CHALLENGES IN PROMOTING PRODUCTIVITY IN PUBLIC SECTOR ORGANIZATIONS IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

This research explores the public opinions about the services provided by Divisional Secretariat (DS) offices in Sri Lanka and investigates the challenges in promoting the productivity in these organizations. The study was carried out with two phases. Face to face interviews, focus group discussions and observations were exercised in data collection in the first phase. The results of this exercise were utilized for constructing the questionnaires that were used in data collection in the second phase. The sample was drawn for the purpose by constituting of 84 executives, 288 employees and 583 customers who obtain the services from the selected DS offices. According to the findings, the majority of the customers are not satisfied with the services provided by the DS offices. They expect more quality service from these offices. Therefore, these offices should improve the productivity of their offices so as to provide better service. Here, they have identified few obstacles that hinder the level of productivity. Among them, negative attitudes of the employees, insufficient non monetary motivation, insufficient training and development opportunities and lack of new technologies are significant factors. Therefore, executives and employees as a team need to create a productive workplace culture within their

offices. For this purpose leaders have to articulate their mission to the employees and they need to inspire employees to provide better service to the customers.

Keywords: Challenges, customer satisfaction, productivity, public sector organizations, service quality

INTRODUCTION

The importance of the efficient use of public resources and high-quality public services for economic growth and stability and for individual well-being has been brought to the forefront by a number of developments over the past decades. With these developments, governments of developing countries are under pressure to improve public sector performance and at the same time contain expenditure growth. Improving the productivity of public sector will be a part of an overall growth strategy of most of the country's economy because it is the largest employer and main service provider in most of the countries According to Dissanayake and Fernando (2016), the public sector is the major employer, the major provider of services and the consumer of tax resources. Therefore, it is important to measure and study the productivity in the public sector.

Public sector is a part of the economy concerned with providing various government services. Economic growth of a country basically depends on productivity improvement in all sectors. In order to sustain the economic growth, all organizations and individuals should focus on improving the productivity in their spheres of operations (Naffel, 2014). It is an accepted fact that productivity is a fundamental source of national development and corporate survival. The standard of living is determined by the productivity of a country's economy.

In the Sri Lankan context, the country is operating relatively with a larger public sector base at different levels. If the public sector is not properly managed and doesn't perform well, it could not contribute much to the country's expectations. Even though improving the productivity is very vital for the Sri Lankan context, measuring productivity in the public sector is a difficult task because it consists of complicated services. On the other hand, measuring the output is extremely difficult comparing with the private sector.

In case of Sri Lanka, the need for public sector quality and productivity has been talked about very much, not just over the past few years, but over decades. But nothing much appears to have happened and the majority of the citizens have come to realize that this topic is at best left alone, because there is no practically anything that could be done about it (Amaradasa, 2012).

According to Dissanayake and Fernando (2016), productivity is very low in public sector organization. Lot of public sector organizations has incurred losses amounting to rupees

millions. Coomaraswamy (2015) has also recently stated that productivity in the government sector has been low and the low productivity erodes Sri Lanka"s competitiveness in international markets.

At the same time, everyone is equally convinced that, unless and until public sector quality and productivity, has been substantially improved, people shall continue to remain a clumsy, lethargic and graceless nation forever (Amaradasa, 2012). Thus, improving public sector quality and productivity is critical factor which should be addressed immediately. This study investigates challenges and prospects for improving the public sector quality and productivity in Sri Lanka. A lift in public sector quality and productivity would have a positive impact on the national basket of services that could be delivered to the average Sri Lankan for a given level of spending. All the successive governments in Sri Lanka have taken various initiatives to expand the public sector and its quality and productivity. However, such initiatives have not achieved the desired objectives entirely. Thus, new and well focused intervention is required to address these critical issues. Findings of present study would have important managerial and policy directives for those attempts in improving public sector quality and productivity. In this context, the main objectives of this study are to;

- To explore the public opinions about the services provided by public sector organization in Sri Lanka
- To investigate the challenges in promoting the productivity in public sector organizations in Sri Lanka

