

Performance evaluation of pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan.

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to evaluate performance trends of pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan. This study utilizes the sample of 211 pharmacists and druggists. Respondents have been assessed on key performance indicators such as efficiency, flexibility, loyalty, hard work, creativity, improvement of skills and coping on-job pressure. Results of the study through univariate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) and independent-samples t-test indicate that druggists working in retail pharmacies are more efficient, flexible, creative, loyal and hardworking than pharmacists. On the other hand mean score of male respondents is higher than female respondents for same indicators. An interesting finding of the study is that less salaried individuals have better understanding of customers & competitors and enjoy better relationships with their bosses and colleagues. Study concludes that there is a dire need of continuing on-job training to maintain motivation of more experienced pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan to revive their interest in customers' satisfaction; a cornerstone for business success.

Key words: Performance, Pharmacists, Druggist, Efficiency, Hard work, Retail Pharmacies, Uzbekistan

INTRODUCTION

Uzbekistan is a doubly landlocked country in Central Asia. Uzbeks comprise 80% population of the country, other ethnic groups include Russians 5.5%, Tajik 5%; Kazakhs, Karakalpaks and Tatars are around 10%. The nation is 88% Muslim, 9% Christian and 3% other faiths. Uzbekistan's economy mainly relies on cotton, gold, uranium and natural gas. Uzbekistan continues to maintain rigid economic controls, which often avert foreign investors, thus undermining the growth of private sector at large. Pharmaceutical selling is the only area where significant decentralization can be observed. All drug stores, except those located in hospitals and polyclinics, have been privatized. According to the international reports pharmaceutical market of Uzbekistan has the potential to reach the value of US\$ 600 million between 2008 and 2013. Decentralization of pharmacies of Uzbekistan encouraged the private sector to invest in this business, which resulted in organized networks and individual entrepreneurs. Importance of the sector can be observed by the fact that there was exclusive expo for pharmacies titled 'Apteka Expo 2009' in April to promote and facilitate pharmacies of Uzbekistan for new business opportunities. Pharmacists and druggists are the key components in pharmacy business in the country. Therefore it is quite important to evaluate the performance tendencies of pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan to give fruitful insight to business entrepreneurs.

PERFORMANCE EVALUATION

Performance is effective behaviors, actions, motivations and decisions that capture the full spectrum of job activities (Stathakopoulos, 1998). Interest in performance evaluation has rocketed during the last few years (Neely and Adams, 2002). Performance is measured in order to improve the efficiency of workforce; it is basically a multi dimensional entity and should be linked to the desired outcomes (Ghobadian and Ashworth, 1994). Evaluation of performance has an important role to enhance individual efficiency (Neely, 1999). It is important that performance evaluation should be relevant and continue to reflect the issues of importance to the business (Lynch and Cross, 1991). In order to guarantee the relevance, organizations need a process in place to ensure that evaluation systems are reviewed and modified as the circumstances of organizations and the business change over a period of time (Dixon, Nanni and Vollmann, 1990). There are multiple, seemingly conflicting, performance evaluation frameworks and methodologies. They all provide unique perspective on performance evaluation. They all provide different set of lenses through which business can assess the performance of employees. The key is to recognize that, despite the claims of the proponents of these various frameworks and methodologies, none of them can be the best and the final way to evaluate the performance, because performance evaluation itself has many dimensions (Neely and Adams, 2002).

RESEARCH THEORY

The aims of the evaluation of employee's performance are to give feedback on performance, to analyze strengths and weaknesses to identify training needs, to establish criteria for reward, to form basis for salary increase or promotions and to facilitate communication between employee and management. In this study key performance indicators for pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan are efficiency, hard work, flexibility, loyalty, improvement of skills, coping on-job pressure and customer satisfaction.

Efficiency

Efficiency is the comparison of actual and the desired performance of the individual (Performance Efficiency, 2009). Efficiency is the ability to accomplish a job with a minimum expenditure of time and effort (Efficiency, 2009). Speed of work and meeting the deadlines also determine the level of efficiency of an individual performance (Individual Performance, 2009). Keeping in view the importance of efficiency in day to day performance this study evaluates and compares the efficiency of pharmacists and druggists working in the retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan.

