

**Employability skills of branch banking employees at
Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital banking era.**

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Magister in Business Administration

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DATE: 13 November 2020

DECLARATION

"I declare that the Field Study hereby submitted for the Magister in Business Administration at the UFS Business School, University of the Free State, is my own independent work and that I have not previously submitted this work, either as a whole or in part, for a qualification at another university or at another faculty at this university.

I also hereby cede copyright of this work to the University of the Free State"

Name: Brendan Jacobs

Date: 13 November 2020

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I miss and love you Dad.

Abstract

Rapid technological development, changing customer behaviour towards online and electronic banking and an ever-increasing number of new, innovative role players in the financial services industry - such as digital banks and Fintechs - has seen a changing demand for employability skills of bank employees. The continuous growth in the use of technology in banking services has placed banks under pressure to employ staff with the required skills to deal with the technological advancements and simultaneously add value to customer relationships.

The primary objective of the study was to identify employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein. The primary objective was supported by determining the current employability skills gaps of employees and establishing how digital banking influences the employability skills of banking employees. Furthermore, the study investigated which technical and soft skills are required of employees at Standard Bank to establish if they can adapt to the constantly changing technological environment.

In order to achieve the research objective, a literature review was conducted which included an overview of employability and theoretical employability models. The literature review also considered an overview of traditional banking, new entrants and emerging trends in banking as well as an in-depth look into digital banking. The research was qualitative in nature and entailed semi-structured interviews with Universal Bankers based at various Standard Bank branches in Bloemfontein. Whilst 28 participants were initially identified via non-probability sampling to be interviewed, data saturation was reached after 14 interviews were concluded. Considering the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, all interviews were conducted electronically via Microsoft Teams.

The foremost findings from the study aligned to the theoretical detail identified in the literature review. Feedback from respondents was categorized into six main themes which largely aligned with the literature review conducted. These findings included the importance of branch banking employees having the necessary technical and digital skills to perform their duties. Furthermore, bankers need to understand and embrace the concept of enhanced customer convenience. There has been a significant shift in customer behaviour and bankers need to understand and adapt to that fact. Further

findings were that bankers must be able to coach customers on digital and product alternatives and need to continuously upskill on digital solutions. Lastly the importance of high levels of emotional intelligence was identified which is critical in engaging and adding value to customers that do visit the branch and need to be flexible and able to adapt to frequent change.

It was concluded from the study that employability skills gaps are acknowledged and present in the frontline banking staff interviewed. Since there are varying levels of competence and readiness for the rigours the future hold, the following recommendations were made from the study:

- A comprehensive skills audit needs to be undertaken for all bankers in frontline positions to identify the technical and digital skills to be developed.
- Personal Development plans need to be developed for all frontline bankers
- Structured and frequent digital and technical training needs to be provided to all frontline banking staff.
- Emotional intelligence and people skill interventions to be prioritized for staff
- Rotation of roles and functions must be encouraged in branch to increase versatility of bankers and
- Change agents and digital champions need to be introduced in branches.

The study concluded that the branch banking employee of the future requires a different set of employability skills than the branch banking employee of the past. There is a joint responsibility on employees and employers alike to ensure such employability skills are developed and sustained.

Keywords: Employability skills, traditional banking, digital banking, digital solutions, banking alternatives, branch banking employees, technological environment, customer convenience, personal development and skills development.

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Chapter 1

1.1 Title of the Project:

The title of the research project is:

Employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital banking era.

1.2. Introduction and Background

Workplace practices have been changing drastically. The impact of globalization and technological advancements have transformed routine work practices and simultaneously brought about a change in the skills required by employers (Sarfraz, Rajendran and Hewege, 2018). Rapid changes in technology require a skilled and knowledgeable workforce, to advance both the organisation as well as the industry forward (Ahmad, Mawar and Ripain, 2017). According to Chadha and Parimoo (2017), changes in technology has transformed the method of banking. The authors further state that because of these changes, bank employees should be developed and made agreeable in utilising technology, and that the reskilling of employees at various levels are required.

The changing demands for employability skills require highly skilled employees; as a result of the joint challenge of a competitive business landscape and rapid technological advancement in the workplace (Tejan and Sabil, 2019).

Employability skills as per Romgens, Scoupe and Beusaert (2019) “focus on the identification and development of knowledge, skills and attitudes which contribute to the performance of workers being at a satisfactory level.” The authors further state that the importance of employability skills manifests in the ability of an individual to fulfill, acquire or generate work through the optimal use of their employability skillset.

Oosthuizen, Coetzee and Mntonintshi (2014) points out that “the challenge for employees to sustain their employability in a dynamic and turbulent labour market places new demands on such employees to navigate their career development.” The authors also note that “there is an incumbency on the organisations to help individuals gain awareness of the skills and attributes they require to sustain their employability.” McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) agree with this concept by underlining the importance of

the role of employers in identifying the employability of employees, and to assist in developing the required skills.

Coetzee (2018) noted that “there is pressure on banks to employ staff with the required skill sets that are able to stay abreast of the exponential developments in technology.” The author also identified that “all South African banks are aware of this and are aggressively focusing on the upskilling of their staff to have the required skills to deal with the digital era.”

Sarfraz, Rajendran and Hewege (2018) raise that “in the past holding a degree with subject-relevant knowledge as sufficient to gain an entry level job.” More recently though, the authors note that employers are also looking for employees with relevant employability skills and personality traits. Sarfraz, Rajendran & Hewege (2018) also identified that “employers believe that they can develop and improve knowledge and technical skills of employees, but that it is very difficult to develop and teach soft skills.” Ahmad, Mawar and Ripain (2017) agree with this sentiment in stating that work skills are not only limited to academic and technical skills. The authors believe that attitudes and habits are equally important in gaining employment and to progress within an organisation.

A few skills that employees need to enhance to improve employability includes knowing the organisation they work for, the ability to interpret tasks and find and interpret new information, technical ability, computer literacy and people skills (Tejan & Sabil, 2019). Core employability skills are defined by Tejan & Sabil (2019) as communication, conceptual and analytical skills, work culture, teamwork, organisational planning, learning theory and practice and leadership.

Besides employability skills and attributes, McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) found that other components to consider includes:

- The extent of the transferability of the employee’s skills.
- How motivated the employee is to seek work?
- The extent of the mobility of the person in seeking work.
- What access to information and support networks the person has?
- The extent and nature of other personal barriers preventing employability for the person.

For centuries, traditional Banks have dominated the financial system extending loans, supplying savings, transactional and investment solutions. Damankah, Anku-Tsedee, and Amankwaa (2015) found that even though traditional banks dominated the financial system for decades, this is no longer the case with the entry of other financial institutions.

The adoption of digital interaction by consumers in various areas of their lives have seen them calling for financial services that are available at all times and which are as easy to use as the social networks or email solutions they use on a daily basis. According to Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015) the impact of start-up companies mainly based on technology, have greatly affected the financial sector. The authors further state that, “it has exploited the divide that exists between the technological demands of customers and the perceived outdated services offered by traditional banks.”

In recent years, there has been a significant increase in research into digitisation and its impact on the banking sector. Coetzee (2018) suggests that “the way banks operate will dramatically change over the coming decade.” Coetzee notes that “technology advancements and changing customers preferences will change how Banks conduct their business, what solutions they offer and how interactions with clients occurs.”

“Physical branches are becoming less prevalent in their current format where human interaction is a key feature. In future, client interactions will become more integrated with digitisation, smart devices and virtual interaction” according to Coetzee (2018). According to Skinner (2014) a disadvantage of digital banking is that the built face to face relationship between the client and the Bank may be at risk over time.

In the South African context, the use of technology in bank branches are becoming more prominent. Looking at Nedbank as an example, their “digital branches include facilities such as video banking, quick-chat banking, self-service kiosks and robo-advisers” (Nedbank Group Ltd 2017).

Furthermore, new fully digital banks such as Thyme Bank and Bank Zero have entered the market. These banks provide customers with more digital alternatives, allowing clients to fully conduct banking electronically rather than visiting a physical branch. “Discovery Bank along with Thyme Bank and Bank Zero are the new entrants to the market, aiming to steal market shares from South Africa’s four big banks” (Faku 2019).

“Given the high unemployment rates in South Africa and the drastic shift in customer behaviour to do their banking digitally, it has been noted that Standard Bank closed 91 branches in South Africa in 2019; Absa restructured operations nationally; and Nedbank was in talks with 1 500 employees over potential job cuts” according to Henderson (2019). This is a world-wide trend that is expected to continue into the future.

Over the past couple of years, there has been a distinct change in customer behaviour - an increase in digital usage and a reduced foot flow through bank branches at Standard Bank. As per the article in the Sunday Times by Strydom (2019) “foot flow to branches have fallen off a cliff. Empty branches are a big problem for major banks who often rent an expensive space in shopping centers.” In the article the CEO of Standard Bank, Sim Tshabalala is quoted as saying that “branches would eventually look very different and employ a different mix of people.” The CEO of FNB, Jacques Cilliers, was recently quoted as saying that FNB won’t be closing any branches. This is an interesting departure from the Standard Bank strategy, with Cilliers pointing out that customers still have a need for personal interaction. In the article by Moyo (2019), it is referenced that “despite the fact that consumers are becoming comfortable with digitisation, there will be a role to play for humans.” “The fast growth in the use of technology in banking services has placed pressure on banks to employ staff with the requisite skill sets” according to Coetzee (2018).

Sarfraz, Rajendran and Hesege (2018) noted that the constantly changing technological demands employees “to learn new software and systems and adopt a lifelong attitude of learning.” The authors also identify that the modern world is characterized by innovation. As a result, “acquiring, practicing and utilizing employability skills (such as innovative and critical skills, problem solving, and team working skills) have become vital to survive and succeed in the workplace.”

Given the above-mentioned, the enhanced use of digital banking has seen the vast majority of transactions performed in branches, being automated for customers to perform themselves. Standard Bank’s internal data analysis concluded that branch transactional volumes, year to date May 2019 vs the year to date May 2018, have reduced by 27.2% in Bloemfontein. This declining trend has been evident year-on-

year for the last three years. Simultaneously, digital usage of customers has increased by 41% in the same period.

As per Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015), “the increased availability of the internet and access to mobile phones have had a big impact on the habits and banking preferences of consumers.” Furthermore, the impact of digitisation is new branch formats, due to the automation of transactional business, where branches will become a place where products are marketed and where value is added to customers. This implies as per Coetzee (2018) that “the organisational structure will be flatter and focus more on teams that are empowered and talent that is mobile, than on operational functions.”

Motivation for the study

The researcher decided to investigate this topic, given the fact that it is a real and relevant challenge that each of the traditional Banks are facing whilst they are carving their operating models for the future. Given the significant branch infrastructure and workforces these organisations have, this research focused on the relevance of bank employee employability skills in physical branches.

Tejan and Sabil (2019) suggested employees could enhance their employability skills by “improving their ability to find and interpret new information, interpret tasks, handle large quantities of information, improving their technical and computer literacy and through gaining people skills.” The authors further found that employability skills include personal character and skills that enhance the employment prospects of employees. As a result, the authors noted that “employability skills are not only beneficial to the individuals, but also to the organisation.”

Furthermore, “the dynamic and exponential growth in the use of technology in banking services has placed banks under pressure to employ staff with the required skills” as per Coetzee (2018). Standard Bank acknowledged in their 2016 Annual Integrated Report (Standard Bank 2016) that they regard the skill set required by staff to face digitisation and automation as a key concern moving forward. Furthermore, the Standard Bank Group is to “provide access to advanced technology and tools for their staff that support the future world of work” (Standard Bank Group 2017). The study therefore focusses on investigating the required employability skills of branch banking staff.

1.3. Problem Statement

“The skill set for a typical banker of the future is not the same as that of a banker of the past” (Coetzee, 2018). Sarfraz, Rajendran and Hewege (2018) suggested “the presence of an employability skills gap - being the gap between the employability skills expected by employers for a particular job and the skills available from employees working in that job.” In this light, employability of the frontline banking staff at Standard Bank moving forward is a cause for concern and are therefore investigated. A detailed analysis of employability and the specific skills required to be developed, needs to be undertaken.

Chadha and Parimoo (2017) identified the human resource as “the most beneficial, the most flexible and the most resourceful. Human resources constitute the most essential and irreplaceable constituent in the economy.” The authors also note that the organisation needs to ensure employee engagement, leadership practices and an environment for learning to improve employee retention and performance enhancement.

Should this study not be undertaken, the skills gap referred to above at Standard Bank in Bloemfontein would remain unexplored. Tejan and Sabil (2019) noted that the employers have a responsibility to assist individuals in developing desirable employability skills. This study will identify the employability skills gaps at Standard Bank Bloemfontein and will also explore the requirements to address these employability skills gaps to ensure the organisation and its employees remain relevant in the changing environment.

1.4. Research Questions

The research questions for this study are indicated below:

- What are employability skills?
- What are the employability skills gaps of employees at Standard Bank?
- How will digital banking influence the employability skills of employees at Standard Bank?
- Which technical and soft skills would be required of employees at Standard Bank?

- Are Standard Bank employees able to adapt to the constantly changing technological environment?
- Are employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein, adequately equipped with the correct skill sets to deal with the demands of digital banking?

1.5. Objectives

This section provides details on the primary and secondary objectives of this study.

1.5.1. Primary Objective

The primary objective of the study, as it relates to customer-facing branch staff in Standard Bank, was to:

Identify employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein.

1.5.2. Secondary Objectives

The primary objective was supported by the following secondary objectives:

- To establish what employability skills are.
- To determine what the current employability skills gaps of employees at Standard Bank are.
- To establish how digital banking influences the employability skills of employees at Standard Bank.
- To determine which technical and soft skills are required of employees at Standard Bank.
- To establish if employees at Standard Bank are able to adapt to the constantly changing technological environment.
- To determine whether Standard Bank employees are equipped with the adequate skill sets to deal with the demands of digital banking.

1.6. Preliminary Literature Review

“Employability can be understood as the possession of basic “core-skills”, or an extended set of generic attributes, or attributes that a type of employer (discipline-linked, sector-related, company-type) specifies” according to Harvey (2001). A further interpretation of employability by The Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2020) is

“a set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace – to the benefit of themselves, their employer and the wider economy.” This definition addresses various of the components relevant to this study.

Chadha and Parimoo (2017) identified specific employability skills gaps as it pertains to entry level banking employees. “Detailed understanding of bank offerings and processes, knowledge of third-party offerings, knowledge of core banking systems and various technology platforms, awareness of regulatory norms, understanding customers’ requirements, patience and perseverance and communication skills” were all identified by the authors.

Sulaiman and AbdelKarim (2019) reported that the fourth technology revolution includes the automation of processes in business, education and the economy and that the banking sector is no exception. The authors further state that the banking sector is undergoing a radical transformation in terms of its processes as banking is shifting towards digital banking, given the advancements in technology.

Son, Kwon, Tayi and Oh (2019) noted that the introduction of digital technology has affected the banking business and changed the traditional financial service operating system, which has largely been based on offline employee-orientated interactions. Son, Kwon, Tayi & Oh (2019) further elaborated that digital banking has various advantages such as lower costs and higher information transferability for customers. The disadvantages include reduced customer loyalty and more simplistic methods to purchase products from competing banks or service providers.

The main challenge for banks is to maintain the relevance of traditional branches whilst more and more people are banking online and depositing their money remotely. However, whilst all these changes and new features to smaller and fancier branches are put in place, the human element remains very important. “The skills banks are looking for have changed much more to being able to sell and build relationships” (De Paula, 2010).

South African Banks are very aware of the changing environment and Coetzee (2018) identified that “all banks in South Africa are currently aggressively focused on upskilling staff to have the relevant skills to deal with the digital era.” Coetzee (2018) continued that “offerings and customer interaction will become more integrated with

digitisation and smart devices.” This in turn will mean that when customers visit their local branches, it most probably would not be for routine transaction-related matters and staff therefore needs to be upskilled in relevant skills and functions.

Standard Bank Group (2016) recognized that technology-based skill sets have become a necessity for branch banking employees. Standard Bank stated that “staff will be empowered by giving them access to advanced technology and tools that support the future world of work.” Coetzee (2018) identified that “staff will not only be required to keep up with technological developments, but also to innovate and offer improved solutions to clients.”

Ganesh (2012) referred to the fact that “computerized branches cannot merely be introduced mainly due to a lack of trained staff.” Ganesh (2012) reported that “banks need to reward trainees to utilize their new skills and knowledge on the job.” A further conclusion from the study by Ganesh (2012) was that employees have shown a reluctance in developing these new skills, as many of the skills were not useful in performing their daily routines. With the advent of so much change and digitisation, it should be tested whether there is a resistance to training or the adoption of new skills - since it might threaten the existence of the branch staff member’s role in the future. Furthermore, Vik (2017) points out that “the changes in banking have impacted the professional identity of branch managers through curbing their ability to make decisions on behalf of the bank.”

A key theme that became apparent in the literature review was that the introduction of technology and digital solutions reduced the number of employees in branches. Branch staff have become averse to adapting to the new methods as they see it as a potential threat to their roles. Caruthers (2014) indicated that “when the Bank of America, for example, announced the use of customer-facing video conferencing in 500 of its branches, the staffing of branches drastically reduced for the centralized model.”

It is also very important for the productivity of the company that the employees in these frontline branch-based roles are fit for the role. As pointed out by Ntsane (2014), “employees who are fit for their roles will have elevated job satisfaction.”

Vic (2017) identified that with “the centralization of back-office operations and digitisation of routine matters, there was a much greater expectation on staff to focus

on sales in branches.” These are of course not necessarily skills that the normal branch consultant or teller would have. It is therefore evident that the stated problem of digitisation impacting the employability skills of branch staff is supported by the literature reviewed.

