

## EFFECT OF STRATEGIC TRAINING PARTNERSHIPS ON SERVICE SATISFACTION OF CUSTOM AGENTS IN KENYA

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### ABSTRACT

Trade facilitation which entails the simplification and harmonization of Customs procedures is one of the key challenges for many Customs administrations. Customs to business partnerships have effects on the service satisfaction of Customs agents. Extensive joint consultations between Customs and business can assist both Customs and Customs agents in pursuing their mandate efficiently, since Customs agents transact business with Customs on behalf of businesses. Therefore, the government must provide adequate support to this initiative through supporting policies as well as financial and planning support. This research explores the effect of strategic training partnerships on the service satisfaction of Customs agents in Kenya. The research design used for this study was descriptive survey. The population of this study comprised of Customs agents in Kenya. According to information obtained from the Kenya International Freight and Warehousing Association (KIFWA), for the period 2014/2015, 525 Customs Agents licensed with the Kenya Revenue Authority (KRA) were registered members of KIFWA Nairobi, while 608 Customs Agents licensed with KRA were registered members of KIFWA Mombasa, being the two branches of KIFWA in Kenya. From this total of 1133 units, a sample size of 297 participants (top management of the Customs Agents firms) was selected. Stratified random sampling was used to select a proportionate strata sample based on the KIFWA branches. Data was collected by use of questionnaires issued to the top management of the Customs Agents. The questionnaire consisted of structured closed ended statements. Data was analyzed mainly by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics included mean and standard deviation. Inferential statistical techniques such as correlation and regression were used to draw a causal relationship between the strategic training partnerships and service satisfaction of Customs agents. Results were presented by use of diagrams and tables. The study findings indicated that strategic training

partnerships are very essential for effective service delivery within the Customs agents and thus improved service satisfaction. Regression and correlation results indicated that there was a positive and significant relationship between strategic training partnerships and service satisfaction of Customs agents. The study therefore concluded that the strategic training partnership positively influenced service satisfaction of Customs agents. Thus it is of utmost importance for institutions to carefully recruit the right people, nurture and retain them to ensure long term survival of their organizations, and all this can happen if there are in place training programmes not only at induction level but continuous training to ensure smooth flow of operations.

**Key Words:** *Service Satisfaction, Strategic Partnerships, Training, Customs Agents*

## 1. Introduction

A Customs agent is any person who is licensed by the Commissioner for transacting business relating to the declaration or clearance of goods or baggage subject to Customs control of a person travelling by Air, Land or Sea on behalf of the owner (KRA, 2014). In commercial transactions, owner usually means the businesses (importers and exporters).

Kenya Customs brokers can be located at border towns to clear merchandise on transit or sent in bond a large number are located in Nairobi and around major airports but most are located in Mombasa city, around Kilindini harbor or basically tend to be concentrated around ports with international traffic where shipment freights are frequent and around Customs remittance offices. Customs brokers normally arrange the forwarding, clearing, and transshipment, delivery, of Customs cleared shipments through relationships with other logistics companies. Kenya Customs agents are licensed by the Kenya Revenue Authority, to which the Customs Services Department belongs.

The Revised Kyoto Convention (1999) states in its general principles that Customs shall institute and maintain formal consultative relationships with the trade to increase co-operation and facilitate participation in establishing the most effective methods of working commensurate with national provisions and international agreements. According to Mikuriya (2012), many Customs administrations around the world have endeavored to work together with business.

In the Implementation Guidance for the WTO Trade Facilitation Guidance by the WCO (WCO, 2015b), there are several examples of Customs-business regular partnerships, from informal to institutionalized. An example is given of Canada whereby the Canada Border Services Agency

(CBSA) engages with external stakeholders through different forums and at various management levels such as the Border Commercial Consultative Committee (BCCC), which provides the CBSA and commercial stakeholders a forum for dialogue on Canada's border operations.

The Ireland Customs is given as an instance where there is a consultative committee to provide a forum for revenue and representative organizations to exchange views on issues affecting the Customs treatment of imports and exports. Membership of the Committee consists of Revenue staff who have a direct involvement in Customs work and Organizations whose members have regular and direct dealings with Customs. Yet again, Jordan has an E-Connectivity program whereby there is electronic connectivity with multiple entities in the public and private sector to enhance Customs-Business relationship. Through this, all companies in the supply chain are encouraged to voluntarily implement state of the art procedures, and benefit from a favoured status ('Golden List Programme') (WCO, 2015b).