Flexibility

Flexibility addresses the needs of both employer and employee. Flexibility improves quality of service and increases productivity (Gower, 2000). It is important to develop flexible attitude to remain in control and safe, because inflexibility actually puts the person at considerable risk. Worker's inability to adapt to a new situation may cause considerable damage to both the organization and the individual (Flexible, 2009).

Loyalty

Lack of loyalty is one of the major causes of failure in every walk of life. The greater the loyalty of the group towards the group, the greater is the motivation among the group members to achieve the goals of the group, and the greater the probability that the group will achieve its goal (Loyalty, 2009). Therefore this study also focuses on this important aspect of individual and the collective success of pharmacy business in the country.

Hard Work

Hard work is the only way to take an individual towards achievement. If the person is hard working s/he will not only enjoy personal success but will ensure success for the group and the whole organization (Hard Work, 2009). All things are possible for those who work hard and believe in its effectiveness. This study determines the hard work of both male and female pharmacists and druggists.

Creativity

Creativity is a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts. Creativity is fueled by the process of either conscious or unconscious insight. The products of creative thought are usually considered to have originality and appropriateness (Creativity, 2009). This study observes the originality and appropriateness of pharmacists and druggists towards their job at pharmacies.

Improvement of Skills

Improvement of skills is a long-term challenge that requires urgent attention. Successful organizations with opportunities for all to flourish have to focus on improvement and better utilization of required skills. It is important to improve upon the skills to unleash maximum potential of an individual. Organizations invest millions of dollars to help people to improve their skills to deliver better results (Skills Improvement, 2009). But, much responsibility lies on the individual to learn how to improve job related skills (Skill, 2009).

Coping On-Job Pressure

Rapid downsizing, budget cuts, and hiring & wage freezes contributed significantly to enhance on-job pressure. As a result employees are losing enthusiasm and energy for the jobs that once motivated them, and pharmacists and druggists of Uzbekistan are no exception. Nobody feels safe; as long as you do your work effectively you have a job. Job pressure results when requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker (Pressure, 2009). In such circumstance both employee and the organization have to work hand-in-hand to overcome this problem. The ability of an employee to manage on-job pressure and to find innovative approaches to rise above the occasion is the key to success. This study digs in to the trends in handling on-job pressure among pharmacists and druggists of Uzbekistan.

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is a measure of how product or service supplied by an organization meets customer expectation. In today's competitive marketplace customer satisfaction plays vital role in the success of retail business (Customer Satisfaction, 2009). To ensure customer satisfaction pharmacists and druggists of Uzbekistan have to understand needs of their customers. Once they

have this knowledge, they can use it to persuade potential and existing customers that buying drugs and other related products from their pharmacy is in the best interest of customers (Know Your Customer, 2009). This study investigates the level of focus towards customer satisfaction of both male and female pharmacists and druggists of Uzbekistan.

METHODOLOGY

Sample and Sampling

All pharmacies in Republic of Uzbekistan form a sample frame for this study. There were two main sources to form a list of all pharmacies of Uzbekistan. First source was a website 'apteka.uz' and second source was the lists provided by the leading pharmaceutical distributors of Uzbekistan. Simple random sampling procedure was adopted for this study from the list of pharmacies of Uzbekistan.

Instrument

To measure the performance of pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan, researchers adopted a 17-item scale from Lusch and Serpkenci (1999). It is important to verify the reliability of data collection instrument; Cronbach's alpha (α) of the instrument for this study is 0.845. A 7-point response scale was used, ranging from 1 (strongly disagreed) to 7 (strongly agreed).