1.7. Research Methodology

An indication of the theoretical perspective to be applied in the study is given below.

1.7.1. Research Design

A post-positivistic approach will be applied to the research by utilizing qualitative methods. Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt and Wagner (2014) pointed out that qualitative research is becoming increasingly more important to business research as it is more concerned with focusing on concepts rather than developing specific measures. The authors also noted that the use of qualitative methods necessitates it to be unbiased and trustworthy.

From an ontological orientation point of view, the constructionist approach will be utilized in this study given that Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart & Wagner (2014) identified that social phenomena are developed by the actions of social characters. Even though these frontline staff members operate in an organisation with set rules, values and objectives, it is also true that in the various branches, the people set the culture in that specific branch in how they interact.

The epistemological orientation applied will be interpretivist, considering the data collection method. Semi-structured interviews will be utilised during the study. Interpretivism as per Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart & Wagner (2014) assumes that the research approach needs to respect the differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences.

1.7.2. Sampling Strategy

The non-probability sampling strategy will be applied to the study; as per Wolf, Joye and Smith (2016) it is accepted that this sampling strategy introduces the possibility that the sample selection criteria is related to the attitudes or behaviour of interest of the respondents.

There are various types of non-probability sampling of which the relevant method to be used in this study is the purposive sampling method. Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) defines it as choosing participants in a strategic way so that those sampled are relevant to the study.

The participants selected to partake in the study are limited to the frontline employees dealing with sales and service-related matters in Standard Bank Bloemfontein branches. The applicable role is called a Universal Banker at Standard Bank. These employees are all in the general staff category and traditionally would deal with administrative functions.

Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) highlights the importance of the researcher identifying the relevant population suited to the investigation of the topic. The rationale for the selection of these participants is that they have the highest levels of interaction with walk-in customers at branches requiring sales or service-related assistance. As a result, their employability skills need to align to the demands of the changing banking environment. All tellers, team leaders and employees in management positions at the selected branches were excluded from the sample.

The population of this study will be limited to the Universal Bankers working within Standard Bank branches in Bloemfontein. Universal Bankers from Brandwag, Bloemfontein, Preller Square, Central Park, Lemo Mall and Langenhoven Park will be interviewed as part of the research. The population based on the above criteria was 28 Universal Bankers. Data saturation was achieved once a sample of 14 respondents were interviewed. Considering the specific employees required for the research being limited in terms of numbers, the purposive sampling method as stated above will be utilised. This is as a result of participants being chosen for their unique characteristics – in this instance for the position they hold within specific branches in Bloemfontein.

1.7.3. Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews as described by Galetta and Cross (2013) are sufficiently structured to discuss specific topics whilst simultaneously affording participants the opportunity to offer new insights to the study. It can be used as the sole method or one of several methods in a study, but it will be the sole research method to be used in this study. Galetta & Cross (2013) also stated that the semi-structured interview process

affords the scope to include structured segments ranging from fully open-ended questions to more theoretically driven questions.

Considering the 28 Universal Bankers all perform the same roles, it is important that data saturation needs to be considered. In this light, data saturation was achieved once a sample of 14 respondents was interviewed. According to Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles and Grimshaw (2010), data saturation is achieved when no new themes, findings, concepts or problems were evident in the data. The researcher will pay close attention to the achievement of data saturation considering the fact that according to Fusch and Ness (2015), the failure to reach data saturation has a negative impact on the validity of the research. They further stated that when and how data maturity is attained varies from study to study.

1.7.4. Data Analysis

Considering the qualitative nature of the data collection methods, it is important for the researcher to interpret and apply coding to the data for it to be re-presented during the study. Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) indicated that utilizing content analysis, the researcher will be able to focus on measuring and interpreting different units of analysis. Examples of such content is particular words that are frequently used by respondents, subjects and themes arising from the study. This process is important to ensure that the necessary themes will be identified, analyzed and interpreted for the relevant recommendations to be made.

1.7.5. Ethical Considerations

According to Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santon, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014), it is essential to consider potential ethical issues at the point of research design, rather than when the conflict arises during the research.

Permission for this research will be obtained from the Provincial Director of Standard Bank in the Free State. According to Baily (2007) it is critical to obtain the relevant permission from gatekeepers and to obtain informed consent from the participants as they may both be in the same setting - which in the case of this study is true. Permission will be sought from the Provincial Director to conduct the interviews during

work hours whilst the participants will also be given the option to conduct some of the interviews before or after work or during lunch hours.

Informed consent as referenced above will be obtained from all staff members partaking in the research. For this purpose, a consent form will be signed and kept as evidence in a location only accessible to the researcher.

According to Baily (2007), *confidentiality* is a very important ethical issue as the participants need to be advised whether the study is anonymous, confidential or neither. The information received from the respondents in this study will be treated as confidential.

As per Lavrakas (2008), *voluntary participation* refers to the participants' right to exercise their free will in deciding whether to partake in the research activity or not. Where staff members are not comfortable to participate in the study, he/she will be excluded from the study.

The researcher will avoid prejudice and remain objective to avoid *harm* being done to any of the participants of the study. Furthermore, the benefit to the sample selected would be in the feedback to their organisation regarding the required employability skills for their roles. The development of those skills could be included in their individual personal development programs ensuring development and improved relevance.

1.7.6. Trustworthiness and Rigour of the Research

The quality criteria for all qualitative research according to Korstjens and Moser (2018) are the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the research.

The Research's credibility as per Cash, Clark, Alcock, Dickson, Eckly and de Jager (2008) refers to the sources of the information being deemed trustworthy and believable and there must be clarity that the information has been independently evaluated.

According to Burchett, Umoquit and Dobrow (2011) *transferability* of the research indicates the likelihood that a study's findings can be replicated in a new specific setting in which case the outcomes of the study's effectiveness would remain the same.

Korstjens & Moser (2018) defined the *dependability* of the research as the manner in which the findings, interpretations and recommendations were supported by the data obtained from the participants.

Korstjens & Moser (2018) continued to confirm that *conformability* is the extent to which the research findings would be able to be validated by other researchers. This was very important for the study should the work be replicated in other areas outside of Bloemfontein.

1.8. The Demarcation of the Field of Study

This study of skills and functions of branch banking staff will be conducted by manner of interviews with selected staff members of Standard Bank within the Bloemfontein area. The targeted individuals to partake in the research was the Universal Bankers working for Standard Bank in Bloemfontein at their Brandwag, Bloemfontein, Preller Square, Central Park, Lemo Mall and Langenhoven Park branches. The research will be conducted on these specific employees in key frontline roles. Other branch staff such as tellers, team leaders and managers will be excluded from the study. The field of study that will be researched is Human Resource Management.

1.9. Risk vs Benefit Analysis

The risks of the research include the potential psychological impact for the participants in terms of them realizing shortcomings in their employability skills. This however is outweighed in terms of potential benefits to be obtained from the study as it pertains to the individuals and the organisation where the research is to be conducted.

Individuals will benefit from the study in that the employability skills to be developed will be identified and can be included in their personal development plans. This will enable them to proactively address development areas and improve their employability within the organisation and financial sector.

As it pertains to the organisation where the research is to be conducted, feedback from the researcher will be available to them. From that content, an independent view can be taken on the level of employability skills of the employees engaged, to establish potential learning and development interventions the organisation needs to develop. As a result, the potential benefits exceed the risks in this study.

1.10 Chapter Layout of the Study

The proposed study is organized into six chapters, which are structured as presented in Table 1.1 below.:

Table 1.1. Chapter Outlay.

Chapter	Title	Objective of the Chapter
Chapter 1	Introduction	This chapter will introduce the topic and provide background information to give context to the research problem, the purpose and objectives of the study.
Chapter 2	Literature Review	This chapter will look into the learnings from prior literature about the various concepts introduced in the study including: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- To establish what employability skills are.- To determine what the current employability skills gaps of employees at Standard Bank are.- To establish how digital banking influences the employability skills of employees at Standard Bank.- To determine which technical and soft skills are required for employees at Standard Bank.- To establish if employees at Standard Bank are able to adapt to the constantly changing technological environment.- To determine whether Standard Bank employees are equipped with the adequate skill sets to

		deal with the demands of digital banking.
Chapter 3	Research Design and Objectives	To give detail on the research design as well as the methods utilized in the data gathering process.
Chapter 4	Research Analysis and Findings	This chapter will focus on the outcomes of the study as well as an analysis of the findings.
Chapter 5	Discussion of the Research Results	This chapter will present a discussion of the research results.
Chapter 6	Conclusion and Recommendations	In this chapter the researcher will draw conclusions from the research findings and furthermore recommendations will be presented in line with the outcome of the study.

The above chapter outlay will allow for a natural flow to the proposed research to enable the reader to consume the information in an organized and logical manner.

1.11 Conclusion

Considering the above discussion of the changing banking environment due to digitisation and its impact on branch structures and staff, the relevant problem and research objectives to be researched was identified and a preliminary literature review was conducted.

The relevance of the research idea can see this proposed study help bank managers and leaders in the sector gain a better understanding of the impact of digital alternatives on the skills and functions of branch banking staff. This can have a major impact on the strategy's banks employ as it pertains to staffing and skills development.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The first component of this literature review will be the concept of employability and various applicable employability models will be explored. The concept of employability can be applied in various contexts both for those in work and those seeking work (McQuaid and Lindsay, 2005) and therefore an in-depth analysis will be conducted to establish the impact of skills on the branch banking staff's employability in the digital banking era.

Considering the dominance of traditional banks for centuries, the next component of the literature review is centered on traditional banking. This review will include a focus on emerging trends within banks, on how they are evolving as technology not only had a bearing on their internal organisational process but also on how they interact with their customers (Flavian, Guinaliu and Torres, 2006).

The next section of the literature review will focus on the concept of digitisation and digital banking. The term digital banking is also known as electronic banking (E-banking) which is a generic term making use of electronic channels such as telephones, mobile phones and the internet for the delivery of banking services and products (Apte, 2020). Digital banking can also be referred to as mobile banking (M-banking) which is the provision of banking and financial services facilitated by telecommunication devices (Chuang, 2019). Different digital banking offerings and its impact on foot flow through bank branches will also be explored as well as the human role in digital banking. The focus on digital banking is important for the relevance of the banking industry in the context of the 4th industrial revolution. The 4th industrial revolution is also referred to as Industry 4.0. It is defined as “the use of automation, big data, cyber-physical systems, internet of things and cloud, to construct an intelligent factory that allows the perfect harmony between people, new technologies and innovation” (I-Scoop, 2017).

The fourth section of the review will focus on the skills required by the branch bank employees in the digital era. Coetzee (2018) infers that the demands of digital banking and the fast growth in the use of technology in banking services has seen pressure placed on banks to employ staff with the relevant skills.

The following sections in this chapter will investigate and analyze the various aspects referred to above in greater detail.

2.2. What is Employability?

Sulaiman and AbdelKarim (2019) concluded that the fourth technology revolution includes the automation of processes in business, education and in the economy - pointing out that the banking sector is no exception. It can therefore be argued, given the background and findings from the literature in earlier sections of this study, that the skills and functions performed by frontline banking staff in branches will drastically have to change.

It is clear from the analysis of the reviewed literature that there is a range of definitions of employability depending on the context in which the term is used. Most of the literature refers to graduate employability, though for the purpose of this study one needs to remember that there is a current workforce in place - as a result employability will also be looked at from the perspective of existing employees.

Definitions range from straightforward textbook or dictionary definitions such as “the character or quality of being employable” as per McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) to much more involved definitions depending on context.

Another basic definition, quoted from Harvey (2001), states: “Employability can be understood as the possession of basic “core-skills”, or an extended set of generic attributes, or attributes that a type of employer (discipline-linked, sector-related, company-type) specifies.”

However, as pointed out earlier, it is important for the purpose of this study to face the challenge of sustaining employability in an environment that is very dynamic and constantly changing which brings new demands on the employees’ ability to navigate their career development (Oosthuizen, Coetzee and Mntonintshi, 2014). They further argued that employability is the capacity of a person to gain initial employment, to maintain such employment and to remain relevant within the labour market.

The Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2020) defined employability as “A set of attributes, skills and knowledge that all labour market participants should possess to ensure they have the capability of being effective in the workplace - to the benefit of

themselves, their employer and the wider economy.” This definition addresses various of the components relevant to this study.

A further definition to be considered as more comprehensive for the purpose of this research, is the definition by the Northern Irish Department of Higher and Further Education as cited by McQuaid & Lindsay (2005): “Employability is the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible deployment. For the individual, employability depends on: the knowledge and skills they possess, and their attitudes; the way personal attributes are presented in the labour market; the environmental and social context within which work is sought; and the economic context within which work is sought.”

The above definition as cited by McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) encompasses the social context element has a high level of relevance considering the social context of customer behaviour towards the digital adoption described earlier and will be the definition adopted for this study.

Standard Bank identified in their 2016 Annual Report (Standard Bank Group 2016) that the skill sets staff will require to face the digital era and automation of tasks is a major concern to them. As a result, they further stated that they are investing in their human capital by offering specialized skills, partnering with universities and upskilling, rotating and exposing staff in order to adopt in the digital age.

The inference by Standard Bank to expose staff to various roles to adapt to the digital challenges are important when considering the view of career identity by Oosthuizen, Coetzee and Mntonintshi (2014). They suggested that a person’s career identity develops in the context of the workplace and the work experiences people have. Furthermore, they argued that the opportunity to enact a variety of roles and explore different identities adds more complexity to their identities in terms of roles, interests and abilities.

Oosthuizen, Coetzee & Mntonintshi (2014) also raises a critical factor to be considered later in this study, which is the impact of demographics (especially age and race) on employability. These demographical factors will be closely monitored in the research to be conducted in Bloemfontein branches as they found that individuals below the age of twenty-five are much more driven in terms of their personal needs than their

older counterparts. Comparisons will be drawn to this conclusion during the research stage of this study.

In the following sections, two predominant employability models namely the USEM and CareerEdge models will be explored to gain a greater understanding of the underlying components of employability.

2.2.1. USEM Account of Employability

Knight and Yorke (2002) developed the USEM model from the basis that capability is a necessary part of specialist expertise and are not separate from it. They also worked from the premise that capable people also have the confidence to apply their knowledge and skills within changing environments and furthermore that they continue to develop their skills and knowledge.

Knight & Yorke (2002) proceeded to develop the USEM model from the concept of capability and taking into consideration literature on cognitive and social psychology. Their model is based on four interrelated components of employability being:

- Understanding;
- Skills (subject specific and generic);
- Efficacy beliefs (and self-theories generally) and
- Metacognition (including reflection)

Knight & Yorke (2002) stated that in the USEM model self-theories (and therefore mostly personal qualities) dominate what the student does. In the past, subject understanding used to be the dominant component. They continue that the different variables are interconnected and that understanding, skills and metacognition especially can be mutually supportive and developmental. They also found that personal qualities are very influential in gaining subject understanding and the development of skills. They concluded that discussions on employability are transformed by the inclusion of personal qualities, especially considering efficacy beliefs and self-theories.

Knight & Yorke (2003) defined employment ability as “a set of achievements - skills, undertakings and personal attributes - that make individuals more likely to gain employment and be successful in their chosen occupations, which benefits themselves, the workforce, the community and the economy”.

2.2.2. The CareerEdge Model

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) explained the CareerEdge model as the five key components which students can focus and reflect on for improvement. The five components are:

- Career development and learning
 - o Appropriate personal development programs (PDP's) are crucial for all employees to ensure a planned and consistent growth path to ensure relevance.
- Experience (work and life)
 - o Whilst work experience is obviously important, it is equally important for employers to consider the life experience which some individuals bring with them. As a result, this needs to be factored into the employability of such individuals.
- Degree of subject knowledge, understanding and skills
- Generic skills
 - o The model includes generic skills which can also be seen as core, key or transferable skills.
- Emotional intelligence
 - o This is a key component of the model as it is identified that emotional intelligence will become more important as customer facing jobs expand. In the instance of the branch facing banking staff, emotional intelligence will be a key component considering the added dynamic that customers can perform most tasks themselves before engaging the branch staff.

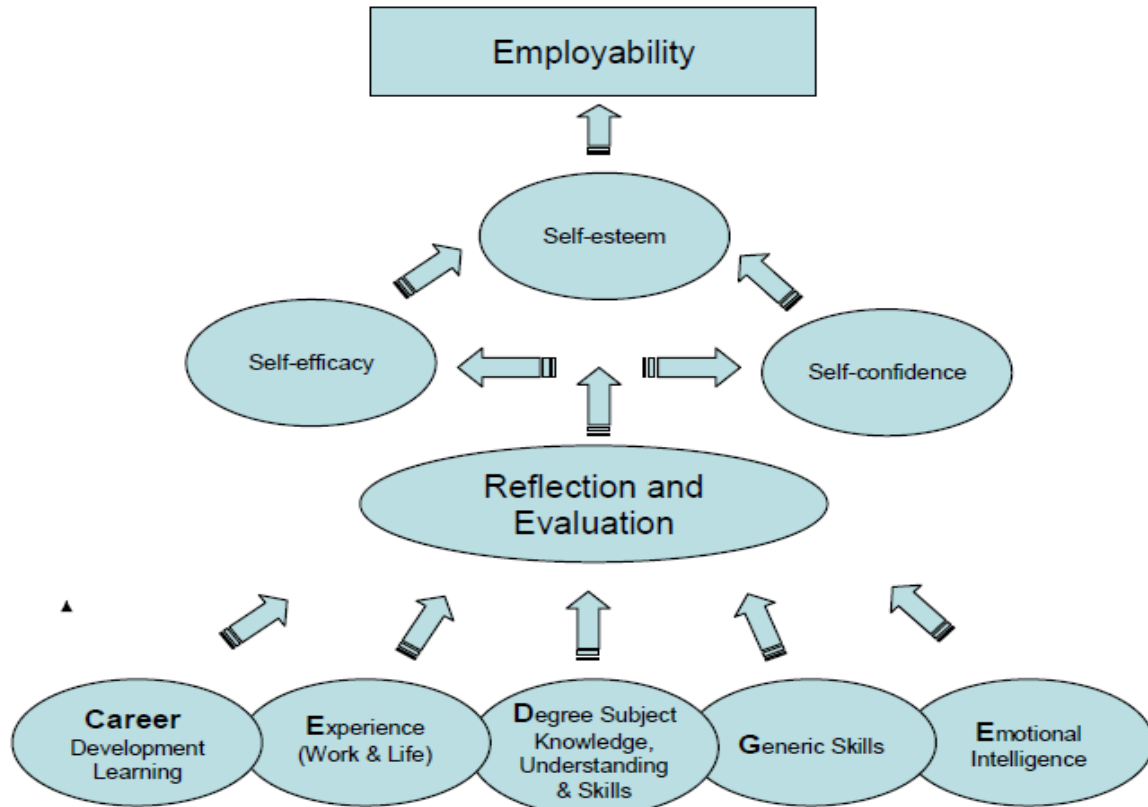


Figure 1. The Essential Components of the CareerEdge Model (Dacre Pool & Sewell, 2017).

