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tutorials case studies

World-Class, Lean Performance Tutorials and Case Studies - Tutorial 04 what makes the difference between lean and non-lean THE TELECOM CASE

The story:

Cape Town, South Africa. December 19, XXXX, afternoon.

All of a sudden, my telephone line stops working: dead, no dialling tone, nothing. I check all other extensions and phones - dead. I move and swap telephones all around. Nothing.

So, I decide to grab my mobile phone and report the fault to the local Telecommunication Company (let's call it "Telecom"), Fault Report N. **10212**.

I wait for 8 minutes: messages, music, and the ritual *"please note that your service provider will charge you the full rate if you are calling this toll-free number from a mobile cellphone"*.

Eventually: a "Service Consultant" answers. Good news. He takes note of fault. He also suggests to check all other phones, computer, alarm system, etc. because should a Telecom technician come for nothing there will be a service charge. I decide to check before lodging a fault report.

I check everything, disconnect alarm, disconnect computer and everything else, etc. No dialling tone. I call again **10212**: this time, 10 minutes waiting and usual music and messages. Eventually another Service Consultant answers. I report officially the fault, I give my mobile number as a contact to him, and I get a ref. number for the case: 22442/12.

Then I check again the alarm system, and notice there is a system error (obviously, because there is no telephone line). But, I have a suspicion: and if it is the alarm system that is causing the trouble?

So, let's call the alarm company. After several calls and many minutes of mobile phone, they answer - understand the problem - but cannot check if the alarm is faulty. All they can suggest is that they will send one of their technicians (in a few days' time). I agree.

December 20, morning. My cellphone rings: it's a Telecom technician, asking me if I reported a fault, and very kindly and professionally informing me that there is a general "exchange" problem. They are busy fixing the fault - it will be fixed for sure during the course of the day. Very good, I say.

December 20, early evening. Still no dialling tone. I call again **10212** and wait the usual 10 minutes. Eventually another Service Consultant answers and states: *"no, it's not fixed yet because it's a 'bulk fault', and this will take time..."*

I argue: *"...but they called me this morning, and said the fault would be cleared by today...."* Very patiently, the SC states again: *"No, it's a bulk fault, it will take time..."*

December 21, early evening. Still no dialling tone. So, I call **10212** again.

This time I grab the Service Consultant's name (Baba), who says: *"I don't know if and when this fault will be cleared, etc. I don't know anything, I am in Johannesburg, not in Cape Town. You must be patient. All I know is that this fault is being attended to, and it is scheduled for repairs tomorrow...."*

I complain bitterly. Baba couldn't care less.

December 22, early evening. No dialling tone. Usual call to **10212**. Another Service Consultant (Prudence) answers after over 12 minutes.

She states: *"according to the system, the fault has been cleared today - they tried to call you to verify if everything was in order, but there was nobody at home"* (obviously, I think, my phone rings free when dialled just because of the fault).

I become really annoyed: *"but I also gave my mobile number as contact number - why did they call me at the home number?"*

Prudence, extremely calm: *"there is no mobile number in the system"*.

I am really irritated: *"But your technical people called me 2 days ago on my mobile... and now you state"*

there is no mobile number in the system...

Prudence keeps silent.

Now I am out of shape: *"I want to know who can tell me something seriously and reliably about my fault, and when it will be finally fixed, and..."*

Prudence, calm as usual: *"Sorry, all I can do is to mark it as urgent..."*

Me: *"I am also fed up of calling (100 minutes of calls from my mobile, so far...), you people must now call me..."*

Prudence: *"No we cannot call you, you call tomorrow morning at 08:00 this same number and ask for the 'supervisor' - supervisors work tomorrow (Saturday). And here is your new ref. n. 559CWZ - 221206".*

Me: *"Must I refer also to my previous reference. n.?"*

Prudence: *"No, the previous reference. n. does not appear in the system..."*

December 22 - 21:13 Hrs. I get an SMS from Telecom:

From: +2783930002873796

Dear customer, Fault 559CWZ 221206 has been created for circuit/phone number 021 xxxxxxxx.