LITERATURE REVIEW

Divisional Secretariat In Sri Lanka

The district of Sri Lanka are divided into administrative sub units known as divisional secretariats. These were originally based on the feudal countries, the Korales and Ratas. They were formerly known as "D.R.O Divisions" after the "Divisional Revenue Officer". Later the D.R.Os became "Assistant Government Agents" and the Divisions were known as "A.G.A. Divisions" Currently the Divisions are administrated by a "Divisional Secretary" and as known as "D.S.Divisions." (Ministry of Public Administration web site retrieved on 2018.04.25). Sri Lanka has 332 divisional secretariats. The main tasks of Divisional Secretariat involve coordinating communications and activities of the central government and Divisional Secrets. These are also responsible for implementing and monitoring development projects at the district level and assisting lower level sub divisions in their activities as well as revenue collection and coordination of elections in the district.

Productivity In Public Sector Organizations

Productivity has clearly been the most widely discussed topic in last few decades in different forums. Different governments used diverse strategies for improvement of the productivity in public sector organizations but still the biggest problem in the country is the productivity improvement. The productivity is a perpetual topic of debate within the public sector that most would describe as improved efficiency and effectiveness of an activity. Simply, productivity can be described as the relationship between output and its inputs (Amaradasa, 2012). The definition of productivity, as being concerned with the relationship between input and output, does not cover issues that many people have in mind when they talk about public sector productivity. According to Dissanayake and Fernando (2016), It is the value received from public services in return for the utilization of public funds. Measuring output in units is very difficult in public sector. Naffel (2014) defined it as "A measure of the efficiency of a person, machine, factory, organization, system, etc., in the process of converting inputs into useful outputs." The organizations and individuals could compute their Productivity by dividing average output per period they witnessed through their operation by the total inputs or costs incurred or resources (capital, energy, material, personnel) consumed in that period. So Productivity is a critical determinant of cost efficiency of an individual or an organization. Paula Linna (2014) identified three categories that define productivity. 1) Productivity as an efficiency measurement. 2) Productivity as a combination of efficiency and effectiveness and 3) Contains everything that makes an organization function better.

Factors Affecting Productivity

Since the public sector is not profit oriented, it is difficult to keep direct measures on productivity in this sector. However, it can be improved through identifying the significant factors that influencing productivity.

Dissanayake and Fernando (2016) have conducted a research using management assistants in public sector organization. They found that the employee productivity of Management Assistants mainly depends on Individual characteristics, Job characteristics, Supervision, Communication, Training and Work environment. Out of them, Training has been the most significant relationship with the productivity of management assistants and next, Communication, Work environment, Individual Characteristics, Supervision and Job characteristics have also shown significant causal relationships respectively.

James, Perry, & Porter (1982) have identified Individual characteristic, Job characteristics, Work environment characteristics, External Environmental characteristics and monetary incentives as the factors influencing productivity in public sector. Loher, Noe, Moeller,

& Fitzgerald, (1985) revealed that Interaction of job characteristics and individual characteristics are related to productivity. Corley (2005) identifies the effect of work environment on productivity. According to Fuchs (1976) productivity largely depends on technology .The technical factors are the most important ones. These include proper location, layout and size of the plant and machinery, correct design of machines and equipment, research and development, automation and computerization, etc. If the organization uses the latest technology, its productivity will be high (Dissanayake and Fernando, 2016).

Some researchers have identified top management support, committed personnel at all levels, a performance measurement system, employee training, reward structures, community involvement and feedback to correction of budget-management decisions as the factors of productivity improvement.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The lack of well grounded evidences on the underline phenomena leads this study to more rely on an inductive approach and qualitative data in first phase of the study. Focusing the study to all public sector organizations which engage in a range of activities would create the study more complex and blurred. Thus, this study only focuses divisional secretariat offices in Sri Lanka. A multistage sampling was employed in selecting the samples to ensure the representation of all the provinces of the country. The study is carried out with two phases. Face to face interviews, focus group discussions and observations were exercised in data collection in the first phase. The results this exercise were utilized for constructing questionnaires that are planned to use in data collection in the second phase. Three samples were drawn for the purpose by constituting of 100 executive level officers, 300 front line employees and 600 citizens who obtain the services from the selected organizations. Qualitative and quantitative data analysis techniques were utilized in the data analysis. SPSS packages were used for the data analysis. Frequency analysis was used to describe the background of the samples. For the Reliability test, Cronbranch"s alpha was used to calculating Alpha value. Factor analysis was used to redundant the perceived factors influencing productivity as identified in first phase of the study.