Dacre Pool and Sewell (2007) continued to advise that if individuals reflect on and evaluate the above, they will be more employable as a result of improved self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem. This reflection needs to be formalized through personal development plans as it is a highly effective tool to reflect on past experiences and identify potential shortcomings which can be developed. Self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem is included in the model as it provides a conduit between the five basic components listed above and the employability of individuals.

Regardless of the model of employability used, the outcomes will inform the interventions, formal and informal training that is put in place for the various employees. For the purpose of this study however, the CareerEdge model is deemed the most relevant model to use based on all elements being relevant and also as a result of the inclusion of the emotional intelligence component which is critical for success of the branch banking staff to be surveyed.

Against the backdrop of the literature review looking at traditional banking, developing trends, various elements of digital banking and employability, the review will be concluded by looking at the changed demands of branch banking and the skill requirements of the frontline staff working at these branches.

2.3. An Overview of the Traditional Banking Sector

Damankah, Anku-Tsede and Amankwaa (2015) noted that traditional banks were dominant in the financial sector for decades. Chiorazzo, D' Apice, DeYoung and Morelli (2018) defined a traditional banking approach as one where banks rely mainly on relationship lending, core deposit funding, transactional and other traditional forms of revenue through a physical branch distribution. Given the above-mentioned, many countries including South Africa have well established banking systems.

As per Redelinghuis and Rensleigh (2010) South Africa has a well-established banking system which is competitive with most developed countries. They elaborate that over time, there has been four dominant market players in South Africa being ABSA, Standard Bank, Nedbank and First National Bank. Traditional banks are burdened by their physical infrastructure, corporate culture and regulation according to Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015).

Physical infrastructure largely includes the number of physical branches as well as the number of automated telling machines (ATM's) the bank has. The term "brick-and mortar" branch refers to a physical branch infrastructure and includes physical locations that customers can visit to conduct business according to Pritchard (2019).

The worldwide financial crises of 2007 and 2008 placed a big focus on corporate culture within Banks. Thakor (2015) highlighted that corporate culture has emerged as a very important topic as it pertains to restoring trust in the banking system as well as enhancing financial stability. The culture of suitable empowerment of staff is critical according to Coetzee (2018) in order to address the rigours of technology. Previously banks were extremely rigid in their processes and procedures, nowadays they will need to have a more participative culture moving forward to ensure staff members understand their roles and the need to perform certain tasks.

Chen, Li, Wu and Luo (2017) compared the response to the introduction of Fin Techs between the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and Citibank. An

interesting deduction was made regarding corporate culture specifically as it relates to innovation. ICBC is a very traditional Chinese Bank who (for technology and talent) focusses internally, whilst Citibank emphasizes cooperation with external internet companies, joint ventures and partnerships. They found that as a result ICBC was focused on innovation mostly in their head office environment, while branches were not motivated and did not have the resources to innovate compared to Citibank where in-branch innovation occurred.

Traditional Banks are heavily regulated and in South Africa there are continuously amendments and additions to the existing legislation. Falkena, Bamber, Llewellyn and Store (2001) identified that this regulation is important to secure stability in the economy, ensure institutional safety and soundness and to promote consumer protection. The challenge for traditional banks is that they have multiple points of representation in the form of branches and ATM's and a high level of human influence on compliance with such legislation. New entrants are mainly electronic and online based and are less burdened by this compliance compared to traditional banks.

Coetzee (2018) noticed that whilst regulators are placing more pressure on banks to re-align their organisational culture in the interest of their clients through market conduct regulation such as 'Treating Customers Fairly', developments in the digital banking space have not been governed as stringently as yet. Coetzee (2018) continues that the amount of big data Fin Tech's and banks have of their clients will put pressure on regulators to enforce compliance in areas such as cybersecurity and the protection of customer information.

2.4. New Entrants and Emerging Trends in the Banking Sector Internationally and Locally

Chen, Li, Wu and Luo (2017) established that the financial industry has significantly changed due to the development of financial technology (Fin Tech) in areas such as mobile internet, cloud computing, big data, search engines and blockchains. As a result, traditional banks are forced to transform and upgrade.

Internationally, a variety of Fin Tech companies has been coming to the fore to disrupt the dominance of the traditional bank. Bambrough (2018) referenced a study by consultancy Accenture which found that new entrants to the banking market, including challenger banks, technology companies and non-bank payment institutions, have

captured around a third of possible new revenue in the industry. Bambrough (2018) points to international Fin Tech companies such as Stripe, Robinhood and SoFi in the United States and China's Ant Financia 1 (which is a digital finance arm of online retail giant Alibaba) as major forces in this regard.

Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015) noted that start-up companies that are technology based have affected the financial industry in a significant way. Furthermore, Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta & Urbiola (2015) noted that the divide between the technological demands of customers and the perceived outdated services offered by traditional banks have widened. Watson (2000) established that customer demand for access to banking via the internet led to internet-only banks, which are banks that forego brick-and-mortar branches and primarily operates through the internet.

Fully digitized banks such as Discovery Bank and Thyme Bank have entered the South African market and are of the intention to gain market share from the traditional big four banks in South Africa (Faku 2019). Discovery Bank is an effort by the insurer Discovery to exploit its insurance customer base by launching a banking platform to these clients that will be serviced digitally (Businessstech, 2018). According to Coetzee (2018), Tyme Digital is a subsidiary of the Commonwealth Bank of Australia and it was the first digital bank launched in South Africa offering affordable and technology-based banking options to clients. The increased offering of digital alternatives to the banking applications and internet banking services of the traditional banks is creating an urgency amongst the traditional banks to improve their relevance in this regard.

Customers can gain access to their bank's website or applications via their laptop, tablets or cellphones to perform transactions that were traditionally performed in a branch. This allows for a customer to transact from any convenient location and reduces the number of customers visiting physical branches. Internal data from Standard Bank Free State Province's Operational Report (2020) indicated that in branch transactions at Standard Bank branches in the Free State Province has reduced on a year-on-year basis by 28%. At the same time, digital adoption and transactions performed by customers have increased in an excess of 40% during the same period.

Coetzee (2018) noted that the impact of the above has been that the four traditional banks in South Africa have all recently reduced their number of branches and have

opted for smaller and more digitally friendly outlets to enable clients to migrate to digital channels.

Traditionally, a large branch network and ATM's have been a competitive advantage in the banking context, but Vyas (2012) argued that it might now suddenly be a disadvantage as digital competitors don't have the same cost base as the brick-and-mortar banks and can undercut prices to end users as a result.

2.5. Digital Banking

2.5.1. Digitisation and Digitalisation

Before digital banking is defined and offerings unpacked, it is prudent to first understand the terms digitisation and digitalisation.

According to Bloomberg (2018), digitisation refers to the process of changing from analog to digital form. An example of this is the conversion of handwritten or typed text to a digital form.

Bloomberg (2018) further stated that digitalisation can be viewed from two perspectives, which are both applicable to this research project. The first refers to how people interact and how their social lives are moving towards digital communication and media. An example is the move away from analog technologies such as snail mail and landline telephone calls to email, social media and online chats. This has relevance in this research topic field considering the fact that this digitalisation trend is also evident in the manner in which people conduct their banking affairs. As Vyas (2012) found, any client with access to a phone, computer or browser can connect to their bank to perform virtual banking functions similar to what previously could be done in branch only. The second perspective Bloomberg (2018) has on digitalisation is the use of digital technologies to change a business model. This is also relevant in the case of this research study considering the earlier references to the entrance of Fin Tech companies and traditional banks altering their approaches on digital capability and investment to remain relevant.

According to Sulaiman and AbdelKarim (2019) the fourth industrial revolution includes the automation (digitisation) of processes and that the banking sector is no exception as there is a radical shift in banking worldwide towards digital banking given the advancements in technology.

In the context of this study the above two principles are critical considering the social movement away from analog processes, the way in which people interact and the importance of banks and their employees remaining relevant to their clients.

2.5.2. Defining Digital Banking

The penetration of the internet and mobile phones had a substantial impact on the habits and preferences of consumers (Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola 2015). The authors further that consumers share information about themselves on the internet, shop online and access new services daily. As such they have been calling for financial services to be available twenty-four hours a day and be equally as easy to use and interactive as their social media experiences.

Various definitions and terminologies for digital banking was found during this research, though no single unanimous definition could be established. For the purpose of this project we will refer to the phenomenon as digital banking, which is also referred to as mobile banking or electronic banking.

Chuang (2019) defined mobile banking as the provisioning and availability of bank related financial services supported by mobile telecommunication devices including a scope of services and facilities including bank and stock market transactions, account maintenance and access to customized information.

Another definition of digital banking by Kureshi and Bhatt (2018) is the offering of various banking services with the use of an electronic machine or technology without time or place constraints and with no direct involvement of the bank's employees. This definition will not carry relevance in this study as an emphasis will be placed on the inter-relation between channels and the employees of Standard Bank Bloemfontein's role in adding value to end users who make use both of the branch and of the digital channels.

Apte (2020) briefly summarised e-banking as the term that signifies and encompasses the entire sphere of technological advancements in the banking environment. Another simplistic definition was put forward by Kalra and Jain (2018) as the provision of customer services at anytime from anywhere at a click of your finger.

Considering the various definitions, the most relevant definition found, given the purpose of this research and therefore adopted as the preferred definition, is by

Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta & Urbiola (2015) defining digital banking as follows: “Digital banking concerns issues such as generating the supply, distribution and sales of financial products and services via digital channels, exploiting cutting-edge technology to know customers better and anticipate their needs swiftly and suitably, and an omni-channel solution, or the possibility of customers communicating with their bank via all channels, both analogue and digital, as well as the automation of services.”

This coherent definition addresses all the key components relevant to the digital journey being undertaken at Standard Bank -critically including the relevance of an omni-channel solution - where human interaction is still very much part of the strategy especially in the relationship banking space. A discussion of the various digital banking offerings will be provided in the next section.

2.5.3. Digital Banking Offerings

Whilst the basic digital banking offerings are standard across the various banks, there is a high sense of competition amongst banks to roll out more functionality and convenience to clients on a continuous basis, including value added services such as buying electricity, cellular phone data or even paying for your motor vehicle license through the bank’s digital platform.

Kalra and Jain (2018) listed services provided by Banks in the digital era as online banking, ATM’s, cellphone banking, fund transfer services, point of sale banking and sms banking. Various services known and used today are missing from this definition.

A more comprehensive summary is provided by Apte (2020) summarising the services provided by digital banking in three broad categories being convenience, flexibility and it being a time saver. Apte (2020) further noted that both corporate and retail clients no longer are willing to wait in queues in branches or hold on for a consultant when it comes to banking. Customers rather expect to be in a position to do the banking they need to do where and when they want to do so. The services listed by Apte (2020) includes ATM’s, internet banking, banking applications, mobile banking, phone banking, telebanking, electronic clearing services, electronic clearing cards, smart cards, doorstep banking and electronic fund transfers. All of these listed services allow customers to conduct banking affairs that previously would have necessitated the customer to go to a bank.

Reference to the websites of all the major Banks as well as new entrants like Thyme Bank, indicate that the full range of banking products as mentioned in the literature above can be accessed by digital means. Furthermore, the offerings continue to be enhanced and improved. As an example, Standard Bank's website also includes reference to an online application called Shyft Global Wallet, which allows trade and virtual methods of foreign currency exchange replacing the need to visit a branch or foreign exchange centre to obtain foreign currency notes. Such developments will continue with Fin Techs and banks alike all striving for further advancements to gain a competitive advantage.

Nedbank for an example, has been testing digital branches with facilities such as video banking, quick-chat banking and self-service kiosks where robo-advisers serve clients (Nedbank Group Ltd 2017). The video banking concept is also utilised by Bank of America who replaced in branch telephone services with customer-facing videoconferencing (Caruthers 2014) which is essentially a one on one discussion with a specialist bank employee in a remote location, meaning no in branch employees.

2.5.4. Benefits and Challenges of Digital Banking

There are numerous benefits and challenges stemming from digital banking which for this purpose will be looked at in the context of the customer or end-user as well as from the banking industry.

In general, customers are significantly affected and in a positive way (Apte, 2020). Benefits to customers can be highlighted as:

- Vyas (2012) highlighted a variety of convenience related advantages to customers such as:
 - o Access to real time balance information.
 - o Ability to conduct real time transfers and payments.
 - o Conducting bank requests online including stop payments, debit order reversals, opening of additional accounts or opening a letter of credit.
 - o Downloading bank statements.
 - o Bill payments can be made through electronic banking. In South Africa cellphone airtime and data purchases, electricity prepaid purchases or even entering the Lotto can be done from the banking application platforms.

- Access to electronic shopping malls.
- Access to personal investments.
- Online Share trading.
- Apte (2020) listed the greatest benefit to customers as the convenience of accessing their accounts from anywhere, anytime. Other benefits identified by Apte (2020) not already referenced by Vyas (2012) above are:
 - The availability and functionality of ATM's are enhancing convenience and a reduced dependency on engaging the bank itself. To elaborate, note accepting ATM's have greatly reduced in branch cash deposits as business owners and individuals prefer not queuing for a teller and can do so at any time outside of the bank's operating hours.
 - Through internet banking or on the banking applications, customers can open a range of banking accounts without going to the branch in person. Lending in the personal and business capacity is also now enabled for customers; to apply for and fulfill loan applications online.
 - All services currently available from the bank can be found on their website.
 - Electronic payment methods mean that a customer can now make payments by a variety of methods without carrying any cash with them.
 - Banks are now available twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

There are also various advantages and arising opportunities to the banking industry. Chuang (2019) found the following advantages to banks:

- Increased product holdings as a result of digital banking with a greater uptake in product lines such as loans, credit cards, mortgages and investments.
- There is a clear correlation that customers who make use of digital banking are likely more engaged with their financial institutions taking up more products and increasing transaction frequency compared to customers who do not make use of digital banking.
- There is a definite decrease in branch transactions which are translating into cost savings. The drop-in branch visits are likely because of simple transactions, deposits, transfers, loan and bill payments and other mundane transactions and can now be done remotely by clients. A detailed analysis of the impact of the reduction of branch transactions will be done in a later chapter

in this study. Importantly, Chuang (2019) noted that the fact that customers use branches less does not mean that the branch is not important to them. They will still use the branch for high-engagement transactions with staff, such as managing an asset or addressing possible fraud activity.

- There is less attrition for banks, as attrition rates of digital banking clients are lower than that of branch only customers.

Further to the above, Apte (2020), identified additional benefits to the banking industry stemming from digital banking:

- The growth of digital banking has assisted banks in controlling their overheads and operating costs.
- Repetitive and tedious tasks have been automated resulting in enhanced efficiencies, time usage and control.
- The industry has become more competitive and banks and Fin Techs need to innovate to identify new and additional revenue streams.
- The digital and electronic storage of information and documents has seen an enhancement in the documentation of records and transactions and a reduction in reliance on paper.
- The reach and capabilities of an online and digital presence is more beneficial than a physical branch network.

Challenges, concerns and limitations as it pertains to digital banking also applies both to customers and the banking industry. Firstly, looking at the impact on customers, Vyas (2012) raised the following concerns:

- Safety situations around ATM's and the abuse by fraudsters of bank cards cloned at ATM's or at point of sale devices.
- The danger of compromising your card number when buying online.

Apte (2020) added that there is a continued challenge regarding the confidentiality, integrity and authentication of websites and transactions when conducting online transactions. Chuang (2019) raised a critical challenge which is wireless network availability. Especially in rural areas, digital banking is disincentivized due to poor or no connectivity. In South Africa, cellular data is expensive which results in large portions of the population reverting to traditional banking or cash transactions. A further challenge for customers noted by Chuang (2019) relates to high mobile banking

costs. In a competitive environment and with new role players such as Fin Techs entering the market the expectation is that pricing will be drastically reduced.

From a banking sector perspective, the main challenges experienced relates mainly to security and connectivity according to Kureshni and Bhatt (2018). Financial institutions have the responsibility to ensure client security and considering the high levels of activity from hackers and increased cyber-crime, this has become a critical focus point for all banks.

Furthermore, Kureshni & Bhatt (2018) raised the concern of connectivity for banks. Though banks do not have any direct control over the factor of connectivity, it has a substantial impact on their customer experience when issues are prevalent. For example, it may be a challenge for a bank to provide digital banking services in specific geographical areas where supporting infrastructure to sustain digital services, are not in place (Ozili, 2017).

