

The Mediating Effect of Qualitative Overstretch on Customer Orientation, Technological Based Crm and Intention to Quit Incall Centers

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Abstract

Call centers globally have been found to be increasing compared to the early 90s, paving way for more employment for the people. Consequently, the rate of employee turnover in the call centers has been very high such that it has become a conundrum which managers are battling to subdue. However, researchers and practitioners have found many factors that are responsible for the persistent rate of turnover, such as work overload, role conflict, role ambiguity, customer incivility and employee job satisfaction. Many literatures have also established the effect of customer orientation and technology based CRM on organizational performance and their capabilities to protect the detrimental effects of qualitative overstretch and reduce turnover rate among employees. Hence, this paper explores the mediating effect of qualitative overstretch on the customer orientation and technological based CRM towards intention to quit of employees from the call centers. It shall also assist the call centers management to fashion out a stress free working environment which would reduce to a greater extent employee intention to quit.

Keywords: Call Center, Customer Orientation, Technological Based CRM, Qualitative, Overstretch, Intention to Quit

Introduction

Call center is highly significant to organizations CRM strategy as it represents a channel of relationship between firms and customers. A strategic center of solutions provider to the needs, complaints and services of customers, and/or a CRM strategy implementation center (So, 2007).

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However, as a result of the vital role call centers can play and has been playing in the interactions between firms and customers which contributed immensely to the organizational performance (Feinberg et al., 2002). The growth of call centers globally has been described as extraordinary incustomer service and marketing strategy companies (Mahesh and Kasturi, 2006; Gilson and Khandelwal, 2005). According to IBISWorld report in 2008, there are over 56,000 call centersin the United States of America only, giving employment to over 3.07 million agents. Moreover, call centers have been found on the increasing rate in many countries of the world (such as, India, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Philippine, South Korea etc), generating over \$ 5.5 billion for the practicing countries, (Macaraig, 2010). The increasing capacity of call centers have traced to the high wages and financial incentives and bonus being created for their employees, making them to earn more than their legislative minimum wages (Batt et al., 2006; Hechanova, 2013; IBON, 2003).

In other words, researchers have emphasized that call centers should be seen as model that serves as means of minimizing cost in services and sales industry (Rosemary et al., 2009). Meanwhile, call centers proves it excellent by providing opportunity for the company to build, manage and maintain customers' relationships by conducting transaction, providing information to the customers, answering questions and solving problems and complains from the customers in order to ensure continuous patronage (Feinberg et al., 2000, 2002). Indeed, work environment of the call center has been centered on the usage of technological tools in order to smooth their operation, bringing more encouragement for the call centers' employees (Hutchinson et al., 2000; Houlihan, 2001).

Pursuing this further, the working environment of the call center is characterized to the similarity of assemblage line production (Taylor & Bain, 1998, 1999) where there is much pressure on the employees of the call center (Belt, 2002; Sawyerr et al., 2009). In other words, the exchange of information between call center's employees and the customers takes another dimension of being scripted resulting to the exhaustion of employees performance (Varca, 2001).

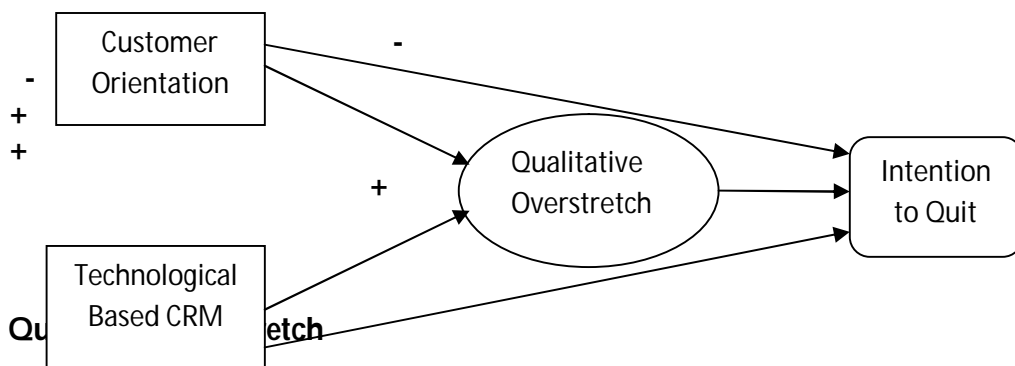
Unarguably, the high level of stress and workload of call centers work as well as lack of employee trainingcan undoubtfullyforce the employees to intend to quit from the job(Das, 2012; Deery et al.,s 2010; Harris et al., 2006). This paper intends to explore how qualitative overstretched mediate theeffect of customer orientation and technological based CRM on intention to quit of the employees of the call centers.

