

INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF RETAIL MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN IMPROVING  
CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AT A RETAIL GROUP

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## Declaration

I, Beverly C. Stegling of 2013008152, hereby declare that this research project dissertation submitted by me in fulfilment of the requirement of the Master's Degree in Business Administration at the University of the Free State's Business School is my original work and that the intellectual property of the authors cited in this product was not compromised. I also hereby declare that I give the copyright of this work to the University of the Free State.

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## Abstract

Organisations in the recent economic era face an increasing need for their responsiveness to radical changes in market demands as well as the effective utilisation of new technology and ways of working. The workforce is becoming more diverse and educated, and technology is driving productivity within organisations. On the other hand, consumers are becoming more demanding of certain products and services and are better informed about competitive or alternative products/ services, hence the reason to satisfy them and retain them as long-term customers. The speed of change in the modern age is rapid, and innovation being at its centre has created an environment of instability and transformation, thereby cementing the emphasis of having well-skilled managers to lead its workforce into an age of rapid change and having to remain agile.

Amongst the many skills that exist to aid managers in leading successful businesses, the researcher has focused on retail management skills, customer satisfaction in retail, a skills development framework to enhance retail management skills and innovative technological systems to support the store's operations. These areas have provided a supporting background to the most requisite skills needed for retail under this research study: how to achieve satisfactory customer service and experience.

This research aimed to investigate the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction in a retail group. The study aimed to achieve an in-depth understanding of customer satisfaction and retention drivers, with specific relation to management's retail skills in the customer service aspect. Data collection from floor employees of the store, customers and store managers was completed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews via purposive non-probability sampling. Interviews were conducted in value stores, superstores, and hyper stores, all based in Gaborone, Botswana. Themes and interpretive analysis were performed. The limitation of the study included time constraints, sample size and data collected through perceptions. The challenges that faced the retail store included the visibility of pricing, the difficulty of handling difficult customers, and a lack of fresh products being sold. The recommendations include adopting a hybrid pricing strategy, understanding why

customers become difficult and how to deal with them and lastly, effective management and monitoring the quality of products sold to customers.

**Keywords:**

1. Retail industry
2. Management skills
3. Customer satisfaction
4. Retail management
5. Retail management attributes
6. Measuring customer satisfaction
7. Information Technology (IT) in Retail

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## CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

### 1.1 Introduction and background

The organisation under study is a retail store chain operating in the sub-Saharan African market's retail sector. The head office of this organisation is based in Gaborone, Botswana. The hyper store concept is pioneering the way in local retailing, serving food products and services in a customer-friendly environment with a one-stop shopping experience.

The Covid-19 pandemic has disrupted global economies, and how they operate as well as unsettling value networks, which aggravated the prevailing growth challenges/ This has led to an estimated real gross domestic product (GDP) contraction of 7.9% in 2020 in Botswana, the biggest on record (Worldbank, 2021). Research shows that the pandemic altered customers' purchasing behaviours, product needs, and post-purchase satisfaction levels. The aforementioned is a major challenge for a retailer such as the retail group to remain competitive and satisfy its customers (Brandtner, Darbanian, Falatouri, & Udokwu 2021). Therefore, a fresh look is required to explore ways to support an improved customer retail experience at the retail group.

### 1.2 Background to the problem

Organisations in the recent economic era face an escalating need for their responsiveness to radical changes in market demands as well as the effective utilisation of new technology and innovative ways of working (Dorenbosch, van Engen & Verhagen 2005). E-commerce is changing both the supply chain and sales, and organizations are becoming more networked and knowledge-based. The workforce is getting more diverse and educated, and technology is increasing productivity within organisations. (Cascio & Montealegre 2016). On the other hand, consumers are becoming more demanding of certain products and services and better informed about competitive or alternative products/ services, hence the reason to satisfy them and retain them as long-term

customers (Khadka & Maharjan, Customer Satisfaction and Customer Loyalty, 2017). The speed of change in the modern age is rapid, and innovation being at its centre has created an environment of instability and transformation, thereby cementing the emphasis of having well-skilled managers to lead its workforce into an age of rapid change and having to remain agile.

Several factors influence customer satisfaction, and ultimately customer retention, and they involve the quality of the services offered within the retail industry. To successfully provide their consumers with high-quality service, managers need to think about embracing innovation, managing employees differently, and seeking important collaborations within a larger ecosystem. (Srinivas et al., 2018). Training in customer service management is pivotal to satisfying customer needs and retention (Naik, Gantasala, & Prabhakar, 2010).

Respectively, management should be sufficiently trained with skills that enable satisfaction and ultimately retention of customers (CommenceCRM, 2020). There are numerous tactics an organisation can implement when striving for customer satisfaction and including being aware of the radical fluctuations in the market demand, understanding the customers and their preferences, and personalised products or services offered to meet their requisites. This can easily be done via automated systems and digitalised business operations in terms of collecting current customer preferences and trends. To achieve this, training structures and systems would have to be implemented in the retail group to provide exceptional service that is convenient and intuitive (CommenceCRM, 2020). There is little doubt that such measurements would tremendously assist staff productivity by improving their flexibility to meet the changing customer needs and thereby enhancing customer service and product quality (Reference for Business, 2021).

The organisation's Integrated Annual Report of 2020 shows that 71 per cent of customers expect uniquely personalised engagement, with proactive service and product recommendations that are connected and contextualised at every point. In earning a customer's trust, which positively influences customer satisfaction, companies need to allow customers to be in control of how data is collected and to be transparent with how

it's used. This ensures the quality of products and services provided and thereby adds value to the customer's shopping experience (Salesforce Research, 2018).

### 1.3 Problem statement

Based on previous customer complaints, it has transpired that the probability is high that more focus is required on retail management skills at the retail group to improve customer satisfaction. According to the organisation's social media page (retail store's Facebook page, 2021), it can be noted that the recurring complaints that have occurred are (1) the lack of welcoming of customers and (2) assisting with queries raised or service sought by customers.

Therefore, the dissertation's research problem of this study statement is that there is a need for improved retail management skills to enable employees to satisfy their customers. Training would help improve their operations by directly impacting the customer's experience (Shah, Shah, & Gul, 2020). This would increase its share market and ultimately improve the profitability of the retail group.

### 1.4 Primary and secondary research questions

#### 1.4.1 Primary research question

The following primary research question has been formulated for this research study:

What is the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group?

#### 1.4.2 Secondary research questions

The following secondary research questions have been formulated for this research study:

- Which human interaction factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction?
- What are the essential skills that retail managers need to possess to support improved customer satisfaction?
- What would a skills development framework consist of to support the development of retail management skills?

## 1.5 Primary and secondary research objectives

### 1.5.1 Primary research objective

The following primary research objective has been put forward for this research study:

- To investigate the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group.

### 1.5.2 Secondary research objectives:

The following secondary research objectives have been framed for this research study:

- To assess which human interaction factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction.
- To determine the essential skills that retail managers need to possess, which will support improved customer satisfaction.
- To outline what a skills development framework would consist of to support the development of retail management skills.

## 1.6 Literature review objective

The literature review objective was to cover the content of existing research on the same or similar theories of this study, which relate to the role of managerial skills and the human interactive factors needed to improve customer satisfaction. The research analysed and discussed these previously researched theories, identified areas of controversy and highlighted any gaps that may exist by drafting a skills development framework that would

be required to support the development and improvement of these kinds of retail management skills (The University of Edinburgh, 2021).

## 1.7 Research methodology

Research methodology is the specific procedures or techniques used to identify, select, process, and analyse information about customer satisfaction in retail (University of the Witwatersrand, 2022).

The research comprises the use of a qualitative research approach which is defined as “the selection of specific data sources, from which data is collected to address the researcher’s objectives” (Gentles, Charles, & Ploeg, 2015). The study used qualitative methods to acknowledge the existence and interplay of multiple views and opinions from different academics as secondary data to provide a theoretical framework for the views and opinions of the participants that paved the way to the reality of those views (James & Busher, 2009).

In terms of the research strategy, this study used the narrative research design as well as its research philosophy making mention of its epistemology and phenomenology. The narrative data collected to support this study were from the participant’s personal experiences and viewpoints on the retail group’s customer service based on past events (Ndlovu, 2021).

The reasons for choosing this research method are, according to Ndlovu (2021), to extract the true feelings and emotions of customers receiving the services and products of the retail group. Also, it is suitable as it incorporates an inductive approach to the relationship between the theory and research thereby enriching the human discourse by generating understanding rather than accumulating knowledge (Ndlovu, 2021).

The study aimed to achieve an in-depth understanding of customer satisfaction and retention drivers, with specific relation to management’s retail skills in the customer service aspect. Data collection of floor employees of the store, customers and store managers was completed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews via purposive non-

probability sampling. The reason for this methodology is that it is useful when studying a problem that requires an understanding of multifaceted, socio-economic environments, and the interactions of people within those environments, as suggested by Ndlovu (2021).

## 1.8 Demarcation of study

The focus of the analysis is to deliberate on aspects of customer satisfaction, the role of retail management skills in customer service, and how to improve customer gratification in the retail group. The study further explains the activities that customers, employees and management staff of the retail group are involved in. The field of study is Retail Management, Customer Satisfaction, General Management, Human Resource Management, as well as Relationship Marketing.

## 1.9 Chapter outline

Chapter 1 Briefly introduces and gives background on the scope and context of the research study and outlines the research topic.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review on the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction in a retail group.

Chapter 3 discusses the research methods used and designed to gather data.

Chapter 4 documents the data analysis and its interpretation. The chapter will further deliberate the development of a skills development framework to support the development of retail management skills, as well as evaluate the benefits of implementing this framework within the retail group.

Chapter 5 concludes the research study by laying down recommendations made on the critical aspects of the study.

## 1.10 Conclusion

The focus of this chapter was to introduce the research study in terms of its significance and relevance in researching the impact of retail management skills on improving customer satisfaction. It identified the gaps that exist in realising the dire need to capitalise and cultivate the right managerial skills to better provide an exceptional shopping experience for the retail group's customers. Taking all the above into consideration, research topics and objectives were duly identified. The next chapter provides a detailed review and critical analysis of the existing literature on the study.

## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1 Introduction

The retail market has undergone a tremendous change over the years, and this was accelerated by the Covid-19 pandemic (KPMG, 2021). These changes include the restriction of movement and closure of some businesses, thus affecting exports and supply of food products (Russo, et al., 2022). This gave Botswana a painful awakening in terms of investing in their local economy and nurturing their entrepreneurs (Xinhua, 2022). It is because of this aggressive change that the need to refine management skills has become essential in running successful retail stores (Catherine & Contributor, 2019). Amongst the many skills that exist to aid managers in leading successful businesses, the researcher will focus on retail management and skills, customer satisfaction in retail, a skills development framework to enhance retail management skills and innovative technological systems to support the store's operations. These areas will provide a supporting background to the most requisite skills needed for retail under this research study: how to achieve satisfactory customer service and experience.

### 2.2 Retail Management

Retail originates from 1365 from the French word 'tailer' intending 'to divide' in terms of tailoring to customer needs. In 1443 it was envisioned with the connotation of a "sale in small quantities" (Harper, 2015). Kumar et al (2019) note that retail is understood to be a method of trading/selling products or services straight to the customer for a profit.

Another scholar suggests that fundamentally, retail involves business activities that are central to the selling of goods and services to customers, and it serves as the final sale to the final customer and is the last stage in the distribution process (Argarwal, 2018).

Management is a process of grouping individuals together for a common purpose and making them work cohesively as a single unit towards achieving organisational goals and objectives and forms an integral activity of all businesses (Juneja, 2022).

Retail management, therefore, is a technique to run and manage retail outlets and their employees to work cohesively towards achieving the day-to-day actions of selling goods and services to customers to ensure that their customers are content with the goods and services they are buying and that these activities run efficiently while making profits (Safetyculture, 2022).

Another aspect of Retail management, according to Tradegecko (2021), is that it is a procedure to safeguard retail business functions at their maximum capacity, to serve its targeted customers while aligning the backend office tasks with the frontend satisfaction. This author highlights the function of the process to have retail managers utilise their resources inclusive of staff for optimal performance (Tradegecko, 2021).