Developing or acquiring the right technology, deploying, maintaining and leveraging it optimally whilst ensuring cost effectiveness and delivering returns to shareholders is a key challenge to banks according to Apte (2020). Furthermore, competition suddenly is no longer only the local competitors in your local area but includes competition from foreign and private sector banks with competitive digital offerings. Apte (2020) also raised a key concern to be addressed in this research paper which is how banks address personal service to customers who physically come to the branch; in other words what value do their staff members add over and above the digital service rendered.

2.5.5. The Impact of Digital Banking on the Future of Branch Banking

Branch banking will never be the same again. Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015) identified that Fin Techs have burst onto the financial industry scene exploiting the existing divide between the new demands of customers and the sometimes-outdated offerings of traditional banks. As a result of this new competition, Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta & Urbiola (2015) identified that traditional banks reacted to the change in demand by developing new digital channels and products to position themselves in the competitive market. The changes digital banking is requiring of traditional banks are far reaching. The challenge for traditional banks is to maintain the relevance of

their branches at a time when more and more clients are banking online (de Paula, 2010).

The context of this study is the impact of the digital era on branch banking staff. As a result, it is critical to understand the views of the leadership of the banking industry. Sim Tshabalala, CEO of Standard Bank Group, was quoted in 2019 as saying that considering the fact that foot flow to branches have fallen off a cliff, branches of the future will look very different and will be employing a different mix of people (Strydom, 2019). This quote is of great significance for the purpose of this study as it acknowledged the fact that the skill set prevalent in the Standard Bank branch network today may not be adequate.

All banks strive to achieve high levels of digital adoption by clients given the benefits set out earlier in this chapter. Customer trust of online banking is a key component that leads to the adoption thereof or not, and as a result a key deduction from Flavian, Guinaliu & Torres (2006) is that the higher the levels of trust in the brick-and-mortar branch, the higher the likelihood of trust in the online services of the bank. In that context, de Paula (2010) identified the following areas to focus on in order to optimize branch banking in the future:

- Build smaller, more neighborhood-based branches and phase out the larger branches when opportunities arise.
- Use technology in branch to minimize the need for human tellers, however, simultaneously use the branch as a migration point for digital services where employees can educate clients about the various offerings.
- Cross training of employees is at the crux of this study. As the headcount reduces as we move into the future, it will be even more important that the employees in branch have the ability to engage the customers and provide value adding solutions in their interactions.

Strengthening the above perspective, Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015) reiterated the importance of having employees in branches that have the ability to adapt from the administrative and sales tasks they performed in the past, to being able to interact with clients on high-end products and focusing on building relationships with customers.

The next section of the study will discuss the employability of the workforce currently in place at Standard Bank branches in Bloemfontein. Coetzee (2018) found that the fast growth in the use of technology in banking services has placed great pressure on banks to employ staff with the required skill sets. The next section will interrogate this phenomenon.

2.6. The Impact of Digitisation on Employability Skills of Branch Banking Staff

According to De Paula (2010), despite all the advancements in technology and new features in banks, the human element remains critical. He stated that the skills that banks are now looking for is much more centered around the ability to engage with customers than to perform transactional tasks. The engagement with the client can also be interpreted as selling solutions or adding value to customers.

Outcomes from various literature sources underlines the importance of trust from the customer towards the bank. This trust from the consumer is established not only from the engagement with digital platforms, but also from engagements with staff at the traditional branch office (Flavian, Guinaliu and Torres, 2006); there is a positive correlation between a customer's trust levels of a traditional branch and that of the digital channels of the bank.

This argument is supported by Khanboubi and Boulmakoul (2018) who found that customers do not want a dehumanized bank and most customers place a high premium on the relationships they hold with bank staff. They also argued that the digital advancements require all of the employees to improve on a number of principles, but most notably communication. A key point raised by Khanboubi & Boulmakoul (2018) aligns with the findings we had in the employability section above, that recruitment, skills management and training will be critical for continued success.

Technology based skill sets has become a necessity for branch banking staff. Standard Bank Group (2016) recognized this and stated that staff will be empowered by giving them access to advanced technology and tools that support the future world of work. Coetzee (2018) added that staff will not only be required to keep up with technological developments, but also to innovate and offer improved solutions to the clients.

An interesting consideration is the role of automation or the so-called robo-advisers. Bouyon (2018) established that whilst these devices will greatly reduce costs for banks as it relates to branches, it is only successful in the performance of mundane or routine tasks. As a result, hybrid models with human intervention will still be required in more complex tasks. However, various European banks are considering automating all manual processes relating to contract signatures and KYC requirements. In this light, it makes it even more important for the staff remaining in branches to ensure the development of skills and a high level of learning agility.

McQuaid and Lindsay (2005) established three interrelated components contributing towards employability that is found relevant in this regard. The three components are individual factors, personal circumstances and external factors. Delving into the individual factors first, the skills and attributes of employees as per McQuaid & Lindsay (2005) are:

- “Essential attributes such as basic social skills and reliability.
- Personal competencies such as diligence, motivation and confidence.
- Basic transferable skills including literacy and numeracy.
- Key transferable skills such as problem-solving, communication, adaptability, work process management and team working skills. In this category problem solving and adaptability are of critical importance considering the fact that clients coming to the branch most likely will have more complex queries or require value adding interactions.
- High level transferable skills including self-management and commercial awareness. These points are crucial as branch management leadership structures have been reduced in recent years and as a result branch staff need to be able to self-manage much more than before. Commercial awareness is critical considering the fact that with enhanced empowerment in decision making, comes the responsibility for these staff members to make informed decisions.
- Qualification and educational attainment. In the past, the typical branch banking employee did not have a tertiary qualification. However, the minimum requirements of the FAIS Act stipulates minimum qualification criteria that these staff members need to attain. In the case of the employees that will be part of

the sample of the research, there are many which are currently in the process of obtaining a qualification.

- Knowledgebase which includes work experience and occupational skills.”

The components of personal circumstances include elements such as household circumstances of the employees, the work culture they operate in and access to resources such as transport (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2018). More recently, a specific requirement of branch banking staff is mobility, in case it is necessary to visit clients at their premises when the need arises to fulfill a transaction. As such, transport is a critical requirement for branch bankers of the future.

Lastly, the external factors affecting the employability of branch banking staff includes issues such as labour demand conditions (McQuaid & Lindsay, 2018). As elaborated in the above sections, the digitalisation of the banking sector has been a great external factor on the employment ability of branch banking staff.

2.7. Conclusion

Various key considerations were examined in this chapter. The context was provided for the fact that even though banks traditionally dominated the financial industry, the introduction of Fin Tech companies have forced traditional banks to embrace technology and invest heavily in it to remain relevant.

It was established that there are a number of emerging trends that banks need to cope with and adapt to. most noticeably the advancement of digital banking and the social phenomenon of the radically changing customer behaviour to a more convenience based, twenty-four-seven type of expectation when it comes to banking. To this end, various aspects, impacts, benefits and challenges of the growth of digital banking were explored with the main deduction being that it is here to stay and that it will forever change the banking landscape.

Given this context, the chapter then turned its attention to the employability of employees which included looking into two employability models being the USEM and CareerEdge models.

The chapter was concluded given the knowledge taken from the literature review to understand the impact of digital banking on the employability skills of bank employees. The study will further interrogate these employability skills, especially that of the frontline branch banking staff in Standard Bank Bloemfontein branches.

Chapter 3 - Research Methodology

3.1. Introduction

The research problem section covered in Chapter 1 highlighted the void in empirical evidence that address the employability skills and functions of frontline banking staff. This study's primary objective is therefore to explore the employability skills in the digital banking era for branch banking employees at Standard Bank in Bloemfontein.

As a result, this study aims to investigate digital banking as a whole, its effects on traditional banking and whether branch banking staff's employability skills are relevant in the changing context.

The previous chapters provided a detailed account of the employability skills required in a changing environment and the applicable employability models that were applied in the study. The data for this study will be obtained by self-administered semi-structured interviews conducted by the researcher. The research is targeted at a specific population within the Standard Bank Bloemfontein branches.

The literature review is the basis on which the objectives and questions utilised in the semi-structured interview is formulated in order to determine the necessary learnings set out above.

3.2. Research Design

A post-positivistic approach will be applied to the research by utilizing qualitative methods. Gefen (2019) noted that post-positivism acknowledges the standard of positivism - that the researcher is willing to put his/her theory to a test that can falsify it - whilst acknowledging that there are social processes in the science of research too. Corry, Porter McKenna (2019) noted that for positivists, an objective truth exists, and the goal of science is to discover it. The authors further identified that positivists take an empiricist approach and that they regard laws as observable in relation to cause and effect.

The epistemological orientation applied will be interpretivist considering the data collection method of semi-structured interviews, which will be utilized during the study. Interpretivism as per Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) assume that the research approach needs to respect the

differences between people and the objects of the natural sciences. Corry, Porter & McKenna (2019) noted that interpretivists highlight the importance of considering an individual's capacity to think and to act in a particular manner.

From an ontological point of view, the constructionist approach will be utilized in this study given that Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart & Wagner (2014) argued that social phenomena are developed by the actions of social characters. Even though these frontline staff members operate in an organisation with set rules, values and objectives, it is also true that in the various branches, the people set the culture in how they interact with one another.

Qualitative research according to Hennink, Hutter and Bailey (2020) in broad terms is an approach that allows the researcher to understand the people's perspectives and experiences in detail. This can be done through a variety of in-depth interviews, focus groups, observations and content analysis. The authors further elaborated that qualitative research gives the researcher the opportunity to identify issues from the perspective of the participant. This in turn allows the researcher to get a better grasp in interpreting the behaviour of participants.

Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt and Wagner (2014) pointed out that qualitative research is starting to become increasingly more important to business research as it is more concerned with focusing on concepts rather than developing specific measures. It is also noted that the use of qualitative methods necessitates it to be unbiased and trustworthy.

3.3. Sampling Strategy

The non-probability sampling strategy will be applied to the study. Wolf, Joye and Smith (2016) identified that this sampling strategy introduces the possibility that the sample selection criteria is related to the attitudes or behaviour of interest of the respondents.

There are various types of non-probability sampling; the relevant method to use in this study is the purposive sampling method. Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) defined it as choosing participants in a strategic way so that those individuals sampled are relevant to the study. Lamm and

Lamm (2019) found that non-probability samples have shown results that are as good as, or even better, than probability-based samples.

The participants selected to partake in the study will be limited to the frontline employees dealing with sales and service-related matters in Standard Bank Bloemfontein branches. The applicable role is called a Universal Banker at Standard Bank. These employees are all in the general staff category and would traditionally deal with administrative functions.

The rationale for the selection of the participants is that they have the highest levels of interaction with walk-in customers at branches requiring sales or service-related assistance. As a result, their employability skills need to align with the demands of the changing banking environment. All tellers, team leaders and management at the selected branches were excluded from the sample.

The population of this study will be limited to all the Universal Bankers working within Standard Bank branches in Bloemfontein. Bankers from Brandwag, Bloemfontein, Preller Square, Central Park, Lemo Mall and Langenhoven Park branches will be interviewed as part of the research.

The sample size based on the above criteria, being the Universal Bankers within Standard Bank at the mentioned branches, was 28. Considering the specific staff members required for the research, being limited in terms of numbers, the purposive sampling method as stated above was utilised, where participants were chosen for their unique characteristics (Bryman, Bell, Hirschohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aardt & Wagner, 2014), in this case for the positions they held within specific branches in Bloemfontein. All positions other than Universal Bankers in branches were excluded from the study.

Purposive sampling according to Sharma (2017) can be utilised to make generalisations from the sample that have been studied, even though it may differ from study to study and whether they are theoretical, analytical or logical in nature. As this research will focus only on branch banking staff in Bloemfontein, generalisations were considered on the broader Standard Bank population.

3.4. Data Collection Method

Semi-structured interviews as described by Galetta and Cross (2013) are sufficiently structured to discuss specific topics whilst simultaneously affording participants the opportunity to offer new insights to the study. Galetta & Cross (2013) also stated that the semi-structured interview process affords the scope to include structured segments ranging from fully open-ended questions to more theoretically driven questions. Semi-structured interviews are preferred over surveys for this study, as it avoids superficial responses. Furthermore, it gives the researcher the opportunity and flexibility to ask follow-up and clarification questions over and above the scripted questions (Shalhoub, Marshall and Ippolito, 2017).

Twenty-eight semi-structured interviews was to be conducted with Universal Bankers as part of this research, with each interview lasting approximately 20 to 30 minutes. All 28 Universal Bankers in the Bloemfontein area were approached to partake in the research. The researcher will facilitate all semi-structured interviews with the respondents and all conversations will be recorded and transcribed verbatim to allow for further analysis after the interviews. The semi-structured interviews will be used as a manner to establish which employability skills are required for branch banking staff in the digital era.

The semi-structured interviews comprise of 7 closed ended questions and 10 open ended questions which will be used by the interviewer as a conversational guide with frequent follow up questions for clarity purposes. The questions were grouped into the following sections:

Section A – Demographic questions.

Section B – Employability skills required by bankers.

Section C – How digital banking has influenced employability skills required by bankers.

Section D – Employability skills that need to be developed by bankers.

Appendix D provides the detail of the questions that will form the basis of the interactions during the semi-structured interviews with the 28 bankers.

3.5. Procedure

The data collection did not start before the necessary ethical clearance had been provided. Once obtained, the researcher advised the target population at Standard Bank of the intention to undertake the research through a bulk correspondence to the 28 bankers. Thereafter, individual meetings was scheduled with the various bankers to clarify the objective of the study and the procedures that will be followed for data collection.

A letter of informed consent will be sent to all participants underlining the purpose of the research, general instructions to participate in the semi-structured interviews and to confirm the anonymity of their feedback. The details of the researcher and the study leader as well as confirmation of approval from Standard Bank to proceed with the research, will also be included.

The timing of the research to be undertaken coincide with the Covid-19 virus outbreak in South Africa which limits face-to-face human interaction. To mitigate the risk, the researcher will conduct the research electronically by doing the interviews via online meeting facilities such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Skype. When participants prefer face-to-face interviews, it will be considered given that the following protocols will be evident at the various branches:

- Each universal banker must have a protective screen separating him/her from the person they are consulting with.
- Social distancing of 1.5 meters in the back-office space and 2 meters with customer engagements must be applied.
- Daily hygiene cleansing of all workstations with the prescribed liquids must be performed.
- Each customer entering the branch or utilising any equipment in the branch must sanitise their hands with the provided sanitisers.
- All customer facing staff must wear protective masks whilst tellers must also wear protective gloves.

The preferred interview method from a hygiene perspective will most definitely be virtual meetings via the electronic means mentioned above.

3.6. Data Analysis

Considering the qualitative nature of the data collection methods, it will be important for the researcher to interpret and apply coding to the data for it to be re-presented during the study. Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santos, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart and Wagner (2014) indicated that utilizing content analysis will enable the researcher to focus on measuring and interpreting different units of analysis. An example would be measuring and interpreting words that were frequently used by respondents, subjects and themes arising from the study. This process is important to ensure that the necessary themes can be identified, analyzed and interpreted for the relevant recommendations to be made.

Content analysis will be utilised as it is a systematic process to transform large amounts of texts into a summary of results following a process of analyzing raw data from the verbatim transcribed semi-structured interviews conducted (Erlingsson and Brysiewicz, 2017). Furthermore, in line with the author's findings, content analysis will be the next step and entails the formation of categories or themes.

Most importantly, as per Erlingsson & Brysiewicz (2017), content analysis is a reflective and continuous process in which identifying themes, coding and categorizing is not something that can be done once off. It is in fact a repetitive process to reflect on the initial analysis to reach insightful outcomes and will be applied as such in this study to get the relevant findings.

3.7. Data Saturation

The 28 Universal Bankers that were to be interviewed for this study, all perform the same roles, and therefore it was necessary to consider saturation. According to Francis, Johnston, Robertson, Glidewell, Entwistle, Eccles and Grimshaw (2010), data saturation is achieved when no new themes, findings, concepts or problems are evident in the data. The researcher paid close attention to the achievement of data saturation considering that Fusch and Ness (2015) pointed out that failure to reach data saturation has a negative impact on the validity of the research. Fusch & Ness (2015) further stated that when and how data maturity is attained varies from study to study. From the population of 28 respondents, data saturation was achieved after a sample of 14 interviews were achieved.

3.8. Ethical Considerations

According to Bryman, Bell, Hirschsohn, Dos Santon, Du Toit, Masenge, Van Aart & Wagner (2014), it is essential to consider potential ethical issues at the point of research design, rather than when the conflict arises.

Permission obtained

Singh and Wassenaar (2016) outlined the importance to obtain permission from gatekeepers when research is conducted in an institutional setting. According to Baily (2007) it is critical to obtain the relevant permission from gatekeepers and to obtain informed consent from participants as both can be in the same setting, which in the case of this study is true. For this study, permission will be obtained from the Provincial Director of Standard Bank in the Free State. Permission will also be sought from the Provincial Director to conduct the interviews during work hours whilst participants will also be given the option to conduct the interviews before or after work or during lunch hours.

Informed consent as per Singh & Wassenaar (2016) has to be obtained for individual participants for all aspects of the data collection process. Participants will also have the right to refuse being recorded in video or audio format according to the authors. It will therefore be important for all staff members partaking in the research to provide informed consent and as such a consent form will be signed and kept as evidence in a safe place by the researcher.

Petrova, Dewing and Camilleri (2016) outlined that all strategies begin through the awareness of the researcher as it pertains to confidentiality. The authors further elaborate that the key values required from the researcher pertains to autonomy, privacy and keeping to one's commitment. Lastly, the researcher needs to display attributes such as honesty and respectfulness towards the participants. According to Baily (2007), *confidentiality* is a very important ethical issue as participants needed to be advised that the study is anonymous, confidential or neither. The information received from the respondents will be treated as confidential. The information was locked away safely where only the researcher had access to it.