Theoretical Background and Framework

The study proposed a model that conceptualizes the impact Customer Orientation and Technology Based CRM have on qualitative overstretch and intention to quit within call center industry. Many existing literatures have stressed that turnover of employees in the call centers is a mystery which management is still exerting strong efforts to tackle (Calisir et al., 2011). However, high job demand or excessive task demand from management, role conflict, role ambiguity, customer complaint and many other factors that resulted to qualitative overstretch (stress) which is detrimental to employees welfare has been considered an antecedent to high rate of employees intent to quit and subsequently quitting the job (Babakus&Yavas, 2012). The negative effects of which are visible on organizational performance and competitive advantage (Rehman et al., 2011; Yousef, 2002; Meyer et al., 2002).

Based on the literatures that established customer orientation and technology based CRM as successful factors of CRM dimensions that can contribute effectively and efficiently to organizational success, that is, attaining its goals and objectives of profitability (Sin et al., 2005; Yim et al., 2005; Yueh et al., 2010). This study conceptualized the effect of Customer Orientation and Technology Based CRM on qualitative overstretch and intention to quit.

Figure 1: The Framework of the Mediating Effects of Qualitative Overstretch on Customer Orientation, Technology Based CRM and Intention to Quit



Jamal (2005) stresses that qualitative overstretch has been recognized as constant issue that does occur to the employees of the organization that aims to achieve competitive advantage.

In other words, qualitative overstretch characterizes a term that has an exact type of stress faced by the employees and peculiar to the stress that leads to emotional exhaustion and lack of interest to continue with the present work (Isic et al., 1999). In a related development, the stress or pressure receives from individual work would definitely lead to the quitting of the job, especially when the employees are emotionally disturbed (Behrman and Perreault, 1984; Gaines and Jermier, 1983; Goolsby, 1992; Olukemi et al., 2009). Moreover, Maslach and Jackson (1981) added that qualitative overstretch which one experienced in the place of work could come from being emotional exhaust, demoralization and accomplishment apathy which is common at densely and stressful organization like call centers (Cropanzano et al., 2003).

Indeed, the stressful nature of work at call centers shows that it would be easier for their employees to call it quit with their job. Bain and Taylor (1999) identify that the practice of usage of scripts in call center together with routine nature of work would definitely lead to the conclusion of leaving the job. Many call centers are found of repetitive work and partly reduced the autonomy of the employees push themselves to losing of their workers (Lanshear et al., 2001; Deery et al., 2002; Belt, 2002). Consequently, it has shown that difficulty that employees receive in their organization like call centers would fast-track the resignation from work.

Many studies have found that the components of qualitative overstretch such as emotional exhaust, stress, and job burnout are strong antecedents to intention to quit, for example Babakusans Yavas (2012), Brough et al., (2008), Lee and Ashforth (1996), Karatepe, (2010, 2011), Slatten et al., (2011), Kantsperger and Kunz, (2005), Wright and Hobfoll (2004), Deery et al. (2002), and Wright and Cropanzano (1998). More so, a positive relationship between burnout and turnover was found by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004), Phillipa and Blakeney (1991), this is evident in Rehman et al. (2011) conclusion that emotional exhaust is extensively positively related to intention to quit of customer service employees in Pakistan. Korunka, Hoonakker and Carayon (2008) in their studies to determine the factors affecting quitting intentions amongst Austrian and American IT employees revealed that employee job satisfaction as well as emotional exhaust is influential factors of turnover intentions.