Data Collection

Researcher distributed 250 questionnaires over a period of six months to the pharmacists and druggists of those pharmacies which formed sample through simple random sampling. Questionnaire was administered in Russian language, because almost all of the respondents were well acquainted with Russian language. Questionnaire was translated from English to Russian and was validated by translation-back-translation to ensure the accuracy. Questionnaire was administered using drop-off and pick-up method and after several callbacks 211 retrieved with 84% response rate. Of the subject 37% are male, 63% are female, 42% are pharmacists and 58% are druggists, moreover 64% respondents are less than 32 years of age and 71% respondents fall within 10 years of experience.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed for descriptive statistics such as percentages and frequencies to present the main characteristics of the sample. A univariate one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was used to observe the differences of means of different age groups and levels of experiences of pharmacists and druggists of both genders working in retail pharmacies of Uzbekistan. Impact of salaries and fluctuation in motivation were also analyzed to get better insight of performance patterns of pharmacists and druggists. Independent-samples t-tests were employed to analyze key performance indicators for pharmacists and druggists of both genders.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Frequency Distribution

Table no. 1 shows the frequency distribution and percentages of respondents with respect to their age, qualification, experience and gender.

Table No. 1: Frequency Distribution (N = 211)

Age	Freq.	% age	Exp.	Freq.	% age	Qualification	Freq.	% age	Gender	Freq.	% age
18-25	57	27%	1-5	72	34%	Pharmacists	88	42%	Male	78	37%
26-32	78	37%	6-10	78	37%	Druggists	123	58%	Female	133	63%
33-39	50	24%	11-15	37	17%						
40-46	18	8%	16-20	12	6%						
47 +	8	4%	20 +	12	6%						

Frequency distribution shows that 64% of the respondents are less than 33 years of age and 71% have experience less than 11 years, on the other hand druggists and female respondents are dominating the sample.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

This study focuses on seven key performance indicators (KPIs) to evaluate the performance of pharmacists and druggists as shown in table no. 2.

Table No. 2: Evaluation of pharmacists and druggists towards KPIs

Variables	Groups	Mean	St. Deviation	t-statistics	Sig.
Efficiency	Pharmacists	5.4318	1.26669	-1.753	0.411
	Druggists	5.7317	1.19475	-1.736	
Flexibility	Pharmacists	4.0341	1.85973	-0.286	0.466
	Druggists	4.1057	1.74061	-0.283	
Loyalty	Pharmacists	5.4886	1.42227	-1.503	0.011**
	Druggists	5.7480	1.08336	-1.438	
Hard Work	Pharmacists	5.6477	1.24143	-0.839	0.615
	Druggists	5.7886	1.17524	-0.831	
Creativity	Pharmacists	5.6705	1.17171	-1.518	0.051*
	Druggists	5.9024	1.03555	-1.488	
Improving Skills	Pharmacists	5.7727	0.93129	-0.603	0.479
	Druggists	5.8537	0.98082	-0.609	
Coping on-job Pressure	Pharmacists	5.2727	1.52170	-4.784	0.000**
	Druggists	6.0569	0.84253	-4.378	

** Significant at 0.05 level

* Significant at 0.10 level

Above analysis shows that druggists are more efficient, creative, flexible and loyal than pharmacists. Although the course length for pharmacists in faculty of pharmacy is five years and for druggists it is two years. But, even then druggists are better performers in retail pharmacies.

They are much hard working and focus more on improving their skills to meet job requirements and to handle on-job pressure.

Broader perception in Uzbekistan is that female workforce is suitable than male counterparts. But, this study found that male pharmacists and druggists are more efficient, flexible, creative, loyal and hardworking. Table no. 3 explains that male respondents showed higher means than female respondents on KPIs. Male respondents keep on improving their skills and handle on-job pressure better than female respondents