Voluntary participation as per Kilinc and Firat (2017) is the choice or action performed without others' influence or being compelled to partake. Lavrakas (2008) defined

voluntary participation as the participant's right to exercise their free will in deciding whether to partake in the research activity. Where bankers are not comfortable to participate in the study, he/she will be excluded from the study by the researcher. The voluntary nature of the research was critical for the credibility of the research.

The researcher will avoid prejudice and remain objective to avoid any harm to any of the participants of the study. The benefit to the sample selected would be in the feedback to their organisation regarding the required employability skills for their roles. The development of those skills could be included in their individual personal development programs ensuring development and improved relevance.

3.9. Trustworthiness and Rigour of the Research

The quality criteria for all qualitative research according to Korstjens and Moser (2018) are the credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability of the research.

The research's credibility as per Cash, Clark, Alcock, Dickson, Eckley and Jager (2008) refers to the sources of the information being deemed trustworthy and believable. There must be clarity that the information has been independently evaluated to ensure the research can be deemed credible. In the case of this research, the researcher's credibility of not having preconceived ideas or opinions is critical because the researcher is a Senior Manager within the organisation.

According to Burchett, Umoquit and Dobrow (2011) *transferability* of the research indicate the likelihood that a study's findings can be replicated in a new specific setting in which case the outcomes of the study's effectiveness would remain the same. This will be a particular point of focus; therefore, great care will be given to the analysis of the feedback to identify areas of transferability to a broader audience than just Standard Bank Bloemfontein.

Korstjens & Moser (2018) defined the *dependability* of the research as the manner in which the findings, interpretations and recommendations were supported by the data obtained from the participants. The authors continued to confirm that *conformability* is the extent to which the research findings would be able to be validated by other researchers. This will be important for the study should the work be undertaken by fellow researchers elsewhere in the future.

3.10. The Demarcation of the Field of Study

This study of the employability skills and functions of branch banking staff will be conducted by way of interviews with selected staff members of Standard Bank within the Bloemfontein area.

The targeted individuals who will partake in the research is the Universal Bankers working for Standard Bank in Bloemfontein at their Brandwag, Bloemfontein, Preller Square, Central Park, Lemo Mall and Langenhoven Park branches.

The research will be conducted on these specific general staff members in key frontline roles. Other branch staff such as team leaders and managers will be excluded from the study.

The field of study researched will be Human Resource Management.

3.11. Conclusion

This chapter referred to the methods used by the researcher to collect the data as part of the qualitative study, and how the data was analyzed and interpreted. The method of collection and analysis were the most effective considering the objectives of the research in order to address the primary and secondary objectives set out in Chapter 1.

The risks of the research include the potential psychological impact on the participants in terms of them realizing shortcomings in employability skills. Individuals will benefit from the study in that employability skills that need to be developed will be identified and can be included in their personal development plans. This will enable them to proactively address development areas and improve their employability within the organisation and financial sector. As it pertains to the organisation where the research is to be conducted, feedback from the researcher will be available to them. An independent view can be taken on the level of employability skills of the employees engaged, to establish potential learning and development interventions that the organisation needs to develop. As a result, the potential benefits exceed the risks in this study. The following chapters proceeds to discuss the details of the findings.

Chapter 4 - Data Analysis and Interpretation

4.1. Introduction

Qualitative data collection was conducted by utilising semi-structured interviews. Subsequent to the initial intention to interview 28 Universal Bankers across various branches in Bloemfontein, the interview process was concluded when data saturation was reached after interviewing 14 participants.

The research setting and procedure involved virtual interviews with 14 Universal Bankers via Microsoft Teams. The researcher obtained the approval of each of the participants to make use of the virtual interviewing method and also to record each of the interviews for transcription purposes.

4.2. Analysis and Interpretation of Biographical Data

The sample of participants in this study included 14 Universal Bankers from various Standard Bank branches in Bloemfontein. The fourteen individuals were all in general staff positions and the demographic delineation is depicted in Table 4.1 below.

Table 4.1. Sample Demographics.

Participants	Gender	Race	Home Language	Qualification	Job level
1	Female	African	Zulu	Certificate after matric	General staff
2	Female	Indian	English	Certificate after matric	General staff
3	Female	African	Sotho	Diploma after matric	General staff
4	Female	African	Sotho	Matric	General staff
5	Female	African	Tswana	Degree	General staff
6	Female	African	Xhosa	Certificate after matric	General staff
7	Male	African	Afrikaans	Diploma after matric	General staff
8	Female	African	Sotho	Certificate after matric	General staff
9	Female	African	Sotho	Matric	General staff
10	Female	Coloured	Afrikaans	Certificate after matric	General staff
11	Male	African	Sotho	Certificate after matric	General staff
12	Female	African	Sotho	Certificate after matric	General staff
13	Male	African	Sotho	Diploma after matric	General staff
14	Male	African	Sotho	Diploma after matric	General staff

It can be seen in Table 4.1 and in Figure 4.1 that the vast majority of respondents were female, making up 71% (ten participants) of the sample whilst males accounted for 29% (4 participants) of the selected sample.

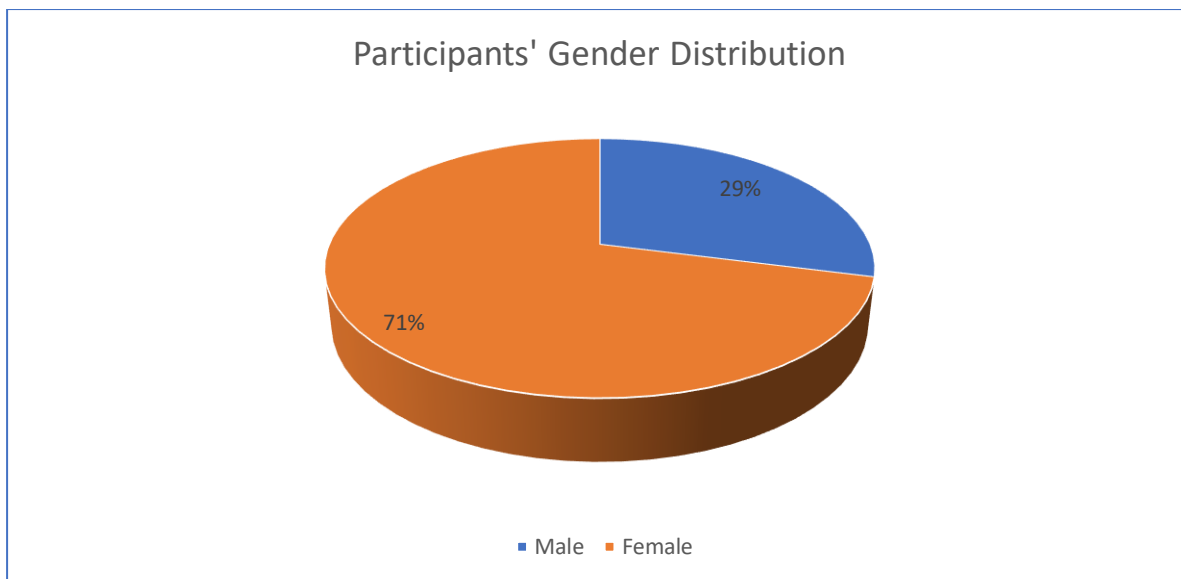


Figure 4.1. Participants' Gender Distribution.

The demographic distribution with regards to race was constituted of more Africans in the sample, with 86% (12 participants) being African and 7% being Indian (1 participant) and coloured (1 participant) respectively as can be seen in Figure 4.2.

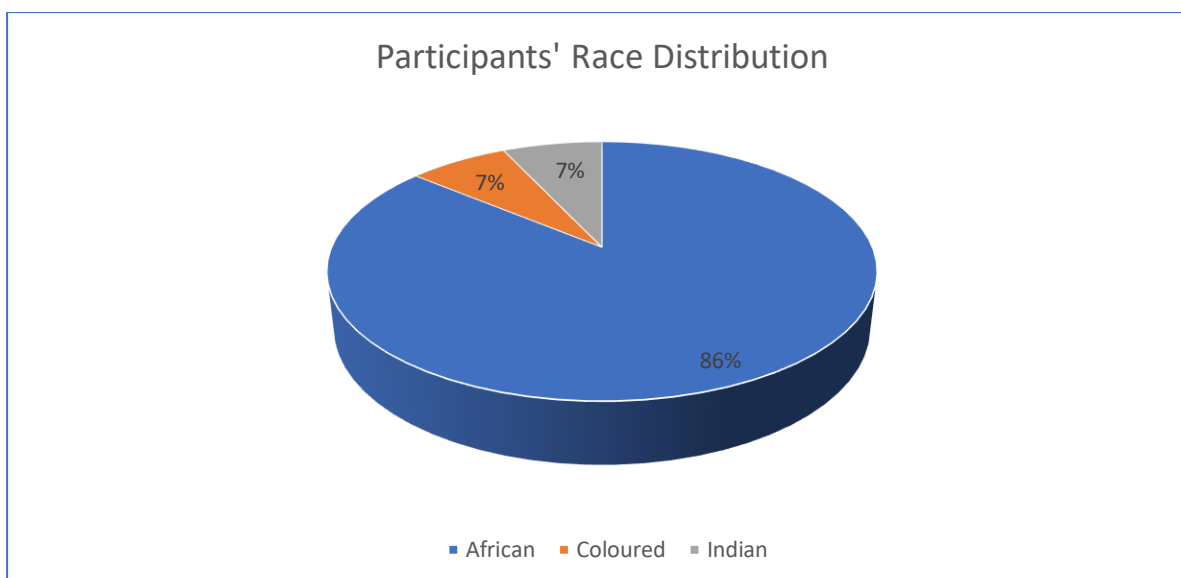


Figure 4.2. Participants' Race Distribution.

As it pertains to home language preferences of the participants, it was interesting to note that only 7% (1 participant) had English as a home language whilst it is also the official business language within Standard Bank branches. The home language most prevalent amongst participants was Sotho which accounted to 58% (8 participants), whilst 14% (2 participants) had Afrikaans as their home language. Xhosa, Zulu and

Tswana each accounted for 7% of participants (1 participant each). The language preference of the participants can be seen in Figure 4.3 below.

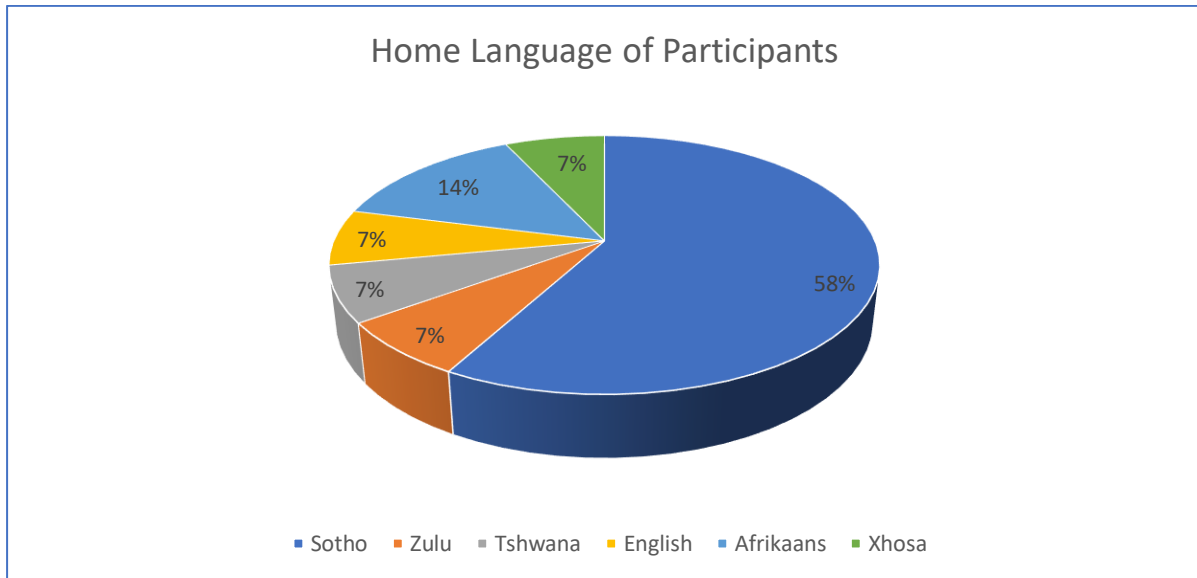


Figure 4.3. Distribution of Home Language of the Participants.

Regarding the qualifications of the participants, 14% (2 participants) held Matric as their highest qualification. Only 7% (1 participant) held a degree, whilst 50% (7 participants) held Certificates after matric and 29% (4 participants) held Diplomas after matric as their highest qualification. This is illustrated in Figure 4.4 below. Furthermore, 100% (14 participants) of the participants are currently in the general staff job level in line with the sample selection criteria.

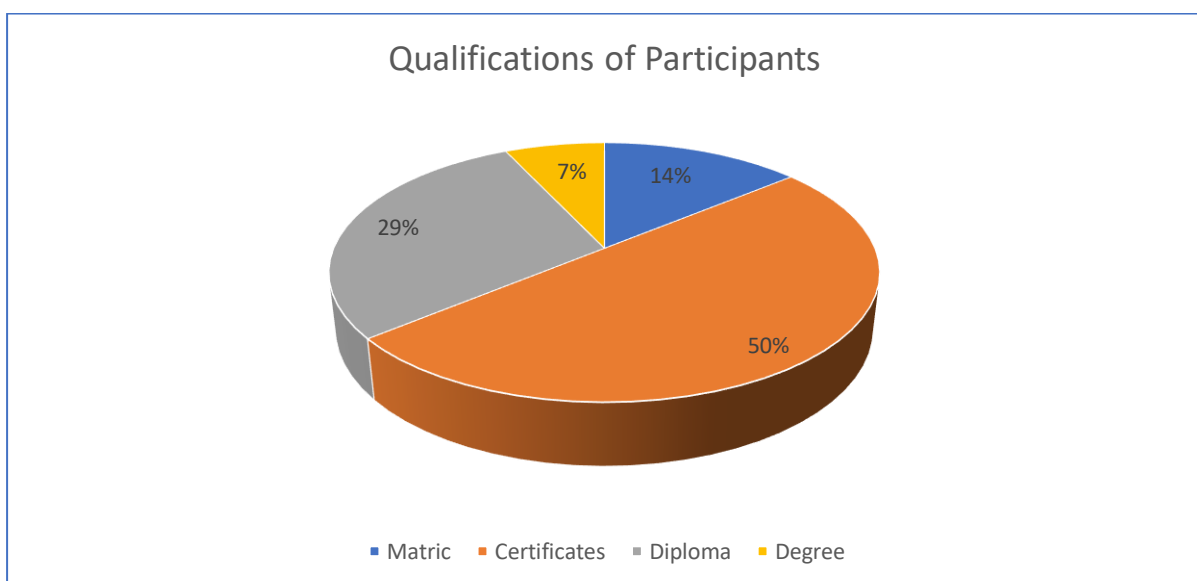


Figure 4.4. Distribution of the Highest Qualifications of the Participants.

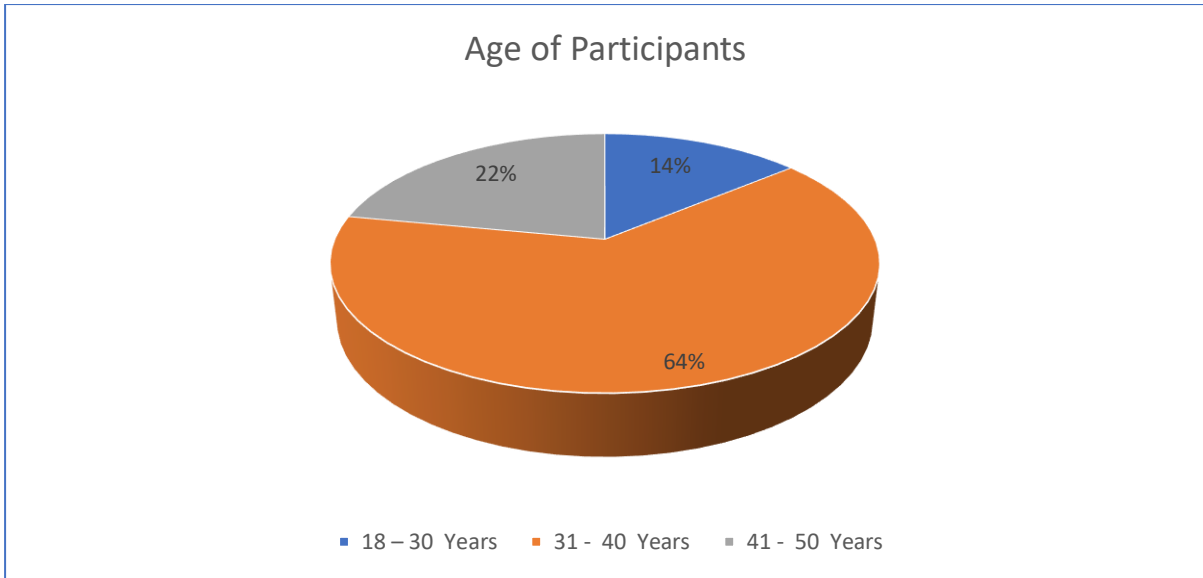


Figure 4.5. Distribution of the Age of the Participants.

It is illustrated in Figure 4.5 that 64% (9 participants) of the sample was between the ages of 31 and 40 years. Furthermore, 14% (2 participants) were between the ages of 18 and 30 years whilst 22% (3 participants) were aged between 41 and 50 years.