On the basis of the aforementioned and organizational behavior literatures which suggested that job stressor such as work load precipitates employees' intention to quit their jobs (Whysall et al., 2009; Harris et al., 2009; Wright & Bonnet 2007), an hypothesis is drawn thus:

H1: Qualitative Overstretch has a positive relationship with Intention to Quit in the call center organizations.

Table 1: Measurement Items for Qualitative Overstretch

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Qualitative Overstretch	My work is too complicated.	Babakus&Yavas (2012); Chang et al. (2012); Kantsperger& Kunz (2005), Olukemi et al. (2009).
	Sometimes, my job is too difficult to execute.	
	I feel overwhelmed in the morning when remembering setting out for my work.	
	I found myself doing task that am not trained for.	
	My work drained me emotional.	
	I always feel exhaust at the end of my work.	
	I feel stressed working with people all day.	
	My work often frustrates me.	
	I feel that I am working too hard on my work.	
	I feel like I am at the end of my rope.	

Customer Orientation

Customer orientation is the dimension of CRM that organizations has confirmed to be highly instrumental to the achievement of solid relationship with customers as it imbibe the customer oriented behavior and culture into the firm's employees, thus instigating them positively on their performance (Yilmaz et al., 2005; Kim, 2008). This is evidence in its immense contribution to the successful implementation of CRM(King & Burgess, 2008).

Customer orientation is described as potential attitude of the customers which needs are to be met for mutual business transaction (Brown et al., 2002). The earlier research of Fountain (2001) emphasized that the customer orientation does not have effect on the situation that employees are passing through within their organization, but increases employees' sovereignty and encourage them to improve service delivery, especially in the competitive market place.

Meanwhile, researchers have stressed that customer orientation influences outcome derived from the business activities as a result of employee's satisfaction from their work and the organizational commitment (Cross et al., 2007; Zhu and Nakata, 2007; Donovan et al., 2004).

Mukerjee (2013) emphasized three main initiatives which organization must adopt to become customer oriented: creating an in-depth knowledge about things that would greatly be valuable to customers, consistently offering customer expected value and ensuring their satisfaction, and finally serving, sustaining and retaining profitable and loyal customers. This was in alignment with the notion that the practice of customer orientation entails cultivating an appropriate culture and obtaining information on the needs and wants of customers, to plan and produce products that would serve their needs as well as meet their satisfaction (Strong & Harris, 2004).

Babakus and Yavas (2012) established in their investigation of the buffering role of customer orientation on job burnout that, customer orientation act as a protector to the adverse impacts of burnout on employees job performance and intention to quit. They further concluded that high level customer oriented frontline employees would be positive about future job environment thus making them to suppress burnout as well as having lower perception of intention to quit, while on the other side, the effect of burnout on employees tend to be aggravated and the tendency to quit is increased.

Donavan et al. (2004) also reported that employees with strong customer orientation are generally likely to be committed and satisfied to a greater extent such that they never thought of intending to quit their job and their performance with resolving customers' issues are better than low customer orientation employees.

Hence, an encouragement toward employees attaining satisfaction in making customer happy is embedded in customer orientation (Harris et al., 2005) and high customer orientation of employees produced greater amount of commitments to the firm (Meyer, Stanley, Herscovitch, & Topolnytsky, 2002). Therefore, this study hypothesized that:

H2: There is negative relationship between Customer Orientation and Qualitative Overstretch in the call center organization.

H3: Customer Orientation has a negative relationship with Intention to Quit in the call center organization.

Table 2: Measurement Items for Customer Orientation

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Customer Orientation	I enjoy taking care of the customers.	Babakus & Yavas (2012); Chang et al. (2012); Kantsper & Kunz (2005)
	I take pleasure in making every customer feel like he is the king.	
	I enjoy having the confidence to provide good service.	
	Solving customer's problem is more important to me.	
	I enjoy giving attention to each customer.	
	I enjoy anticipating the needs of my customers.	
	I enjoy delivering service to customers on time.	
	I take a great deal of satisfaction in completing tasks precisely for customers.	
	I enjoy getting to know my customers personally.	

