

PERCEPTIONS OF COMMUNICATION EFFICACY AMONG AFGHANISTAN GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES AND THEIR CUSTOMERS

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Abstract

Perception of communication gap is common between Afghanistan government employees and their customers. This research attempted to find out the reasons for the perception of communication between the Afghanistan government employees and their customers and how to close this gap and increase engagement and between these two entities. The interview was done with 12 persons from both, Afghanistan government employees and their customers in Afghanistan. The thematical method is used for data analysis, the perception of communication gap is caused by the government employees and the customers' lack of knowledge about government work procedure and lack of communication skills. The Afghanistan government officials lost their trust due to their unproficiency. Closing the communication gap requires the government considerations to take place importance on the employee's behaviours and their communication knowledge. The obtained data illustrated that the perception of communication gap needs both government and people efforts to have responsible departments by teaching the people and improving the employee's communication skills.

Keywords: *Afghanistan government, Communication Efficacy, Lack of Trust, Engagement, Perception and Organization.*

1.0 Introduction

The communication gap is considered as the main obstacle to every organization's functions during its service delivery to the stockholders. The government could be one of the organizations that need to enhance its communication departments to deliver social services to society. There is a lack of good communication with customers in the government departments, which leads to people's dissatisfaction and an increased gap between people and the government. Based on the report, many people in Afghanistan were arguing that the uncertainty is increasing intentionally by government departments which are accused by their employee's behaviour and treatments who are in touch with the customers while people are referring to government departments (Alemi and Stempel, 2019).

However, the Afghanistan government trends are to adopt the new technology in the service delivery to society but there are several factors that make obstacles to the process. The Afghanistan government conducts communication programs to the employees in order to increase their

awareness about the government work procedures, also the Afghanistan government communication trend is promoting confidence, stability, and good governance by strengthening government communication (Gmic.gov.af, 2020). Promoting good governance is the first aim of the Afghanistan government.

The purpose of this study was to find out what are the factors to lead to the perceptions of communication gap between Afghanistan government employees and their customers by investigating three questions; what are the Afghanistan government employees' perceptions of the relationship they have with customers, why is there a lack of trust among customers towards Afghanistan government officials and how to increase the engagement and reduce the communication gap between the Afghanistan government employees and their customers. This research brings remarkable benefits to the people in Afghanistan, whether they are employees or customers alongside the solutions to communication gap wherever occurs. According to these research outcomes, the Afghanistan government sees what are the perceptions of the communication gap among its stakeholders to close the communication gap and increase the engagement between government and society.

2.0 Problem Statement

Upon discussion with peers, common opinion was raised about government services, and there is a perception of communication gap between the Afghanistan government and people which people argue that this perception of communication gap is caused by government employee's miscommunication with their customers in the government departments. Based on people's point of view, the government employee's treatment is not good enough with their customers, which this point, raises distance between the government and people.

According to the report from Pajhwok News, on January 8/ 2018, in the Logar province of Afghanistan police thrashed a number of residents, after the accident, the residents of Jumma Kala, Bucha Kala, Ali Khan, Muhajir, Ahkbar Kala, and Khwaja Mohammad areas of the central capital of Lagar province visited the provincial council office to complain about what the police have done in their areas. Bismillah, who is 50 years old, and is one of the residents of Khwaja Mohammad area has talked on behalf of the others told the provincial council "A police vehicle has got a roadside bomb in their village on Sunday, after the explosion, Afghan local police and public order police forces came to the village and beat up many people, they began hitting me with the bottom of their guns and sticks in front of our women and children, throwing the turban away from my head, they used abusive words." (Pajhwok Afghan News, 2020).

People in Afghanistan have almost the same perceptive about the government employee's treatments with people, who refer for their works in government departments and this issue has led to deep people's dissatisfaction with the government (Aljazeera, 2020). Moreover, a survey by BBG-Gallup related to the people satisfaction toward the government in Afghanistan illustrates that approximately 80 % of Afghanistan citizens argued that they were dissatisfied with the Afghanistan government employee's performances while only 18 % of them said they were satisfied, and 2 % of them have not any idea (VOA, 2020). This survey has found that people complained about government services, besides lack of good services the government employees are not good enough for communicating with people. Based on that survey, people argued that not

only does the government not provide enough services to people, but its employees treat their customers rudely too.