Retail management is a significant and vital process of any retail business (Safetyculture, 2022). The key to any effective retail management lies in the individual store manager's capacity and emphasises the well-being of employees while aiding to achieve sales objectives. They actively assist in customer satisfaction and sustenance, administer the day-to-day operations of the whole store, and especially empower their colleague's true potential for future use in the retail store (Safetyculture, 2022).

Retail management is a method to evaluate all the components of retail sales, to increase positive outcomes. It is a set of activities and systems engaged to enhance the retail environment and its structure to generate greater customer satisfaction that consequently benefits the customers to shop without any struggle (Kumar P, 2020).

Stemming from the above authors' literature, this study concludes that retail management is a methodological and systematic approach to optimally utilising store resources, and inclusive human resources to sell goods and services directly to the customer, in an effective, efficient, and profitable manner that benefits the customers and leaves them satisfied of their shopping experience. This approach, therefore, would need the skill set required to be applied to enable a successful management system for the benefit of the

stores and the relevant stakeholders affected directly and indirectly. The next section provides an overview of retail management skills.

## 2.3 Retail management skills

Research has shown that retail managers deal with numerous tasks in the workplace, particularly as the retail industry is becoming more fast-paced and competitive with the foremost challenge being the intricacy of their occupation (Disprz, 2021). They are expected to achieve numerous tasks themselves while ensuring their team performs its duties well. The multifaceted process requires managers to decrease the number of employees parting with the job by sufficiently engaging and motivating them (Disprz, 2021). In addition to this, the retail manager's challenge is the continuously developing nature of the retail market requiring a retail store to continuously rebrand itself, whether internally or externally. This can become complex for the retail manager, who must comprehend, alter customer trends and markets, and adjust the store accordingly. It is shown that a deficiency in training and experience is problematic as retail managers more often have insufficient experience or the necessary skill set to tackle such challenges. Consequently, it is crucial to warrant the upkeep of retail management skills in a timeous manner to remain successful, agile, and resilient (Disprz, 2021).

Phibbs (2021) highlights that an efficient retail store manager should have the required and right skills to ensure they are equipped for the occupation. The best manager may have gaps or flaws and they must be prepared to learn how to be an effective retail manager and grow within their capacity. These essential retail management skills can be trained, but it's idyllic for retail managers to possess a compatible personality type. Phibbs suggests the below-tabled vital skills a manager must have in a retail store (Phibbs, 2021):

**Table 6 Retail management Skills** (Phibbs, 2021)

Skills	Attributes
<b>Multi-tasking</b>	Effective managers are required to oversee all the employees, keeping their capabilities and flaws in cognisance while prioritising numerous tasks. Managers must multi-task while balancing priorities devoid of slacking in productivity.
<b>Decision-making</b>	The capability to assess and decide on activities essential to the success of the store. Retail habitually requires activities to be acted upon speedily while making the right choices swiftly without mistakes by evaluating information according to what is significant and what is not.
<b>Leadership</b>	Effective managers are equipped to get the optimum performances out of their team through their people management skills, listening skills, and problem-solving skills to inspire and sustain employee engagement. This means using thoughtful, constructive criticism and giving others respect while leading by example and not subordinating tasks.
<b>Motivation</b>	Motivation is integrated into leadership because an effective team leader must motivate retail employees and be able to nurture them alongside clear performance anticipations. By setting goals, managers will be attentive to the long-term success of the retail store.
<b>Organisational skills</b>	A manager must have the ability to identify capacities where either the rules or organisational procedures can be enhanced through streamlining techniques, employing the best candidates and training them appropriately, while also cutting costs.
<b>Effective communication</b>	The best managers must improve their aptitude to not only communicate their points but also to truly pay attention to others. True communication skills mean knowing that only an insignificant percentage of communication is spoken word and that body language and facial expressions, with the tone of voice, are used to deliver a message.

**Making the first sale of the day**

When staff sees managers actively selling to the first patron, it becomes harder for employees to moan "No one's purchasing". Meaning the manager must set an example for the team.

Research shows that less than 27% of managers possess 5-9 years of experience, and about 26% have 10-19 years of experience, thereby indicating the need to have training programmes for managers either to improve their skills or to learn other skills. It is paramount for an organisation to recognise a deficiency in a manager's retail skills early on to be able to alleviate the frustrations of the manager, its staff, and the customers, that may come from the operations of a retail store (Disprz, 2021). Sufficient and relevant training and development programmes, especially in management skills, must be grounded in the business plan and include strategies that employ innovative behaviour (Chiguvi, 2016).

It is important to realise that both management and leadership traits are essential for the successful running of any organisation (Paychex, 2022). The retail store should not overlook the opportunity of promoting both managerial and leadership skills and qualities because as research has shown, a manager can most certainly benefit from learning how to think innovatively and influence staff (Paychex, 2022). Although management and leadership skills may overlap, and the skills may be identical, it is how the skill is used that varies across the two roles and the expected outcome (Paychex, 2022). Brief aspects of leadership skills are incorporated into this study because, in the retail setting, the common hierarchy of reaching out to customers is normally through the floor staff who are under the management and leadership of the store manager. This then justifies why the study mentions traits of leadership that would help a masterful manager organise and coordinate the successful running of the store, whilst also inspiring and motivating floor staff to be engaged and productive in the vision and strategic objectives of the store (Paychex, 2022) which includes customer satisfaction.

Disprz (2021), recognises that a manager needs at least the following eight leadership qualities that must be employed in their workings with their staff, and they are tabled below. They include (Disprz, 2021):

**Table 7 Leadership qualities for managers** (Disprz, 2021)

Skills	Attributes
<b>Multi-tasking</b>	Just as it is a requirement in terms of one’s management capabilities, it is important for retail managers, when leading a team, to be able to assist, supervise and delegate tasks to their staff to be able to collectively meet targeted goals. Effective multitasking needs managers to start the day by clearly crafting and communicating set tasks giving them an indication of what tasks can be grouped and completed together. This way, the staff are bound to feel like they belong and to be proud of meeting targets that they have contributed towards. Staff members will be eager to be more engaged and active in the working of the team, while also being responsible for their store activities. This will increase productivity.
<b>Time management</b>	It is critical for managers to efficiently distribute their time. They ought to comprehend the significance of tasks and delegating tasks. They must set clear goals concerning how much work must be completed during the day. They ought to know how to remove distractions and handle interruptions, for themselves and their teams.
<b>Decision making</b>	A manager’s job description necessitates them to make numerous decisions throughout the day. These decisions need to be well-informed and be made hastily. This can be done by involving and engaging staff members by way of properly delegating tasks to them regularly. By engaging employees in

	<p>the daily workings of the store, the manager can easily get information to enable him or her to make the final decisions. This creates a culture of accountability in that staff members feel they have contributed toward that decision, and this contributes to the increased workmanship and interest in the company</p>
<p><b>Leadership abilities</b></p>	<p>As teams comprise diverse and multi-talented individuals who possess the right skills in retailing, leadership attributes, therefore, become a vital management function that helps to direct an organisation’s resources for improved efficiency and the achievement of goals. Effective leaders provide clarity of purpose and motivate and guide the organisation to realise its mission (Indeed Editorial Team, The importance of leadership (with types and values), 2021). There is no uniform approach to leadership, hence the importance of managers being able to learn and to be a part of the people they work with to effectively be able to provide direction for them. This permits a manager to maximise their team’s output and help them to accomplish their full potential. Developing numerous interpersonal skills like people management and problem-solving are essential in that a good leader can principally enable their team to manage themselves, consequently saving time and resources</p>
<p><b>Organisational skills</b></p>	<p>Managers are required to nurture organisational skills to guarantee the store’s efficient management. The rapidly evolving retail industry landscape makes these skills increasingly imperative as they can enable a healthy working environment. By ensuring effective role-job-fit for every employee in the store, confusion, delays, duplication of work and overlapping efforts are avoided. This establishes a sense of trust and professionalism in the workplace (Chron Contributor, 2020). A well-organised retail manager projects an image of reliability</p>

	<p>and control, thereby enabling him to capture the employee's trust and confidence, leading to easy compliance by them (Tutorialspoint, 2022). Organisational skills aid in managing tight schedules and budgets, recognising the store's difficulties, cutting costs, and enhancing sales</p>
<p><b>Effective and impactful communication</b></p>	<p>For there to be an improvement of any kind in the workplace, managers must be able to communicate openly and honestly with their staff. This builds trust amongst them and creates a better store environment where clear and respectful communication can enable clear constructive criticism for better results. Managers must have the aptitude to communicate effectively and efficiently to guarantee there is no miscommunication. A manager is required to have excellent listening skills to understand their employee's or customers' concerns and remedy them. Efficient communication is an essential tool used for training employees</p>
<p><b>Motivational skills</b></p>	<p>Developing motivational skills helps managers to encourage their employees to be more productive by providing constructive criticism and giving feedback to learn from their mistakes. An inspiring manager also enhances an employee's job satisfaction and reduces employee turnover. Motivated employees are known to increase productivity which may develop a culture of innovativeness.</p>
<p><b>Efficient customer service</b></p>	<p>Providing efficient customer service must be a manager's highest priority by understanding customer needs, behaviour, and preferences. They ought to be capable of assisting a customer satisfactorily and train their staff to do so as well. Providing efficient customer service confirms buyers will do repeat purchases from the store and improve sales.</p>

Today, retail stores have evolved from just providing customers with only their physical needs, they now offer integration of physical and value-added services to attain a competitive advantage (Bolton, Dhruv, & Levy, 2007). Keenan (2022), states that retail management is a toolkit of abilities that combines people management, process-building, and an eye for detail to prevent a state of anarchy (Keenan, 2022). He continues to state that a skilled retail manager can make a difference between a store that just survives and one that thrives. In the famous words of Sam Walton, founder of Walmart: “You love it when you visit a store that somehow exceeds your expectations, and you hate it when a store inconveniences you, or gives you a hard time, or just pretends you’re invisible.” This statement denoted the importance of giving customers what they want, which is exceptional service and an excellent shopping experience, and this is where the importance of retail management skills comes in (Keenan, 2022).

This study is relevant in that it highlights the importance of improved retail management skills and how it affects the business. The aim of the study in this section is for the retail store to acknowledge and internalize the importance of these skills as a direct link to improving how the store operates, how to improve the productivity of the employees, and ultimately how to ensure customers are satisfied. The next section provides an overview of customer satisfaction.

## 2.4 Customer satisfaction

Earlier scholars have advocated that customer service is an integral function in any business, and that good customer satisfaction has a consequence on the profitability of virtually every organisation (Reck, 1991). For instance, when customers receive a decent product or service, each will usually recommend the business to nine to ten people as is predicted that approximately half of American organisations are constructed upon informal, “word of mouth” communication (Reck, 1991). In addition, Griffin (1995) states that improving customer retention by a slight percentage may upsurge profits by 25% or more.

A customer's intention to repurchase stemming from their satisfactory experiences is a vital activity to businesses because it is a sign of business continuity, prospect revenue generation and therefore business profitability (Chang, 2006). Schwager and Meyer (2007), describe customer experience as being the integral and subjective response customers have toward a company, whether directly or indirectly. Customer experience involves aspects of a store's offering the quality of customer care or interaction, advertising, product, packaging, ease of use, and reliability (Schwager & Meyer, 2007).

The importance of a customer being satisfied is paramount for organisations to be able to sell products or services. The process of selling a product for instance involves product development via customer demands and experiences. In terms of the service given, it translates to the transaction that connects the product specification and the operations that flow from it which encompasses the quality of the product, its availability, and the associated cost of the product (Schwager & Meyer, 2007).

Satisfied customers will cultivate trust in the organisation and turn into loyal customers and consequently make repeat purchases (Kang, Okamoto, & Donovan, 2009). Furthermore, these authors advocate that a satisfied customer is considered a strategic success factor that enables the organisation to achieve a competitive advantage. They note that retail management enriches customer satisfaction where it is all about guaranteeing that the customer is constantly and consistently given the value they expect from the organisation. The strategic aspects that come into play are that customer satisfaction is inclusive of planning in-store and on-site programmes, merchandising (for example, product situation, organisation, and presentation) and offering customer service and maintenance. It is imperative, says Kang et al (2009), to be proactive in the method of providing for customers' needs and lacking proper retail management may lead to dissatisfied customers.