Table No. 3: Gender-wise evaluation of pharmacists and druggists towards KPIs

Variables	Groups	Mean	St. Deviation	t-statistics	Sig.
Efficiency	Male	5.6154	0.91497	0.079	0.002**
	Female	5.6015	1.38684	0.087	
Flexibility	Male	4.6410	1.61144	3.618	0.026**
	Female	3.7444	1.80762	3.728	
Loyalty	Male	5.8718	1.04892	2.099	0.109
	Female	5.5038	1.32359	2.228	
Hard Work	Male	5.8205	1.10187	0.838	0.465
	Female	5.6767	1.25860	0.868	
Creativity	Male	5.8718	1.12075	0.669	0.330
	Female	5.7669	1.08633	0.664	
Improving Skills	Male	5.9615	0.74629	1.650	0.007*
	Female	5.7368	1.05812	1.801	
Coping on-job Pressure	Male	5.7436	1.28362	0.124	0.441
	Female	5.7218	1.20826	0.122	

** Significant at 0.05 level

* Significant at 0.10 level

Motivation

Motivation plays an important role over the counter to handle customers. This study shows that there is decline in motivation with increasing age of pharmacists and druggists as shown in table no. 4. This finding gives an important insight for the betterment of retail pharmacy business in Republic of Uzbekistan.

Table No. 4: Comparison of motivation with increase in age and experience

Age	Mean	Experience	Mean
18 – 25 Years	5.5614	1 – 5 Years	5.6944
47 + Years	5.2500	20 + Years	5.3333

Customer Satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is also an important element for the success of a business. In the business of retail pharmacies it is necessary that pharmacists and druggists working in retail pharmacies should focus towards customer satisfaction. Findings of this study suggest that attention of pharmacists and druggists towards customer satisfaction declines with increase in their age and experience.

Table No. 5: Attitude of pharmacists and druggists towards customer satisfaction with increase in age and experience

Age	Mean	Experience	Mean
18 – 25 Years	6.2456	1 – 5 Years	6.1944
47 + Years	6.1250	20 + Years	6.3333

Salary Comparison

Table No. 6: Comparison of less and high salaried pharmacists and druggists

	Means (50 \$ / Month)	Means (200 \$ / Month)
Customer Satisfaction	6.3279	5.9091
Monitoring Competitors	5.8361	5.2727
Relationship with Bosses	6.2951	5.8182
Relationship with Colleagues	6.4590	5.3636

Interesting finding of the study is that pharmacists and druggists with less salary are more focused towards customer satisfaction and take more interest in monitoring their competitors. They also enjoy good relations with their bosses and colleagues. It may be because of the fact that less salaried pharmacist and druggists are those who are at the start of their career and are always keen to have good relations with their bosses, colleagues and customers.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the course length in faculty of pharmacy is less for druggist than pharmacists, but keeping in view the profile of the job at retail pharmacies and the results of this study, it is concluded that druggists are better option to hire than pharmacists for retail pharmacy business in Uzbekistan. Mean score of male respondents for KPIs in this study is relatively higher than female respondents but it can not be concluded that female pharmacists and druggists are not suitable for retail pharmacy business in Uzbekistan. There is significant dominance of female pharmacists and druggists in pharmacies of Uzbekistan; distributing organizations and entrepreneurs are by-in-large satisfied with their overall performance. This study concludes that there is dire need of continuing on-job training to maintain motivation of pharmacists and druggist with the increase in their age and experience.

It is recommended that there should be well designed training and development (T&D) program for pharmacists and druggists across Uzbekistan. Training and development programs should focus to sharpen the skills of pharmacists and druggists to keep their customers satisfied. Big distribution companies can hire trainers to conduct periodic T&D programs to improve performance of pharmacists and druggists against KPIs and to maintain their motivation through out the career. Individual entrepreneurs can engage the services of any T&D institution in this regard. It is also recommended to introduce cash incentives for pharmacists and druggists to get best out of their abilities.

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Notes:

In Republic of Uzbekistan medical terminologies are based on Russian language. Therefore it is necessary to explain some terminologies related to this study.

It is important to note that pharmacy is called apteka (аптека) in Russian language, because there is a mention of 'Apteka Expo 2009' in introduction.

Pharmacist is called pravizor (провизор) in Russian language. Course length for pravizor is 5 years in faculty of pharmacy in medical university.

Druggist is called farmacivt (Фармацевт), the course length for farmacivt is 2 years in faculty of pharmacy in medial university.

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