Base on the documents, the perception of communication gap between the Afghanistan government employees and their customers is caused by the inadequate management of Afghanistan officials as well, they do not concern enough about their position's duties to provide and deliver acceptable services to the society even they make challenges to other government departments. For instance, on September 5, 2017, a traffic officer was assaulted by the president protective services (PPS) in Kabul city. The accident happened when that traffic officer stopped a PPS vehicle for a checkpoint purpose (TOLO news, 2020). This accident caused noise in the public regretfully, but nobody was responsible for it.

The Afghanistan parliament members sometimes make problems for the people while they are moving from parliament to their homes, they usually block the road when they are moving from one place to the other place. The parliament members in Afghanistan like most other countries have a judicial exemption, but sometimes they abuse their power against ordinary people, even against the police officers on the road who are in charge to stop the vehicles for the checkpoint. Two years ago, a female Afghanistan parliament member slapped a cop near the parliament in Kabul city (Radio Free Europe, 2020).

3.0 Methodology

The qualitative research methodology was selected in this research to provide a clear understanding of the two entities' relationship in Afghanistan; government employees and their customers during the interview and data analysis. Data in this research was collected through the interview and the data is primary data, which is via remote interview. The interview with target participants was selected and conformed through social media. The interview was conducted with 12 persons combining both employees and customers and male and female. the limitation which is faced due to the Covid-19 was the internet connection, it is because the time Horizon Malaysia and Afghanistan are different and during the day in Malaysia doing the interview with people in Kabul was not easy due to situation and only after 11 pm in Malaysia most of the interview has been conducted the internet speed was better in both countries Malaysia and Afghanistan at night. Furthermore, interviews have been done via Facebook Messenger, Imo, and WhatsApp, and before recording, permission for recording the participants' voices was obtained.

More importantly, this point must be shared that, not everybody who did the interview was ready to give their time due to the many reasons such as, insecurity in Afghanistan, gender issues; who do want to their voice be recorded, job responsibility, and so on. The duration of the interview was different from person to person, because some participants in the interview were quiet and they were talking very short and they did not want to explain their answers to the interview's question. When the interview was done then the voices were transcribed one by one and word by word in order to obtain a clear understanding of the Afghanistan administration workplace. After transcribing, the interviewee's transcribes were applied in the finding and analysis part of this research as quotes alongside the interpretation. For the data interpreting thematic analysis method has been used in order, the similar codes have been selected and combined in themes to be identified each of them, fifteen codes have been recognized and then combined into four themes.

4.0 Results

A set of codes base on the literature reviews and interviewees' perceptions have been selected and developed. To address the results the research questions answered through the interview and the interviewees have been specified based on their ages.

Table 1: Summary of Codes

No	Codes	Themes
1. 2.	Overview Point of view	Perception
3. 4. 5. 6. 7. 8.	Distrust Inspection Unprofessional Bureaucracy Attitude Disrespect	Lack of trust
9. 10. 11.	Unity Coordination Training for the employees	Engagement
12. 13. 14. 15.	Consolidate the “Rule of Law” Punctuality Effectiveness Knowledgeability	Commitment

4.1. The Afghanistan Government Employees Perceptions Toward Their Customers

The government employees' perceptions are various toward their customers. During the interview some of the government employees claimed that their customers do not follow the government department's work procedures and they want to be done their works as soon as possible, on the other hand, some of the employees argued that their colleagues do not do their customer's works properly.

One of the interviewees who is a Criminal Records Officer at the Ministry of Education said that the customers' behaviours are different from one person to another, but usually, the criminal records officers face misbehaviour from the suspects when they want to investigate their cases most of the suspects are the colleagues and working in the same department of the ministry.

“As I said I am an inspector I usually go to the other departments of the ministry of education for investigating. The staff treatments are different one person to other I face good treatment sometimes and sometimes I face very rude treatment from the other employees, meanwhile no one likes the inspectors, because I go to investigate on the other employees' forgery and embezzlement, that from other departments like schools refer to

my office or some departments send some complaining towards schools' teachers, we must go and investigate on those case." Employee Participant 1 (age 35)

While another interviewee from the government employees illustrated the customers do not have nice treatment with the Afghanistan government employees when they refer for their administrative works. This participant stated that the customers do not have enough respect for the employees when they refer for their administrative works, and they attempt to finish their works as soon as possible.

"...In general if we measure rationally the customers' behaviours with government employees, they have not suitable behaviours. They want to do their works as soon as possible, they do not understand their actions make obstacle to the office procedures. This is why their works sometimes delay. In general, customers have unsuitable behaviours with government employees." Employee Participant 3 (age 28)

4.2. Why is There a Lack of Trust Among Customers Towards Afghanistan Government Officials?

This question has been asked from both entities; government employees and their customers on the interview. Answers from government employees and customers are almost the same. They shared their experiences in the workplace when referring to the government departments. According to the employees, the customer's distrust toward the Afghanistan government employees and officials is caused by several factors, such as bureaucracy, irresponsible officials, and unprofessional employees.