The intense and competitive business world and the rise in customer awareness highlight that customer satisfaction is a critical subject in all organisations, hence, to endure competitive and sustainable businesses organisations should ensure they always satisfy their customers (Richard & Sandada, 2013).

From the above author's findings, customer satisfaction is essentially the culmination of the experience they had in a store. It occurs when there is a bridged gap between the customer's expectations and their experiences (Schwager & Meyer, 2007). Although companies can collect data on customer satisfaction, it is often difficult to interpret and analyse it for the betterment of the company. This thereby makes this research study important in that such data will not only be collected but analysed to understand the disparities that exist in terms of customer satisfaction and how best to improve services offered and experiences lived, especially since customers have a multitude of choices now with regards to which store to shop in. From the analysis of data to be collected, a simple-to-understand and integrated solution to the problem will be formulated for managers to refer back to and guide the floor staff and how to create an environment that harbours an enjoyable shopping experience (Schwager & Meyer, 2007).

The study concludes that customer satisfaction is an imperative business function in any organisation as it contributes to customer loyalty and directly relates to the longevity of the company. The next section provides an overview of the retail management attributes that enhance customer satisfaction.

## 2.5 Retail management attributes to enhancing customer satisfaction

Evidence in academic research suggests that managerial behaviours and practices at the store level can create a climate for customer satisfaction and are mediated by employees as the customer's first contacts. Research continues to indicate that the manager's influence on customers is qualified by the employee's job attributes and behaviours, while the store's performance is attributed to customers (Richard, James, & Maxham, 2010), thus showing the interconnectedness of the different relationships on the store as a whole. Having regard to this, a retail manager is required to have people leadership. This entails supervising a team that may in most cases be inexperienced employees in a demanding job. It, therefore, involves being able to identify people's strengths and areas of opportunity available in the store which may contribute to an employee's growth and in essence motivate them. This translates to an employee's training and development which

ultimately contributes to creating an environment where customers can easily be satisfied, while also contributing to the success of the company (Catherine & Contributor, 2019).

Academics comprehend those employees with a higher level of job satisfaction tend to display positive interactions with customers as they are their first points of interaction, thereby influencing the customer's shopping experience (Al Kurdi, Alshurideh, & Alnaser, 2020). According to Pincus (1986), the perception employees have of top management, their communication style and management activities influence their job satisfaction and performance. Satisfied employees engage positively with customers and provide better care and service, and this has a direct link to customer satisfaction (Pincus, 1986).

According to Wikaningrum and Yuniawan (2018), the effectiveness of managerial attributes on leadership style is based on the consequences of leaders' actions towards their followers and can be based on two categories, being task-oriented style of leadership, and interpersonal relations leadership. The former speaks to a concentration on task or job-orientated functions such as planning and coordinating employer activities. Whereas the latter gives more attention to human interaction and seeks to understand employee issues and amongst other things gives recognition to contributions made and achievements reached (Wikaningrum & Yuniawan, 2018). Therefore, employees who exhibit good human interaction skills will have a high probability of satisfactory interaction with the staff and customers, and this trait is essential in providing satisfying customer experiences and interactions.

There are numerous ways in which a retail manager can actively work towards ensuring that employees are satisfied within the workplace, and satisfied employees in the workplace will exhibit satisfactory service provision to their customers. To satisfy customers, employees need to have effective communication with each other and the customer to fully comprehend the importance of giving excellent service. According to Prachi (2018), effective communication is a process of exchanging thoughts, ideas, knowledge, and information in that the intention or purpose is fully conveyed. Prachi goes on to list the characteristics of effective communication which include conveying a clear, correct, and complete message, conveying reliable information, consideration of the recipient and showing a level of courtesy (Prachi, 2018).

Shaw (2005) notes that a competent communicator must share and respond to information timeously, take note of other people's points of view, and have clear and concise communication within all distinguished communication lines. These mentioned traits benefit not only the employee and employer relations but also benefit the customer in the case of seeking clarification or being disgruntled about products and services offered by the retail store.

The concept of managing retail has many viewpoints, one being viewed as taking care of employees, actively assisting to achieve targeted sales goals, proactive and constant support of customer satisfaction and maintenance, supervising the stores, the daily operations, and empowering store managers. Therefore, retail management as a managerial function is indispensable (Safety culture, 2021).

Another view is that the retail managerial function monitors the performance of the company as it gathers valuable information about customer perceptions considering the diverse needs and expectations of the company (Goic´, Levenier, & Montoya, 2021).

However, it has to be noted that although there are numerous strategies one can implement, the fundamental key to an effective strategy for retail management lies in the manager's knowledge of customer service, and or training provided that will affect each store's operations, the effectiveness of services and satisfaction of their customers (Safety Culture, 2021). Information on how best to serve your customers and manage your employees will be sourced from them specifically as participants of this study. The relevance of this study follows from the data collected from the participants. This information will be collected and analysed primarily and will speak directly to the issues discussed above and to the specific retail group, thereby making it important to conduct. The next section will give an overview of the importance and advantages of measuring customer satisfaction.

## 2.6 Importance and advantages of measuring customer satisfaction

The importance of customer satisfaction cannot be over-elaborated. Most organisations assume they recognise customer wants, but it is paramount to comprehend the customer's opinion through numerous tools such as customer surveying, focus groups, and polling, to help organisations understand customer demands, and to achieve a more detailed insight into what customers want. This assists in delivering improved tailoring of services or products that either meet or surpass customer expectations (ASQ, 2022).

Measuring customer satisfaction is a significant factor in any industry as it affords marketers and organisations a metric to compute and enhance business performance from a customer standpoint. Besides being a primary pointer of intentions of customer repurchase and loyalty, this measurement also serves as an understanding of whether customers will grow into long-term repeat customers and or advocates (Bremley, 2017). It is, therefore, vital that customer satisfaction be measurable and analysed to forecast whether customers are satisfied, if they will return for purchasing again, the level at which they are happy or unhappy, as well as serving as an informative tool used to detect customers' dissatisfaction to take corrective measures well in time (Bremley, 2017).

In agreement with the previous researchers, Karmugil and Kannapa (2015) state that customer satisfaction in retail is commonly acknowledged as a crucial element and factor in the database of customers' prospect purchase intent. In addition, Kaizo (2021) states that there is a direct connection between the level of customer satisfaction and how much profit a business makes. The customer satisfaction score (CSAT) marks the frequency of repeat purchase rates and customer loyalty, and word-of-mouth referrals, and helps to inform business decisions (Kaizo, 2021).

The advantages of measuring customer satisfaction are tabled below (Kaizo, 2021):

**Table 8 The advantages of measuring customer satisfaction (Kaizo, 2021)**

Advantage	Benefits
Reduces customer churn	<p>The current capitalistic world always has novel and prevailing competitors that an organisation needs to be aware of. This is significant because customers will continually have alternative places for their shopping needs. According to these customer retention statistics, 66% of customers ceased purchasing after an unsatisfactory customer service experience. Therefore, safeguarding that a business customer service team is exceeding the competition to keep CSAT scores up, is vital to decreasing customer churn. Retaining customers is a significant part of the customer service enigma, by going the extra mile to help customers.</p>
Boosts customer loyalty and recurring revenue	<p>Existing customers are likely to spend 31% more with a 50% chance of trying novel products in comparison with new customers. Higher customer loyalty is a display of customer satisfaction levels. Satisfied customers will make recurring purchases, and this will eventually boost customer satisfaction.</p> <p>Increments in customer loyalty and retention by merely 5% may boost profits from 25% to 95% and this can aid in diminishing customer acquisition costs (CAC). Obtaining new customers may cost up to five times more than retaining an existing customer.</p>
Improves efficiency and productivity	<p>Evaluating CSAT and other customer service KPIs aids in determining where to improve to satisfy customers more, as satisfied customers depict spending a lesser amount of time correcting problems and added time to get work done.</p>

<p>Increases employee satisfaction</p>	<p>A happy team reflects in them providing greater customer service than being frustrated.</p> <p>Removing any barriers to tasks generates an improved workflow and a clearer identification of what's working and what's not. By generating an atmosphere of accomplishing set objectives, employees will feel content and engaged. This will aid in improved worker satisfaction, productivity, and retention.</p>
<p>Encourages brand advocacy</p>	<p>Customer satisfaction and loyalty are significant for brand promotion as customers converse about their experiences with an organisation and dissatisfied customers tell fifteen people about their unsatisfied experience.</p> <p>Contrariwise, 72% of satisfied customers tell others about their positive experiences with others and 92% believe the recommendations from people they know. Enhancing an organisation's CSAT scores reflects those happy customers will advocate for their good experiences and will eventually lead to additional business.</p>
<p>Provides upselling and cross-selling opportunities</p>	<p>Positive customer satisfaction makes people return to the company for repeat purchases and this presents more opportunities to cross-sell complementary products or advanced services to upsurge sales revenue. The customer will be more probable to purchase because they're previously happy with the products and customer service.</p>
<p>Benefits other departments</p>	<p>Taking feedback from these customers and sharing it with other departments can aid a better understanding of the dissatisfied points of customers that can be used to inform other departments such as the marketing campaigns that can generate marketing strategies that</p>

clarify how the product or service solves potential or existing customers' dissatisfaction.

Cross-team collaboration could result in a 25% increase in total productivity. Everyone can understand expectations, receive information fast, and react to insights more quickly with improved communication.

A cohesive cross-department communication flow permits for a holistic depiction of the customer experiences which points to where in the process is improvement needed to generate an improved result and more content customers.

Advantages are tabled below, according to (Wooll, 2021) are:

**Table 9 The advantages of customer satisfaction to a company (Wooll, 2021)**

Advantage	Benefits
Revenue increment	86% of customers are prepared to pay extra for an excellent customer experience and consequently, happy customers will lead to additional revenue.
Growth in brand loyalty	67% of a recent survey approved that a respectable reputation may lead customers to try a product thereby indicating that satisfied customers bring with it a lesser churn rate, increased retention, and an upsurge in brand loyalty.
Added brand buzz	Happy customers are an abundant resource for motivating an organisation's brand buzz. Customers that are overjoyed about a product will be praising the services and this means more constructive reviews and more social media users appraising an organisation's products and services.
Less destructive word of mouth	<p>When brands disappoint customers, word gets around rapidly that damagingly affects the business's reputation, therefore it is crucial to address every undesirable review with benevolence and resolutions.</p> <p>Dissatisfied customers can wreak devastation on a business specifically if they have negative feedback. While an occasional damaging review won't interrupt a business, 92% of customers are less probable to use the business having constant poor criticism and recent negative reviews.</p>

A variance in competition	Competitors thrive on other organisations that have bad reviews about bad services and products as they take advantage and persuade customers to give them a try as an alternative.
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## 2.7 The use of information technology in retail

Information Technology is any action that encompasses processing information and integrated communication through electronic equipment (Victoria, 2020) and this author advocates that this word is more wide-ranging, referring to all varieties of technology that function with information, whether in an information system, automating the industrial process, communication amongst computers of two organisations, or even in the personal use of computational resources.

Burgelman (1996, p. 91), states that information technology denotes largely the resources applied by an organisation in the processing and administration of its data inclusive of hardware, software, and communications. Information may be demarcated as a fact, an event, or a statement. Nevertheless, Victoria (2020) advocates that a fact not communicated will not be information, therefore a more developed description for information would be a communicated fact. Information is a procedure of broadcast and transfer of facts: forms, data, and concepts, studies to make it available to another person, institution, or society.

Currently, the swift changes that transpire in the business environment necessitate organisations to adapt and pursue novel techniques to compete and distinguish themselves from the competitors where information technology is currently being utilised as an instrument to stimulate competitive advantage (Victoria, 2020). With regards to retail, it has been highlighted those retailers have to recognise the significance of cultivating customer experience as a crucial issue in business success,

particularly with the development of online competitors that have shaped new markets and enticed customers through tailored services. Future retailing will emphasise customer engagement at a personal level. This irrevocable trend is grounded on augmenting satisfactory customer experiences at different stages - rational, emotional, sensorial, physical, and spiritual (Verhoef, Lemon, Parasuraman, Roggeveen, Tsiros, & Schlesinger, 2009).