In Figure 4.6, the distribution of the experience of participants at Standard Bank is illustrated. An interesting mix of years of experience is evident with 29% (4 participants) working for the Bank for more than 15 years and the exact same percentage of participants is working for the Bank for less than 5 years. Individuals who have between 6- and 10-years' experience at Standard Bank, accounted to 21% (3 respondents) as did the participants that have 11 to 15 years' experience.

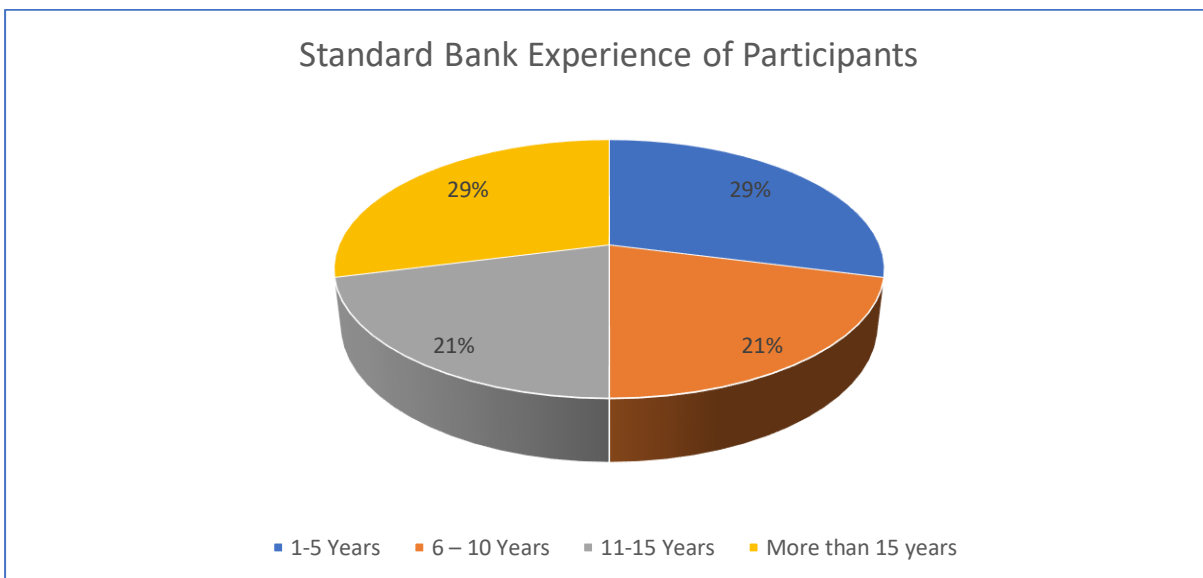


Figure 4.6. Distribution of the Standard Bank Experience of Participants.

In terms of tenure of the participants in their existing roles, Figure 4.7 below depicts the distribution of experience in their current role.

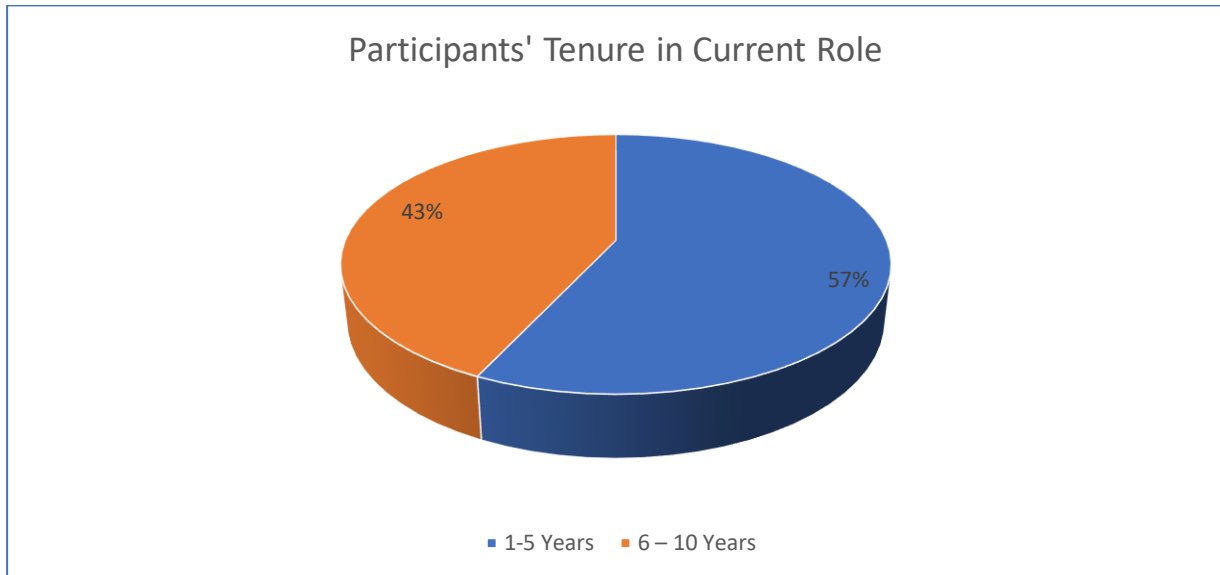


Figure 4.7. Distribution of the Participants' Tenure in their Current Role.

Further to the length of tenure at Standard Bank it is interesting to note that 57% (8 participants) of the sample have been in their current roles for less than 5 years. The remainder of the sample - 43% (6 participants) - have been in their current roles between 6 and 10 years. From an insight perspective, this experience came in handy in unpacking the various semi-structured interview questions.

As noted earlier, semi-structured interviews were utilised in an effort to explore more profound meanings by allowing new information and themes to emerge from the results, something a qualitative research approach would not have done. The researcher captured audio recordings of the participants' answers in order not to miss any information amongst the high volume of data that qualitative studies provide.

4.3. Analysis and Interpretation of Data Obtained

Data analysis included the transcription from the audio recordings that were consolidated into Excel sheets indicating the feedback per participant. Thereafter, thematic analysis was used in order to identify the associations that existed between the phenomena.

The researcher also made use of verbatim quotes from the interview responses and compared it with available literature in order to substantiate the validity of the data and to ensure the main research questions were adequately addressed.

The findings of the semi-structured interviews utilised to conduct the research have been tabulated, indicating the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the study. The researcher utilised verbatim quotes obtained from some of the participants' answers to substantiate some of the findings.

From Table 4.2 the frequency of the various sub-themes that emerged from the interviews, as it pertains to employability skills currently needed and skills that need to be developed to ensure future employability in the frontline roles in the bank, can be seen. The findings in Table 4.2 indicates that technological and digital skills, communication skills, people and relationship skills, selling and marketing skills and flexibility and being adaptive to change were identified as some of the key skills required to ensure future employability within the bank.

Table 4.2. Frequency of Themes Related to the Employability Skills Required by Bankers.

Themes and sub-themes		Frequency
Theme	Employability skills required by bankers	57
Sub-Themes	Communication skills	9
	Flexibility / Being adaptive to change	6
	Time management	2
	People / Relationship skills	9
	Technological / Digital skills	16
	Selling / Marketing skills	8
	Product knowledge	4
	Sign language	3

4.3.1. Employability Skills Required by Bankers

In line with the main purpose of the study which is to identify employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein, respondents gave their insights into the employability skills currently needed in their existing role and also which skills in their opinion, they need to develop for future employability.

4.3.1.a. Technological and Digital Skills

The importance of Universal Bankers having the necessary technological and digital skills was the skill that occurred most frequently in this research. The vast majority of respondents acknowledged changing customer behaviour and expectations, enhanced self service capability on self-service channels and more digitally savvy customers as the reasons why this is the most important skill to have to remain employable.

The following participant highlighted the importance of remaining relevant to a customer as a banker by enhancing their own digital skills:

“We must develop our digital skills. Customers don’t want to go to the bank to increase a limit. We need to teach customers how to do it themselves as it is convenient. I need to know and show customers how to download the banking app and show the customers on the app how to perform tasks and earn loyalty points.” (Participant 7, male, post matric certificate, black/African)

Another participant echoed the above sentiment and elaborated on the importance of these skills in helping customers:

“We need to continue learning new technology and we must also teach customers how to use this technology. For example, we can show clients how to send money to loved ones.” (Participant 13, female, post matric diploma, black/African)

Another participant indicated that your relevance as a banker is dependent on being able to show customers how digital alternatives work:

“You need to know everything about digital banking and be informed to be able to assist customers digitally.” (Participant 14, male, post matric diploma, black/African)

One participant indicated some of the accompanying challenges or frustrations experienced in upskilling themselves and customers on digital means. The participant

indicated that both time and device constraints sometimes have an adverse impact on their intended upskilling:

“Looking at customers, the problem is that by the time you get to show the customer the banking app, the next client is waiting in line. Another challenge is that there are different types of phones and sometimes the phone does not want to connect to the Bank’s wi-fi, or the client doesn’t have data.” (Participant 2, female, post matric certificate, Indian)

4.3.1.b. Communication Skills

The findings showed that a core skill required and one that should be improved to remain employable is communication skills. Many of the respondents indicated that even though customers can perform a wide variety of digital functions themselves, good communication skills are imperative to ensure that customers that visit the branch are adequately serviced.

Listening skills were identified by some participants as a key skill and is evidenced by the feedback of this participant:

“Listening skills are important as we need to understand our customers and what they want.” (Participant 6, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

An interesting learning and finding from the research were that a number of respondents identified the need for sign language in a particular hub within Bloemfontein as bankers are struggling to adequately service the deaf customers in their community. The importance of acquiring this skill was expressed by the following participant:

“Sign language skills to communicate with deaf customers is really a challenge. There are many deaf customers frequenting our branch.” (Participant 11, male, post matric certificate, black/African)

Another participant reinforced the importance of being able to communicate with different types of clients depending on the situation at hand:

“We need to have good communication skills as we are constantly in contact with customers and need to be able to handle all kinds of situations.” (Participant 1, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

An interesting insight from another participant was that strong communication skills are required from a sales perspective as well as by Universal Bankers:

“When we are speaking to clients, we need to establish what really matters to them. For that to happen we must not only listen to understand, but also be able to engage in conversation to understand the customers better.” (Participant 5, female, degree, black/African)

4.3.1.c. People / Relationship Skills

One might assume that in the digital age, people and/or relationship skills would become less important. The findings from the semi-structured interviews actually confirmed the contrary by placing a high level of importance on these skills for future employability. Various participants indicated that the ability to handle complex interpersonal situations including the ability to handle conflict is deemed necessary in their roles. The following participant reflected this in her feedback:

“I really need to have strong relationship skills as I am constantly in contact with persons. I need to be able to build relationships with different types of customers and be able to handle different kinds of situations.” (Participant 1, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

One participant gave an interesting - though non-conventional - response regarding the importance of relationship skills:

“Most important is people skills. The what matters conversations with customers needs to be developed. I need to continuously develop my people skills, specifically communicating with customers. I almost need to develop a sense to pick up what customers are thinking – like reading their minds.” (Participant 5, female, degree, black/African)

Self-awareness and being able to work with people were evidenced from the feedback of this participant:

“We need to start and speak to the heart of our customers by being patient and wanting to work with people.” (Participant 14, male, post-matric diploma, black/African)

Even though it has been clear from the feedback in the research that there is a strong theme of digitisation in banking, this participant pointed to the importance of people skills and human interaction still being sought after by clients:

“Customers still want human interaction. When the customer is in the branch with you and able to speak to you, the client feels more at ease and understood. They are then more comfortable.” (Participant 6, female, post-matric certificate, black/African).

4.3.1.d. Selling and Marketing Skills

The need to maximize opportunities when customers are visiting branches to market additional revenue generating products to clients, was acknowledged by a number of the Universal Bankers interviewed and it was said that they need to further develop these skills. Many of the functions previously performed by these bankers are now automated, therefore they need to ensure their employability by adding value to the customers through need identification and fulfillment. Simultaneously, they need to generate new income streams for the organisation when interacting with clients. The following participant indicated that the sale might not necessarily be concluded by them in the branch:

“I need to have strong selling and marketing skills as the customers are doing everything electronically. When the customers come into the bank to reverse a payment or enquire on a banking product, I must be able to assist and share information on what is needed to purchase the product. Sometimes the client will then apply online after I have explained.” (Participant 6, female, certificate after matric, black/African).

Another participant identified the importance of knowing what the competition has to offer before marketing his/her own products:

“Marketing skills are very important as we need to try switch the customer’s mindset. We need to be aware of what the competition is doing when we are marketing as the competition out there is very high.” (Participant 8, female, post matric certificate, black/African).

Another participant pointed to being able to communicate an relate information to clients in a persuasive manner considering the importance of marketing products to clients:

“We need to explain to our customers and use persuasion and listening skills to get to identify how we can find a solution for the customer’s needs.” (Participant 13, male, post matric diploma, black/African).

This participant indicated that empathizing with customers opens up discussions and conversations which leads to sales or marketing opportunities:

“You need to empathize with the clients and put yourself in their shoes. This will make customers feel more comfortable to talk to you which gives you an opportunity to sell to them and get referrals.” (Participant 7, male, post-matric diploma, black/African)

4.3.1.e. Flexibility / Being Adaptive to Change

The ability to be flexible and adapt to continuous change was also a prominent theme. Given the continuously changing technological and business environment, the Universal Bankers who are dealing with customers in the frontline are expected to be up to date with changes on an ongoing basis. This was clear in the findings as was evidenced by this respondent’s feedback:

“Life is no longer like before. I need to adapt to change especially considering the impact of the 4th Industrial revolution.” (Participant 12, female, post matric certificate, black/African).

Being in the frontline during rapidly changing business environments also requires a high level of flexibility and learning agility as shared by this respondent:

“I need to be able to adapt to change all the time. Flexibility is important as I need to be able to assist the broader team wherever they need me.” (Participant 1, female, post matric certificate, black/African).

This participant added:

“I am expected to adapt quickly and make time to learn new things such as opening business accounts and home loans.” (Participant 4, female, matric, black/African)

Participants also indicated that it is their responsibility to upskill themselves and to continuously improve to be relevant. This participant as an example indicated the importance of being up to date with current affairs to remain relevant in the constantly changing environment:

“My branch manager is always encouraging us to read and remain up to date - even with current affairs. I also downloaded the Degreed app to my phone to allow me to read and learn at any time.” (Participant 8, female, post-matric certificate, black/African).

4.3.1.f. Product Knowledge

Considering the fact that the sample group interviewed were all Universal bankers dealing with customers in the branch every day, product knowledge was identified as an important skill to have. Though this sub-theme occurred less frequently, participants indicated that there is a high level of expectation for competence and product knowledge from bankers.

The upskilling of digital product knowledge is an important notion that this participant pointed out:

“You can do a lot on the app and need to use it to learn and improve. We can learn about opening accounts, utilising the available calculators and learning different information about digital banking.” (Participant 3, female, post-matric diploma, black/African).

Another participant concurred with the importance of continuous digital upskilling:

“I do online training and read articles to remain relevant. I also follow social media as it is a good place to identify new products or trends.” (Participant 5, female, degree, black/African)

The following participant highlighted the need for additional product knowledge, given the role of a Universal Banker and the expectations of customers to be served at one point of contact:

“I need to improve my practical skills including being able to open business accounts and home loans for example.” (Participant 4, female, matric, black/African)

4.3.2. The Impact of Digital Banking on the Employability Skills Required

Depicted below in Table 4.3 are the sub-themes under the impact that digital banking has on the employability skills required by bankers. The themes that arose from the research made it clear that the advancement and impact of digital banking on the everyday activity of the frontline bankers interviewed during the research has been

extensive. The most prevalent sub-themes identified were that bankers are now required to introduce customers visiting the bank to digital banking. Furthermore, they need to coach customers how to use the digital alternatives and how to acquire and update banking products themselves on these digital platforms.

Table 4.3. Frequency of Themes Related to the Impact of Digital Banking on Employability Skills.

Themes and sub-themes		Frequency
Theme	Impact of digital banking on employability skills	53
Sub-Themes	Enhanced customer convenience	14
	Coaching customers on digital and product alternatives	14
	Assisting customers with fear of digital solutions	7
	Reduced time to assist and ability to serve other clients	5
	Need to continuously upskill on digital solutions	13

Identified as equally important sub-themes, was the acknowledgement that digital banking has significantly enhanced customer convenience and the need to coach customers on digital solutions. Other sub-themes identified include the need to continuously upskill on digital solutions, assisting customers with a fear of digital solutions and capitalizing on the reduced time to assist customers.

4.3.2.a. Enhanced Customer Convenience

All respondents in some or other form acknowledged the enhanced convenience that digital banking solutions have brought to customers. Functions that could previously only be performed at a bank branch can now be performed in the comfort of a customer’s own home or at a bank ATM. Bankers realized that they are not required to assist customers in traditional tasks as some customers prefer not to have any face-to-face interaction with the bank. This participant indicated as such:

“Customers are able to do banking in the convenience of their own homes and don’t need to go to the Bank. They can just use their own phone, laptop or tablet to do things themselves without having face-to-face interaction at the Bank.” (Participant 2, female, post matric certificate, Indian).

This participant agreed with this notion:

“Customers now have the convenience as they have the flexibility to do transactions at home and avoid long queues at the bank.” (Participant 10, female, post-matric certificate, coloured)

Various participants endorsed the enhanced customer convenience by also referring to the reduced time and travelling costs for customers in using digital banking alternatives. An example of this is seen in the reference made by this participant:

“Clients can do things electronically from home saving the time of queuing and petrol costs. They can open accounts, make transfers and so forth from their own living rooms which makes life easier for them.” (Participant 3, female, post matric diploma, black/African)

The following participant referred to specific documentation that customers can now obtain electronically which normally could only be found at the bank itself:

“Once I have showed customers how, they can now get important information such as their tax certificates online from their homes instead of having to go to the branch.” (Participant 9, female, matric, black/African)

4.3.2.b. Coaching Customers on Digital and Product Alternatives

A strong theme that was identified was the acknowledgement from bankers that inherently a large part of their roles has changed from performing tasks for clients to showing clients how to perform the tasks themselves. The coaching required varied from how to show clients how to utilize their devices, download and navigate the banking app or website, performing tasks on the ATM or how to acquire or update products themselves on the platforms.