Good partnerships are important for any function of Customs authorities, including revenue collection, trade facilitation, protection of industry/citizens, and trade security. These partnerships are equally important to anti-corruption and Customs reform as well as modernization efforts (Mikuriya, 2012). According to Mikuriya (2012), these partnerships are beneficial to both Customs and business. While Customs may benefit from improved trade security, trade efficiency, and effective enforcement, the trade community is able to benefit from prompt Customs clearance, low trade transaction costs, transparency, and predictability of Customs procedures.

Since trade facilitation is a common objective and mutual trust is vital, Customs should be cognizant of the complexity and vulnerability of the international trade supply chain, and understand the needs and priorities of the business. At the same time, businesses should be aware of border regulations and how Customs systems operate in order to maintain a high level of compliance with Customs laws and regulations (Mikuriya, 2012).

The 'Customer perspective' is a key strategic goal of the Kenya Revenue Authority, according to its fifth corporate plan (KRA, 2012). It is reported in the 5<sup>th</sup> Corporate plan that taxpayers still faced problems relating to Customs clearance time/excessive time spent in queues, complexity of forms and procedures and understanding of statutory procedures such as valuation, classification

and so on. Therefore, one of the key challenges of KRA in its fifth corporate plan is to improve customer satisfaction and therefore enhance the willingness of customers to voluntarily comply with tax laws. A key measure employed by KRA to achieve customer satisfaction is through enhancing partnerships with key stakeholders such as the business and Customs agents. According to the Corporate plan, the relationships will be geared towards achieving mutually beneficial outcomes on trade facilitation, capacity building, and enhanced revenue collection (KRA, 2012).

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

The WCO has long recognized the importance of a partnership with business. Through the important work of groups such as the Private Sector Consultative Group, the WCO is able to hear the views of business and ensure that its instruments are shaped with business needs in mind. Indeed, the WCO Customs in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century strategic policy positions the Customs-Trade partnership as a building block for modern Customs administrations. Communication and collaboration between Customs and business is fundamental to achieving mutually beneficial outcomes. Many administrations have found that close collaboration with the private sector has numerous strategic benefits – not only for Customs, but for nations as a whole (WCO, 2010).

Several studies have been done related to strategic partnerships and the satisfaction of Customs agents, such as Zhang and Preece (2011), Kairu (2013) and Mutema (2013). Zhang & Preece (2011) undertook a study on designing and implementing Customs-Business partnerships, looking at a possible framework for collaborative governance. The study explores the meaning of public-private-partnership (PPP) in which governments and businesses work together to achieve common goals. These include the need for collaboration, reducing transaction costs, and resource dependence between both parties. It explains how the Customs community is also moving towards the ‘partnership’ buzz – through the highly talked of Customs to Business (C2B) partnership being advocated for by Customs organizations worldwide.

The authors explore the C2B partnership initiative of the Authorized Economic Operator (AEO) program, whereby Customs provides minimal clearance controls and faster clearance to stakeholders in business that are compliant with the Customs authority standards. However, other

partnerships have been simply mentioned in the passing (for example, the Single Window in Thailand, the Industry Partnership Program in the United States etc.).

Kairu (2013) studied the effect of strategic responses on Kenya Revenue Authority operational performance. One the objectives of the study was to determine the effect of strategic partners' management on the operational performance of KRA. According to the study, KRA has formed strategic alliances with banks and mobile telecommunications companies. The study revealed that these alliances have helped in streamlining tax revenue collection, discovering new taxable citizens, increasing revenues and improving the overall performance of KRA. However, the study failed to study address strategic Customs-business partnerships in areas such as training, Customer Relationship Management and information technology. The effect of the same was service delivery was therefore not adequately researched.