ANALYSIS

Selection Of The Factors

Initially, the researchers discussed with the executives and employees who are working in DS offices and customers of DS offices to understand the different factors that affect for productivity of DS offices. Based on the factor analysis results, 05, 14 and 13 perceived factors were identified from customers, executives and employees respectively.

Table 1 KMO and Bartlett's Test

		Executives	Employees	Customers
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.503	.787	.700
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	230.063	246.877	675.125
	df	91	78	276
	Sig.	.000	.000	.000

According to the analysis, all the KMO values are greater than 0.5. Therefore, all the data which the researchers use to the analysis are advisable.

Table 2 Communalities of each variable

	Extraction
Perceived factors of executives	
Insufficient cooperation from the higher authority	.740
Negative attitudes of the employees	.730
Insufficient allocation of resources including money	.613
Rigid rules, regulation and policies	.746
Poor cooperation among the different employee layers	.776
Insufficient training and development opportunities	.845
Political influence	.653
Insufficient monetary motivation	.669
Insufficient non monetary motivation	.813
Poor working condition	.784
Internal politics	.872
Insufficient use of modern technologies	.860
Job stress of the employees	.766
Unnecessary wastages	.791
Perceived factors of employees	
Insufficient monetary motivation	.750
Insufficient non monetary motivation	.598
Rigid rules, regulation and policies	.627
Poor working condition	.804
Political influence	.601
Insufficient training and development opportunities	.614
Insufficient allocation of resources including money and human	.577
Weaknesses of the leadership styles of executives	.645
Inability to work as a team and poor delegation of authority	.693
Internal politics	.522
Insufficient use of modern technologies	.622
Job stress of the employees	.668
Unnecessary wastages	.725
Perceived factors of customers	
Tangibility	.520
Reliability	.732
Responsiveness	.574
Assurance	.742
Empathy	.622

According to the results of the table 2, all the factors extraction values are greater than 0.5. The lowest value of the perceived factors that affect on productivity of executives was .613 and higher value was .872. The lowest value of the perceived factors that affect on productivity of employees was .522 and higher value was .804. The lowest value of the perceived factors that affect on productivity of customers was .520 and higher value was .742. All the items included in the table are strong enough to explain at least 50% variation of respect variables. Therefore all the factors can be considered as variables of productivity.

Table 3 Sample profile

Demographic Factors		Frequency		
		Customer	Executive	Employee
Gender	Male	210	50	44
	Female	373	34	240
Civil Status	Single	106	-	68
	Married	477	-	216
Age	<30	132	-	-
	30-39	187	18	-
	40-49	155	46	-
	50<	109	20	-
Education	O/L	228	-	-
	A/L	274	14	-
	Degree	66	66	-
	PHD	1	04	-
	Other	14	-	-
Occupation	Employee	154	-	-
	Professional	94	-	-
	Business	47	-	-
	Unemployed	228	-	-
	Other	60	-	-
Experience	<3	-	-	28
	3-5	-	8	85
	6-8	-	26	53
	9<	-	50	118
Distance	<25	-	-	238
	25-49	-	-	29
	50<	-	-	17
Position	Development Officers	-	-	120
	Management Assistance	-	-	144
	Trainers	-	-	05
	Other	-	-	15

According to the table 03, the sample profile reflects along with respondents profile under different groups of peoples those who are involved with the research study. Mainly those were encompassed the customers, executives and employees. The number of customers includes 583, executives 84 and the employees represented 284.

Table shows that the most of the respondents are females including 373 of customers and 240 of employees except the executive category. The most of the respondents are male in that category. The married respondents are higher than the single respondents in both customer and employee categories. The most of the customers represent age group between 30-49 years but the majority of the executives are in 40-49 group. The majority of the customers have studied up to secondary level and the majority of the executives are graduates. The majority of the customers are unemployed workers. It is also represented 154 employees, 94 professionals and 47 businessmen. 50 executives and 118 employees have more than 9 years work experience. 144 employees are working as management assistance and 120 employees are development officers.