"I strongly perceived that people do not have enough trust in government employees. It is because, the government employees have not been hired based on their proficiencies, but based on their parties and being in contact with the Afghanistan government officials, and they do not want to do the people affairs on time, or they send the customers to the irrelevant departments." Employees Participant 1 (age 35)

"... the officials are not responsible for their positions and the next reasons is that if you want to do your affairs at government departments the official either they make challenges to you or they indirectly make you pay to bribe them. people in Afghanistan have encountered many times challenges from officials. This is why they do not have any trust in the official, and there is no trust from people toward officials." Customers Participant 1 (age 31)

4.3. How to Increase the Engagement and Reduce the Communication Gap between the Afghanistan Government Employees and their Customers

Increasing engagement in the workplace is one of the principles in every organization. The Afghanistan government as an organization needs to take place importance on its employee's behaviours with their customers to achieve public support and increase its customer's satisfaction. The participants in the interview from both, government employees and their customers stated several solutions to increase engagement between government employees and customers. coordination among the top managers and departments with suitable training related to the communication with the customers in the workplace must be considered in the government departments.

Based on employee's overviews, the coordination between top managers and those departments which are directly in contact with people must be increased and the top managers must become professional. In order to make a responsible government department to the society, the top managers must conduct proper training on government employee's morals, for the new employees. A Professional manager must have proper leadership skills and creativity in order to teach the new staff and employees about responsibility to enhance the service delivery and increase the customer's satisfaction towards the government services.

In Afghanistan, even the ministers are not selected based on their proficiencies. It is common that one minster has medical qualification but he/she is working as a minister of technology and information, for example, the former mister of the interior affair of Afghanistan was an engineer, but he was supported by political parties to become minister of interior affairs (Old.moi.gov.af. 2020). Government employees suggested that the government must hire the employees based on their qualifications and competencies then managers in charge must train them how to treat their customers, also that departments must conduct proper seminars related to their department.

“... when an employee is going to be hired in a government department it must be based on his/ her skills, qualification, and his competencies.” Employee Participant 4 (age 30)

“So, my idea is that the government should do some general activities, the government must use the social media and it must train people through the media to learn the office's rules before they refer to their affairs also government should train the employees on how to treat their customers in their offices.” Employee Participant (age 27)

The customers, suggested to the Afghanistan government to consolidate the “Rule of Law” in the country to have a responsible department and suggested the employees must have the proper training related to their works and their morals.

“...In my opinion the first approach to close the gap between employees and their customers is that the government must consolidate the “rules of law”. Also maybe the security is necessary, bureaucracy must be done in the government departments and the employees must be trained to behave with their customers nicely and give them suitable information related to their officers.” Customer Participant 1 (age 30)

“In my perspective, the officials in the government are either illiterate or do not have enough knowledge about their position in other words they are not eligible for those positions. It means they do not know how to talk with their customers. Those officials must be trained to improve their abilities and update their knowledge about the new administration and train them on how to talk with their customers at their offices. In short, the top manager's competencies must be improved.” Customer Participant 2 (age 26)

5.0 Discussion

This research has been done due to the current communication perceptions between the Afghanistan government employees and their customers. The perceptions of government employees toward their customers vary based on the literature review and employees' perceptions, people in Afghanistan are dissatisfied with the government employees. Dissatisfaction is caused by employees' miscommunication and people's unawareness about government work procedures. However, some people would not face challenges during referring to the government departments. There is a lack of trust towards government officials. It is caused by officials' unproficiency, lack of knowledge about their positions, and they have been hired not based on their qualifications while having professional officials is crucial for every organization to do make and keep satisfied its stakeholders (Harrison and Cavalcanti 2017).

To close the communication gap and increase the engagement between government employees and their customer's government must hire qualified people in higher positions. Government can use the media whether social media or stream media to teach the public about government work procedures. Furthermore, the government must consolidate the rule of law and law enforcement in the country to reform the employee's behaviours and bring back the customer's satisfaction. The main three questions in this research have been answered, the interviewee's perceptions are interpreted, the factors for communication gap perceptions highlighted, and the solutions to close the gap and increase the engagement between the mentioned entities have been obtained.

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