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TITLE: IMPLEMENTATION OF THE CRITICAL INCIDENT
TECHNIQUE ON SERVICE-BASED COMPANIES

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0.1 ABSTRACT:

The purpose of this report is to analyze the Critical Incident Technique (CIT) by implementing it in an organization or company. By using appropriate research techniques based on articles and websites and relevant books, I was able to retrieve the information explained in the report below. The coverage of the study is based on the introduction of the Critical Incident Technique, interview based examples of 2 positive critical incidents and 2 negative ones, and references from which the information and justification was referred to.

1.0 INTRODUCTION:

The Critical Incident Technique (CIT) is a qualitative method created by John C Flanagan (1954), which uses flexible principles to allow storing of interview data and information in relationships or patterns and then describe them effectively after being summarized. A CIT can also be defined as any noticeable human activity that is adequately thorough in itself to authorize suggestions and estimates to be made about the persons performing the act (Flanagan, 1954). It is also a research approach that offers step-by-step practical approaches for data collection and analysis of information concerning human activities as well as their impacts to the people involved (Hughes, 2007).

As mentioned by Chell (1998), the CIT was designed during a time when the positivist methodology to scientific research was the prevailing standard in the social sciences, certainly, in all sciences. Even though it is a qualitative research method, it was posed as a scientific tool to help reveal existing truths so that they could be measured, forecasted and eventually controlled within the authority of job and task analysis.

The applications or uses of the CIT can be seen in a diversity of different studies and fields, including library science and communication. In the context of judging an action as a critical incident, it must happen in a situation in which the reason or purpose of the action is fairly clear to the spectator and where its consequences are adequately certain to leave doubts concerning its effects or impacts (Flanagan, 1954).

1.1 1ST POSITIVE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

This incident happened to a business woman in Tanzania. She was on her way travelling to Malaysia for a business meeting through Emirates Airlines. Since she is a frequent flyer with the Emirates airlines and holds a gold membership card with the company, she was offered a free upgrade by the airlines to first class from economy. This was due to the fact that there was an open seat in the first class carrier.

“In late October, 2013, I was travelling to Malaysia for a business meeting in Kuala Lumpur. While I was waiting at the gate ready for boarding the plane, I was approached by a flight attendant of the Emirates Airlines which was the plane I was using that day. She told me that on behalf of Emirates airlines I was being offered a free upgrade from economy to first class for a ride to Dubai, since I am a gold skywards card holder. Knowing that I was travelling with my child, I asked her if there was anything that they could do for him if I would accept to go to the first class leaving him in economy. She told me that she was going to personally take care of my son for me during the whole flight until Dubai where I would be reunited with him.” (Mrs. Hajjat Amina Mrisho Said, 63 years, Commissioner of Population Census, Tanzania)

As seen from the interview passage above, such an act from the service company (Emirates Airlines) to the customer can motivate the customer to establish a good relationship with the company. This creates customer satisfaction and later may lead to brand loyalty. As said by Mittal & Kamakura (2001), customer satisfaction is a key factor in formation of customer's desires for future purchase. A satisfied customer is likely to talk to others about their good experiences with the company. In fact, Middle Eastern cultures whose social life has been shaped in such a way where social communication with other people enhances the society, is more significant (Jamal & Naser, 2002). Clearly as explained, the act of Emirates to provide this woman with a free upgrade from economy to first class was indeed a smart idea. It is more likely to compel the woman to be more loyal to the Emirates airlines. This may force them to make the airlines their first choice on their next journey because they would be looking forward to obtaining such privileges in their future flights.

1.2 2ND POSITIVE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

This incident happened to a college boy at a coffee place close to where he lives. He said that one morning when he was at the coffee place he was lucky enough to meet the manager of that outlet. He said that he was called by the manager and asked about something that he had on him which he created on his own. He had made a small round coffee holder with openings on both side that he could use to hold the hot cup of coffee so that he would not get burnt. When the manager saw the boy's simple but creative invention, he asked him if he had made it on his own or if he got the idea from the people. What the manager did for him after their conversation changed his life forever. The following is his story.