Reliability Analysis

Table 4 Reliability test

		Items	Cronbach's Alpha
Customer	Service Quality	21	**0.871**
	Tangible	5	0.699
	Reliability	3	0.753
	Responsiveness	4	0.686
	Assurance	4	0.814
	Empathy	5	0.772
Executives		14	0.893
Employees		13	0.892

As per the reliability findings all variables in this study reached to the reliability requirement.

Table 5 Descriptive analysis

Category	Factors	Mean	SD
Executives	Insufficient cooperation from the higher authority	3.01	0.854
	Negative attitudes of the employees	4.32	0.632
	Insufficient allocation of resources including money	3.54	0.961
	Rigid rules, regulation and policies	3.27	0.854
	Poor cooperation among the different employee layers	3.98	0.584
	Insufficient training and development opportunities	4.23	0.740

	Political influence	3.84	0.734
	Insufficient monetary motivation	3.46	0.987
	Insufficient non monetary motivation	4.19	0.729
	Poor working condition	2.48	0.786
	Internal politics	3.98	0.895
	Insufficient use of modern technologies	4.01	0.652
	Job stress of the employees	2.42	0.984
	Unnecessary wastages	3.00	0.622
Employees	Insufficient monetary motivation	3.45	0.654
	Insufficient non monetary motivation	4.23	0.659
	Rigid rules, regulation and policies	2.38	0.657
	Poor working condition	2.76	0.642
	Political influence	3.31	0.812
	Insufficient training and development opportunities	4.23	0.800
	Insufficient allocation of resources including money and human	2.94	0.946
	Weaknesses of the leadership styles of executives	4.16	0.788
	Inability to work as a team and poor delegation of authority	3.98	0.779
	Internal politics	3.22	0.641
	Insufficient use of modern technologies	4.03	0.672
	Job stress of the employees	2.68	0.785
	Unnecessary wastages	2.96	0.658
Customers	Service Quality		
	Tangibility	2.39	0.597
	Reliability	3.02	0.847
	Responsiveness	3.15	0.705
	Assurance	3.54	0.702
	Empathy	3.13	0.624

Table 5…

Table 05 presents the mean and standard deviation values of perceived factors regarding productivity of executives, employees and customers. According to the executives view points, the negative attitudes of the employees, insufficient non monetary motivation, insufficient training and development opportunities, poor cooperation among the different employee layers and insufficient modern technologies are main perceived factors of productivity. On the other hand, the employees perceived insufficient monetary motivation, insufficient training and development opportunities, weaknesses of leadership styles of executives, inability to work as a team and poor delegation of authority and insufficient use of technologies. as the factors influencing productivity. The customers measured the productivity based on the services provided by the DS offices. They are not satisfied with the services of the DS offices. It proves by low mean values for tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy.

DISCUSSION

Since the public sector services are responsible and accountable to citizens and communities as well as to its customers, they expect good service from the public sector organizations. They evaluate the level of productivity based on the service quality that they are provided from the DS offices. However, they are not satisfied with the service quality. The service quality was measured using tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance and empathy. According to the results, tangibility is recorded the lowest mean value among the service quality dimensions. That means the customers are unhappy of the basic requirements like infrastructure facilities, physical facilities, facility attractiveness, technological instruments and other tangible factors. The reliability dimension is included sincere interest in solving customers' problems, performs the service right the first time and provides services at the time promised. It is the ability to perform promised services dependably and accurately. However, the customers are also not satisfied with these factors. Other three factors- responsiveness, assurance and empathy are just above the moderate level. The responsiveness emphasized on the personnel attitudes based on attention and care about demand responsiveness, customer complaints and inquires. Knowledge and courtesy of employees and their ability to inspire trust and confidence are the factors of assurance. Empathy emphasized the caring and individualized attention the DS office provides to customers. The customers expect quality service from the DS offices but they are not satisfied with the actual service they are being provided. From the customers' perspectives, they believe that the DS offices need to improve the service quality dimensions to improve the productivity but these services should be provided by the executives and employees of DS offices. They need to improve the productivity of their offices to provide better service to the customers. However, executives and employees have identified some hindrances and challenges to improve the productivity.