Telecom will endeavour to resolve the problem as soon as possible.

Fantastic, I say, now at least I know that my mobile n. is in the system.

December 23, 08:10. I call **10212**. 12 minutes waiting time.

Service Consultant: *"Your fault is being attended to, but today is Saturday, technicians don't work on Saturdays".*

Me: *"And when do they work? And who can give me an answer about when my phone line is going to be fixed? I demand to talk to a supervisor".*

SC: *"There is no supervisor on duty today".*

Me: *"But I have been assured he would be on duty today..."*

SC: *"No, is not".*

Me: *"I want to talk to a Manager, a Technical Manager, a Manager of the Managers, Telecom Chief Executive Officer.... to someone who can tell me where I stand with this fault..."*

SC: *"I don't know... I am in Durban, not in Cape Town... You have to wait...."*

My blood pressure must be at 30 bars, at least.

December 23, 09:15 - I have an idea: let's drive down to the nearest **Telecom Direct** (a Telecom Service Centre open to the public) - the nearest one I know is in Sea Point.

I get in, and go to info counter: *"I wish to lodge a customer complaint".*

Info Counter Employee, very calm: *"Wait for a Service Consultant".*

After a few minutes the SC comes, not definitely with a dynamic approach. He seats down quietly, and starts listening to my story.

Then he interrupts me: *"All I can do, I will call the fault department on your behalf..."*

Me: *"Wait, first listen to the entire story!"*

I manage to tell him my story. He doesn't seem impressed.

Then I tell him: *"While you phone 10212, give me a customer complaint form to fill..."*

He gives me the form, then he calls **10212**, then he waits. I fill the form.

After 8 minutes, he says: *"...sorry, I am still waiting for them to answer..."*

Me: *"Yes, I understand, I am used to it..."*

Then someone answers.

Long talk, and then the short outcome: *"It's long week-end, Christmas Holidays, technicians are not working until mid of next week... sorry, you have to wait..."*

Me: *"I want to know WHO can tell me something about when my fault is going to be fixed, and I want to know it now! There must be a Technical Manager on duty, in charge of this technical problem? Who is this person?"*

The Service Consultant seating next to him, a young lady, was already listening to the story (my voice is not really a soft one...), and since she has nothing to do, she intervenes in our conversation and says: *"Wait a moment, let's see if I can find out who is the technician appointed for this fault - it must appear in the system!"*

She plays with her Computer 20 seconds, then: *"Oh, it's Richard XXXXX, and his mobile number is in the system, let me call him."*

Now I start getting interested.

She calls Richard and starts talking to him, while whispering to me *"he is in the box"*.

Me: *"What is the box?"*

She says: *"The exchange..."*

Then she talks to Richard: *"Richard, I have a furious customer here, his telephone n. is xxxxxxxxxxxx, so what is the story?"*

I am definitely impressed.

Waiting about 1 minute, then the lady asks me: *"Is there anybody at home?"*

Me: "Yes, my wife".

She: "OK, Richard, don't bother, I will call his wife, you must be very busy in the box - if the problem persists, I will call you back".

The lady: "The fault has been fixed by Richard, it was just a matter of reconnecting 2 wires, now let's see if your wife confirms it..."

My wife answers - the lady: "Yes, I was just checking if it was fixed... Your husband is here with us"

Then she calls back Richard: "OK, Richard, fixed".

I am astonished. The other 'Service Consultant', the one who originally attended my complaint, is there frying in the hot pan. I just abandon him, change seat, and go in front of the lady. I finish writing my complaint form with an addendum: a praise for the lady's performance.

My complaint ends with this exact sentence: "After dealing for days and days with a bunch of useless, irresponsible 'Service Consultants' - both by phone and at a Telecom Service Centre - only one, out of more than 6, has taken care in an excellent and personal way of my case. Her name is Anneline XXX, of Telecom Service Centre - Sea Point. Her assistance and her performance, after a series of disgraceful shows, have been superb".