Mutema (2013) examined customer service delivery at the Customs and Border Protection (CBP) Department. The respondents included various Customs staff and clearing agents. The study found that the main tasks of customer service in Customs Services Department involve processing of declarations, release of cargo resolving public complaints and provision of focused taxpayer education. Findings indicated that service delivery in the department had not been satisfactory because of poor working conditions and unfriendly customer attitudes. The study however, did not address customer service delivery as a strategic objective of KRA. However, partnerships were not studied, although these are strongly recommended by the WCO, as recommended in the WCO Customs-Business Partnership Guide (WCO, 2015a). This study therefore seeks to analyze the effect of strategic Customs-business partnerships on the service satisfaction of Customs agents in Kenya.

### **3. Purpose of the Paper**

The purpose of this paper was to establish the effect of strategic training partnerships on service satisfaction of Custom agents in Kenya.

## 4. Literature Review

### 4.1 Strategic Training Partnerships and Service Satisfaction of Customs Agents

Training, in the most simplistic definition, is an activity that changes people's behavior (Zwick, 2006). Training is essential not only to increase productivity but also to motivate and inspire workers by letting them know how important their jobs are and giving them all the information they need to perform those jobs (Zwick, 2006).

Faems, Sels, DeWinne, and Maes (2005) list the following as general benefits from employee training: increased job satisfaction and morale, increased motivation, increased efficiencies in processes, resulting in financial gain, increased capacity to adopt new technologies and methods, increased innovation in strategies and products, reduced employee turnover. This is only a partial listing of the many benefits that result from training. Training that is appropriate to the needs of an organization can add great value.

A number of studies indicate that employee training has a positive impact on corporate performance. They generally test the hypothesis that, by improving the competency of employees, training also improves their productivity, which is reflected in an improvement in the firm's performance. Markos and Sridevi (2010) also found a positive relation between training and productivity, profit, revenue and client satisfaction, a relation that is more significant when the training is accompanied by incentives for the employees.

Ng and Siu (2004) conducted a study on state-owned manufacturing enterprises (SOEs) and non-state-owned manufacturing enterprises (non-SOEs) from a survey in Shanghai to assess the effects of training on firm performance. They found that managerial training had a positive and significant effect on sales in both SOEs and non-SOEs. However, technical training made no contribution to firm productivity. The study also indicated that training objectives have three major dimensions, namely enhancing working relationships, tackling skill deficiencies, and skill development. In addition, SOEs tend to focus more on skills development whereas non-SOEs concentrate on enhancing both working relationships and skill development.

Thang and Quang (2005) estimated the impact of training on firm performance, surveying cross-sector enterprises. They found that there was a positive association of training with market share

and organizational performance. Omole (2004) and Akintayo (2011) noted that in Nigeria individual's firms and companies have started making various attempts at training the required skilled manpower. Industries like the Nigerian Port Authority, Nigerian Telecommunication Limited and Banking industries have taken their turns to have their training schools. The author further contends that the Government and its various agencies, also realizing the importance of training, and has virtually set-up various training schools for human resource development. This is buttressed by the Nigerian National Policy on Education, according to which, "for all classes of workers, different kinds of in-service training course, seminars, conference or workshops should be arranged on a continuing basis, so that all workers may attain greater proficiency in their works".

Emojong (2004) in his work; In-Service Training Programs and their effects on the performance of staff at the Uganda Revenue Authority, emphasized the need for on-job training, short seminars and team building workshops as programs that increase the employees performance. Without the right training, employees can be the organization's biggest liability. Trained effectively, however, they can become a firm's biggest asset (Bartram and Gibson, 2008). According to Noe (2010), after training support is a key ingredient in the success of training where managers offer after training support to employees to implement the new skills acquired successfully. Support and endorsement from management can greatly enhance training results. One can conclude that training is not always the answer, and when it is the answer, it has to be the right training.

According to HR-Guide (2015), the difference between the actual level of job performance and the expected level of job performance indicates a need for training. The identification of training needs is therefore the first step in a uniform method of instructional design. A successful training needs assessment helps to identify those who need training and what kind of training is needed. It is counter-productive to offer training to individuals who do not need it or to offer the wrong kind of training (HR-Guide, 2015). According to Brown (2002), training needs assessment is an ongoing process of gathering data to determine what training needs exist so that training can be developed to help the organization accomplish its objectives. A good training needs analysis includes Organizational Analysis (what the organization is trying to accomplish), person analysis (potential participant and instructors involved), work and task analysis (the job and the requirements for performing the work), performance analysis (if there is a performance gap),

content analysis (knowledge and information), training suitability analysis (whether the training has the right solution) and content analysis (return on investment) (HR-Guide, 2015). A Training Needs Analysis therefore helps a business to use its training resources effectively and efficiently.