According to the executives, the negative attitudes of the employees are the main hindrance to increase the productivity. A person with a high level of attitudes holds positive feeling about a job, while a negative person holds negative feelings thereby impacting on labour productivity. Negative attitudes can decrease the employee productivity much faster because attitudes are the main cause of positive behavior. If the employees have negative attitudes, the customers can not expect quality service from the employees. Therefore it is very important to change the attitudes of the employees.

Both executives and employees emphasized the importance of non monetary motivation as another factor. They are not satisfied with the appreciation and other non monetary motivation methods. Non-monetary factors can excite employees in addition to formal rewards.

It is important to appreciate and motivate the contributors who are giving their valuable inputs for the advancement in an appropriate way to get their active involvement throughout the working period. The higher authority should recognize the good work of executives whereas the executives should appreciate the employees who are performing well. These factors can include praise, recognition, exposure, challenge, feedback, and learning opportunities.

And also both employees expect more training and development opportunities. Investing more in employees is essential to improve the skills of the employees. It helps to improve the self direction and self motivation of the employees. The more skills the staff had, the more innovative they could be. They would also be more capable with new technology. Skilled workers could also work more quickly with fewer mistakes. They generally required less supervision, accepted more responsibility and were better communicators. These skills will help to provide better service to customers and improve the level of productivity. It is important to change the mindset of the employees as productivity basically concerns the change in mindset of individuals and organizations. The current knowledge and skill levels must be continually updated to maintain the productivity. Majority of the employees like to operate in traditional ways. Gradually, this situation needs to be changed by the management through providing continuous training programmes for the employees at all levels. After providing the training, it is the duty of the management to evaluate the effectiveness of the training programmes and changes happened in the ways of operation of the organization. It will help to redesign the way of delivering the training programmes. There should be a comprehensive, systematic approach for measuring the performance of the individuals in the DS offices. Based on the performance target accomplishment, career development opportunities and other job related privileges should be decided.

The employees have identified some weaknesses of their executives. They identified poor delegation of authority as a major problem. The organizational culture is not support to work as a team. From the executives' side, they identified poor cooperation among the different employee layers. As the researchers, we observed some DS offices are maintaining very productive workplace cultures. These DS offices are very productive. Employees are working happily and they are committed to satisfy the customers. The customers are also highly satisfied their service. However the majority of the DS offices need to create productive workplace cultures. This was about positive relationships among staff, teams and managers. A positive work environment motivated people and helped them commit to the organisation. Their ideas helped the workplace to do things smarter and better. Here, the executives should play the main role and they have to articulate their vision clearly. They have to inspire people to achieve the mission by providing quality service to

the customers. In order to undertake this, capability of executives have to be systematically developed and this would help to strengthen the productivity chain of the organizations.

In the ways of the service deliveries, underutilization of available technology or failure to provide the necessary technology and updates or insufficient training on technology can dramatically slow productivity in the organizations. So, this is another important area to be focused by DS offices executives to improve the productivity by utilizing available technology, machines etc. through empowering the employees.

CONCLUSION

The objectives of this study were to explore the public opinions about the services provided by DS offices in Sri Lanka and to investigate the challenges in promoting the productivity in these organizations. According to the findings, the majority of the customers are not satisfied with the services provided by the DS offices. They expect more quality service from these offices. Therefore, these offices should improve the productivity of their offices so as to provide better service. Here, they have identified few obstacles that hinder the level of productivity. Among them, negative attitudes of the employees, insufficient non monetary motivation, insufficient training and development opportunities and lack of new technologies are significant factors. Therefore, executives and employees as a team need to create a productive workplace culture within their offices. For this purpose leaders have to articulate their mission to the employees and they need to inspire employees to provide better service to the customers.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

One of the limitations of this study was relying on self-reported data. The survey was self-reported, and may include a response bias. The level of service quality and productivity were measured according to the customers' own attitudes. In turn, executives and employees have identified the obstacles to increase productivity based on their own attitudes and some biases. Despite these limitations, the study contributes to enrich the literature of productivity.

In further research, this empirical evidence may be improved and better represent for public sector organizations in any district in Sri Lanka. Besides, further research may deeply examine whether the factors used in this study are suitable to measure the service quality and productivity in public sector organizations in Sri Lanka.

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