"I was at a coffee house that I usually go to every morning to get a cup of coffee before head to college. I always ordered hot coffee but unfortunately enough, it was too hot for me to handle since it was still fresh from the kettle. I created a small round coffee holder from some household materials which I used to hold the hot cups of coffee that I took every day. One morning while I was at the coffee house taking my coffee as usual, the manager saw me holding the coffee holder and watched me as I inserted the cup inside it and used to keep the heat of the coffee from burning my fingers. He liked the idea so much that he offered to buy it from me. Sensing my hesitation, he then offered me a portion of the earnings for every copy that they would create for the rest of my life. This happened about 13 years ago and until today, I have more than enough money to pay for my own tuition and to help my family." (Jamal Abdul-Rahman, 21 years, Student, Malaysia)

As mentioned by Bearden and Teel (1983, p. 21), customer satisfaction is important to the marketer because it is generally assumed to be a significant determinant of repeat sales, positive word of mouth and customer loyalty. Anderson and Sullivan (1993) also argued that the more satisfied the customers are, the greater is their retention. In the situation above, the manager showed the boy that he appreciated his idea and as a result offered to buy it. This may be a factor that can compel the boy to feel worth something more than being a regular customer at the coffee outlet. It may also be a factor that can create customer satisfaction and result to brand loyalty which will then motivate the boy to spread positive word of mouth especially about his encounter with the manager.

1.3 1ST NEGATIVE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

This incident happened to a young college student at his university. He was an international student and was following up with his visa procedures that he had to settle because he wanted to stay in the same university to pursue his degree. While he was talking to a receptionist in the immigration office at the university, he was surprised to see how the receptionists was treating him. Further stated that she was really verbally abusive, she used harsh and strong language at him an even shouted at him in front of everyone which as a result made him feel very bad.

“I was at the university’s immigration office hoping to speak to an immigration clerk at the reception so that she could help me with my visa proceedings since the expiry date of my current visa was almost due. While I was explaining to her about my problem, she interrupted me in a harsh voice saying that I’m careless since I didn’t go there sooner. I tried to explain to her that I couldn’t go sooner since I had exams the week prior and that I had other family related issue, instead, she called me stupid and even cursed at me. She continued to call me very harsh names and more. While all this was happening, I was still standing at the counter with everybody else around us watching. I felt so ashamed and left the office after that.”
(Hassan Hussein, 19 years, Student, Malaysia)

Many studies have identified that the increase of retention rate implied greater positive word of mouth (Appiah-Adu, 1999), decrease price sensitivity and future transaction costs (Reichheld and Sasser, 1990) and finally, leading to better business performance (Fornell, 1992; Ennew and Binks, 1996; Bolton, 1998; Ryals, 2003). However, in cases where the customer is dissatisfied with the company’s services due to how they were treated in a particular situation, may result to a rapid increase in negative word of mouth hence destroying the company image, sensitivity to price is likely to increase and later result to a worse business performance. In the situation above, the customer was faced with a very emotional and in other cases psychological tremor that is very likely to establish a negative impact between them and the company. If the situation is not amended by the company, the boy is very likely to tell this experience to other people who will also feel negatively about the university. Such situations can be handled by either reducing their position in the organizational, removing them from their current post, suspension or even expulsion from the organization.

1.4 2ND NEGATIVE CRITICAL INCIDENT:

This incident happened to a high school girl. Her school has a strict policy of students not having cellphones in the school environment. This particular girl ignored the policy and took her phone with her illegally. As a result, she was caught by one of the employees while she was using it and then she was reported to the principal. Instead of the principal to handle the situation in a civil way, he decided to call an emergency gathering of all employees including teachers and other workers and the students, and then he announced the situation to everyone. He called the girl in front of the school and demanded her to kneel next to him while he was explaining the situation. He further explained that he was teaching everyone a lesson by using her as an example if anyone of them would be found in the same situation.

“When I was in college about 3 years ago, I was caught using a cellphone at my school. Even though the school had strict rules of students not having cellphones in the school compound, I took mine with me anyway. One night while I was using it, I was caught by an employee of the school who then reported me to the principal. Instead of the principal handling the situation in a civil way by punishing me without anyone else knowing, he called an emergency school gathering and announced the situation to everyone. He called me to go and kneel next to him in front of the whole school as he was explaining the situation. He said that he was using me as an example of what would happen to anyone else if found in a similar situation. While doing so, he was calling me bad names, saying that I’m stupid and rude, after all that, he suspended me for 6 weeks and then kept my phone until the end of the academic year.” (Khamisa Omary, 20 years, Student, Tanzania)

According to the SERVQUAL Model which talks about the gaps that occur in a service organization, the customer expectation-management gap explains the differences between customers’ expectations and managements’ perceptions of the quality of service (Shahin and Samea, 2010). In accordance to the story above, the principal shows clear signs of misunderstood rules and regulations due to how he handled the situation. The student on the other hand might have had a good perception of the school thinking that in cases of serious issues such as her own, the school would handle such cases properly so that it can avoid any further problems like those that the principal caused to her.

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