Consequently, with the specialisation of IT in retail, oriented resolutions, encompassing the newest developments, radio frequency, computer systems and the Internet, the application of innovative technologies in retail has become conceivable.

**Table 10 The requisite for information technology in retailing is to offer the following areas (Aruna, 2016)**

Product information	Customer information	Operations information
catalogues, accessibility, novel releases, promotion, supply, and demand	profile, behaviour, activities, preferences, distribution	Logistics, allocation, procurement, schedule, inventory, shelf space

The retailing sector has gone through developments that lead to the requirements for IT in a retail store (Aruna, 2016), they include:

- a) The globalisation of business operations has increased exposure to foreign markets and consequently increased the demand for an international shopping experience. The industry developed into a more global operation in procurement, manufacturing, and marketing, which necessitated a need for the use of information technology to lessen barriers of time and space.
- b) Competition obligated retailers to be more efficient and effective to gain a competitive advantage, therefore adopting information technology decreases operating expenses through automation and enhances the product and service quality. It also makes provision for quality assurance with product differentiation.

- c) Meeting customer demands because of globalisation which brought the world's economy closer and hastily heading to a single interdependent system. The consequence, therefore, is that information is shared quickly and effortlessly globally with linguistic and geographic barriers being eradicated as ideas and information is shared by everyone.
- d) The technology revolution quickens processes and delivers cost savings methods that profit the organisation. IT made it conceivable to convey, stockpile, process and dispense numerous information on a single integrated technology and therefore meet the needs of the customers.
- e) Inventory management utilises IT software as a computer-based system for tracking inventory levels, orders, sales, and deliveries. It aids in avoiding product overstock and outages. Therefore, the electronic inventory control organism is now an intricate implement for retail management.
- f) Information technology is advantageous for store management systems to signal stock-out items and utilises marketing methods together with business process information systems to uplift and alter the retail shopping experience.
- g) Forecasting using IT benefits automated statistical forecasting systems that generate more calculated and accurate demand forecasting from historical sales data, forecasts, and future orders being on one system. As an outcome, forecasting systems can be within the grasp of every line manager's desktop. Thus, the forecasts approach to demand forecasting in retail will donate to the accuracy of forthcoming plans, and the overall effectiveness and lucrativeness of retail operations.
- h) In terms of navigating the management of retail post-COVID-19, there is an urgent need for physical shops to reposition the functions of the multi-channel business (being the existence of both online and in-store customer engagement). There has been significant growth in online shopping during the pandemic, and this is likely to become the new shopping behaviour, thus warranting the need for retailers to also have an online retail platform for their survival and adaptation. Physical stores may need to accommodate the product delivery needs, consumer's experiential

shopping demand and the adoption and integration of digital facilities (Nanda, Xu, & Zhang, 2021).

It is through innovative thinking that the retail group would be able to consider using technology to this level. The new global economy emphasises the importance of innovation for organisational effectiveness (Reuvers, Van Engen, & Vinkenburg, 2008). This forces organisations to increase their flexibility, responsiveness, and efficiency. Seeing that the origin of innovation is ideas, which are developed and carried by people, this study aims to bridge the gap that may exist amongst the relevant stakeholders in achieving a successfully run company resulting in satisfactory customer service. The next section discusses the skills development framework to be applied.

## 2.8 Skills Development Framework

In people transformation and change programs, a framework for skills development is widely employed. It assists in identifying pertinent jobs within a sector or organization, the important competencies necessary to carry out those tasks successfully, and competencies that may be used to evaluate the application of the skill at various levels of experience, skills, and competency frameworks (National Digital Twin Programme, 2021).

The use and application of a skills development framework are beneficial to an organisation as it provides a fundamental roadmap guiding the sector through future changes. A continuous assessment will provide the organisation with a well-developed and better-oriented focus to reduce a skill mismatch in managing the workforce and harnessing relationships with different stakeholders (Akyazi, Goti, Oyarbide, Alberdi, & Bayon, 2020).



**Figure 1 Internal Customer Service Framework (Donna Earl Training, 2022):**

The framework that is presented in Figure 1 will guide the training of employees, specifically, managers to work together more productively with staff, communicate more proactively, practice better internal customer service, enable superior external customer service and identify opportunities for cost savings (Donna Earl Training, 2022).

The most expensive currency in the markets currently is the use of information for the benefit of the organisation. For an organisation to be able to assess and convey the change of thinking that is required for value creation, management needs to utilise the information that is at their disposal, which in most cases can be retained from staff. An organisation can gain a competitive advantage by implementing continual innovation and managerial skills and knowledge that are the centre of this process (Papulova, 2007).

## 2.9 Conclusion

The conclusion of this chapter represents a compilation of secondary information meant to provide the theoretical background and framework of the present study. Different aspects associated with the title of this research were identified and gaps were highlighted which will be addressed as part of the contribution of this research study. The concepts of retail skills management were explored in terms of its role in improving customer

satisfaction, and factors that may successfully contribute to effecting this as part of the skills development framework were highlighted.

## CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Introduction

This research aimed to investigate the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction in a retail group. In this chapter, the research design will be covered to outline the research approach used and will include the research philosophy that was adopted for this research study. Thereafter, the population and sampling strategy, data collection, data analyses and ethical considerations will be discussed.

### 3.2 Research design

Research design is defined to be an all-encompassing plan for the procedure, collection, measurement, and analysis of data (Gray, 2018).

The research approach is Qualitative which is defined as the selection of specific data sources, from which data is collected to address the researcher's objective (Gentles, Charles, & Ploeg, 2015).

As noted by Creswell (2012), qualitative research seeks to understand the perspectives of the population engaged to dissect the research problem. Tracy (2013), eludes that qualitative data is organised, interpreted, analysed, and communicated to address real issues and concerns. This method of research records the perception of one's meaning of events, and not just necessarily the event as it exists externally to them (Leedy & Ormrod, 2015). Therefore, qualitative research is the best approach for this research study because it aims to understand how managers exert their skills and management roles to influence the employees in actualising a wholesome and satisfactory customer service experience at the retail group stores. The data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the managers, employees, and customers. The interview guides that were used, are attached as Appendices B, C and D respectively. The study

explored the phenomenon of the participants' viewpoints on customer satisfaction. The phenomena being researched are grounded in the perspectives and accounts of the participants, with the opportunity to capture these realities by answering various questions, to collect data to answer the research questions.

The next section describes the research philosophy of the study, specifically epistemology and phenomenology.

### 3.2.1 Research philosophy

Research philosophy is the belief in data about a specific topic should be gathered, analysed, and used. It deals with the source, nature, and specific way of developing knowledge (Business Research Methodology, 2011).

A researcher's epistemological stance is influenced by the interrelationship of the method of data collection, the research methodology, and the adopted theoretical perspective (Gray, 2018). The epistemological framework of this study was constructed by the researcher getting close to the participants of the study, and gathering subjective evidence on the views expressed by the participants (Creswell J. W., 2012) through interpersonal one-on-one interviews, by approaching customers, employees and management in retail stores to gather subjective evidence of their views about customer satisfaction in the retail stores subjected by this study.

Another framework that is applied is that of phenomenological research where the views of the participants in the research are recorded to understand the perceptions and understandings of customer satisfaction in the retail store (Creswell J. W., 2012). The researcher recorded the interviewees with two recorders and comprehended the customer's views on customer satisfaction in the retail stores in this study. The interviews of the floor staff, as well as the store managers, were to determine the essential skills that retail managers need to possess, which will support improved customer satisfaction through the floor staff and actions taken by the managers themselves. The narrative data

collected to support this study were from the participant's personal experiences and viewpoints on the retail group's customer service based on past events (Ndlovu, 2021). Accordingly, Guest et al. (2013), are in alignment with the present researcher's views in that a phenomenological perspective is concerned with revealing multiple social realities of a specific subject, rather than one objective reality.

In conclusion, the researcher noted the literature discussed in the previous chapter, which was used to build the theoretical insight highlighting the impact of retail management skills on customer satisfaction. The application of a phenomenological process of using in-depth, semi-structured interviews to gather primary data as an attempt to understand, in a purposively selected sample, the perspectives of the seven participants from each of the selected groups of research respondents (managers, employees and customers).

The next section discusses the sampling strategy used by the researcher.

### 3.3 Sampling strategy

The importance of an accurate sampling strategy is cumulative of the degree of generalisation of one's findings of a study and its representativeness relating to the population. In terms of population, this specific retail group has over 250 stores across the Southern African region. The population for this study covered only the stores in Botswana which are 90 in total. These stores are divided into three categories: (1) hyper stores, (2) super stores, and (3) value stores. The sample size for the research included all three types of stores and the participants were 7 retail customers, 7 managers and 7 employees of the selected retail group (Guest, et al., 2013).

The selection of the 7 sample stores was based (as criteria) on stores where a manager has been running that specific store for more than 5 years. The tenure of the store manager determined which store the researcher selected, regardless of which one of the 3 types of stores this manager works in. There are 6 hyper stores, 78 super stores, and 6 value stores in Botswana where the research was conducted (Retail Store, 2018). The researcher chose the stores from a split of 2/3/2 respectively, only if the manager has

been running the store for more than 5 years, and that the store has been in operation for at least 5 years. The rationale behind the selection of participants per store is that although there are more super stores, research has found that the hyper store and value stores carry more volume of customers due to their strategic placements of convenience (Retail Group integrated annual report, 2020). The latter are usually placed within areas of communal residence thus justifying the volume of customers entering the stores daily.

The researcher approached the managers with a letter which has already been provided by the Human resource manager that allows for the research to be conducted. The researcher worked with the manager in terms of them providing information on the longest-serving employees and customers, following the criteria for inclusion stated in Annexure A. Once the researcher had all the relevant information to assist in selecting the participants, the researcher approached them to explain what the research was all about, what it aimed to achieve, whether they would be interested in participating, reassuring them that their identities will be concealed, and explaining their rights and obligations concerning the study.

The reason for including the employees of the retail group for purposes of this study was because they are the first contact with the customers. Training on exceptional customer service was conducted for the retail group employees in 2020, and the discussions held indicated that in most cases, the management of the retail group lacked the know-how of enabling the employees (floor staff) to fully exercise and apply their training to produce outstanding service to the customers and to leave them feeling satisfied.

The study used purposive, non-probability sampling, which Showkat and Parveen (2017), note usefulness as being less expensive and easy to apply considering that the data were collected at a business establishment for this study. Purposeful, non-probability sampling is a strategy used to choose a small group of individuals likely to be knowledgeable about the topic at hand (McMillian & Schumacher, 2001), and the current study adopted this method to choose a small group in the retail stores that know/experience customer service. The non-probability sampling method speaks to the criteria of participants (Appendix A.) The researcher conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with seven managers (Appendix C), seven staff (Appendix D), and seven customers (Appendix E)

for this research, thereby amounting to three sample groups in total. The sample size was determined by data saturation, in that, if after interviewing these sample sizes the researcher has not experienced repetition of data to answer the research questions, the sample would increase by another two participants in each of the three samples categories to try and achieve data saturation (Bryman, et al., 2018).

The next section will elaborate on the methods of data collection.

### 3.4 Data collection method

Data were collected primarily from the participants and secondarily via literature reviews gathered from the retail group's platforms such as its websites, integrated annual reports, and its online social platforms.

The primary data were collected via in-depth, semi-structured interviews in which the researcher prepared a list of themes and questions to be covered during the sessions (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2010). The interviews covered a wide range of contexts where the interviewer (researcher) had a series of questions prepared. The sequence varied, and they were set up flexibly to ask further follow-up questions (Bryman, et al., 2018). To extract rich and detailed primary answers, the interviewee's point of view was captured. In this regard, the researcher learnt of issues related to the topic of discussion that the researcher may otherwise have not thought to ask or have been aware of.