## **5. Methodology**

This study utilized descriptive survey design. According to Mugenda (2008), descriptive design studies are commonly used when examining social issues that exist in communities. In this study the target population comprised of Customs agents in Kenya from which the accessible population was drawn. According to information obtained from KIFWA, for the period 2014/2015, 525 Customs agents licensed with KRA were registered members of KIFWA Nairobi, while 608 Customs agents licensed with KRA were registered members of KIFWA Mombasa, being the two branches of KIFWA in Kenya. A sample size of 297 respondents was selected through stratified random sampling. The stratas were based on regions that is Nairobi and Mombasa, in each stratum simple random sampling was used to select individual respondents. This study used primary data which was collected through use of questionnaires. Data was collected, coded and analyzed using SPSS version 20.0. The findings were presented in form of tables and pie charts and discussions and interpretation of the same given.

## **6. Results and Discussions**

### **6.1 Response Rate**

Out of the 297 questionnaires administered, all the 297 questionnaires were filled and returned. This represented 100% of response rate. According to Mugenda and Mugenda (2003), a 50% response rate is considered to be adequate, 60% to be good, while a 70% and above rate is considered to be very good. Therefore, a 100% response rate from this study is considered to be very good and satisfactory.

### **6.2. Descriptive Statistics**

The objective of the study was to establish the status of strategic training partnerships of Custom agents in Kenya. Table 1 shows that 66.9% of the respondents agreed that Customs Agents were



regularly inducted into new processes of Customs and Border Control Department at KRA, 69.4% agreed that training programmes meant to serve Customs Agents were developed jointly with KRA in order to maximize learning outcomes and 60.3% of the respondents agreed that Customs Agents attended the same training as KRA employees in order to create harmony Customs operations between KRA and Agents. Fifty six point nine percent (56.9%) of the respondents agreed that training programs were developed with the needs of Customs Agents in mind, while 67% of the respondents agreed that training programs had improved the relationship between KRA employees and Customs agents and 43.1% agreed that there was adequate after-training support by KRA after trainings. Furthermore, 77.5% of the respondents agreed that training had improved their knowledge about Customs procedures, which helped them adjust comfortably to the work environment and 72.3% of the respondents agreed that joint trainings with Customs had improved their perception towards KRA Customs operations. The mean score for responses for this section was 3.62 which indicates that majority of the respondents agreed that strategic training was a key determinant of service satisfaction of Customs agents. The findings imply that the Customs agents are welcoming the strategic partnership with KRA to learn more on Customs issues which will help improve their service satisfaction and gain competitiveness. The study findings are in line with Ng and Siu (2004) conducted a study on state-owned manufacturing enterprises (SOEs) and non-state-owned manufacturing enterprises (non-SOEs) from a survey in Shanghai to assess the effects of training on firm performance and found that managerial training had a positive and significant effect on sales in both SOEs and non-SOEs. Similarly, Thang and Quang (2005) estimated the impact of training on firm performance, surveying cross-sector enterprises and found that there was a positive association of training with market share and organizational performance.

**Table 1: Strategic Training Partnership Descriptive Statistics**

Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Undecided	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean
Customs Agents are regularly inducted into new processes of Customs and Border Control Department at KRA	4.7%	10.1%	18.2%	55.1%	11.8%	3.59

