

A Role-Based Model in the Service Industry: An Ethical Perspective

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Abstract: In the service industry, ethics can be observed by studying the nature of this activity. However, literature of the service industry is recently discussing ethics in a philosophically meaningful way beyond the traditional pragmatic and financial success scope. In this study, a model of ethics in the professions will be used to formulate the ethics of service relationships to conceptualize the role of service providers and formulate a value-maximizing ethics theory that includes both the service provider and the customer. Therefore, we propose a role-based ethics model for the service industry that establishes standards for the fulfillment of social obligations, specialized knowledge and skills for the benefit of an organization. This model will provide a framework for ethical decision making in the service industry which should be of practical use to service providers and Frontline Employees (FLEs) in their daily work activities and it can assist academics and professionals in portraying the service industry as an enterprise in which an ethical conduct is rightly expected. The model involves practical implications from the business perspective as well as social implications from an ethical standpoint.

Key words: Service industry, ethics, professional role, utilitarianism, implications, portraying

INTRODUCTION

Traditional service industry literature focus is narrowly pragmatic, aimed at financial success and the smooth running of the business organization whether relevant ethical values are mentioned or not (Taminiou and Ferguson, 2015; Galbreath, 2010). However, recently a discussion in ethics from a philosophically meaningful way has started (Williams and Aitken, 2011; Weiss, 2015). As it is discussed in one of the three areas in which business ethics is divided; the first and most published area focuses on decision making in personal issues that business people face. A second area talks about business in relation to society and the third one is about the ethics surrounding the different types of roles of people within business organizations. In order to examine the service industry, it is necessary to reconsider the ethics of the service-role, developing ethical standards for people in the role of service work: a role-based ethics.

The analysis of ethics in the service sector will principally derive from studying the nature of this type of work. Usually, the service providers themselves put into practice the values to be implemented in these services through their work for the people they serve (Solomon *et al.*, 1985). If FLEs really do this, it is by having a deep understanding of their role as direct service providers within society. Therefore, it is definitely

a role-type activity in which the relationship between service providers and customers involves both practical implications from the business perspective and social implications from an ethical standpoint.

A role-based model of ethics in the professions will be used to formulate the ethics of service relationships, emphasizing the similarities between the roles of a business professional in general and particularly the role of a service provider or FLEs (i.e., both are social roles, both are focused on providing benefits or preventing harms for the customer and both ethical standpoints are constructed in dialogue with the people served). This model will provide a framework for ethical decision-making in the service industry which should be of practical use to service industry staff in their daily work activities. Furthermore, this model can assist those who teach business students in portraying the service industry and also to managers who want to improve the work conditions and financial outcomes of their firm through ethical conduct.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A role-based ethic model for the service industry: There are two key questions that need to be asked about the foundations of any role-based ethic model. They will provide a clearer starting point for this philosophical task for the service industry asking: to whom does the role

serve? and What benefit does it give for those it serves? on the standard business account, people and their satisfactions are the center of value for a service business. What satisfies customer desires is what a service business should consider valuable or good. Even though the service provider's role exists within a business context (as a mean to the business's financial success) and considering that customer satisfaction is valuable, the role is actually focused on human well-being.

Scanlon (1998) explains that desires cannot count as adequate reasons for action. It means that customers are not satisfied simply because they are satisfied but because some aspect of their well-being has been adequately addressed. Therefore, if service providers are going to be responsive to customer's reasons for purchasing services, they cannot focus their role-specific efforts just on satisfaction. Their role must be conceived as being about some substantive list of elements that make human life valuable and therefore, the ethics of the service provider's role cannot be based only on the practice standards in the service industry.

Therefore, it is essential, to develop an adequate role based ethics model for service providers. The focus of the analysis must be on substantive benefits that service providers produce for those they serve and specifically on the way the role and relationships support (or not) the achievement of those benefits and not simply on satisfaction or fulfillment of desires. In the next paragraphs we will present the service relationship dilemma and how a role-based ethic model applies for the service industry.