The managers who were interviewed were asked about their management roles and how they measured their effectiveness according to the productivity of their employees concerning customer satisfaction. The interviews were scheduled for between 30 minutes to an hour depending on the quality of answers the manager will provide. The questions were phrased in such a way as to have captured the strengths and challenges faced, and how they believed the challenges could be overcome.

Employees of the retail group, as well as its customers, were also interviewed via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Both these sets of interviews were scheduled for between 30 minutes to an hour depending on the quality of answers provided by the staff

and employees. The participants consisted of seven individuals per group with open-ended questions to get rich data from different participation perceptions. The researcher interviewed the longest-standing employee and customer from each of the 7 selected stores across all 3 store categories, failing which the researcher interviewed the second longest-serving customer or employee (this is if the longest-serving ones were not available for interviewing). These participants were identified by approaching the relevant store manager to provide data from their database of recurring customers with over one year of consistent monthly shopping, for example via loyalty cards. With regards to the employees, they have worked for the same retail store for at least 5 years. The reason for these specified years of employment was to ensure that the feedback given carried the weight of experience and familiarity. The employees were also able to comment on the trends they have observed and learnt from the customer demands and expectations.

The researcher involved managers of retail stores in the study because the study was about managerial skills and how the implementation of these skills affects how employees work, thereby directly impacting customer satisfaction. The employees of these retail stores have also been selected as they are directly linked to the customer's shopping experience and satisfaction. They are the link between management and the customer. The customers were included in the study because the study revolved around customer satisfaction. Customers were chosen according to the database provided by the managers. The only criteria the researcher applied was whether the customer has been a consistent shopper of the store for at least one year. All these participants were able to give the researcher primary feedback thereby adding to the credibility of the study.

The researcher aimed to provide a relatively informal setting to source their understandings and viewpoints on the research issues in a comfortable and relaxed atmosphere. To ensure the quality of the questions asked at the interviews, tested questions for both were used. This is to say that the questions that were asked were similar to previously asked questions in similar research topics having been posed to the participants. The researcher used two recorders, which included a cell phone recorder and a backup recorder to eliminate the risk of data loss due to technical issues. The recordings are kept in a password-protected laptop and password-protected recorder and

only the researcher will have access to it. The recording of these interviews gave the researcher the ability to focus on what was said to answer follow-up questions keeping all the interviewees focused enough to answer all questions sufficiently. The researcher as a result was not required to make notes that could have distracted her as the interviewer or researcher.

Using in-depth, semi-structured interviews were useful in that it contributed to the richness and depth of the data, to help identify themes emerging from the interviews to help follow up on issues raised at either one of the sessions (Bryman, et al., 2018).

The following section will speak of the data analyses.

### 3.5 Data analyses

Bryman and Bell (2014) note that qualitative analysis begins in the field where researchers recognise problems through observations and interactions. A themed analysis was applied to analyse and interpret the data. This analysis was done once all the data were collected to identify the themes. This ensured that the information presented was of quality after the researcher transcribed the questions and answers verbatim (Bryman & Bell, 2014).

According to Kelly (2022), data analysis is a method of enlisting facts to solve the research problem. It is often difficult to deduce raw data and therefore the data collected must be analysed and an outcome is deduced from it (Kelly, 2022). The thematic analysis was relevant to answering the research question(s).

The researcher used narrative data analysis by way of using primary data from the interviews. The researcher made use of audio where participants (with their given consent) were recorded, and their testimonials were recorded verbatim. To ensure that confidentiality and anonymity were observed, the researcher named the participants as "Participant 1," "Participant 2" and so forth. The audio recordings were then transcribed verbatim into a word document before it was then coded and subjected to thematic analysis.

The data analysis approach consisted of coding which was followed by thematic analysis.

### 3.5.1 Coding

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2018), coding in a qualitative study involves the process of organising and sorting out data to make it relevant to answering the research questions. In this study, the researcher applied selective coding which involved selecting and integrating codes related to the core theme of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). The purpose of coding according to Braun and Clarke (2013) is that it identifies aspects of the data that answer the research questions. By following this process, the researcher categorised data between usable and redundant data (which does not relate to any research question and can therefore not be used for further analysis). The output from this coding process was a file that only contained data that was relevant to answering the research questions.

### 3.5.2 Thematic analyses

For this study, thematic analysis was a suitable technique to use to analyse and attempt to comprehend experiences, views, or behaviours across a data set (Kiger & Varpio, 2020).

The thematic analysis technique was used to evaluate qualitative data that involved searching through a set of data to pinpoint, examine, and report repetitive patterns (Clarke, 2006). This was applied in this research by examining the collected data and pinpointing the repetitive customer satisfaction or dissatisfaction in retail stores in the study. Thematic analysis was applied in this study because it carries a unique feature- its flexibility to be utilised within an extensive variety of theoretical and epistemological contexts, as well as applying to a broad range of study inquiries, designs, and sample sizes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Thematic analysis was used to extract relevant themes to provide comprehensive answers to all the research questions and to address the research problem.

In this instance, the overall aim was to link the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction. Gray (2018), notes that the importance of a theme is dependent on its ability to capture an important aspect of data that relates to the research question. Braun and Clarke (2013), continue to state that well-captured themes not only make sense on their own but can fit together and form an all-encompassing pattern. The researcher aimed to establish all factors that could have played a role in improving customer service, and how these skills, once identified, could have been framed in a skills development framework to be developed from the identified patterns. The researcher would further link the results of the analysis to the existing literature by determining how they contribute to, further develop, or challenge the status quo of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

### 3.6 Ethical considerations

This research study was planned with much precision to eliminate any likelihood of misleading outcomes. It was planned to adhere to the ethical appropriateness that was expected. All the necessary steps were taken to ensure the safety of the participants or any possible interested party's integrity (Barkhuizen & Schutte, 2020).

#### 3.6.1 Permission obtained

To have been able to conduct the study at the retail group stores the researcher had to obtain permission from the retail stores' gatekeeper standing between the data collector and a potential respondent, who by their personal or work relations with a respondent could control who has access, and when, to the respondent. The researcher ensured that the organisation's processes on research protocols were followed duly.

### 3.6.2 Informed consent

Participants were informed of the study's purpose and their respective rights concerning their participation in this regard. They were handed out consent forms along with a brief abstract of the study and the interviews they were expected to answer, and questions likely to be asked of those participating in the interviews. This ensured that they had a clear understanding of the study's objectives and the extent of their participation.

### 3.6.3 Voluntary participation

In this case, the researcher was required to inform participants, in languages they could understand, of the aims and implications of the research project and of any other considerations which might influence their willingness to participate (University of Connecticut, 2019). Although it might have been difficult to give the participants the full background of the study, the researcher ensured that everyone was on par with all they would need to know about the process of the study through emails or text messages and to have ensured they participate voluntarily and they would have been informed that they could withdraw from the research study at any point, without any consequences to them.

### 3.6.4 Confidentiality and anonymity

Confidentiality speaks to the care one must take when findings such as confidential communication, and identities are made public to ensure the individuals and organisations are not identified unless permission for data to be passed is given (Bryman, et al., 2018). This was addressed by getting all participants to sign indemnity forms before their participation. The participants' names and the organisation's names were disclosed, and pseudonyms were used.

### 3.6.5 No harm

Diener and Crandall (1978) explain harm to be either “physical harm, harm to career prospects or future employment, and including subjects to perform reprehensible acts.” In this research study, the research participants were not exposed to any physical or psychological harm.

## 3.7 Conclusion

This chapter’s focus was on providing a detailed insight into the qualitative research design that was applied through in-depth, semi-structured interviews to explore the views of the three groups of participants, the managers, employees and their customers. Purposive, non-probability sampling was used allowing participants to be chosen based on their years of experience. The sample size was 7 individuals from each group of employees, managers and customers, representing all three types of stores the hyper store, the superstore, and the value store.

Open-ended questions were used to delve deeply into the topics thus allowing the participants to express and elaborate on their views. The determination of the sample size was based on data saturation.

## CHAPTER 4: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

### 4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses and interprets the data collected and presents the results. The main objective of this chapter is to explore the participant's experiences in the retail store, concerning the impact of management's role in customer satisfaction.

The interview data were collected from managers, floor employees and customers. The managers had to have been in the managerial role for at least 5 years while the floor employees also had to have been working at the retail store for at least 5 years. Customers on the other hand have been shopping at the retail store monthly for a continuous period of 1 year. The researcher used coding, thematic and interpretive analysis techniques to analyse all the data.

The following section will analyse the biographical data of the participants.

### 4.2 Analysis of biographical data

**Table 11 Analysis of biographical data**

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Age category</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Current position</b>	<b>Number of years working/ shopping at the store</b>	<b>Type of store</b>
Participant 1	18-35	Female	Customer	2	Value Store
Participant 2	18-35	Female	Customer	3	Value Store
Participant 3	35-65	Female	Customer	5	Superstore
Participant 4	18-35	Female	Customer	4	Superstore
Participant 5	18-35	Male	Customer	2	Superstore

Participant 6	35-65	Male	Customer	5	Hyper store
Participant 7	35-65	Male	Customer	4	Hyper store
Participant 8	35-65	Female	Employee	7	Value Store
Participant 9	18-35	Female	Employee	5	Value Store
Participant 10	18-35	Female	Employee	5	Superstore
Participant 11	18-35	Male	Employee	5	Superstore
Participant 12	18-35	Female	Employee	5	Superstore
Participant 13	35-65	Male	Employee	5	Hyper store
Participant 14	35-65	Male	Employee	5	Hyper store
Participant 15	35-65	Female	Manager	5	Value Store
Participant 16	35-65	Male	Manager	5	Value Store
Participant 17	35-65	Female	Manager	7	Superstore
Participant 18	35-65	Male	Manager	6	Superstore
Participant 19	35-65	Male	Manager	5	Superstore
Participant 20	18-35	Female	Manager	5	Hyper store
Participant 21	18-35	Female	Manager	5	Hyper store

The data collected in the qualitative study of Table 6 represent the opinions of both males and females. A total of 21 participants were interviewed via semi-structured interviews with ages ranging between 18 and 65 years.

There are 3 categories of participants customers, employees and managers of the retail group. The number of years shopping at the store for the customers ranges from 2 to 5 years, while and employees interviewed range from 5 to 7 years of working at the store. The managers on the other hand have a range of 5 to 9 years of working as a manager for the retail group.

In terms of the stores in which interviews were conducted, the researcher interviewed 6 participants from value stores, 9 participants from super stores and 6 participants from hyper stores, all based in Gaborone, Botswana.

### 4.3 Coding and Thematic Analysis

The researcher organised and sorted the data collected to make it relevant to answering the research questions. In this study, the researcher applied selective coding which involved selecting and integrating codes related to the core theme of the study. The purpose of coding was to identify aspects of the data that answer the research questions. By following this process, the researcher categorised data between usable and redundant data (which does not relate to any research question and can therefore not be used for further analysis). The highlighted themes in table 7 represent those identified to answer the research questions while the rest are common themes identified by the participants.

**Table 12 Themes generated from the interviews**

<b>Number of themes</b>	<b>Main themes</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>Category</b>
1	Level of customer service satisfaction	4	Customer
2	The lack of fresh products in the store	5	Customer
3	Common customer complaints	7	Employee and managers
4	Human interactive factors influencing customer satisfaction	6	Employees and managers

5	Challenges faced in providing customer service	3	Employees
6	The essential skills needed to support improved customer satisfaction	6	Customers, Employees and Managers
7	Skills development framework	6	Employees and managers

From table 7, the most discussed theme in the interviews was common complaints from customers with 7 references from employees and managers. This is followed by the human interactive factors that influence customer satisfaction, the essential skills needed to support improved customer satisfaction and the skills development framework with 6 references. Followed by these 3 was the lack of fresh products in the store with 5 references, then was the level of customer service satisfaction with 4 references, and lastly is the challenges faced in providing customer service with 3 references.

For each of the themes identified, quotes extracted from the interview data will be presented to substantiate the selection of a theme that speaks to the research questions together with the sub-themes. After this, the researcher will interpret the implications of the themes identified. The themes highlighted in table 7 relate directly to the research questions and will be discussed by analysis and interpretation below.

