced retail environment, learning is often deprioritised due to time constraints. This highlights a structural limitation: even well-designed HR practice may fail if operational pressures are not addressed.

Another critical issue is digital inequality among employees. Not all CSAs will have the same level of technological competence, particularly older workers or those with limited prior exposure. Standardised training may not meet diverse learning needs, suggesting that personalised learning pathways are more effective.

Talent Management and Retention Strategy

Although flexible working and engagement initiatives are widely used, their effectiveness depends on how they are perceived by employees. According to Equity Theory (Adams, 1965), employees compare their input and rewards with others. If shift allocation, pay, or recognition is perceived as unfair, dissatisfaction will arise-even if HR policies are objectively reasonable.

Tesco's use of flexible contracts may also contribute the job insecurity, which can negatively impact commitment. While flexibility benefits employers operationally it may weaken the psychological contract (Rousseau, 1995). Therefore, Tesco must balance flexibility with stability, for example by offering guaranteed minimum hours or clearer progression pathways.

Another important practice is career development. While retail roles are often seen as temporary, providing visible progression opportunities (e.g., team leader roles) can improve retention. However, the limitation is that not all employees seek long-term career in retail, meaning development programmes may not always yield retention benefits.

Moreover, employees voice mechanisms (e.g., survey, feedback systems) are critical. These allow organisations to identify issues early and respond effectively. However, if employees feel their feedback is ignored, trust may decline, reducing engagement.

DEI Practices

DEI practices are often criticised for being symbolic rather than substantive. While policies and training programmes are important, they do not automatically lead to behavioural changes. According to Roberson (2019), meaningful inclusion requires systematic change in organisational culture.

One key issue is the implementation gap between corporate strategy and store-level practice. Tesco may promote diversity at a strategic level, but inconsistencies in managerial behaviour can undermine these efforts. This highlights the importance of embedding DEI into everyday practices, such as shift allocation, task distribution, and communication styles.

Another important concept is intersectionality, which recognises that individuals may experience multiple forms of disadvantage simultaneously (e.g., gender and ethnicity). Standard DEI policies may fail to address these complexities, suggesting a need for more nuanced approaches.

Furthermore, measuring DEI effectiveness is challenging. While quantitative metrics (e.g. diversity ratios) are useful, they do not capture employee experiences. Therefore, a combination of qualitative and quantitative data is necessary.

4. Expanded Critical Evaluation of Managerial Implementation

Bridging the Gap Between Policy and Practice

A major challenge in HR implementation is the intended vs. Actual HR practices gap (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007). While Tesco may design effective HR policies, their success depends on how managers interpret and apply them.

Store managers often exercise discretion in decision-making, which can lead to inconsistencies. For example, one manager may prioritise employee development, while another focuses solely on operational efficiency. This variation can significantly affect employee outcomes.

To address this, Tesco must ensure clear guidelines, training and monitoring systems to reduce variability in implementation.

Managerial Capability and Leadership Development

The effectiveness of HR practices depends heavily on managerial capability. Many retail managers are promoted based on operational performance rather than leadership skills, which can limit their ability to manage people effectively.

The AMO model (Ability, Motivation, Opportunity) provides a useful framework. Managers must:

- Have the ability (skills and knowledge)
- Be motivated to implement HR practices
- Have the opportunity (time and resources)

In Tesco Express, managers may lack opportunity due to workload pressures, even if they have ability and motivation. This highlights the importance of organisational support in enabling effective implementation.

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Managing Performance vs. Supporting Employees

Managers must balance performance management with employee wellbeing. In retail, there is often a strong focus on efficiency, sales, and customer service metrics. However, excessive performance pressure can lead to stress and burnout.

The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti et. al.,2001) suggests that high job demands must be balanced with adequate resources (e.g., support, autonomy). Managers play a key role in providing these resources.

Failure to achieve this balance can result in:

- Increased absenteeism
- Higher turnover
- Reduced customer service quality

Embedding DEI Through Leadership Behaviour

Managers are central to creating an inclusive environment requires behavioural change.

Inclusive leadership involves:

- Encouraging participation
- Valuing diverse perspectives
- Addressing bias proactively

A key challenge is that some managers may lack confidence in dealing with sensitive issues such as discrimination. This can lead to avoidance behaviour, allowing problems to persist.

To overcome this, Tesco must provide:

- Practical DEI training
- Clear escalation procedures
- Ongoing support

The Challenge of Urgency vs. Sustainability

The assignment emphasises implementation “as matter urgency”, but this creates a tension between short-term action and long-term sustainability.

Managers may implement quick fixes (e.g., poor retention). While urgent action is necessary, it must be aligned with long-term HR strategy.

This requires:

- Strategic thinking
- Data-driven decision-making
- Continuous evaluation

Accountability and Performance Measurement

A critical issue in HR implementation is accountability. If managers are not held responsible for HR outcomes, practices may not be prioritised.

Tesco can address this by linking HR metrics to managerial performance, such as:

- Employee turnover rates
- Engagement scores
- Diversity indication

However, over-reliance on metrics can lead to “gaming” behaviour, where managers focus on achieving targets rather than genuine improvement. Therefore, a balanced approach is necessary.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, Tesco Express faces complex and interrelated HR challenges driven by technological advancement, high employee turnover, and the need to foster diversity, equity, and inclusion. The analysis demonstrates that while contemporary HR practices- such as continuous training, flexible working arrangements, and inclusive policies- offer viable solution, their effectiveness is not guaranteed. Limitations such as inconsistent implementation, operational pressures, and gaps between policy and practice can significantly reduce their impact (Purcell and Hutchinson, 2007).

Critically, the success of these practices depends largely on the capability and commitment of departmental managers, who act as the key link between strategy and execution. Without strong leadership, adequate resources, and accountability, even well-designed HR initiatives may fail to deliver meaningful outcomes.

Therefore, Tesco must adopt an integrated and proactive approach, ensuring that HR strategies are not only well-designed but also effectively embedded within daily store operations to enhance employee performance, engagement, and overall customer service quality.

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