This participant also indicated how the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic accelerated the use of digital alternatives:

“Most customers who normally came to the branch for transfers always had the banking app and could have done the transactions themselves. During Covid-19 when they came to the branch, they asked me to show them how to do it themselves.” (Participant 6, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

Another participant highlighted the importance of showing clients how to perform tasks on the digital platforms:

“To make it personal, I show the client my banking app on my phone and what options are available. The other day a client came into the branch to stop his banking card. After I did it for him, I went outside to the ATM with him and showed him how to do it himself so he wouldn’t need to come to the Bank for that again.” (Participant 7, male, post matric diploma, black/African).

The following participant added that it is important to show clients how to perform a task on the digital platforms rather than doing the task for the client:

“It is important to show the customer how to perform a transaction and not do it for them. We need to use time and patience to help the customers.” (Participant 12, female, post-matric certificate, black/African).

An important factor highlighted by this participant is that not all customers have new and smart phones. It is important to identify the type of device a customer uses to ensure that the relevant digital solution is shared with the client:

“Some customers have relatively old phones and then we need to show them Cellphone Banking as an alternative to the banking app.” (Participant 3, female, post-matric diploma, black/African)

4.3.2.c. Need to Continuously Upskill on Digital Enhancements

The vast majority of participants acknowledged during the process that they have a responsibility to continuously upskill themselves on technological and digital solutions. Various methods and means were shared by participants on how they could go about doing so as is evidenced by this participant:

“I read through all the communication received from the Bank. I also refer to the Group Referencing Guide and the Bank’s website to better understand. Thereafter I try it practically to understand before sharing my learnings with colleagues during our in-branch workshops.” (Participant 12, female, post matric diploma, black/African)

Many participants also pointed out that self-upskilling to remain relevant is important. This participant emphasized that:

“We cannot use only the communication from the bank to remain relevant and up to date. I need to utilize Google and do refreshers on the Bank’s website to remain relevant.” (Participant 3, female, post matric diploma, black/African)

Participants indicated that remaining upskilled was very important as customers visiting the branch expect of them to be updated and able to show them how to perform tasks. This participant added:

“We receive internal update emails and the refreshers on Network Next works very well.” (Participant 7, female, post-matric diploma, black/African)

The next participant however indicated that they could be more proactive in upskilling themselves, pointing to some form of complacency. A potential recommendation would revolve around how the Bank can find ways to make upskilling fun and interactive for staff members to ensure knowledge levels are at an acceptable level. The comments from this participant indicates a high level of reactivity:

“I should visit the website more to keep up to date. I will look at the emails the Bank sends in need.” (Participant 1, female, post-matric certificate, black/African)

4.3.2.d. Assisting Customers with Fear of Digital Solutions

Participants also indicated that there are still customers who prefer to come to the Bank to perform tasks - especially elderly customers. A theme that was identified from participants that relates to these customers was that they often were elderly customers, or they had security concerns regarding digital banking. As it pertains to elderly customers, this participant contributed the following:

“Most customers still coming to the branch are relatively older. They are normally afraid of doing banking on their phones or making mistakes.” (Participant 1, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

Another participant added:

“It is difficult for older customers as they normally have older phones as well.” (Participant 3, female, post matric diploma, black/African)

Regarding the security concerns of customers, this participant noted:

“Some customers are coming to the bank and asking staff to rather assist them with their transactions due to the fear of paying the wrong customer.” (Participant 5, female, degree, black/African)

Another participant added:

“Customers appreciate when you show them the functionalities of the ATM, but some customers feel safer doing their business in the branch. I have noticed customers feel safer when you go out to the ATM with them.” (Participant 2, female, post matric certificate, Asian)

4.3.2.e. Reduced Time to Assist and Ability to Serve Other Clients

Participants were largely positive about the fact that they could frequently help a customer by showing him or her how to perform a function, which would result in the client not returning to the branch. In turn, this allowed them more time and capacity to serve other clients with more complex requests. The following participant emphasized this point:

“I show customers how to deposit at the ATM instead of standing in the queue or how they can perform a task on the app. That gives me more time to attend to clients with more important queries”. (Participant 2, female, certificate after matric, Asian)

One participant however, indicated that it is difficult to coach clients when there are long queues in the branch:

“If there are long queues, I need to screen the customers in the queue that can assist themselves and limit my coaching time to avoid clients getting upset.” (Participant 10, female, post matric certificate, colored)

4.3.3. Employability Skills for the Future

In the themes identified as it pertains to employability skills required for the future, emotional intelligence was the most dominant sub-theme. Participants also gave a lot of prominence to the importance of bankers having the relevant personal attributes and competencies. These included technical/digital skills, flexibility, communication skills, proactiveness, being a team player, having resilience and being empathetic.

Lastly, participants indicated that it is important for these developmental areas to be formally included in a personal development plan (PDP) which is a living document.

Table 4.4. Employability Skills for the Future.

Themes and sub-themes		Frequency
Theme	Employability skills for the future	73
Sub-Themes	Emotional intelligence	14

Rotation for holistic skills	10
Importance of a robust PDP	9
Personal Attributes and competencies required	12
Proactiveness	9
Empathy	4
Team player	6
Flexibility / adapting to change	12
Technical / Digital skills	16
Resilience	6
Communication skills	9

4.3.3.a. Emotional Intelligence

In line with what was identified a critical skill during the literature review, the semi-structured interviews reinforced the importance of emotional intelligence as a non-negotiable skill for bankers in moving forward. Some comments from participants indicated its importance as follows:

“Different people communicate differently, and we need to deal with this. We need to deal with customers that are sometimes even crying as a result of their financial situation and we need the emotional stability to deal with such circumstances.” (Participant 5, female, degree, black/African).

“We are in a business where we deal with a person’s feelings. We need empathy to understand and help our customers.” (Participant 1, female, post-matric certificate, black/African)

Some participants indicated that customers often visit the branch and has a level of frustration, as they couldn’t perform the task they wanted to do remotely. These respondents added:

“We need to deal with very frustrated customers sometimes. We need to be able to stay calm and assist such customers.” (Participant 13, male, post matric diploma, black/African).

“We do make mistakes from time to time, but we do go all the way to assist angry customers. In such instances it is very important to be aware of how one reacts to such customers.” (Participant 4, female, matric, black/African)

4.3.3.b. Personal Attributes and Competencies

A prominent theme identified from participant feedback was a range of personal attributes and competencies which they deemed important for future employability. Besides emotional intelligence, which was discussed above, the most prominent attributes identified for future success was technical and digital skills, flexibility and being able to adapt, proactiveness and communication skills. Other skills identified as important were the ability to be a team player, resilience and empathy.

4.3.3.c. Rotation for Holistic Skills

Being able to perform most tasks in the branch was identified as crucial for future success. For these skills to be learnt, a theme forthcoming from participants was the necessity to have staff in branches regularly rotate between positions to learn and upskill. An example of such feedback was where a staff member indicated how much she learnt and obtained perspective when she was rotated to a team leader position:

“I used to be in a comfort zone. When I rotated to a team leader position, I had to take a lot of responsibility and I had to have the confidence to make decisions. Other general staff members will benefit greatly from similar feedback.” (Participant 12, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

This participant also had newfound respect for leadership positions after rotating to a team leader role:

“When I helped in a team leader role, I was very surprised by the amount of work they need to do and what they all have to know. It showed me the more I know and understand – the better.” (Participant 10, female, post-matric certificate, coloured).

Another participant indicated that they learned the most about products and customers when they rotated to different roles:

“It is very important to rotate especially when you want to apply for different roles as the exposure is important.” (Participant 6, female, post matric certificate, black/African)

This participant had a similar experience:

“I have rotated as a learner and was exposed to cash consultant, ATM consultant, enquiries and now a Universal Banker. It has been very important, to know the industry

I work in at rotating to various roles definitely helped with this.” Participant 5, female, degree, black African)

4.3.3.d. The Importance of a Robust Personal Development Plan (PDP)

In line with what was identified during the literature review, a theme that emerged from respondents was that continuous learning and a structured PDP is crucial for future success. Importantly, participants indicated that it needs to be a live document which continuously gets updated with relevant skills in line with future requirements as noted by this participant:

“With relationships now going virtual, I need to develop presentation and telephonic skills to embrace, develop and work as a Universal Banker.” (Participant 10, female, post matric certificate, colored)

Interesting to note was that some respondents have PDP’s taking their careers in a totally different direction as the role they are currently fulfilling, as noted by this respondent:

“I am currently studying an Advanced Diploma in Internal Auditing through Unisa as I want to do a Post Grad on and work in Risk Management.” (Participant 13, male, post matric diploma, black/African).

Another example of a participant upskilling through a PDP is:

“I am busy with my RE5 governance exam studies and also busy with a diploma in Business Administration through Unisa.” (Participant 1, female, post-matric certificate, black/African).

Some participants, like the one quoted below, have clear PDP’s focused on reaching a particular goal within the organisation:

“I am working towards becoming a transactional banker by testing myself and caretaking in various roles.” (Participant 3, female, post-matric diploma, black/African)

4.4. Discussion

The main objective of this study was to explore the employability skills in the digital age of banking employees. The study was aimed at identifying the relevance of banking staff employability skills in the changing context of digital banking.

The findings of the study suggested that three themes are crucial for consideration in order to ensure employability of branch banking staff moving forward. The employability skills and the skills currently being developed of bankers, understanding the influence of digital banking on employability skills and employability skills of the future emerged as three main themes.

Sub-themes were identified under each of the main themes. We will discuss these in the following sections.

4.4.1. Employability Skills of Bankers

The results of the study indicated that technological and digital skills were the most frequently mentioned skill required for employability. In accordance with Participants 13 and 14, Coetzee (2018) noted that “offerings and customer interaction will become more integrated with digitisation and smart devices.” Moyo (2019) confirmed what participants in the study stated, for example Participant 1. The author indicated that even though digital skills are crucial for bankers, customers still want some form of human interaction and coaching and hence bankers also needs to have the necessary softer skills.

Communication skills were highlighted in the study as being important even in the digital age. This aligns to Chadha and Parimoo’s (2017) findings that entry level banking employees - as discussed by Participants 5 and 9 - need to understand the customers’ requirements and as such communication skills are key. An interesting phenomenon which came to the fore from the study relates to the identified needs by some participants, like Participant 11, for upskilling in terms of sign language.

Flexibility and being adaptive to change was a less popular sub-theme that emerged, although most participants pointed out its importance. Sarfaz, Rajendran and Hewege (2017) supports the issues raised by Participants 1, 4 and 5 in that change in the rapidly changing technological landscape is constant and continuous.

Though *product knowledge* was not a popular theme identified, Participant 6’s comment about the opportunity to market and sell a broad array of products to customers are endorsed by Chuang (2019). They concur on the fact that if you entrench a customer in digital banking and adequately show them how to utilize it, the opportunity exists for vastly improved sales.

Time management was not a very popular theme though some respondents indicated its importance. It was found that Universal Bankers often have to prioritize which customer to assist in person and which customers to migrate to digital channels, especially when there are long queues. Universal Bankers also need to ensure that their time is spent as productively as possible. Coetzee (2018) noted that nowadays bank staff members often have to focus more on value adding activities that the routine, administrative tasks they had to perform before.

People and relationship skills were consistently identified as important across the feedback from various participants. De Paula (2010) found that relationship skills are critical for banking staff and this aligns with the commentary from various participants such as Participant 5 who highlighted that people skills “specifically when communicating with customers and having to pick up a sense of them” are a key component of what is required for success.

Though there is a close correlation to people and relationship skills, *selling and marketing* skills stand out as an employability skill that the frontline bankers need to possess. The participants indicated that they need to have different types of conversations with their customers than before - specifically to identify cross sell opportunities and promote digital and other products. Participant 6 for example indicated the importance of discussing solutions with customers even though they might not take them up immediately and may do so on an omni-channel. This aligns with De Paula’s (2010) observations that the employability skills banks require includes the ability to speak and engage efficiently with customers.

4.4.2. The Impact of Digital Banking on Employability Skills

The convenience factor which has emerged from digital banking was mentioned by each of the 14 participants. The feedback from the participants in this regard were that customers now have the ability to perform tasks previously done at the branch from the comfort of their homes. Apte (2020) and Vyas (2012) both endorse the observations from the participants. Apte (2020) especially confirms the observations of Participants 1 and 3 that customers no longer accept waiting in queues at Banks as they expect to do their banking from the comfort of their homes. This brings an interesting phenomenon to the fore as it relates to how Bank’s make money which will be touched on in Chapter 5 during the recommendations.

The study showed that *bankers are required to illustrate and coach customers on the various options and functionalities available* on the digital platforms as well as banking products. Coetzee (2018) pointed out the same phenomenon discussed by Participant 7, that virtual interactions and engagements will become more prevalent. During such engagements, clients can be coached on how to utilize particular functions.

Participant 8 especially pointed out what Apte (2020) discussed in that certain customers will not return to the branch again once you have shown them how to perform a task themselves. This brings a fear in some branch banking staff that the more they migrate customers to digital platforms, the better the chance is that their roles will become redundant.

Participant 2 mentioned that “I have been looking at the restructures at Standard Bank and sometimes one assumes digital will take over.” Caruthers (2014) indicated the impact on frontline banking staff when Banks digitize aggressively, though each case needs to be considered on its own merits and in its own context.

Another impact of digital banking highlighted by the participants were that they are required to *assist customers who have a fear of digital banking solutions for security related matters*. Kureshni and Bhatt (2018) endorsed the observations from Participants 2 and 5 that cybersecurity has an adverse impact on the take up rate of digital solutions by some clients. Both participants in their responses indicated that banking staff are expected to assist, calm and provide alternative solutions to customers.

Lastly in this category, an observation from the study was the acknowledgement and willingness of the majority of participants that they *continuously need to develop their technical and digital skills*. Participants 1, 6 and 11’s comments about their upskilling in this area and the difference between customer expectations and banker skill levels were aligned with the findings of Cuesta, Ruesta, Tuesta and Urbiola (2015). This category is also one that will be discussed under recommendations in Chapter 5.

4.4.3. Employability Skills for the Future

Having discussed the employability skills required in frontline banking, respondents also gave insights into the employability skill requirements for the future. Four broad sub-themes emerged being emotional intelligence, holistic banking skills, having a

clear personal development plan and a subset of personal attributes and competencies required for success. The discussion below will look into each of these sub-themes.

The findings from the study as it pertains to the importance of *emotional intelligence* amongst frontline banking staff in the digital age came through very strongly as a theme. Dacre and Poole (2007) discussed the importance of individuals reflecting on the importance of emotional intelligence and individual improving with regards to “self-efficacy, self-confidence and self-esteem.” This especially aligns with the commentary from Participant 5, who indicated the importance in this regard especially when dealing with customers in a position of conflict.

Another key theme forthcoming from the study was when a customer visits a bank, they expect to meet a banker that has *holistic and overall banking knowledge*. Participant 12 and the comments by Coetzee (2018) align with this thought in that it is clear that banks are “aggressively focusing on the upskilling of their staff to deal with the digital era.” Various participants also referred to *the importance of a coherent personal development plan*. Dacre, Pool and Sewell (2007) are in accordance with Participants 3, 4 and 9 in stating how crucial a laid-out growth path is in the form of a PDP to ensure future relevance.

The *personal attributes and competencies* that were identified most frequently by the participants of the study, included themes discussed earlier such as empathy, proactiveness and being able to function as part of a team. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of flexibility and being able to adapt to change, technical and digital skills as well as communication skills.

The one employability skill that stood out in the feedback from the respondents is that bankers of the future need to have a high level of resilience. The recent Covid-19 pandemic has brought additional urgency to the digital transformation and technological advancements companies have according to Candello, Ferreira, Vasconcelos, de Santana, de Paula and Pinhanez (2020). The authors further stated that even though there has been an obvious reliance on technological solutions during the pandemic, in person interaction remains important. Frontline banking staff need to be resilient in this ever-changing environment, as it has been identified by various participants in their feedback. Participant 2 as an example underlined this point by

pointing out that “we need change agents in branch as there is daily and continuous change in process and focus, especially now.”

4.5. Conclusion

This chapter discussed both the findings of the demographical as well as content related matters from the study. Considering the above discussions, the following six line items across the themes were the most frequently mentioned or discussed as critical for employability skills by participants and which largely aligns with the literature review conducted:

- The importance of having the necessary technical and digital skills.
- Understanding and embracing the concept of enhanced customer convenience.
- Bankers must be able to coach customers on digital and product alternatives.
- Bankers need to continuously upskill on digital solutions.
- Emotional intelligence is critical in engaging and adding value to customers that do visit the branch.
- Bankers need to be flexible and able to adapt to frequent change.

The above findings amongst others, will be elaborated on in the concluding Chapter 5.

Chapter 5 - Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction

This research project investigated the employability skills of frontline banking staff at Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital age. The study included a literature review, qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews and the consequent analysis thereof. The timing of the research coincided with the worldwide Covid-19 pandemic which has also accelerated digital solutions and user acceptance of digital means. This impact is mentioned considering the fact that the observations in the study bears even greater relevance.

This chapter will provide a brief oversight of the key elements, findings and recommendations stemming from the conducted field study. Firstly, we will reflect again on what the research objectives of the study were.