#### 4.4 Analysis and interpretation of data on themes generated from the three categories of participants

The analysis and the interpretation were combined due to the closely related connection of the two parts. The researcher has coded the responses according to the researcher's objectives and considering that there are 3 categories of participants, the researcher has

divided the summary of themes accordingly to share the different perspectives and will then summarise the common themes at the end.

#### 4.4.1 Summary of Themes generated from customer interviews

##### **Theme 1: Level of customer service satisfaction**

The researcher asked *How do you find the customer service at Choppies?* The following quotations show the shared views of responses:

Participant 1- *“The customer service in Choppies is fine, it’s not bad because when you need help, there are always people there to assist you.”*

Participant 2- *“The customer service in Choppies was good”.*

Participant 3- *“The service is not bad or good, it’s just fine.”*

Participant 4- *“moderate.”*

The data collected shows that the customers were fairly happy with the service they received. As is explained in section 2.6 in chapter 2, organisations need to use tools such as interviews and surveys to understand and get a detailed insight into customer demands. By so doing, it assists them to deliver improved tailoring of services or products that either meet or surpass customer expectations. Customer satisfaction is determined by customer service. Customer satisfaction entails customers being happy with both products and services, emphasis is therefore placed on the customers having received satisfaction only on the services as indicated by the data.

Although the responses are fairly positive, analysing the responses made by the participants makes it easier for the organisation to identify where they may be lacking and may need to improve. The responses thus indicate that the improvement would need to focus on the products offered to them by the stores.

## **Theme 2: The lack of fresh products in the store**

When the researcher said if *they had ever been dissatisfied with anything in the retail store*, this is what they had to say:

Participant 3- *"Yeah, sometimes the fruits are rotten, some are not fresh"*

Participant 4- *"Yeah, most probably the products. Like the quality of the products."*

Participant 5- *"Yes. I bought rotten meat. It was already packaged."*

Participant 6- *"I've only had a bad experience with the food. I once bought a product from them, and the food was not fresh."*

Participant 7- *"Yes. Once. It was about the pie. It was not good. I was for yesterday."*

The responses indicate that there is a dire need to improve customer satisfaction with the supply of quality products. Khadka and Soniya (2017) note that organisations that can satisfy their customers fully tend to enjoy a competitive advantage in their market and thus gain customer loyalty through satisfaction. The modern retail sector is a highly volatile business environment due to the lack of or reduced tolerance of poor products and services by customers. The responses indicate a serious need to improve the quality of the products sold in the stores. According to the Indeed Editorial team (2020), they describe product quality is how well a product satisfies customer needs. They note that customer perspectives can be used to assess the quality of a product which is important as it affects the success of the business and its reputation (Indeed Editorial Team, 2022).

The responses indicate that focus needs to be placed on the upkeep of fresh products or to fast-track the sales of those products with a lower shelf life. The interviews cover all three types of stores, being value stores, super stores and hyper stores. Emphasis must be placed on the required training that is grounded in the strategies of the retail store, which is to provide value for their customer's money, while simultaneously building a good reputation for the store. In most cases, you find that should customers have a perception that the store's product is of low quality, this leads to consequences such as lost revenue and decreased customer loyalty. These customer-related consequences then lead to

business-related consequences which may result in increased legal fees, decrease reputation, and increased costs such as insurance premiums and warranty costs (Quality Guru, 2022). To continuously achieve the business's strategic objectives, organisations must look to employ and encourage innovative behaviour from top management, down to the employees.



**Figure 2 Consequences of poor quality (Quality Guru, 2022)**

Figure 2 illustrates the cycle of the consequences related to selling poor-quality products to customers. It shows that poor quality products affect the business's ecosystem from being customer related to operations to society-related and business-related systems. The figure depicts that the sale of poor-quality products is interrelated to other parts of the business, and has the potential to magnify the consequences other than just having an unsatisfied customer.

#### 4.4.2 Summary of themes generated from employees' interviews

##### **Theme 3: Common customer complaints**

The question that the researcher posed was *what customers complain about the most*, and the responses were as follows:

Participant 8- *“She was complaining about the price differences at the tills.”*

Participant 9- *“Prices. That they are expensive and sometimes they don’t find the prices. Then you have to go and get them the price.”*

Participant 10- *“They complain about the prices not being made available because sometimes it gets busy”*

Participant 11- *“Eh, maybe when the stock is out of stock, and maybe when the prices change over time.”*

The participants indicate a problem with the price setting of the stores. They complain that prices of products are not always placed next to the product, or that the prices tend to vary at the tills. The importance of price visibility is that it informs the customer about the value of the product and they can play a key promotional role (StayinFront Digital, 2022). One of the participant employees (participant 8) noted that sometimes the store gets so busy that the shelf packers are unable to put up the updated prices. This was mentioned by a participant customer (participant 3) when they stated that *“the prices here seem to change every other day. You can come to the store thinking you’re coming to buy something only to find that they changed the prices and a short space of time.”*

Customer satisfaction encompasses the measurement of how happy a customer is with the store’s services and products. This includes having prices readily available for the customer’s appreciation and convenience. Employees must be able to anticipate what the needs of a customer may be when entering the shop. It could range from having trolleys readily available and reachable, just as well as with prices. Once this is achieved, less time will be consumed by a customer looking for an employee to assist with getting prices, and by the employee who will have time to do something else in the store besides getting prices for each product that has no price placed next to it.

#### **Theme 4: Human interactive factors**

The researcher asked *which human interactive factors you would say play a role in improving customer satisfaction*. The responses were as follows:

Participant 8- *“Good behaviour allows us to interact well with the customers. Good behaviour from the customer’s side and the staff’s side. I think customers shouldn’t be rude to employees and employees shouldn’t be rude to customers.”*

Participant 12- *“The manager communicates clearly when advising or interacting with us. She addresses us with respect, and this helps me to give the customer good service”*

Participant 13- *“Humbly approaching the customer gives the customer satisfaction. Especially when they don’t see something on the shelf while it’s in the storeroom. When I leave the till and look for something that they want in the storeroom, the customer leaves here very very happy, and they’ll be very satisfied. Going the extra mile”*

The participants gave various answers to this question, but they all speak to the same thing- which is the behaviour and way of communication. One participant noted that approaching customers humbly gives them satisfaction, while the other participant made mentioned of respectful interaction between managers and employees also has a positive effect on how they provide services to customers.

These responses can be interpreted to show the importance and effect of behaviour and communication amongst people, whether as a manager, employee or customer. They indicate that validating one’s feelings, such as humbly approaching a complaint affects the outcome of the interaction and the business. Research has shown that human interaction is the most desired form of service as compared to others such as faster responses (National Business Research Institute, 2022).

## **Theme 5: Challenges faced in providing customer service**

The employees were asked what *challenges they faced in providing good customer service* and this was their response:

Participant 7- *“Sometimes customers can be rude, that one is a barrier on its own.”*

Participant 11- *“Customers need to understand and acknowledge that when they find you by a shelf, you are a worker whose working. So sometimes they come there and they*

*don't even greet you. They will look for what they're looking for then later when they don't find what they're looking for, they come to you angrily and expect you to help them although they didn't acknowledge you there."*

Participant 14- *"Sometimes customers forget that we are also humans with feelings and that we also want the same respect we are told to give them when serving them. They can be so rude and impatient at times and dealing with customers like that can be problematic because then I will not always go the extra mile to give them good service."*

The interview data collected shows that the employees of the stores mainly struggle with the attitude they get from customers that influences the service they give in return. They note good behaviour and mutual respect from the customers would remove the hindrance of giving good customer service.

As is stated in section 2.3, customers no longer endure poor products and services, and to remedy these responses of dissatisfaction, sufficient and relevant training is necessary. These are necessary as they contribute to the development of employee and management skills thus employing innovative behaviour. Innovate behaviour speaks to the mindset of staff. It involves refining the competencies within the workplace. The front-line employees' responses must be designed to empower and motivate professionalism as a way of instilling a global service climate (Jerger & Wirtz, 2017).

#### **Theme 6: The essential skills needed to support improved customer satisfaction.**

The question posed was *what essential skills would you retail managers need to possess to support improved customer satisfaction?* The participants responded to say the following:

Participant 8- *"The managers should have good interactive skills and be able to interact well with staff and customers. Sometimes they don't interact with us well and they approach us when angry"*

*Participant 12- “If I don’t understand something, don’t just shout at me at that moment. Let me go through the process. Let me understand first before everything. I need to understand why this thing is like this. One time a manager was shouting at me because I took the dirt and put it in another bin. He shouted at me in a way that I didn’t understand why because at the time it was my first month at work. I didn’t like it because he didn’t tell me this is how you do something, that this litter you put it somewhere. That is when I didn’t like how they treated me because I didn’t understand much about the work I see. I was asking myself questions, in fear, that I wasn’t doing something right. It was better for him to teach me that this is how you do things, this is how things are done, and not to just shout at me.”*

*Participant 14- “Managers must be humble and respectful when they approach their staff because sometimes the customers are very rude to them, so when the manager doesn’t also speak to their staff properly then it will affect my mood when having to assist a customer. The managers must know we also have feelings.”*

The participants explain that managers need to have good interactive skills, and coaching skills and exercise a level of patience when dealing with their employees. This corresponds with section 2.3 which speaks to the skills retail managers need to have to successfully manage a store and influence customer satisfaction. These skills include being able to constructively communicate with an employee to ensure that instructions are passed down clearly and are not clouded by disturbing emotions that may have arisen due to the manner the message was conveyed.

Managers need to acknowledge that they have a multifaceted job of having to lead and manage people from different backgrounds and join in the mission of giving satisfying service to customers. Respectfulness and humility must be balanced with sternness and professionalism to achieve the objectives of the organisation.

Theme 2, as discussed above can be related to theme 7. The need for the required training necessitates innovative behaviour that will improve business models and routines within the organisation. According to Business Victoria (2021), as mentioned in chapter 2 of this study, they argue that innovation refers to a mental state and behaviour of pursuing

explorative prospects that refine the methods of efficacy where organisations utilise creativity that is advantageous to the business. In this case, it relates to understanding your employees and how best to communicate and train them.

For employees to be encouraged to think and behave innovatively, it needs to come from the management of that certain store. Upon observation of each store's culture, it was evident that the approach of managers in running the stores was adopted by the employees.

#### 4.4.3 Summary of themes generated from managers interviews

The themes derived here are similar to those derived from either customers or employees. The only difference will be the perspectives as in this section, the researcher explores the viewpoints of retail managers in the three types of stores.

##### **Theme 3: Common customer complaints**

Participant 16- *“ah sometimes they complain that the cashiers didn't assist them nicely or they were unwelcoming.”*

Participant 17- *“So unsatisfied customer, most of the time they complain about the service generally. We can talk about the prices, maybe the behaviour of employees. So when they enter the store and they find there is no price, and he or she is in a hurry, they want to get a taxi, there's no price but he wants the very thing that they came for. You see. So you don't know whether to take it. Who do I ask, anywhere here? You find that there is no one available. And he comes out with anger.”*

Participant 19- *“Mostly they're complaining about the long queues. They're complaining about the prices. They also complain that they don't find the staff on the isle and have to look for someone to assist them.”*

The responses of the managers are similar to the employees where the recognised complaints from customers are the visibility and height of prices. This is an indication that

the stores would have to invest in systems that enable them to improve their pricing strategies. This would elevate customer complaints and frustrations.

#### **Theme 4: Human interactive factors**

Participant 15- *“You have to be able to know which language the customer would be using to interact you with and use that language so there is understanding.”*

Participant 17- *“Your voice must be calm. Sometimes you can be saying the right thing through your words, but your voice can be an irritation to another person.”*

Participant 21- *“You have to engage with the customers with a smile. You always assist the customer and do not wait for them to approach you.”*

From the responses of the participants, the manager’s approach to human interaction concerning improving customer satisfaction is that one must always be approachable, either by way of communicating in the customer’s spoken language, in a calm voice and with a smile. The demeanour must be inviting and accommodating.