Technological Based CRM

Customer relationship management (CRM) is the major focus in the competitive market where competitive advantage needs to be achieved (Sin et al., 2005; Rababah et al., 2011). Therefore, CRM is a term in information industry which refers to methodologies, software and internet-based tools or equipment that help organization to maintain good customer relationship in order to stick with the existing customers and win more of customers into their organization (Yurong et al., 2002). It is further stated that for a firm to excel more than its competitor, a technological-based seamless product approach should be adopted (Yurong et al., 2002).

Information technology has been a major tool which many organizations employ for the successful implementation of CRM particularly in the call center firms where the adoption of cutting edge technology is employed to enhance the effectiveness of their back and front offices processes in order to achieve and sustain competitive advantage (Batenburg & Versendaal, 2008). Scheper (2002) reported that the interaction between information technology and organizational aspects would enhance the achievement of superior performance.

It was acknowledged by researchers that organizational success are driven by the employees (Sabherwal et al., 2006; Devaraj & Kholi, 2003), but should the adoption of new technology which could improve their performance is not highly supported (Jones et al., 2008; Simon & Usunier, 2007).

Then, a situation where such technology is enforced on employees in an organization may result to qualitative overstretch and consequently lead to intention to quit.

More so, it is imperative to note that call centers are involved in intensive use of technology compared to other industries and more importantly are the differences in terms of the technology used by the call centers (Deery&Kinnie, 2004). The use of technology to exert control and reduce employees' autonomy (Noble, 1984) in the call centers thereby making tasks to become Tayloristic can lead to stress and then absenteeism and turnover of employees. Houlihan (2001) concurred that the nature of work in the call center is characterized with intense technology usage to influence the rate and quantity of work and the fact that studies have revealed that technology can generally increase the complexity of jobs (Autor, Levy & Murnane, 2003; Spitz-Oener, 2006), then technological advancement deployment and the increasing usage of it to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of firm activities can lead to job stress among employees (Love & Irani, 2007) and then intention to quit.

Apparently considering the impact of technology in the successful implementation of CRM (Abdulateef et al., 2011; Sin et al., 2005; Kincaid, 2003; Yim et al., 2004), lack of adoption of CRM technological product would out rightly result into loss or slow improvement in the company's performance (Dimitriadis and Stevens, 2008; Preeti and Purnima, 2012). Thus, this study hypothesized that:

H4: The relationship between Technology Based CRM and Qualitative Overstretch in the call center organization is positive.

H5: Technology Based CRM is related positively to Intention to Quit in the call center organization.

Table 3: Measurement Items for Technology Based CRM

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Technological Based CRM	Technical supports for the utilization of modern technology are readily available in my place of work.	Abdullateef et al.(2011) Sin et al. (2005); Yim et al.(2005); Yueh et al. (2010).
	CRM Technology provides customer information at every point in my place of work.	
	Comprehensive database of the customers are maintain in my in my place of work.	
	Customized offering are created for the customers by the help of computer technology in my in my place of work.	
	Management of customer relationships is facilitated by information technology in my place of work.	

Intention to Quit

It is the general phenomenon to say that employees of a particular organization stay and departure are basically determined by their experienced and commitment of the organization on the employees (Griffeth et al., 2000; Erich et al., 2009; Hom and Griffeth, 1995). These yardsticks have earlier been emphasized by Maertz and Campion (1998) as the determinant for employees' preservation in the firm. Researchers have stressed that intention to quit of the employees of a particular company is tantamount to their well-being together with the volume of stress they are experiencing in their firm (Siong et al., 2006; Hong, 2007). Supportably, Gianfranco (2011) argue that employees' turnover intention about a job is anteceded by unfriendliness of their work which is a result of job stressors. Besides, Harris and Reynolds (2003, 2006) agreed that customers sometimes facilitated quitting of employees from the service.