This will be followed by key findings which have been deduced from the study including a brief discussion of these findings. The chapter will conclude with proposed recommendations stemming from the substantiated findings of the study.

5.2. Research Objectives

A reminder of the primary objective of the study as it relates to customer-facing branch staff in Standard Bank was to:

“Identify employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein.” This was to be investigated in the context of the digital age which is prevalent in banking.

The primary objective was supported by the following secondary objectives of the study which were addressed throughout this paper:

- To establish what employability skills are.
- To determine what the current employability skills gaps of employees at Standard Bank are.
- To establish how digital banking influences the employability skills of employees at Standard Bank.

- To determine which technical and soft skills are required of employees at Standard Bank.
- To establish if employees at Standard Bank are able to adapt to the constantly changing technological environment.
- To determine whether Standard Bank employees are equipped with the adequate skill sets to deal with the demands of digital banking.

The above objectives were addressed by conducting a literature review and obtaining the insights of Universal Bankers working at Standard Bank Bloemfontein branches. The insights and learnings from the study is summarized below.

5.3. Key Findings of the Study

Various employability definitions were explored during the literature review. The adopted definition for the purpose of the study that comprehensively covers the term, was the definition of the Northern Irish Department of Higher and Further Education as cited by McQuaid and Lindsay (2005):

“Employability is the capability to move into and within labour markets and to realise potential through sustainable and accessible deployment. For the individual, employability depends on the knowledge and skills they possess, and their attitudes; the way personal attributes are presented in the labour market; the environmental and social context within which work is sought; and the economic context within which work is sought.”

5.3.1. Employability Skills Required by Bankers

The main themes identified by bankers that are required to be successful in frontline banking roles relates to the following categories of key skills.

The most prevalent employability skill identified by the respondents related to the importance of remaining relevant as it pertains to *digital and technical skills*. Whilst some participants indicated that they are comfortable with their skill level and continuous learning in this regard, there were also participants who acknowledged that they are lacking in this category.

Communication skills, people and relationship skills and selling and marketing skills were also very prominent themes that were identified and discussed in detail in chapter

4. An interesting observation in the above categories of employability skills are the fact that they are all soft skills which speaks to interpersonal interaction. The identification of such skills being critical, highlights the importance that human interaction will remain relevant and sought after even though the use of digital banking alternatives has become pronounced.

There was a high level of acknowledgement from participants that since it was not previously required from them to demonstrate and coach customers to utilize digital products, growing these communication skills would be important for them. Participants also indicated that customers visiting the branches for assistance expect a high level of engagement and expect to engage with a banker who can assist in all aspects of banking.

As it pertains to *product knowledge* this means that bankers who previously were only responsible for certain tasks now have to learn and upskill in various products. Participants for example mentioned business banking related products and the continuously changing digital products as key areas of development in the roles that they perform.

Flexibility and being able to adapt to change were a frequently raised topic and most respondents indicated that there is quite a high level of change fatigue. It is expected of these frontline banking consultants to be up to date and competent in most aspects. Recommendations in this regard are made below.

5.3.2. How Digital Banking is Influencing the Skills Required by Bankers

It was very clear from the results that there is a direct impact from digital banking on the skills required by the bankers. The most prevalent theme that arose was that bankers need to acknowledge the greatly enhanced *convenience* available to their customers compared to what they previously experienced. Bankers need to adapt to this convenience and embrace the digital alternatives customers have in their engagements.

Furthermore, many customers expect the bankers to *demonstrate and coach them on various alternatives*. Therefore, bankers need to *continuously upskill on digital alternatives* and simultaneously be aware which devices are compatible with the

different solutions. This is important in order for the bankers to be relevant and also for them to make appropriate recommendations.

As there are a number of customers, especially the elderly customers, who have a fear of potential security issues with regards to digital banking, bankers are required to have a high level of empathy and interpersonal skill to be able to deal with such situations and provide alternative solutions to customers.

5.3.3. The Technical and Soft Skills Required by Bankers at Standard Bank

Other than the skills referred to above, participants indicated that the following technical and soft skills are crucial for future success. These findings correlate broadly with the literature review conducted in this regard. The key technical and soft skills as identified by the bankers themselves include:

- Proactiveness
- Empathy
- Being a team player
- Flexibility and ability to adapt to change
- Maturity
- Resilience
- Communication and interpersonal skills
- High level of digital and technical skills
- All round product knowledge

The personal development plans of the bankers need to incorporate development in these areas and are highlighted as such in the recommendations. Various participants indicated the learnings they experienced from continuous role rotation; this is also noted under recommendations.

5.3.4. Summary of Key Findings from the Study

In summary and considering the above discussion, the key findings from the study can be summarized as follows:

- Frontline bankers need to understand and develop the necessary technical and digital skills.

- Bankers need to embrace the concept of enhanced customer convenience from digital banking and leverage off it when engaging with customers.
- Demonstrating digital alternatives and coaching customers how to use digital solutions and how to buy products electronically has become a core required employability skill.
- Bankers need to continuously upskill themselves on digital solutions and broad product sets in line with customer demand as relayed by participants from the study.
- Emotional intelligence is critical in engaging and adding value to customers that do visit the branch. The theme of developing emotional intelligence underscores the importance of people and communication skills as elaborated on in the study.
- Bankers are exposed to continuous change and as a result need to be flexible and able to adapt to frequent change and fulfill various roles in a branch.

5.4. Recommendations

Based on the discussion above, the following recommendations are made based on the six key findings noted. Due consideration should be given to these recommendations.

5.4.1. A Comprehensive Skills Audit to be Undertaken for All Bankers in Frontline Positions

Considering the detailed discussions on the technical and digital skills required by frontline bankers, it is recommended that a comprehensive skills and competence audit is performed for these roles. This should be done in the context of considering the key skills and attributes discussed in the above section.

5.4.2. Personal Development Plans (PDP's) Need to be Developed for all Frontline Bankers

A key finding from the study was that even though most participants acknowledged the presence of employability skills gaps, not many had formal personal development plans in place to address the shortcomings discussed. Line managers should co-create and develop PDP's based on the outcomes of the skills audit recommended

above. These PDP's should also include formalized plans for product upskilling where deemed necessary.

5.4.3. Structured and Frequent Digital and Technical Training Needs to be Provided to All Frontline Banking Staff

Whilst a key theme was that participants acknowledged the need and importance of continuous digital and technical training; the findings of the research also exposed the unstructured basis in which these learnings take place. Considering the importance of bankers embracing the solutions available when interacting with customers, banks should heavily invest in continuous and relevant digital and technical training interventions for these staff members. Many staff members indicated the existence of online upskilling alternatives and frequent updates on company websites as being beneficial - these should be continued.

5.4.4. Emotional Intelligence and People Skill Interventions to be Prioritized

Considering the importance of human interaction, resilience, dealing with conflict and the requirement to engage with clients and sell to them, emotional intelligence interventions and awareness must be put in place. This may also include encouraging the necessary forums to be created internally to support and endorse employee wellness considering the high levels of expectations from these bankers. An emotional intelligence survey can also be conducted to identify which components of emotional intelligence needs further development.

5.4.5. Rotation of Roles and Functions Must be Encouraged

With an ever-increasing expectation of customers to engage with bankers that can assist them with whatever their query is, the learnings taken from participants are that rotation of tasks and roles in branch builds greater employability skills capacity. The researcher would suggest that this recommendation be explored in greater detail by the bank.

5.4.6 The Introduction of Change Agents / Digital Champions in Branch

Another finding from the research was that many of the change interventions are communicated on company websites or via email. There is a perceived opportunity to improve the change management process including introducing change agents in

branch who can take the lead on ensuring new technologies and ideas are workshopped and discussed for understanding with the various bankers. This one point of entry can assist both the bankers and their leaders to have a more coherent change management approach to ensuring the employability skills of bankers are adequately developed.

5.5. Conclusion

During this study the researcher found that there are great expectations of the respondents to continuously develop and upskill themselves in an ever-changing environment. The rate of change has also been accentuated by the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

The findings from the study were conclusive that employability skills gaps are acknowledged and exist in the frontline banking staff interviewed. Considering the fact that there are varying levels of competence or readiness for the rigours the future hold, the researcher proposes the recommendations to be seriously considered and implemented.

Whilst the 4th Industrial Revolution and the digital age provide a platform for the transformation of the banking landscape, the human role and the need for human interaction is acknowledged and embraced. As a result, organisations must prepare their employees in the best possible way for the employability skills required in future.

Annexure A – Research Permission Form

REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

Dear Mr Anton Nicolaisen

I am doing research and would like to request permission to conduct my research at Standard Bank in Bloemfontein.

DATE

1 August 2020

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital banking era.

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

Brendan Jacobs
0825685404

Student Number: 1999212069

Contact Number:

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

University of the Free State

Business School

STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Mr Lyle Markham

Contact number: 0842076074

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The primary objective of this study is to explore the employability skills of Standard Bank branch banking employees in the digital banking era.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I am currently an MBA student at the University of the Free State Business School. I am also currently the Head of Commercial Banking in the Free State, Northern Cape and North West and believe this research can contribute positively to Standard Bank in the Free State.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2020/0836/2107

WHY ARE YOUR INSTITUTION/ORGANISATION/COMPANY INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

As an employee and member of the Provincial Executive Committee at Standard Bank, I am familiar with the opportunities and challenges which digital banking has brought to the banking landscape. I am also aware that the organisation faces challenges as it pertains to the employability skills of their bankers. As such relevance for this research at your organisation was identified. Your agreement as the Provincial Head of Standard Bank in the Free State for this research to be conducted with 28 Universal Bankers in Bloemfontein is therefore sought.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews with 28 Universal Bankers which will be conducted by the researcher. The interview comprises of closed and open-ended questions and each interview is estimated to last between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews will be voluntary and any of the identified employees who are not comfortable to partake in the study will be excluded.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefit of the study is that the employability skills of frontline banking staff will be explored, and subsequent gaps will be identified. The analysis and findings will be available to the organisation to consider relevant learning and development interventions for the identified employees. The employees will also benefit as their personal development plans and learning paths can be updated accordingly for relevance which in turn can enhance their employability. The findings of the research will be treated with full confidentiality.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL RISKS TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The potential risk in partaking in the study includes the possibility that employees could feel inadequate should they realise during the research that their employability skills are not adequate. The current Covid-19 virus pandemic raises a risk for the conduct of the interviews. To alleviate this risk, electronic means will be utilised. A further risk is that some of the participants would prefer not to be interviewed considering the researcher being a senior manager at Standard Bank. This risk will be mitigated by the interviews being voluntary and the employees being guaranteed of confidentiality.

WILL THE INFORMATION BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Confidentiality of the information will be maintained by ensuring participant names not being recorded anywhere and as such no one will be able to connect participants to the answers given. Participants' answers will be given a fictitious code number and will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Only the researcher and his study leader will have access to the data, and they will be bound to confidentiality. Participant answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify participants will be available only to people working on the study, unless they give permission for other people to see the records. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of the answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher's residence for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The information will be destroyed by shredding the hard copies of the research and deleting the electronic versions after the time period has passed. Describe any potential level of inconvenience and/or discomfort to the participant.

WILL THERE BE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise for participation in this research. There will also not be any costs incurred by the participants of this study.

HOW WILL THE INSTITUTION / ORGANISATION / COMPANY BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Brendan Jacobs at 0825685404 or Brendan.Jacobs@standardbank.co.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher on the above contact details. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Lyle Markham at 0842076074.

Yours sincerely

Brendan Jacobs

Annexure B – - Research study information leaflet and consent form

RESEARCH STUDY INFORMATION LEAFLET AND CONSENT FORM

DATE

1 August 2020

TITLE OF THE RESEARCH PROJECT

Employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital banking era.

PRINCIPLE INVESTIGATOR / RESEARCHER(S) NAME(S) AND CONTACT NUMBER(S):

*Brendan Jacobs
0825685404*

Student Number: 1999212069

Contact Number:

FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT:

University of the Free State

Business School

STUDYLEADER(S) NAME AND CONTACT NUMBER:

Mr Lyle Markham

Contact Number: 0842076074

WHAT IS THE AIM / PURPOSE OF THE STUDY?

The primary objective of this study is to explore the employability skills of Standard Bank branch banking employees in the digital banking era.

WHO IS DOING THE RESEARCH?

I am currently an MBA student at the University of the Free State Business School. I am also currently the Head of Commercial Banking in the Free State, Northern Cape and North West and believe this research can contribute positively both to you and to Standard Bank in the Free State.

HAS THE STUDY RECEIVED ETHICAL APPROVAL?

This study has received approval from the Research Ethics Committee of UFS.

Approval number: UFS-HSD2020/0836/2107

WHY ARE YOU INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH PROJECT?

You are invited to partake in this study based on your role as a Universal Banker dealing with sales and service interactions with clients that visit the branch. The study will focus on the employability skills required in the digital banking era and as a result you can benefit by identifying which skills you can develop as part of your personal development plan.

WHAT IS THE NATURE OF PARTICIPATION IN THIS STUDY?

The study involves semi-structured interviews which will be conducted by the researcher. The interview comprises of closed and open-ended questions and each interview is estimated to last between 20 and 30 minutes. The interviews will be voluntary, and should you not be comfortable to partake in the study you will be excluded.

CAN THE PARTICIPANT WITHDRAW FROM THE STUDY?

Being in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.

WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The benefit of the study is that the employability skills of frontline banking staff will be explored, and subsequent gaps will be identified. The analysis and findings will be available to you and as such you can benefit by updating your personal development plans and learning paths. This in turn can enhance your employability for future roles. The findings of the research will be treated with full confidentiality.

WHAT IS THE ANTICIPATED INCONVENIENCE OF TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY?

The potential risk in partaking in the study includes that you could feel uncomfortable should you realise during the research that your employability skills need to be improved. The current Covid-19 virus pandemic raises a risk for the conduct of the interviews. However, to alleviate this risk, electronic means will be utilised for the interview by means of Skype or Zoom electronic meetings. This risk will be mitigated by the interviews being voluntary and you being guaranteed of confidentiality.

WILL WHAT I SAY BE KEPT CONFIDENTIAL?

Confidentiality of the information will be maintained by ensuring your name is not being recorded anywhere and as such no one will be able to connect you to the answers given. Participants' answers will be given a fictitious code number and will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings. Only the researcher and his study leader will have access to the data, and they will be bound to confidentiality. Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Committee. Otherwise, records that identify participants will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. A report of the study may be submitted for publication, but individual participants will not be identifiable in such a report.

HOW WILL THE INFORMATION BE STORED AND ULTIMATELY DESTROYED?

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at the researcher's residence for future research or academic purposes. Electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. The information will be destroyed by shredding the hard copies of the research and deleting the electronic versions after the time period has passed.

WILL I RECEIVE PAYMENT OR ANY INCENTIVES FOR PARTICIPATING IN THIS STUDY?

There will be no payment or reward offered, financial or otherwise for participation in this research. There will also not be any costs incurred by you for this study.

HOW WILL THE PARTICIPANT BE INFORMED OF THE FINDINGS / RESULTS OF THE STUDY?

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Brendan Jacobs at 0825685404 or Brendan.Jacobs@standardbank.co.za. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact the researcher on the above contact details. Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact Lyle Markham at 0842076074.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet. I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable). I am aware that the findings of this study will be anonymously processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings.

I agree to the recording of the semi structured interview.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Full Name of Participant:

Signature of Participant: _____ Date:

Full Name(s) of Researcher(s):

Signature of Researcher: _____ Date:

Annexure C – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Section A

1. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN WITH STANDARD BANK?

1-5 Years	
6 – 10 Years	
11-15 Years	
More than 15 years	

2. HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN IN YOUR CURRENT ROLE IN THE BRANCH?

1-5 Years	
6 – 10 Years	
11-15 Years	
More than 15 years	

3. AGE:

18 – 30 Years	
31 - 40 Years	
41 - 50 Years	
51 - 60 years	
61 – 65 years	

4. GENDER:

Male	
Female	
Gender nonconforming	

5. Demographical Information

African	
Coloured	
White	
Asian	
Other	

6. EDUCATIONAL LEVEL:

Less than matric/Senior certificate	
Short courses less than one year	
Certificate after matric/senior certificate	
Diploma after matric/senior certificate	
Degree	
Honours	
Masters	
PhD	

7. LANGUAGE

Afrikaans	
English	
Pedi	
Sotho	
Tswana	
Venda	
Zulu	
Xhosa	
Ndebele	
Tsonga	
Swati	
Other	

Section B – Employability Skills required by bankers

1. What would you identify as the key skills you require to remain or become employable as a banker?

2. What skills do you feel you need to develop to remain relevant as a banker given the digital impact?

Section C – How digital banking has influenced employability skills required by bankers?

3. What is your understanding of digital banking?

4. How have you embraced digital solutions in your interactions with customers?

5. How do you remain up to date with technological advancements and new digital products?

Section D – Employability Skills to be developed by bankers

6. How are you currently upskilling yourself in line with your personal development plan?

7. Have you been exposed to rotation between different roles to obtain different skills and what did you learn from that experience?

8. How do you view emotional intelligence and how important would you say is it in your career development and readiness for future roles?

9. Which personal attributes or competencies in your opinion are most important to ensure your future employability in branch banking?

10. What additional training, upskilling or development other than what we have discussed thus far do you view as important for your future employability?

Thank you once again for partaking in this semi-structured interview.

Annexure D: Ethical Clearance



GENERAL/HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (GHREC)

22-Jul-2020

Dear Mr Brendan Jacobs

Application Approved

Research Project Title:

Employability skills of branch banking employees at Standard Bank Bloemfontein in the digital banking era.

Ethical Clearance number:

UFS-HSD2020/0836/2107

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 Plessis

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