#### **Theme 6: The essential skills needed to support improved customer satisfaction**

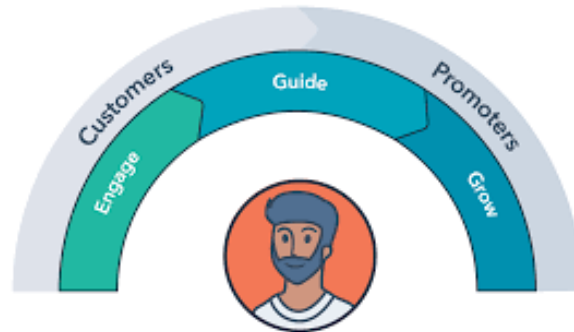
Participant 16- *“They need to have skills of listening to customers and managers because sometimes they can respond without having understood what the problem is actually and or what might’ve caused the problem. Sometimes when emotions are high, they tend to only be defensive.”*

Participant 17- *“The skills they need to possess is the skill to listen first and show signs like nodding, and not to defend themselves.”*

Participant 21- *“You should have listening skills and not argue with staff or customers”*

The common essential skill identified here is that a manager must have the ability to listen actively. This may assist them in keeping the employees and customers engaged by making them feel heard. This is beneficial to the managers because they will gain a better understanding of the kinds of people they work with, as well as be able to prevent future concerns of a similar nature from customers. By listening to customers, managers can

identify trends in the market, and tailor their products and services from such engaged interactions.



**Figure 3 The Power of Listening (Redbord, 2018)**

As is shown in figure 3, the power of being able to listen by managers enables those interacting with them to be engaged in the conversation, which will guide their thinking and eventually lead to growth in whatever aspect is lacking or where concerns are raised. This emphasises the importance of being able to nurture the skill of listening to be guided to a preferred solution, thereby resulting in the required growth and improvement.

### **Theme 7: Skills development framework**

Participant 15- *“At the moment we are always taken on training and knowing how to successfully implement these teaching in the stores”*

Participant 17- *“Encouraging someone whose good at something can develop one’s confidence.”*

Participant 21- *“By going to training so that skills like coaching and leadership skills can be improved.”*

The data collected here indicates that training is essential in nurturing the talents and skills of managers. This will help boost their confidence when dealing with the different things managers have to deal with daily. Developing a skill through training, fewer

mistakes will be made, and productivity will rise. The employees will also adopt the best practices and productivity on their end will also increase.

## 4.5 Conclusion

This chapter provided a detailed qualitative analysis and interpretation of data derived from managers, employees and customers. This chapter aimed to investigate the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group. The secondary objectives were firstly, to assess which human interactive factors played a role in improving customer satisfaction, secondly, to determine the essential skills managers needed to possess to support improved customer satisfaction, and lastly, to outline what a skills development framework would consist of to support the development of retail management skills. A total of 7 themes emerged from the interview data collected from the 3 categories of participants. The last 4 themes mentioned under themes extracted from managers were similar to those of the customer or employees, and to avoid confusion, the researcher named and numbered them to same as previously mentioned. These themes are:

1. The level of customer satisfaction according to customers.
2. The lack of fresh products in the stores. This is derived from customer complaints.
3. Common customer complaints, from the perspective of employees and managers.
4. The Human interactive factors influencing customer satisfaction, according to employees and managers.
5. The challenge faced in providing customer satisfaction by employees.
6. The essential skills needed to support improved customer satisfaction from employees and managers.
7. The skills development framework from the perspective of employees and managers.

The following chapter will bring the study to a close and provide recommendations.

## CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### 5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides conclusions and recommendations for the study. The chapter further discusses the results in relation to the research questions and objectives of the study. Limitations of the study are provided and recommendations for future research in the retail industry.

### 5.2 Conclusions

#### 5.2.1 An overview of the Problem Statement

Based on previous customer complaints, it has transpired that the probability is high that more focus is required on retail management skills at the retail group to improve customer satisfaction. According to the organisation's social media page (retail store's Facebook page, 2021), it can be noted that the recurring complaints that have occurred are (1) the lack of welcoming of customers and (2) assisting with queries raised or service sought by customers.

Therefore, the proposed research's problem statement is that there is a need for improved retail management skills to enable employees to satisfy their customers.

#### 5.2.2 Primary and secondary research objectives

##### 5.2.2.1 Primary research objective

The following primary research objective has been put forward for this research study:

- To investigate the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group.

### 5.2.2.2 Secondary research objectives:

The following secondary research objectives have been framed for this research study:

- To assess which human interaction factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction.
- To determine the essential skills that retail managers need to possess, which will support improved customer satisfaction.
- To outline what a skills development framework would consist of to support the development of retail management skills.

To achieve these objectives, the researcher undertook two approaches. The first was through the review of literature under chapter 2, the second was through the analysis and interpretation of the findings in chapter 4.

## 5.2.3 The key research findings according to the secondary research objectives

### 5.2.3.1 To assess which human interaction factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction

From the perspective of managers, the responses indicated that the manager's approach must always be approachable, either by way of communicating in the customer's spoken language, in a calm voice and with a smile. The demeanour must be inviting and accommodating.

Employees on the other hand gave various answers to this question, but the underlying theme was based on the behaviour and way of communication of the employees. One participant noted that approaching customers humbly gives them satisfaction, while the other participant pointed out that respectful interaction between managers and employees also has a positive effect on how they provide services to customers.

These responses can be interpreted to show the importance and effect of behaviour and communication amongst people, whether as a manager, employee or customer. They indicate that validating one's feelings, such as humbly approaching a complaint affects the outcome of the interaction and the business. Research has shown that human interaction is the most desired form of service as compared to faster responses.

#### 5.2.3.2 To determine the essential skills that retail managers need to possess, which will support improved customer satisfaction

The common essential skill identified by managers was to have the ability to listen actively. This may assist them in keeping the employees and customers engaged by making them feel heard. This is beneficial to the managers because they will gain a better understanding of the kinds of people they work with, as well as be able to prevent future concerns of a similar nature from customers. By listening to customers, managers can identify trends in the market, and tailor their products and services from such engaged interactions.

The employee participants expressed that managers need to have good interactive skills, and coaching skills and exercise a level of patience when dealing with their employees. These skills include being able to constructively communicate with an employee to ensure that instructions are passed down clearly and are not clouded by disturbing emotions that may have arisen due to the manner the message was conveyed.

Managers need to acknowledge that they have a multifaceted job of having to lead and manage people from different backgrounds and join in the mission of giving satisfying service to customers. Respectfulness and humility must be balanced with sternness and professionalism to achieve the objectives of the organisation.

The need for the required training necessitates innovative behaviour that will improve business models and routines within the organisation. Innovation refers to a mental state and behaviour of pursuing explorative prospects that refine the methods of efficacy where

organisations utilise creativity that is advantageous to the business. In this case, it relates to understanding your employees and how best to communicate and train them.

For employees to be encouraged to think and behave innovatively, it needs to come from the management of that certain store. Upon observation of each store's culture, it was evident that the approach of managers in running the stores was adopted by the employees.

#### 5.2.3.3 To outline what a skills development framework would consist of to support the development of retail management skills.

The data collected here indicates that training is essential in nurturing the talents and skills of managers. This will help boost their confidence when dealing with the different things managers have to deal with daily. Developing a skill through training, fewer mistakes will be made, and productivity will rise. The employees will also adopt the best practices and productivity on their end will also increase.

#### 5.2.4 Other research findings: Challenges faced by retail stores

- Visibility or rapid change in prices.
- Challenges faced by employees and managers when dealing with difficult customers.
- The quality of products sold in the stores.

### 5.3 Recommendations

#### 5.3.1 To assess which human interaction factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction

The frequent collection or assessment of which human interactive factors play a role in improving customer satisfaction is paramount to the success of a business. This enables

management to understand the expectations that their customers have and to strive towards meeting them. This exercise is an ongoing work in process that businesses should constantly be seeking to improve. The reason for this is to avoid losing customers and employees due to unsatisfying interactions. Businesses must remember that interaction with an employee of the store translates to their interaction with the whole store or business. Therefore, the leadership of the company needs to invest in innovative and technological systems that enable to company to uncover the gaps in communication, common occurrences that drive customers and employees away, or other poor practices. These systems include the use of software such as the Customer Interaction Management tool (Freshdesk, 2022). This software is used to manage and record interactions between a business and its customers and employees. It tracks historical data through a multitude of digital and in-person channels. This can help the business measure or track the improvement made.

### 5.3.2 To determine the essential skills that retail managers need to possess, which will support improved customer satisfaction

A good manager enhances the overall performance of a store. This includes the performance of their employees, the increase in sales, and the reduction or prevention of loss of resources and time. The success of a manager depends on the level of trust that the employees have in them. There may be good policies in place but without the skills of knowing how to effectively engage with employees and customers, these policies may not necessarily come to life to meet the shared goals and objectives. Managers should, therefore, remember that they need to unlock a certain level of engagement which is underlined with trust, with their staff to be able to effectively lead and manage them. In this sense, not only will it be easier for the manager to give instructions but would have developed a level of understanding of what is expected of them. This will elevate the burden of always having to micro-manage the employees. Being able to trust your manager allows the employees to work effectively thereby increasing productivity. This may even result in having the skills and talents of employees unlocked as they would due to having a common understanding of the level of work that is expected of them. Working

in an environment where employees are flexible to work within the bounds of the expected results reduces work frustration and will be motivated them to come to work.

5.3.3 To outline what a skills development framework would consist of to support the development of retail management skills.

The importance of having a skills development framework reduces the risk by enabling management skills to match the organisation's operational requirements and overall objectives. It ensures that skill gaps are identified and the required training is undertaken. This will help managers stay motivated by facilitating the creation of transparent and achievable career paths. The training provided will increase the effectiveness of the store as now managers would be able to see what is required and how best to tackle it. It helps align managers with what is required for the success of the store, at that time.

The following steps should be considered to set out to launch a retail skills development frame (Suchan, 2022):

1. Outline the training program goals- here, it is important to ask what the store is currently doing and why it is still doing it. This point emphasises the idea that skills development frameworks should be revised frequently to align with the company's strategic objectives.
2. Choose your modalities- this is where it must be assessed what kind of training is required and how to conduct it. The store trainers may opt to use blended learning which combines traditional and digital learning techniques.
3. Audit your current materials- this is to evaluate what has worked in terms of our previous training programs and what has not worked. There may be opportunities to evolve training materials into relevant ones.
4. Develop content and materials for your program- this is where content development for the required training will be formulated.
5. Run a pilot- the purpose of running a pilot is to ensure that the training material is received and understood well by the trainees. Engagement and feedback from the trainees is vital here.

6. Fine Tune and launch- Review feedback from the pilot and make updates. This is to ensure that the training is effective and well-grasped.
7. Evaluate results and program effectiveness- once the training has been running, measure the results and the effectiveness of the program.

The layout of the recommended framework follows below:

**Table 13 Recommended Skills Development Framework**

<b>Training plan for skills development</b>	
<b>Workshop 1 (Duration 3 days)</b>  <b>GENERAL</b>	1. Orientation Mission Objectives Vision 2. Placement Rotational on agreed periods 3. Fact-Finding Workshop
<b>Workshop 2 (Duration 14 days)</b>  <b>OPERATIONS</b>	4. Focused Training Programs i. Segmentation analysis ii. Product Knowledge Floor Products Bakery and Confectionery Butchery lines Hazard Products Basic Office Management iii. Supply chain Supplier Wholesaler Retail Brokers and Agents iv. Ordering patterns v. The Impact of Pricing and its effect on the bottom line

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>vi. Customer Service in an exceptionalist fashion.</li> <li>vii. Basic Computer Skills</li> <li>viii. Staff involvement in service provision</li> <li>ix. Human Resourcing (hiring and firing) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Simple Accountability</li> <li>Productivity</li> <li>-what did you achieve?</li> <li>-what problems were encountered?</li> <li>- How did you overcome them?</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 3 (Duration 3 months) General Management</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>5. Delegation and Monitoring</li> <li>6. Spot Meetings</li> <li>7. Scheduled Staff Meeting</li> <li>8. Impact Evaluation</li> <li>9. Discipline</li> <li>10. Performance Charter</li> </ul>
<b>Workshop 4 (Duration 4 days) The Simple Strategy</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>S set expectations</li> <li>I invite Commitment</li> <li>M measure progress</li> <li>P Provide Feedback</li> <li>L link to consequences</li> <li>E evaluate effectiveness</li> </ul>

5.3.4 Visibility or rapid change in prices

Pricing has the power to draw or turn away customers and retail stores' pricing policies significantly influence customer satisfaction. The success of a supermarket may be determined by its ability to match the supermarket price trend with the consumer buying behaviour trend, and the employment of the proper pricing strategy offers advantages as a marketing tool. Hybrid pricing, which combined exciting sales promotions with cheaper prices, tends to draw customers.

### 5.3.5 Challenges faced by employees and managers when dealing with difficult customers

Customers no longer endure poor products and services, and because of this, employees have expressed the difficulty of clients. To remedy these responses of dissatisfaction, sufficient and relevant training is necessary. These are necessary as they contribute to the development and innovative behaviour of employees and management. Innovate behaviour speaks to the mindset of staff. It involves refining the competencies within the workplace. The front-line employees' responses must be designed to empower and motivate professionalism as a way of instilling a global service climate.

To effectively achieve such transformation, it is paramount for employees and managers to understand the reasons why customers may respond rudely to them. These reasons include:

- Unmet expectations- This can happen when for example, the customer does not find stock and has spent time and money visiting the store.
- Product issues- This relates to the complaints made about the freshness of the products sold such as the stores' fruits and vegetables.
- Poor customer service- an example of this can be an unmet expectation of a customer such as the lack of visibly placing the prices next to the relevant products.
- Lack of acknowledgement- this could be as simple as not greeting the customer or acknowledging a mistake that was made by the store or employees.

Keeping customers happy is important for the health and success of any business. Since it can be very difficult to ignore your feelings as an employee, retail stores must have strategies in place that provide appropriate training. These strategies include staying calm and try not to take the “attack” personally. Displaying the same attitude back to the customer will only anger them more. Instead, the employee should avoid blame and acknowledge the problem rather. Humbly reassuring the customer that the problem is being solved and keep your promises. Listen to show empathy and allow the customer to speak. Use positive language and structure the customer’s experience around convenience. This means that the customer must encounter fewer obstacles and make

their experience enjoyable. Build a support system within the store to ensure the customer is always assisted as no one can know everything.

#### 5.3.6 The quality of products sold in the stores

Since product quality is one of the key factors influencing both customer satisfaction and loyalty, the management of the retail store must develop an interactive metric to monitor the quality of their products based on customer perceptions. This is important because a decline or increase in product quality can affect both customer satisfaction and loyalty levels.

### 5.4 Limitations of the study

#### 5.4.1 Data collected based on perceptions

All the interviews were based on the participant's perceptions. Should the participant fail to respond correctly, truthfully or clearly, this may affect the quality of the data.

#### 5.4.2 Time

There were serious time constraints. The time spent waiting to submit for Ethical Clearance was long and due to other unforeseen delays, ethical clearance was received very late thereby resulting in a limited time to collect data and having to complete the study.

#### 5.4.3 Sample size

The sample size does not represent all the retail stores. The study was done only in one city which does not represent the broader retail group as it operates multi-nationally as well. Data were collected where the headquarters of the retail store is situated.

## 5.5 Conclusion

In closing, retailers must ensure that the right pricing policies such as the hybrid pricing policy are used, and prices are made visible to avoid frustrating the customer. Concerning the quality of products sold, it is crucial to customers as it has a direct impact on the reputation of the store. Should systems be created that effectively manage and monitor the quality of goods, this would lead to repeat business and positive recommendations to other potential customers.

It is important and necessary that the store has systems in place that aid employees to diffuse a situation with difficult customers. The impact of how one does this affects the business because, firstly, your customer is always free to go to your competitors. Secondly, you may not know who your audience is. It may be a future investor, or the incident may be shared on social media leading to a damaged reputation and loss of loyal customers.

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## Appendix A: Criteria for inclusion

Three sample groups are the manager, employees, and customers. Each group will be interviewed via in-depth, semi-structured interviews. The research will interview participants from ages 18 to 65 years.

### Manager:

1. Must have worked as a manager for at least 5 years in the retail industry.

### Employees (floor staff):

1. The employee must have at least 5 years of working experience in the specific store.

### Customers:

1. The customer has been amongst the longest-serving customers of the store.
2. The customer has consistently been shopping at the retail store for over one year, monthly. (the approach is in two ways as explained in paragraph 3.4).
3. The customer buys goods from the store every month.

## Appendix B: Interview guide for retail group managers

1. Who do you consider to be an unsatisfied customer?
2. What do unsatisfied customers complain about the most?
3. How do you typically deal with an unsatisfied customer?
4. Do you engage your employees in resolving customers' complaints? If so, how? If not, why not?
5. How do you deal with customers' complaints?
6. How do you engage your staff about customer complaints?
7. How do you engage your staff about customer satisfaction?
8. Which human interaction factors would you say play a role in improving customer satisfaction?
9. What essential skills would you say retail managers need to possess to support improved customer satisfaction?
10. What is the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group?
11. In your experience, what would a skills development framework consist of to support the development of retail management skills?
12. What kinds of training have you had in customer service?
13. How effective do you think the previously mentioned training was?
14. Are there practices that you have implemented in the store that strive towards giving satisfactory service?
15. What are the challenges you face when trying to afford customers exceptional customer service?
16. What are your strengths as a manager concerning customer service?
17. What are your set goals regarding achieving good customer service?
18. Is there anything else that you feel might add value to this research?

## Appendix C: Interview guide for retail group employees

1. What was your first experience with an unhappy customer?
2. What do customers complain about the most?
3. How do they approach you?
4. Do unhappy customers ever ask to see the manager? How do you react to this?
5. Does your manager empower you to solve the problem? What is typically his approach in this regard?
6. Generally, is your manager's approach satisfactory or enabling you to give good customer service?
7. What did you like about the manager's approach in this regard?
8. What do you not like about the manager's approach in this regard?
9. Did your manager ever teach you about customer service?
10. Have you ever talked or had meetings with your staff about customer service?
11. What role do you think management plays in creating an environment for staff to give good customer service?
12. Which human interaction factors would you say play a role in improving customer satisfaction?
13. What essential skills would you say retail managers need to possess to support improved customer satisfaction?
14. What is the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group?
15. In your experience, what would a skills development framework consist of to support the development of retail management skills?
16. How would you describe good customer service?
17. In your experience, how best do you think customers would like to be serviced?
18. Are you free and empowered to implement these ways mentioned in your previous answer? What have been the results of these ways? (Did the behaviour of customers change for the better?)
19. What are the challenges in providing good customer service?
20. Is there anything else that you feel might add value to this research?

## Appendix D: Interview guide for retail group customers

1. How do you find the customer service at Choppies?
2. Have you ever been dissatisfied with anything in Choppies?
3. What was your dissatisfaction about?
4. To whom did you make your complaint?
5. How did they respond to you?
6. Did you have to engage the manager about your complaint?
7. How long did the manager take to respond to you?
8. Did the employee fully resolve the dissatisfaction?
9. Did the manager engage in and resolve the dissatisfaction? How?
10. How long did it take to solve the problem and what were the reasons given, if any?
11. What is the level of engagement of managers in solving the problem- (1 to 3) 1 being bad, 2 being good and 3 being excellent?
12. Did they do a follow-up on your complaint?
13. Between 1 and 3, 1 being not satisfied, 2 being satisfactory and 3 being very satisfied, how would you rate visiting Choppies retail stores and using their products and services?
14. What kinds of service would you like to receive to be satisfied?
15. What would you want to see change within the stores for customers to always be satisfied?
16. What do you like about Choppies?
17. What don't you like about Choppies?
18. Which human interaction factors would you say play a role in improving customer satisfaction?
19. What essential skills would you say retail managers need to possess to support improved customer satisfaction?
20. What is the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at the retail group?
21. Is there anything else that you feel might add value to this research?

## Appendix E: Ethical clearance approval letter



### **GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)**

10-Nov-2022

Dear Miss Beverly Stegling

#### **Application Approved**

Research Project Title:

**INVESTIGATING THE ROLE OF RETAIL MANAGEMENT SKILLS IN IMPROVING CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AT A RETAIL GROUP**

Ethical Clearance number:

**UFS-HSD2022/1648/22**

We are pleased to inform you that your application for ethical clearance has been approved. Your ethical clearance is valid for twelve (12) months from the date of issue. We request that any changes that may take place during the course of your study/research project be submitted to the ethics office to ensure ethical transparency. Furthermore, you are requested to submit the final report of your study/research project to the ethics office. Should you require more time to complete this research, please apply for an extension. Thank you for submitting your proposal for ethical clearance; we wish you the best of luck and success with your research.

Yours sincerely

**Dr Adri Du Plessis**

**Chairperson: General/Human Research Ethics Committee**


**Adri  
Du  
Plessis**  
Digitally signed  
by Adri Du  
Plessis  
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2022.11.10  
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9337  
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[www.ufs.ac.za](http://www.ufs.ac.za)



## Appendix F: Permission letter to conduct research from Retail Store

 **UFS BUSINESS SCHOOL**  
BE WORTH MORE

Dear *Mr Bakang Tlaga*

**RE: Preliminary permission to conduct research at your organization**

I am doing research and would like to request permission to conduct my research at The University of the Free State.

**DATE**  
*25<sup>th</sup> June 2022*

**PRELIMINARY TITLE OF RESEARCH PROJECT\***  
*Investigating the role of retail management skills in improving customer satisfaction at retail group*


**PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR**  
*Beverly Stegling*  
*2013008152*  
*+267 73 597 119*

**FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT**  
Economic and Management Sciences Faculty  
Business School

**STUDY LEADER NAME AND CONTACT**  
*Dr Hekkie Van der Westhuizen*  
*+27 82 330 6040*

**APPROVAL NEEDED**  
This study still needs ethical approval from the General Human Research Ethics (GHREC) committee at the University of the Free State. As part of the application for ethical clearance I need temporary approval from you to conduct the research in your organization. Once the Ethical Clearance certificate has been issued by the GHREC, the formal and final permission document and the data collection instruments will be provided to you for final consideration and approval.

Therefore, in order for me to complete my research, I need your permission to:



Collect data from your managers, employees and customers	Yes	Yes
Access to internal data from staff experiential		Yes
Including your organization's name in the study and the title of the study. If the answer is no, please also indicate whether I can still get access to the above if the study results are successful.		No
Using the data collected for future conference proceedings and in other publications		Yes

**ADDITIONAL SPECIFICATIONS**

If you have any additional stipulations about the temporary copies for permission to conduct research in your organization, please include these stipulations in the space provided.

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Your identity:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Email: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



Approved/Granted by:

PROFESSOR DR. JEFFREY  
 DEPARTMENT OF  
 MANAGEMENT  
 2011



Signature: Jeffrey  
 Name, surname and initials of  
 authorized person for reference

Signature: Jeffrey  
 Contact number:

## Appendix G: TurnItIn report



## Appendix H: Supervisor Declaration



<b>Student name:</b>	Beverly Stegling	<b>Student number:</b>	2013008152
<b>Module code:</b>	MBRP7900	<b>Department:</b>	Business School
<b>Project title:</b>	Investigating the Role of Retail Management Skills in Improving Customer Satisfaction at a Retail Group		

I, Dr Hekkie van der Westhuizen, hereby declare that:

		Yes	No
1.	I have reviewed Chapter 1 of the above-mentioned student	X	
2.	I have reviewed Chapter 2 of the above-mentioned student	X	
3.	I have reviewed Chapter 3 of the above-mentioned student	X	
4.	I have reviewed Chapter 4 of the above-mentioned student	X	
5.	I have reviewed Chapter 5 of the above-mentioned student	X	
6.	I have reviewed the data collection instruments of the above-mentioned student	X	
7.	I am satisfied that the standard of the above-mentioned documents is on the expected level	X	
8.	I hereby approve the documents for the above-mentioned student	X	

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Supervisor

**27 November 2022**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of declaration