The lady watches me writing the complaint form, rather puzzled and perhaps a bit worried. Then I ask her to take a photostat copy of it for me.

When she is back, I praise her loudly, in the presence of several Service Consultants and some customers: "Miss XXX, thank you very much for your care and attention for my problem, for your personal initiative, and for showing 'everybody' that problems can be sorted out effectively and rapidly, if one wants. Your performance, after the disgraceful examples I had in the past few days, has been superb. You are an asset to Telecom. Thank you very much and Merry Christmas!"

She becomes, red, purple, violet... but she is thrilled. With sparks of joy in her eyes she says: "Thank you Sir, Merry Christmas to you!"

December 23, 09: 50. I go out, back home.

December 23, 10:30. I receive an SMS from Telecom:

From: +2783930004534944

This is a progress update from Telecom SA. Case 559CWZ 221206 for circuit/phone number 021 xxxxxxxx. A technician has been dispatched.

I laugh.

December 23, 11:40. Another SMS from Telecom:

From: +2783930004535297

Dear customer, Fault 559CWZ 221206 for circuit/phone number 021xxxxxx.

The fault has been resolved. Telecom apologises for any inconvenience caused. I don't laugh anymore. All this is just pathetic.

January 28, next year. As at the time of writing this case study, there has been no acknowledgement at all of my complaint from Telecom side.

March 10, next year. As at the time of writing this newsletter, there has been no acknowledgement at all of my complaint from Telecom side.

CONCLUSIONS

What are your conclusions?

World-Class, Lean Performance Tutorials - Tutorial 04
what makes the difference between lean and non-lean?
conclusions

Analysis

One case, two different approaches.

One approach: non-lean at all - lasting several days.

Another approach: totally lean - lasting a few minutes.

What makes the difference between the two approaches and the two outcomes?

According to my simple mind, all data were in the "system" - including details of the Technician (Richard) appointed to attend to the fault.

But only one Service Consultant (Anneline XXX) found the relevant data.

All the others:

- Either they did not know how to find the only important (for me) information
- Or they did not want to, or could not bother, or....

All other Service Consultant showed only one feature to me: that they had been extremely well trained to remain calm in any situation, including when dealing with furious customers (like me). Nothing else: no sign of attention, of dedication, of customer care. Nothing. Just attention to the rules and follow-up of procedures.

And moreover: the "craze" of the "Call Centre". Astonishing that the entire world is going for this craze - a system that customers hate - instead of returning to a personalised customer care system.

Unbelievable!

Those little sentences, like: *"I am in Johannesburg.... I am in Durban... You are in Cape Town..."*, what do they mean?

They mean: **"What do you expect me to do for you? I cannot do anything else, so stop bothering me, this is the SYSTEM"**.

To cut a long story short:

- Technology (the IT system) was important in this case, even vital in the end - because only through technology Anneline XXX found out details of the technician (Richard) and solved my problem once and forever (just 2 wires to be re-connected!).
- But Technology was only an "enabler". The same technology was available to other 6 Service Consultants, and none of them bothered to utilise it. **So, it's not technology that makes the difference between lean and non-lean!**
- Methods may make the difference. If people stick to traditional, bureaucratic rules and procedures, and only do a "fragment of a process" (a task), not much will happen. Whereas, if people take care somehow of the entire process (my case and its solution & conclusions) the difference is there! **So, methods make the difference or contribute to make the difference between lean and non-lean!**
- But, at the end of the day, the real difference was made by one person, Anneline XXX. She was not even consulted by me, she was just accidentally listening to my case. BUT, she went into the initiative of doing a bit more. That bit more resolved the entire issue. **So, the real and solid difference between lean and non-lean outcomes, as usual, is made by people. People of a different breed, people with a different industrial culture. These people exist - or, we can fabricate them. If we want. Or, we can fabricate "Call Centres"!!**

Which proves once again the old motto:

- 1. People come first**
- 2. Methods come second**
- 3. Third, and only third, comes Technology**

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