Training programmes meant to serve Customs Agents are developed jointly with KRA in order to maximize learning outcomes	2.0%	7.4%	21.2%	51.2%	18.2%	3.76
Customs Agents attend the same training as KRA employees in order to create harmony Customs operations between KRA and Agents	4.7%	14.5%	20.5%	41.1%	19.2%	3.56
Training programs are developed with the needs of Customs Agents in mind	5.1%	13.5%	24.6%	43.8%	13.1%	3.46
Training programs have improved the relationship between KRA employees and Customs agents	3.4%	9.8%	19.9%	52.2%	14.8%	3.65
There is adequate after-training support by KRA after trainings	7.4%	17.2%	32.3%	34.0%	9.1%	3.2
Training has improved my knowledge about Customs procedures, which has helped me adjust comfortably to the work environment.	3.0%	5.1%	14.5%	49.2%	28.3%	3.95
Joint trainings with Customs have improved my perception towards KRA Customs operations	4.4%	5.7%	17.2%	49.7%	23.0%	3.81
Average	4.3%	10.4%	21.1%	47.0%	17.2%	3.62

### 6.3 Regression Analysis

Regression analysis was conducted to empirically determine whether strategic training partnerships were a significant determinant of service satisfaction of Customs agents in Kenya. Regression results in Table 2 indicated the goodness of fit for the regression between strategic training partnerships and service satisfaction was satisfactory. An R squared of 0.445 indicates that 44.5% of the variations in service satisfaction are explained by the variations in strategic training partnerships effectiveness. This implies that 55.5% of the unexplained variations in service satisfaction are accounted for by the other variables including strategic ICT partnerships, strategic banking and strategic partnerships in customer relationship management. The study findings agree with those of Emojong (2004) who in his work; In-Service Training Programs and their effects on the performance of staff at the Uganda Revenue Authority, emphasized the need

for on-job training, short seminars and team building workshops as programs that increase the employees performance. Without the right training, employees can be the organization's biggest liability. Trained effectively, however, they can become a firm's biggest asset (Bartram and Gibson, 2008).

**Table 2: Model Summary for Strategic Training**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.667a	0.445	0.443	0.56165

a Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Training

The overall model significance is presented in Table 3. An F statistic of 236.482 indicated that the overall model was significant. The findings imply that strategic training partnerships were statistically significant in explaining service satisfaction of Customs agents in Kenya.

**Table 3: ANOVA for Strategic Training Partnerships**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	74.599	1	74.599	236.482	.000b
	Residual	93.059	295	0.315		
	Total	167.658	296			

a Dependent Variable: Service Satisfaction

b Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Training

The strategic training coefficients are presented in table 4. The results show that strategic training contributes significantly to the model since the p-value for the constant and gradient are less than 0.05. The findings imply that one positive unit change in strategic training effectiveness led to a change in service satisfaction at the rate of 0.727. This confirms the positive effect of strategic training and service satisfaction of Customs agents in Kenya. Results are consistent with those of Markos and Sridevi (2010), who found a positive relation between training and productivity, profit, revenue and client satisfaction, a relation that is more significant when the training is accompanied by incentives for the employees. The fitted equation is as shown below

$$Y = 0.875 + 0.727X_2$$

**Table 4: Coefficients of Strategic Training**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	Constant	0.875	0.174		5.018	0.000
	Strategic Training	0.727	0.047	0.667	15.378	0.000

a Dependent Variable: Service Satisfaction

## 7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study established the critical role of strategic training partnerships in improving service satisfaction and thus improved performance and customer satisfaction. The study demonstrated that to improve customer satisfaction and service delivery, Customs and Customs agents should pursue proactive management approach that embraces skill and knowledge development through training coaching selection and retention of the best employees. Top management should put in place strategies and mechanisms that respond quickly to market changes. Results therefore led to a conclusion that Customs agents received induction training on all new processes and all the training programmes are incorporated with KRA to ensure that there are high outcomes from the trainings. The study therefore concluded that the strategic training partnership positively influenced service satisfaction of Customs agents. Thus it is of utmost importance for institutions to carefully recruit the right people, nurture and retain them to ensure long term survival of their organizations, and all this can happen if there are in place training programmes not only at induction level but continuous training to ensure smooth flow of operations.

The study recommends that Customs and Customs agent's management should initiate a policy of providing opportunities for development for its staff. This will help them to engage closely and creatively with activities that will improve the strategic performance of the organization. The study also recommends that Customs executive should demonstrate commitment toward empowering company employees and the Customs agents by ensuring and offering continuous training on new Customs processes and operations across the borders. It is also recommended that the management ensures that career growth, training and development on reward and motivation are emphasized.

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