Proposition 1: The traditional five practical standards of service quality have ethical implications. Actually, there is a growing attention to discuss what constitutes ethical behavior and how to promote ethical leadership and establish organizational ethical initiatives (Swanson and Frederick, 2016). But there is still a significant gap in the literature of business ethics in regards to the service industry. Services are routinely "evaluated" against the standards of quality service. But these are not a moral or an ethical evaluation of service and it is necessary to ask: how ethics is related to assessing service quality or service delivery outcomes that FLEs provided?

Most business ethics literature has ignored the service industry in the aggregate; either assuming that all aspects of business are identical from an ethical point of view or assuming that the ethics of goods-producing businesses are an adequate model for the service industry as well. In order to fill the gap in the business ethics literature, a role-based ethics model will be proposed instead by identifying elements that ground ethical practice in the service industry. Customers are the

foundation of any business and in the service industry the customer is (sometimes) considered as a co-producer and partner in the marketing exchange (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). Therefore, the customer's point of view in the service determines the specific expectations of service and the perceived quality. Thus, the evidence of business researchers shows that profitability in the service business is significantly due to perceived service that is relatively superior to one's competitor's service (Zeithaml, 2000; McMurrian and Matulich, 2006).

Moreover, there are some practical standards currently found in the service industry literature which will be introduced and described to serve as an initial framework for this study. Most customers consider five dimensions or practical standards in their assessment of perceived service quality. These five are: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1994). Service businesses that maximize these standards are most likely to achieve the highest measure of customer satisfaction. These five practical standards effectively define the role of service providers in service industry as well as the ethics of service providing. However, despite of the existence of marketing ethics literature (Batra and Klein, 2010; Laczniak, 1983) or inter-organizational factors affecting marketing ethics in service organizations environment (Kennedy and Lawton, 1993), there is no mention about the five dimensions of service quality in an articulated or unified way.

Further, a carefully articulated ethic-focused approach on the maximization of these practical dimensions of service quality has not previously been proposed. Additionally, the relevance of these five practical standards in the service industry is more evident when they are understood as how they are interconnected. With this, an important gap in the understanding of these five practical standards for business ethics in general can be fulfilled, especially for businessmen concerned about service. Some examples of previous business ethics examinations of these five practice standards are listed below.

Reliability usually means "dependability" or to be "trustworthy". It involves consistency of performance. It also means that a business honors its promises repeatedly and consistently (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). Then, performance is considered reliable if it provides the same result over and over again under the same circumstances. Likewise, if the firm provides a service as promised on time and error-free will be valued as reliable. In this sense, value is the perceived net effect of a company's capability and reliability. According to Bigelow (2005), it takes long time for the marketplace to fully understand the

'dedication' and 'integrity' of a company. By word of mouth or social networking, the customer shares to others which companies have a good reputation and provide value and those who do not. Therefore, the reputation of a company that really provides value to customers is an ethical standard of service quality.

Responsiveness refers to reacting quickly and as an attribute of people, it also involves responding with energy to people and events (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1985). It concerns the willingness or readiness of FLEs to provide good and prompt services when customer's desires are known and to make the needed effort to know customers needs and/or desires, so customers believe they are being understood. For example in the insurance industry, life insurance professional associations are continually working to increase the awareness and responsiveness of their members to recognize the ethical dilemmas in their work (Cooper and Frank, 1992).

Assurance is related to knowledge, to confidence and courtesy FLEs give to customers which makes them feel safe during service transactions. In this sense a sustainable assurance requires companies to focus on risk-management processes and building credibility among stakeholders. Thus, assurance requires quality of governance procedures and the organizational capacity (human and social capital) to deliver a service according to the expectations of its stakeholders (Cumming, 2005).

Empathy refers to the provision of caring and individualized attention to customers (Berry *et al.*, 1988). According to Strong *et al.* (2001) the empathy starts from the actions and beliefs of top management involved in timeliness, honesty and empathy. Thus, thoughtful communication is needed to promote empathy, always telling the truth even before rumors start. Also consistency in the speech is required to tell the same story to all stakeholder groups and concern about the viewpoint of each group.

Tangibles refers to the physical aspects or the visually appealing materials associated with the service (Kang and James, 2004). According to Seeman (2004) intangible is anything that generates value like people, brand, perception, image, reputation, the ability to innovate and learn, etc. Then, to evaluate service it is important to consider the role of a CEO and the board and the challenges these intangibles represent to them; making final suggestions on how to make them tangible for customers.

As mentioned earlier, the descriptions of the five practical standards demonstrate that even though they exist as occasional topics in the business ethics literature, they are dealt separately and only in general contexts.

This also indicates that practitioners and customers consider these five practical standards important. However, the description of how a service provider typically conducts himself in conformity to or aiming to maximize these five practical standards does not imply that these standards are to be addressed from an ethical perspective. So, the task is to provide a careful description of the five practical standards even when this does not mean yet that they are ethically appropriate to the service role. The reason why service providers should conceptualize their role mainly depends on their characteristics which will help to formulate a role based ethics model for this industry.

The five practical standards can be summed up by saying that the key to service excellence is the degree to which a service business can meet customer's expectations for a wide variety of service quality attributes (Johnston, 2004). Then, it is relevant to examine service expectations and desires.

Proposition 2: The customer's desires are not the only relevant guide for behavior, service providers must routinely 'evaluate' customer satisfaction and expectations. In the light of the expectation construct, we refer to the desired level of performance that is a key role in the customer evaluation of service quality (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993). Then, a critical management challenge is to define the business strategic focus relative to the expectations of the customers the service business wants to acquire and keep. Each service business must be adapted to its market and to its customer's particular definition of service quality because different customers have different kinds of expectations for different kinds of services. For service businesses, the most important assessment of quality is made during the service encounter that is the dyadic interaction between a service provider and a customer (Solomon *et al.*, 1985). In this case, each customer contact is referred as a 'moment of truth' because in that time and place, the service provider has an opportunity to satisfy a customer but in many service settings this 'moment of truth' lasts for an extended period of time.

The literature of the service industry is solely and precisely related to customer expectations as the key to business success (Donthu and Yoo, 1998; Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991; Bebeko, 2000). Thus, it is simple to adopt them as an ethical framework for the service industry. The service provider businesses must know the psychology of their customer's expectations (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993); they must know what customers expect in order to fulfill their needs and/or desires (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991) and they must know the

consequences of failure to meet those expectations (Hess *et al.*, 2003). If a service provider wants to become a profitable service business, it needs to have systems in place to evaluate worker's and system's performance in terms of these five practical standards and this is commonly done and investigated (Zeithaml, 2000). However, this particular effort at value maximizing (utilitarian thinking) is not necessarily related to ethical judgments at all (Nantel and Weeks, 1996), far less to the development of a role-based ethic model for the service industry. Therefore, simply adopting these already accepted practical standards would not necessarily yield a role-based ethic model that can be philosophically justified; instead, a more careful argument that focuses more specifically on service as a distinctive social role is needed.

Under a philosophic value perspective of expectation's fulfillment, Scanlon (1993) discusses what he called the unrestricted actual desire theory of values which holds that "the quality of a person's life at a given time is measured by the degree to which the preferences which he or she has at that time are fulfilled" (1993). Scanlon is not talking directly about the service industry but commercial relationships are an example of this value theory in action. Then, in order to apply this to the service industry, customer satisfaction (the fulfillment of customer's preferences) has to be considered as the only thing that has value in itself; consequently price, products and service quality are all merely means to produce such satisfaction (Bei and Chiao, 2001).

Nevertheless, this view of the service industry which sees customer satisfaction as the only thing worth pursuing for its own welfare, although it is philosophically informative is too narrow. Instead, service industry maximizes other values too. In fact, its view of customers is different from Scanlon's: it is not just in terms of desire's fulfillment or satisfaction. This difference is not superficial; it is a completely different way of looking at ethics. Scanlon (1993) argument about desire does not provide us with adequate reasons for explaining human actions.

"Desire is not a clearer notion in terms of which the idea of having a reason might be understood; rather, the notion of a desire in order to play the explanatory and justificatory roles commonly assigned to it, needs to be understood in the idea of taking something in order to be a reason. Nor do desires provide the most common kind of reasons for action; rather, it is almost never the case that a person has a reason to do something because it would satisfy a desire that he or she has" (Scanlon, 1998).

That is, 'having a desire' is different from 'seeing something as a reason' and it almost never plays a role in

the determination of an action. Similarly, the proposal of a role-based ethics model is not a version of this preferentially utilitarian view of values. A different kind of ethical value judgment is incorporated into a role-based ethics model. From the point of view of value for those served, this ethics model will be built on a version of Scanlon's proposed value theory which he calls an approach based on a critical scrutiny of a substantive list of elements that make human life valuable and which is based in turn on its contractualism and its broader account of reasons for acting (Scanlon, 2002).

As we already explored, expectations play a central role in customer satisfaction and are a parameter in the world's general measure of quality for the service industry. Expectations are important because quality is a judgment versus some standard. When customers evaluate the quality of a service, they are evaluating it considering their own standards and their expectations are based on their own values as customers (Parasuraman *et al.*, 1991). Therefore, the expected goal of any service business is to deliver what customers perceive to be service quality. This does not mean that a business can mislead customers into thinking that they are getting quality when they are not. In this sense customers are never wrong: when they say that quality is bad, that is a fact. If a customer perceives bad quality, then the service provider has failed to meet its standard for service. For service businesses that wish to compete successfully, the service quality must be perceived by their customers to be relatively better than their competitors.

A business's identification of customer expectations is based on several sources including word of mouth, personal needs and past experiences (Zeithaml *et al.*, 1993). Since, each service business must identify the specific expectations of its own customers, it needs information about such an important source. Service businesses most often discover people's expectations by talking to them directly about what they think will happen, what they would like to happen and what they experienced to happen when they visited or used the service. That is, since all businesses look for profitability, services are also routinely 'evaluated' against the standard of customer satisfaction and expectations. Since, these are not moral or ethical evaluations of service, only a specific role-based ethical model for the service industry can identify the basis of justifiable ethical evaluations of service and its business praxis. The acknowledgement of both internal and external benefits in the perception of the service provider allows businessmen to elucidate what qualities of service are most important in their business and their social role within the service industry.

Table 1: Comparison between professions and service providers

Gardner and Shulman (2005)	Lowendahl (2005)
Commitment to serve	High degree of customization
Special knowledge	Highly knowledge intensive, delivered by people with high knowledge in an area of expertise
Specialized set of professional skills	High degree of discretionary effort and personal judgment
Capacity to render ethical judgments	Requires substantial interaction with the customer
Learning from experience	Within the constraints of professional norms of conduct
Professional community	

Proposition 3: The ethics in the service industry is best examined using a professional ethics model because of the similarities between the role of service providers and the role of professionals. In order to formulate and support an ethics model for the service industry a study of professional ethics will be use this approach considers the professional role of direct service providers. Despite the wide variety of services, many of which strive to be recognized as professions in order to gain higher status and respect, those who work as direct service providers have six common characteristics that are made by providing services very similar to professions when properly interpreted. According to psychologists Gardner and Shulman (2005), all professions have:

- A commitment to serve the interests of customers in particular and the welfare of society in general
- A body of theory or special knowledge with its own principles of growth and reorganization
- A specialized set of professional skills, practices and performance unique to the profession
- The developed capacity to render judgments with integrity under conditions of both technical and ethical uncertainty
- An organized approach to learning from experience both individually and collectively and thus, of growing new knowledge from the context of practice
- The development of a professional community responsible for the oversight and monitoring of quality in both practical and professional education (Table 1)

While some service providers are closely resembled to all six of Gardner and Shulman’s characteristics, all service providers cannot properly deliver service as a social role with its own ethic framework. An additional implication of this is that, since service provider’s knowledge invariably involves a particular sphere of expertise, service businesses must recognize they have no expert authority outside the scope of that sphere. Considering all these mentioned characteristics, (Lowendahl, 2005) summarizes five professional service characteristics:

- It involves a high degree of customization
- It is highly knowledge intensive, delivered by people with higher education and frequently closely linked to scientific knowledge development within the relevant area of expertise
- It involves a high degree of discretionary effort and personal judgment by the expert(s) delivering the service
- It typically requires substantial interaction with the customer firm representative involved
- It is delivered within the constraints of professional norms of conduct including setting customer needs above profits and respecting limits of professional expertise (Table 1)

One point of similarity between the role of the service provider and the role of a professional is the important fact that the behavior required of a service provider challenges the individual service provider’s affiliation with his/her employer. That is because as the role of the service provider is oriented to substantial values of the customer (even though role also exists to maximize the service firm’s business success), situations will arise in which the role and the firm’s business success will be in conflict. That is the reason why an ethics model in the service industry is needed.

Proposition 4: For a service provider, a utilitarianism (value-maximizing theory) that includes both, the service provider and the customer is a better option than the cost-benefit analysis as a form of utility calculation. A useful analogy about the importance of customers in the service industry could be done using a rhythmic gymnastics example. This sport offers an appropriate metaphor for the nature of competition through customer service in today’s business world. It is not like baseball or basketball where one team is trying to smash its oponent. Instead in the business world of service, there is a set of activities designed to delight and impress a panel of judges where ‘judges’ are customers. You might even successfully smash other business organizations or competitors but still lose the ‘game’ if you only ring up 4’s and 5’s with your customers. In rhythmic gymnastics,

a 10 valuation is perfection and that is what is required in a service business. Customers or judges sometimes provide 10's.

People in business use utility analysis to plot the results of various actions, choosing those that maximize the value of whatever it is that they wish to achieve (Boudreau, 1988). Pleasure is arguably a value worth choosing for its own sake while pain something worth avoiding for its own sake as well. So, these are more reasonable choices for an ethical theory than money which is always a mean to something else (i.e., happiness). Moreover, there is another significant difference between utilitarianism as an approach to ethical thinking that is used in the concept of utility analysis in the business praxis. When a business uses a utility or a cost-benefit analysis, it weighs the good and the bad consequences of performing a certain action that would impact profits. Meanwhile, an ethical approach or a utilitarian analysis weighs the good and the bad results of an action on every actor involved, mainly customers and service businesses.

In the first place, customers are the subjects for whom the services are designed and offered: the one served. In the real world, customers might be individuals, families, businesses, corporations or other formal legal entities, so there may be more than one person making the decisions and there are often a number of people, sometimes many of them, who are direct beneficiaries of the service. Customers are also fully capable of making independent decisions about their needs and/or desires and about the appropriate kind of service they need. Sometimes, customers are children, mentally disabled persons or persons who suffer from serious illnesses or other deficits that interfere with their decision-making powers. Working on the differences that these variations in types of customers would imply for the service provider's ethics to focus on its role, principally on maximizing the wellbeing of the customer through the service process (Turley and Blanc, 1993). Particularly, the arguments to support this proposed role-based ethics model of service will be concerned about utilitarianism in this broader sense by examining the service provider's role from the perspective of its impact on the ones affected.

Later on, considering the fact that a service business strives to be a profitable business, it is not surprising that it employs a value-maximizing theory as a philosophy or even as its own ethical framework. That theory determines what oughts to be done by identifying which of the available courses of action would be likely to accomplish customer's expectations (i.e., needs, desires) but emphasizing on the benefits from bringing customers to the first place in service businesses. In fact, businesses

usually reduce goods or services to items that can be countable (i.e., money) in order to calculate costs and benefits in monetary terms. Because the aim of a business is eventually to make profit, those actions that tend to help it increase revenues are considered right actions from a service business perspective but those that tend to make it lose money are considered wrong actions. So, a rationally operated business makes an effort to maximize its right actions and minimize its wrong actions, so that when revenues and costs are balanced, a profit will result.

Above all stated before, it is mandatory for this role-based ethics model to simultaneously consider the impact on customers to provide effective goods for both actors. This utilitarian approach is not strange to most people. It is widely used in many forms including its use in the principle of utility described by Jeremy Bentham in which "(the principle of utility) approves or disapproves of every action whatsoever according to the tendency which it appears to have augment or diminish the happiness of the party whose interest in question; or what is the same thing in other words to promote or to oppose that happiness" (1988). In this ethical approach, Bentham is widely known for stating that the greatest amount of happiness is to be determined by reference of pleasure and the absence of pain. Therefore, the proposed positive consequences will be the outcomes of a well-applied value-maximizing theory that includes both, the service provider and the customer.

Proposition 5: The ethics of the service industry should maximize internal and external goods including confidence and social benefits for the customer. MacIntyre (1981) explains that the nature of the relationship between the parties in a practice is what creates bidirectional goods for the whole community who participate in the service industry practice. He means by a practice "any coherent and complex form of socially established cooperative human activity (e.g., the service relationship) through which goods internal to that form of activity are realized in the course of trying to achieve those standards of excellence" (MacIntyre, 1981). He also notes that a practice typically produces other goods that are not directly beneficial to the service provider; he calls these 'external goods' and states that "when achieved they are always some individual's property and possession" (MacIntyre, 1981). Applying this to the service provider's role whose internal goods correspond to the values obtained for its own profit; the external goods of their role are precisely what the service provider aims to produce for the customer when performing the functions according to the productive practical standard of its organization. In

Table 2: Value-maximizing standards for service providers

Variables	Internal goods	External goods
Beneficiary	Service provider	Customer
Ethical approach (Utilitarianism)		
Perspective	Utility analysis	Utilitarian analysis
Target value	Money	Benefit
Measurement tools	Cost-benefit calculation	Customer satisfaction feedback
Mean to value (Service (s))		
Positive output	Profits	Satisfied need
Negative output	Losses	Unsatisfied need

other words, the external goods of the service provider's role are those things that constitute business success in the service industry because of what the customer brings (i.e., sales and customer satisfaction and other components of business success including profit) (Table 2).

Therefore, a service business must determine the specific expectations that its customers have for its service if it wants to remain profitable. As expectation we refer to "a belief that something should happen in a particular way or should have particular qualities or behavior" (Bentham, 1988). A critical management challenge is to define the business's strategic focus relative to the expectations of customers to whom the service business wants to acquire and keep. Each service business must be fitted itself to its market and to its customer's particular definition of service quality because different customers have different kinds of expectations for different kinds of services (Staughton and Williams, 1994). For instance, when we go to our physician, we expect to be treated differently than going to the bank. When we attend to a symphonic concert our expectations are different from those when we attend to a rock concert. It is imperative for a service business to understand the frequently subtle differences in expectations of customers for different kinds of services and in the different service markets.

Moreover, there is a moral/ethical commitment from the service provider to respond to the customer needs and/or desires (i.e., commitment needs). Evidently, customer needs or desires will have a different impact depending on service encounter experiences. Then, the benefits that customers see, expect or perceive when being in a customer-service provider relationship vary from one service to other. Thus, according to Gwinner *et al.* (1998) some of the benefits that customers derive from service encounters can be grouped into three broad clusters: confidence benefits, social benefits and special treatment benefits.

First, confidence benefits include the feeling of customers about having less risk of something going

wrong in their relationship with the service provider. The client lowers his/her anxiety when purchasing because he or she trusts in a correct service performance and that the service provider will act as expected. The customer receiving these benefits depends on the customer knowing what to expect and actually receiving the service. Second, social benefits include mutual recognition between customers and service providers. Some examples of social benefits are when they know each other by name when there is friendship between them and the client enjoys certain social aspects of the relationship. These social benefits depend in turn on an open and respectful communication from the service provider to the customer and vice versa. Third, the special treatment benefits category mentioned by Gwinner *et al.* (1988) includes better prices, discounts or special deals that are unavailable for most customers, extra services, high priority to avoid waiting and a faster service than most customers. However, these benefits cannot be provided for every customer, since they involve prioritizing some customers over others independently of the specifics of a particular service provider-customer relationship.

The first two categories of benefits are related to all types of customers and can be integrated in the development of a universally applicable ethical standard, regardless of any special treatment that particular customers might receive in contrast from the rest. Therefore, for the purpose of identifying a set of general ethical standards for all service providers, only the first two clusters will be considered: confidence and social benefits.

It must be admitted that the customer's experience in a service-encounter will determine if customers receive the confidence benefits and social benefits. That is achieving these customer's benefits is directly related not only to the adequacy of the service actually received but also to the customer's own perceptions about the service. In other words, the customer's perceptions about the service (i.e., the customer's belief that the service they get is what they expected) are unavoidably implicated in these benefits being delivered.

It has been stressed earlier that quality service (i.e., the summary notion used to refer to customer's comparisons of actual service with the expected one) is directly connected to business success and is therefore, often used as a measure of a successful service. But when the focus is the role-based ethics model of the service provider, the customer's perceptions of what the service provider has accomplished plays a different function in the analysis. That is a service provider might be doing



Fig. 1: Role-base ethic model for service industry

everything he/she ought to do ethically in regard to a particular customer even if a particular customer's point of view leads to negative perceptions. Clearly, if the service provider is acting with the service required characteristics (i.e., reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles) then such negative perceptions by the customer will have to be attended.

In articulating those mentioned characteristics for this role, it is important to say that an unhappy customer's perceptions can in fact be mistaken; the service provider may be doing exactly what he/she ought to be doing in this role. So, the proposal that customer satisfaction is the measure of successful service may be true from the perspective of business success but it is not a guarantee that the service provider has done what he/she ought to be doing. Customer dissatisfaction is not also a confident sign that the service provider is failing to act according to the ethical standards of his/her role.

Those all interrelated factors (i.e., practical standards, customer satisfaction, professional ethics, value maximization and internal/external benefits) can be summarized in Fig. 1.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

It is important to consider that the characteristics of a particular service are derived from the nature of the service itself and not necessarily personal attributes of the people employed. However, it is clearly also that any service firm that pays no attention to the relevant characteristics that customers expect and does not work hard to hire persons with the traits that they point as important, would be acting contrary to his own success as a business.

The main purpose of ethics for the role of services providers is to offer guidance about what that role requires to address in conflict situations. Another purpose is to raise questions about how service providers

are seriously committed to the service role and its ethics in serving their customers. In cases of conflict of interest between what is profitable for the business and what will be the best solution for the customer, the latter alternative is ought to be chosen (i.e., is the ethical solution for the service provider). In this sense, Davis (2001) claims that:

“A conflict of interest is a situation in which some person P (whether an individual or corporate body) stands in a certain relation to one or more decisions. On the standard view, P has a conflict of interest if and only if P is in relationship with another requiring P to exercise judgment in the other's behalf and P has a (special) interest tending to interfere with the proper exercise of judgment in that relationship”.

Accordingly, if the success of the firm interferes with the proper exercise of the service provider's judgment for the sake of the customer then the 'judgment on the other's behalf' is at risk but the service provider's role is to serve the customer by making the proper judgment for the sake of the customer. Although, choosing an alternative that seems to be beneficial for the customer is a difficult constraint to impose on a business; it is something that many people believe is also in the long term reputation of the service business. Therefore, the principle on which the ethics of service providers must be built is on the substantive values of the customers not merely the satisfaction of their desires. It is in value-maximizing terms that service providers, their managers and even the leaders of the service industry can ethically concern with both internal and external goods and with their influence on a decision making process.

In the case of the professions, the ethical directive is to assure the wellbeing of those served. This well established social practice might have fairly rare exceptions in the daily practice of professionals themselves. But there is a specific focus within the service provider on playing a distinctive role within the examined components of the service provider-customer relationship. Given the nature of the social role of the service provider, it is very reasonable to propose that: even if the social mandate is more implicit than in the case of specifically professional roles, there is still an expectation by the larger community that people who enter such roles (of a service provider) will perform as not to harm the ones served (the customer).

Therefore, every service provider in a service encounter should perform its functions correctly according to their standard productive role in order to achieve business success effectively with an adequate service but at the same time to conduct the service

encounter ethically with the customer. These are the two most important qualities of a service that allow a service provider to meet the business, moral and ethical obligations.

CONCLUSION

Finally, there is a good reason to say that these social-role-based obligations for service providers do not intend to harm customers but to assist them in meeting their needs and fulfilling their desires. However, when a service provider does not put its social role-based obligation into practice, it will be dissatisfying customers from an ethical perspective and society does not accept the establishment of a social role that involves harming those served. After all, the essence of a role-based ethics model for the service industry establishes standards that properly fulfill social role-based obligations through value maximizing approaches that benefit service providers and the one served (customers), respectively with the production of internal and external goods.

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