However, the rate of employee turnover in the call center industry globally is a problematic incidence that the managements are still consistently struggling to overcome (Ahmad et al., 2010; Sawyerr et al., 2009). And the fact that many researchers have revealed and established many antecedents as well as recognizable means of providing solution to this employees attitude which is detrimental to organizations achievement of their business goals and objectives (Abdullateef et al., 2011; Sawyerr et al., 2009; Walsh, 2010).

An estimated rate of 35 percent to 50 percent of employee turnover is still being reported yearly as call center are also reported to be rapidly increasing too (IBISWorld, 2008).

Tia-Foreman (2009) and Maertz et al. (2007) revealed huge expenses that organizations have incurred on employee turnover. Such expenses include, recruitment cost and selection of new staff, payment of overtime to complement shortfalls and the replacement of experienced employees with inexperienced ones as well as the cost of training and development (Alexandrov et al., 2007). In support of this is the estimated \$5 trillion spent annually by American firms as cost on employees turnover (Frank et al., 2004) and a 17 percent of pre-tax annual income as organizations cost incurred on turnover of employees (Yang et al., 2011).

The causes of turnover of employees has been traced to qualitative overstretch by Kantsperger and Kunz (2005) and Sawyerr et al. (2009), most especially in the call center where tasks are prearranged in a monotonous and tayloristic manner (Bain et al., 2002). Kantsperger and Kunz (2005) further explicated that employee overstretch is vital for the performance and motivation of employee as it signifies if job are too demanding based on the required skills and abilities. Other causes of employee turnover reported by relevant literatures are role clarity, role conflict and job tension (Abdullateef et al., 2010; McNally, 2007), organizational commitment (Ahuja et al., 2007; Firth et al., 2004; Kuruuzum et al., 2009), and organizational factors such as gender differences, pay, promotion, education as well as job features (Joseph et al., 2007), and employees job satisfaction which many studies argued as the strongest determinant (Calisir et al., 2011; Gonza'lez & Garazo, 2006; Harrison et al., 2006; Korunka et al., 2008; McKnight et al., 2009; McNally, 2007; Rutner et al., 2008). Therefore, for this study, qualitative overstretch shall be the main focus as it determine employee intention to quit.

It is imperative to note that many literatures explained turnover using intention to quit (Siong et al., 2006), both of them are never the same thing according to Igbaria and Greenhaus, 1992. The adoption was based on the fact that intention to quit breeds an action that results to turnover (Armitage & Connor, 2001).

Table 4: Measurement Items for Intention to Quit

Construct	Measurement Items	Source
Employee Intention to Quit	I have decided to quit this organization.	Calisir et al. (2011); Gianfranco (2011); Ryan et al. (2011); Tian-Foreman (2009); Siong et al. (2006).
	I am no more comfortable with the condition of work in my organization.	
	I would turn down an offer from another company if it comes tomorrow.	
	I intend to leave this organization within a short period of time.	
	I feel cheated with the policy makers in my organization.	

Conclusion

Considering the fact that employee behavioral attitude in terms of quitting an organization can have deteriorating effects on gaining customer satisfaction and loyalty which in turn deter the achievement of organizational long term relationship with their customers. More so, after due consideration of costs imposed on the firms by the employee turnover as it affects their growth and performance, it is important to conclude that Customer Orientation and Technology Based CRM can serve as managerial tools which if properly integrated has the capabilities of preventing qualitative overstretch of employees and thus reduce immensely their rate of turnover.

Therefore, the hypothetical model presented by this study illuminates the mediating effect of qualitative overstretch on Customer Orientation and Technology Based CRM toward employee quitting intention in the call centers. The contribution to knowledge is the framework employed to explicate the relationships of these independent variables on qualitative overstretch and intention to quit within the call center firms.

However, the management of the call centers can derive from this paper an insight into how qualitative overstretch can be minimized within the work environment so that best performance which would guarantee organization attainment of competitive advantage can be achieved from the employees.

The lack of data to practically test for the authenticity of the proposed model which is needed for the investigation of hypothesized relationship is the inherent limitation of this study.

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