

Unit 7 e-Portfolio Activity

Question: As a Project Manager, what might be your response to manage the emotional reactions of a customer?

Empathy is a critical skill for Project Managers as they deal with internal and external interpersonal issues, and the foundation for problem resolution (Akgün et al., 2015; Buckley et al., 2004). After taking time to examine issues from the position of the customer, a Project Manager can apply several techniques to manage a customer's emotional reactions.

The most obvious technique is to use empathetic communication that acknowledges the customer's feelings, and demonstrates a genuine commitment to resolving their concerns (Akgün et al., 2015; Buckley et al., 2004). This helps establish a common position with the customer and is frequently a precursor for problem resolution (Lastner, 2016).

Project Managers should collaborate with the customer to identify the root cause of their concerns and develop corresponding solutions (Lastner, 2016). Though not all customer desires may be reasonable or feasible, demonstrating the will to listen and acknowledge a customer's equities often leads to solutions or acceptable compromises (Wong, 2018).

Trust is a key component in managing customer emotional reactions, and often intertwined with the circumstances of the reaction (Gefen, 2002). A large body of literature states that the perception of ability, benevolence, and integrity are the foundational components of establishing trust (Svare, 2020). These characteristics are often achieved through the use of transparent communications, and demonstrates a Project Manager's commitment to openness and honesty (Scott, 2004).

According to a study by Henkle et al., effective communication and active listening are key factors in managing customer emotions, and artificial intelligence applications can be used to help customer-facing employees respond to emotional reactions (2020).

Project Management is a very difficult field, requiring emotional intelligence and empathy to manage the emotional reactions of customers, as well as team members, external stakeholders, and leadership (Wong, 2018). None of these techniques are omnipotent, and each customer situation is unique.

References

- Akgün, A. E. et al. (2015) Antecedents and consequences of collective empathy in software development project teams. *Information & management*. [Online] 52 (2), 247–259.
- Buckley, M. et al. (2004) Benefits of using socially-relevant projects in computer science and engineering education. *SIGCSE bulletin*. [Online] 36 (1), 482–486.
- Gefen, D. (2002) Nurturing clients' trust to encourage engagement success during the customization of ERP systems. *Omega (Oxford)*. [Online] 30 (4), 287–299.

Henkel, A. P. et al. (2020) Half human, half machine – augmenting service employees with AI for interpersonal emotion regulation. *Journal of service management*. [Online] 31 (2), 247–265.

Lastner, M. M. et al. (2016) The road to recovery: Overcoming service failures through positive emotions. *Journal of business research*. [Online] 69 (10), 4278–4286.

Scott, J. (2004) Ethics, Governance, Trust, Transparency and Customer Relations. *Geneva papers on risk and insurance. Issues and practice*. [Online] 29 (1), 45–51.

Svare, H. et al. (2020) The function of ability, benevolence, and integrity-based trust in innovation networks. *Industry and innovation*. [Online] 27 (6), 585–604.

Wong, Z. (2018) *The eight essential people skills for project management : solving the most common people problems for team leaders*. First edition. Oakland, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc.