CLOSING THE CUSTOMER GAP THROUGH EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEES

by

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Submitted in accordance with the requirements for the degree
MAGISTER COMMERCII

In the
Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences
Department of Business Management
University of the Free State
Bloemfontein, Republic of South Africa

February 2015

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DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis hereby submitted by Johanna Maria Fourie for the degree Magister Commercii at the University of the Free State is my own independent work and has not previously been submitted by me at another university/faculty. I furthermore cede copyright of the thesis in favour of the University of the Free State.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A special word of thanks to the following persons:

Dr Johan van Zyl, my study leader, for his patience, guidance and support.

Dr Pierrie Nel and Mr Alex Coetzee, for the statistical analysis of the data.

Mrs Marie-Therese Murray, for the language editing of the thesis.

To my family, thank you for your encouragement and support, but most of all for your love.

To all my friends, thank you for your friendship and support and for always lending a helpful hand and a willing ear.

DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the following:

In loving memory of my late father.

And my two loyal and loveable study buddies Jabez and Lalliepot who keep me company.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

This is to confirm that I have edited Marina Fourie's Masters dissertation, entitled

CLOSING THE CUSTOMER GAP THROUGH EFFECTIVE EMPLOYEES

for language use and technical aspects.

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ABSTRACT

This study attempts to contribute to the current knowledge to determine the factors that influence front-line employees in delivering a sustainable quality service.

It is nearly impossible to deliver a quality service without loyal and satisfied front-line employees who, through a service encounter, determine the level of service quality delivered. These employees form an integral part of the competitive advantage of a service organisation and play a crucial, bridging role in company growth.

However, some variables influence front-line employees' effectiveness, for example personal and professional circumstances.

Customer expectations are critical towards the evaluation of a service; therefore, customers have different levels of expectation. Factors such as front-line employee commitment, loyalty and satisfaction influence customers' perception of the quality of service provided. In addition, customer satisfaction impacts on customer loyalty, which, in turn, directly affects the financial results of an organisation.

In cases when expectations are not met, customers are dissatisfied, thus causing a gap between the customer and the service organisation. This "gap", called the "Customer Gap" or the "Service Quality Gap" (in the Gaps Model of Service Quality), is the difference between what the customer expects and his/her perception of the service. However, in order to close the Customer Gap, the Provider Gap (consisting of Gaps 1 to 4) needs to be closed first.

Front-line employees, customers and intermediaries (for example, suppliers) mostly influence the Service Performance Gap (Gap 3), which occurs when there is a discrepancy between specifications and service delivery. It is, therefore, evident that front-line employees play an important role in the closure of the Service Performance Gap; such closure depends on their attitude, competencies, skills, commitment, trust, communication and work in a complex relationship.

A literature review was conducted where-after two different questionnaires were developed. Open-ended questions and Likert-scale questions were used. To this end, the questionnaires were distributed at branches within AVBOB. The sample consisted of front-line employees and managers who were in the service of AVBOB from the beginning of June 2013 to the end of November 2013. Statistical measures such as descriptive statistics were used.

It was found that the following professional circumstances influence front-line employees' effectiveness: qualification, training, rewards, organisational benefits, work stress and workload. The following personal circumstances were identified, namely "front-line employee transport system", "residing area", and the fact that some front-line employees do not always have clean clothes to wear. In addition, front-line employees experience conflict between their work and family responsibilities. These circumstances can, therefore, be argued as critical for the management of effective front-line employees and service quality.

Although other factors might also influence front-line employees' effectiveness, the factors identified may provide management with focal points for the management of front-line employees. To this extent, the Gaps Model of Service Quality should be used to guide management to find the reasons for quality issues. This useful model also needs to be used to identify appropriate ways in which to close the Customer Gap.

LIST OF DEFINITIONS

Customer Gap

"the difference between customer expectations and perceptions" (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 32).

Customer loyalty

"the behavioural intentions of the customer and the likelihood that he or she will return to the organization" (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 163).

Customer satisfaction

"the degree of satisfaction provided by the goods or services of an organisation as measured by the customer" (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 110).

Front-line employees

"those employees who interact with customers directly" (Grönroos, 2007: 365).

Gaps Model of Service Quality

"a framework to understand and improve service delivery" (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 31).

Service Performance Gap

"the difference between customer-driven standards and actual performance by front-line employees" (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 38).

Service quality

"customer's assessment or perception of how well a service is delivered or performed" (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 13).

UITTREKSEL

Hierdie studie poog om 'n bydrae te lewer tot die huidige literatuur deur te bepaal watter faktore 'n invloed het op kontakwerkers in die lewering van 'n volhoubare kwaliteit diens.

Dit is feitlik onmoontlik om 'n kwaliteit diens te verskaf sonder lojale en tevrede kontakwerkers. Deur hul diensverskaffingsinteraksie met die kliënt bepaal hierdie werkers die kwaliteit van diens gelewer. Hulle vorm 'n integrale deel van die organisasie se mededingende voordeel en speel ook 'n kritieke rol in die groei van die organisasie deurdat hulle 'n oorbruggingsrol vervul. Daarom het die effektiwiteit van hierdie werkers ook 'n direkte invloed op die kwaliteit van diens wat gelewer word.

Verskeie faktore, soos byvoorbeeld persoonlike en professionele omstandighede, beïnvloed die effektiwiteit van kontakwerkers.

Kliënte is krities met hul evaluering van 'n diens en het verskillende vlakke van verwagtinge van 'n diens. Faktore soos die kontakwerker se vertroue, lojaliteit en werksbevrediging het wel 'n invloed op die kliënt se persepsie van die diens. Dus, die kliënt se tevredenheid beïnvloed kliëntlojaliteit wat weer 'n direkte invloed het op die finansiële resultate van die organisasie.

Wanneer daar nie aan kliënte se verwagtinge voldoen word nie is hulle ontevrede en ontstaan daar 'n "gaping" tussen die kliënt en die diensleweraar. Hierdie "gaping", naamlik die Kliëntegaping, is dus die verskil tussen wat die kliënt verwag en sy/haar persepsie van die diens wat sy/hy ontvang. Dus, om hierdie gaping te sluit, moet die Voorsieningsgaping wat uit Gapings 1 tot 4 bestaan, eers gesluit word.

Die Dienste Werkverrigtingsgaping (Gaping 3), wat dus ontstaan wanneer daar 'n teenstrydigheid is tussen diensspesifikasies en die diens wat gelewer is, word die meeste beïnvloed deur kontakwerkers, kliënte en tussengangers (byvoorbeeld verskaffers). Dit is dus baie duidelik dat kontakwerkers 'n belangrike rol speel in die

sluiting van die Dienste Werkverrigtingsgaping (Gaping 3), omdat die sluiting van hierdie gaping grotendeels afhang van hul houding, vaardighede, bevoegdheid, toewyding, vertroue, kommunikasie en werk in 'n komplekse verhouding.

'n Literatuurstudie is gedoen waarna twee verskillende vraelyste opgestel is. Oop vrae sowel as Likertskaal-vrae is gebruik. Die vraelyste is aan verskillende AVBOB-takke gestuur. Die teikengroep vir die studie was kontakwerkers en bestuurders in die diens van AVBOB vanaf begin Junie 2013 tot einde November 2013. Die statistieke metingsinstrument wat gebruik is, sluit in beskrywende statistiek, breuke en korrelasies.

Bevindinge dui aan dat faktore soos kwalifikasie, opleiding, erkenning, organisasievoordele, werkstres en werklading die grootste invloed op kontakwerkers se professionele omstandighede het. Persoonlike omstandighede sluit in kontakwerkers se vervoersisteem en woonarea terwyl sommiges nie altyd skoon klere het om aan te trek nie. Kontakwerkers beleef ook konflik tussen hul persoonlike verpligtinge en werksverpligtinge. Daarom kan daar geargumenteer word dat hierdie faktore 'n kritieke rol in die bestuur van effektiewe kontakwerkers en kwaliteitdiens speel.

Laastens, alhoewel daar ook ander faktore mag wees wat die effektiwiteit van kontakwerkers kan beïnvloed, kan die faktore wat geïdentifiseer is as fokuspunt vir die bestuur van effektiewe kontakwerkers dien. Juis daarom moet die Gapings Model vir Diensleweringskwaliteit aangewend word om bestuur te lei om redes te bepaal vir dienste probleme. Hierdie uiters handige model moet ook gebruik word om toepaslike maniere te vind om die Kliëntegaping te sluit.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The South African economy is reasonably diverse, consisting of various products and service organisations, marketing and selling a product or service, or a product with a service of some kind, for example the airline industry, the funeral industry, telecommunications, and many more. These organisations play an important role in formulating their customers' expectations of the quality service they deliver. In order to attract customers, they make promises concerning a product or service delivery to them. For example, Pick n Pay promise low prices and smart savings whereas Walmart/Massmart promise that one can save money and live better when buying from them.

Due to such promises, customers have certain expectations when they enter a service organisation. One of these expectations is the quality of service they are about to receive. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 241) state that "expectations shape satisfaction". Customers' expectations of a service are formed prior to the use of the specific service. Thereafter, customers will compare their perceived service with their expected service. If the service meets (or exceeds) customers' expectations, they are satisfied or highly satisfied. It is no surprise that the law of service, according to Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 17), is satisfaction equals perception minus expectation.

Customer expectations are critical towards the evaluation of a service and have different levels of expectations. According to Zeithaml, Bitner and Gremier (2009: 75-97), customer service expectations can range from low to high. According to Zeithaml et al., "tolerable expectations" is the lowest level of expectation, followed by "acceptable expectations", "experience-based norms", "normative expectations" (also called "adequate service") and the highest level of expectations "ideal expectations" (also called "desired service"). Desired service is thus what the customer hopes or wishes to receive. For example, at a fast-food restaurant, the customer expects fast

service, as well as convenient and tasty food. With an adequate or acceptable level of service, on the other hand, customers are sometimes willing to accept the level of service rendered to them. For example, a customer expects to stand in a queue at a bank or when paying an account at a retail store. These service expectations are formed by experiences that have developed over a period of time (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 75-97; Hoffman, Bateson, Wood and Kenyon, 2009: 390) and that are influenced by more than one factor.

A desired service expectation is mainly influenced by personal needs, explicit and implicit service promises, customers' past experiences, word-of-mouth communication and lasting service intensifiers. An adequate service expectation, on the other hand, is influenced by a variety of factors, which are not under the service provider's control, such as, for example, situational factors, perceived service alternatives, temporary service intensifiers, and the customers' self-perceived service role.

However, in cases when expectations are not met, customers are dissatisfied and a gap arises between the customer and the service organisation. This "gap", called the "Customer Gap" or the "Service Quality Gap" is thus the difference between the expectations and the perceptions of the customer (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 32; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 48-51) (see Figure 1.1 Page 3) and are the most critical service-quality gap to close. Zeithaml et al. (2009: 33) indicate that the Provider Gap, which consists of four other gaps needs to be closed first, in order to close the Customer Gap to (also called Gap 5) in order to fulfil customer expectations. Therefore, in delivering a consistent quality service, it is important for any service organisation to close this gap.

The Provider gap occur within the organisation that provides the service and include the Listening Gap (not knowing what the customer expects); the Service Design and Standards Gap (not having the required service designs and standards); the Service Performance Gap (an organisation not delivering to service standards), and the Communication Gap (not matching performance to promises). These are indicated as Gaps 1 to 4 in Figure 1.1 Page 3.

The Gaps Model of Service Quality, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry, demonstrates the two different gaps in services marketing, namely the Customer Gap and the Provider Gap (Grönroos, 2007: 114). The upper part of the Gaps Model of Service Quality shows aspects related to the customer whilst the lower part shows aspects related to the service provider (the organisation) (Grönroos, 2007: 114; Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2011: 1240; Zeithaml et al., 2009: 32; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 48-51).
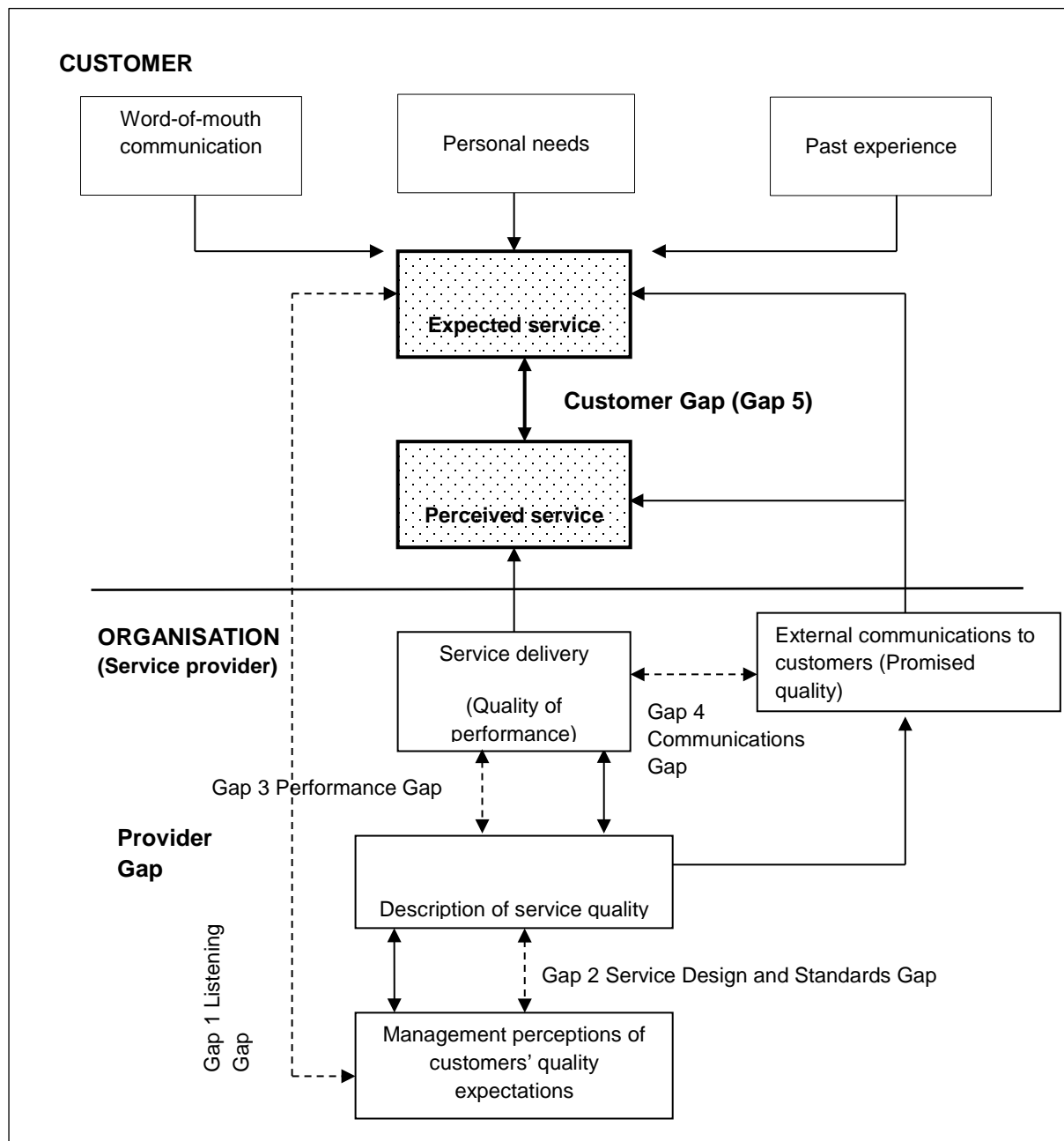
Figure 1.1: Integrated Gaps Model of Service Quality

Source: Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1240), Grönroos (2007: 114)

This Model demonstrates the steps when an organisation analyses and plan service quality and also helps in identifying the factors causing gaps in service delivery. It is important that any service organisation knows and analyses the different gaps to ensure that they constantly change aspects in favour of service delivery in total.

The most significant variables in the service-delivery process are the degree to which the service is offered and the extent to which front-line employees meet customers' needs and expectations. It is important to differentiate between the service quality expected by the customer during a service encounter and the customer's perception of the service received.

A service encounter involves at least two people – namely the front-line employee and the customer. Therefore, the person who delivers the service is the front-line employee. These persons are important to both the customer and the organisation, as they personify the organisation and influence the customer's perception of service. Some front-line employees perform different roles from sub-ordinate roles (receptionist or delivery staff) to more professional roles such as a professional advisor. The also act as representatives of the organisation and therefor occupy boundary spanning roles (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 202). Literature refers to front-line employees as front-line staff or service employees (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 351). Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 131) point out that "staff that interact with customers" are also referred to as front-line staff. Therefore, for the purpose of this study and in the remainder of this document, these employees will be referred to as front-line employees.

Front-line employees can be viewed as "the service, the organization in the customer's eyes, the brand and the marketers" of the organisation (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 352; Hoffman et al., 2009: 295). They also act as an element of communication and help portray the image of the organisation. These employees are the first contact between the customer and the organisation and thus play a prominent role in the immediate marketing process. They are the public face of the organisation and their role is to "present" the company and to provide an accurate and quality service. Not all front-line employees play an equally important role in the service-delivery process.

Customer expectations are met when front-line employees deliver a sustainable quality service. This reflects positively on the organisation, resulting in a higher market share and an increase in profits. These employees have a direct influence on the five dimensions of service quality, namely reliability, responsiveness, empathy, assurance and tangibles (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 355). It is, therefore, important to meet customer expectations by employing front-line employees who have the ability to deliver.

In their study, Geetika (2010: 101) indicate that various researchers find that effective employees are a determinant of customer satisfaction. Table 1.1 provides a summary on front-line employees attributes for customer satisfaction.

Table 1.1: Summary on front-line employee attributes for customer satisfaction

Sector	Attributes	Author
Railways	Front-line employee behaviour	Agrawal (2008)
Railways	Reliability, empathy tangibles, assurance and responsiveness of front-line employees	Vanniarajan and Stephen (2008)
Bus service	Helpfulness of front-line employees	Eboli and Mazzulla (2007)
Banking	Front-line employee behaviour	Jham and Khan (2008)
Tourism	Front-line employee service quality	Ekinci (2003)

Source: Geetika (2010: 101)

Table 1.1 provide a summary on front-line employee attributes that contribute to customer satisfaction. Front-line employees form an integral part of the competitive advantage of a service-delivery organisation and play a crucial role in company growth, as they serve a bridging role. There is a demand for quality service in the competitive climate in which service-delivery organisation operate at present. Therefore, delivering a service that satisfies customers is always a challenge.

The effectiveness of front-line employees and the role they play in service delivery determine whether customers will return to the organisation as long-term customers or not. For these companies to be able to provide this type of service, management need to understand the role of their front-line employees, as the demand for quality services will always remain strong and increase with technology and competition.

Effective front-line employees are assets to any organisation. The effectiveness of front-line employees is a topic that is seldom discussed, although they form the backbone of any service-delivery company. Some carry mental baggage, for example, their personal circumstances or inappropriate compensation, to work, and this may influence their encounter with customers. Due to their responsibilities at home and at work, lack of time available to do personal business means that decisions about work affect decisions about life at home, and vice versa. Therefore, front-line employees may often find it difficult to draw a line between personal, home- and work-related aspects (Lin, Wong and Ho, 2013: 178; Wong and Lin, 2007: 726; Chiang, Birtch and Kwan, 2010: 25-27).

Research has found that, due to stress, employees experience role conflict, with negative consequences for both the employee and the organisation (Varca, 2009: 51). Gunlu, Aksarayli and Perçin (2010: 693) confirm that professional circumstances may also influence employee effectiveness, and indicate that staff dissatisfaction (for example, role ambiguity, employee or job mismatch, lack of empowerment, lack of management commitment) are some of the forces that affect front-line employees' effectiveness.

From literature, it is evident that front-line employees, through a service encounter, determine the level of service quality delivered. Thus, the effectiveness of the front-line employees who are appointed has a direct influence on the quality of service rendered. However, variables such as personal and professional circumstances influence their effectiveness. A lack of fulfilment in any human need may result in employees being ineffective.

A service-delivery company cannot function effectively without front-line employees. Therefore, management need to understand their employees' basic human needs. Sometimes managers do not know their employees, or know how many children they have. As human beings, front-line employees have different needs and wants and, unless management connect with them, they will be unable to develop into effective employees. Service delivery mainly occurs through human contact and human interaction. The right person needs to be hired and developed in order to deliver according to customer expectations.

Bearing the above in mind, it is critical for AVBOB to employ front-line employees who form long-term relationships with their customers and at the same time can deliver outstanding service, show empathy and be friendly and trustworthy towards their grieving customers.

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

Product- and service-oriented organisations that sell their services or a product with a service attached thereto need effective front-line employees to serve the customer. A successful service-delivery organisation, quality service and effective employees go hand in hand. Quality service delivery is dependent on the front-line employees of such an organisation. However, employees do not always deliver a sustainable quality service for many reasons. Many factors and circumstances in their personal lives and work situation influence their effectiveness as employees and the quality of service they render. Therefore, this research study aims to investigate these factors and their impact on the effectiveness of front-line employees. Their ineffectiveness contributes directly to the existence of the Customer Gap.

1.3 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Primary objective:
The primary objective is to determine the factors that influence front-line employees in their delivery of a sustainable quality service.

Secondary objectives:
The secondary objectives to reach the primary objective are:
a) To examine the aspects affecting the Customer Gap;
b) To investigate the role of front-line employees in narrowing the Customer Gap;
c) To identify personal circumstances influencing the effectiveness of front-line employees;
d) To identify professional circumstances influencing the effectiveness of front-line employees;
e) To investigate front-line employees' commitment towards rendering a quality service;

f) To discuss management's role in, and awareness of the role of front-line employees in service delivery, and

g) To set up a blueprint of steps for recommendation for the management of service delivery organisations.

1.4 METHODOLOGY

Quinlan (2011: 4) define methodology as the way in which the research study is carried out, which implies the overall process of the literature study, the data collection and the analysis of the data.

1.4.1 Literature study

Literature (secondary data) related or similar to the research topic was reviewed. Existing verifiable literature (publications, academic journals, electronic databases and the Internet) was reviewed to ascertain and interpret what has been written and published on the research topic.

1.4.2 Research design (see 4.6.2 Page 76)

A quantitative research design was adopted to collect data for this research study. In this type of research design, the respondents are asked to select and answer from among a list provided by the researcher. Quinlan (2011: 392, 397) states that quantitative data is precise and concise and defines a quantitative research design in a study where variables can be measured, controlled and/or manipulated. In this type of analysis, "the unit of measurement is the variable" which has more than one value. For example, in gender, there are two values, namely male or female. Cooper and Schindler (2014: 146) indicate that quantitative data is numerical data, as this type of data results from counting things and placing them into a category.

Scale questions were used in Section A of the questionnaire. Buglear (2005: 114) indicates that "the numerical scale used to produce the figures, forms the basis of the analysis of quantitative data". Buglear also states that scale questions enable the researcher to compare the ranking of different respondents easily. Quinlan (2011: 326) points out that scale questions are used widely in research, as it is a structured data-gathering method. Descriptive statistics were used in the compilation of the

demographic part (Section B) of the questionnaire. Quinlan (2011: 399) notes that descriptive statistics, which is a form of data analysis, is used to describe the data gathered. Summarising the statistics is an example of descriptive statistics, as variables can be described in a number of ways such as, for example, frequencies, ranges, means, modes, standard deviations, and medians.

- *Study population and sampling*

The target population for this research study consisted of front-line employees and managerial staff who were involved in service delivery and in the employment of AVBOB from the beginning of June 2013 to the end of November 2013 and who were willing to participate in the research study. Non-probability sampling was used, because it is less time consuming and inexpensive (Serakan and Bougie, 2010: 276).

A total of 123 questionnaires were completed, of which 82 were completed by front-line employees and 41 by managers. Not every front-line employee and manager was identified and asked to complete a questionnaire (see Page 86).

- *Data-collection method*

Various sources of secondary data (literature) available on the research topic were used to compile two different structured survey questionnaires. In order to achieve the purpose of this study, both front-line employees and management were requested to complete a questionnaire. The aim of the questionnaires was to determine what factors influence front-line employees in their delivery of a sustainable quality service.

The questionnaires were only made available in English, as this is one of the official languages, and the vast majority of the population has a command of English.

The questionnaire survey gathered quantitative data pertaining to the research topic. Scale questions, more specifically Likert-type scale questions, were used. These types of questions measure both the direction and the force of the attitudes. Therefore, respondents were instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with a

list of statements supplied by the researcher. The majority of the questions consisted of an option between "Strongly disagree/Disagree/Unsure/Agree/Strongly agree" (Quinlan, 2011: 225, 327).

In order to maintain continuity, the questions were grouped by topic and placed in a logical order. The first questions were open-ended questions to encourage response, followed by close-ended questions; the demographic questions were placed last (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 221).

- *Statistical analysis of data*

The data obtained was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The Department of Industrial Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, assisted the researcher in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

The results of the survey were interpreted using inferential statistics such as Cronbach's alpha to measure item reliability. According to Quinlan (2011: 399), inferential statistics is used in quantitative data analysis for prediction, whereas prediction in quantitative data analysis is based on the science of probability.

Pearsons Product Moment Correlation measures the relationship between variables. Correlation is a measure of the relation between two or more variables. The Pearson's r method was used to examine relationships between interval and ratio variables. "The "r" in Pearson correlation coefficient symbolizes the estimate of strength of linear association based on sampling data and its direction between interval and ratio variables" (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 362). The correlation coefficient (prefix) indicates the magnitude and the direction of the relationship. The coefficient can be either positive (+) or negative (-). A number represents the strength of the relationship. Thus, the closer the coefficient is to 1, the stronger the relationship, whereas 0 (nil) indicates a weak relationship (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 362; Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 469). Descriptive statistics such as percentages were also used.

1.5   ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The information obtained from this study will be kept confidential and will not be shared with other participants or any other person. The results of the study will only be presented as a summary of all the results and participants and/or branches will not be directly identified in any way.

Participation was completely voluntary, and participants were free to withdraw at any time. No unethical practices took place in order to obtain information from respondents. Data collection was preceded by obtaining a letter of permission from the head of the Department of Business Management, University of the Free State. There was also a verbal agreement between the Department of Business Management and senior management of AVBOB. In order to protect the respondents, they were informed not to write their names on the questionnaires and, therefore, no provision was made to do so.

1.6   CONTRIBUTION OF THE RESEARCH

The key lesson to be learnt from this study will be the importance of understanding the role that physical and professional influences play in the effectiveness of front-line employees.

Secondly, to demonstrate the important role that front-line employees play in closing the Customer Gap in a service organisation. The findings of this study are also of importance to managers of service-delivery organisations, as this study will support literature concerning the right person to be appointed to the right job. In general, it can be concluded that management is seldom aware of the factors that influence employee effectiveness. Therefore, the aim is to make some useful recommendations to service employers regarding their front-line employees.

1.7   CHAPTER LAYOUT

The study consists of seven chapters outlined as follows:

Chapter 1: Introduction
This chapter provides an introduction to the thesis.

Chapter 2: The Gaps Model in service delivery
This chapter deals with the literature reviewed on the importance of a service culture in an organisation.

Chapter 3: Front-line employees as the key role players in the Service Performance Gap
This chapter addresses the critical role of front-line employees in an organisation.

Chapter 4: Research methodology
This chapter provides details on how the research was conducted.

Chapter 5: Research results
This chapter provides the data analysis of the findings of the study as well as a discussion of the findings.

Chapter 6: Discussion of the research results and summary
This chapter presents the main findings, a critical assessment of the findings and a list of recommendations drawn from the conclusions.

CHAPTER 2

THE GAPS MODEL IN SERVICE DELIVERY

2.1   INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Service is the lifeline of an economy and, therefore, the service sector is of importance to any economy. In an advanced economy, the focus is also on the production of services, including, among others, airlines, car rentals, beauticians, doctors. For example, at a fast-food restaurant, the customer consumes both a product and a service.

Countries that initially focused on manufacturing are now experiencing growth in service. For example, in 2014 40% of China's GDP was attributed to services. South Africa in 2014, was the second biggest economy on the African continent. Statistics published by Investec and updated on 6 November 2014 indicate that services form the largest sector of the South African economy and "accounts for around 73% of the country's GDP. Within services, the most important are finance, real estate and business services (21.2 per cent of GDP); government services (13.6 per cent of GDP); wholesale, retail and motor trade, catering and accommodation (12.5 per cent of GDP) as well as transport, storage and communication (9 per cent of GDP)".[1]

Therefore, in the present competitive environment, one of the key factors to a competitive advantage is delivering a quality service, which will satisfy customers. Customer satisfaction is a prerequisite for customer retention, customer loyalty and profitability. Customer satisfaction is an essential strategy in maintaining a competitive advantage for any business, whereas service quality and effective front-line employees are two variables in the process that maintain customer loyalty. The quality of service rendered by effective front-line employees is crucial for customer satisfaction, loyalty and the retention process, but also for the success and survival of the organisation. Many studies in services marketing have indicated that the

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[1] Retrieved from http://www.tradingeconomics.com/south-africa/gdp-growth-annual [Accessed 6 November 2014].

human element (front-line employees) plays a key role in the delivery of quality service (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 119; Varca, 2009: 51; Grönroos, 2007: 417).

Customers are becoming more critical of the quality of service they experience. The Internet provides customers with a great deal of knowledge before they buy a product; thus the front-line employee needs to be au fait with a product's pricing, uses and technical aspects. South African consumers have not only an unlimited need for goods and services, but are also aware of their importance as customers and, therefore, demand high service quality.

Therefore, providing an excellent service quality, coupled with customer satisfaction, is an important challenge for any organisation, be it in the public or private sector. Due to the aforementioned and because of constant development, strong competition, and shrinking management resources, service-quality organisations are forced to evaluate the quality of their service encounters. Over the past few years, service quality has become important to managers and researchers because of its impact not only on organisational performance and customer satisfaction, but also on return on investment, growing profits and customer loyalty (Chi and Gursoy, 2009: 245; Lenka, Suar and Mohapatra, 2009: 46-47).

Customer service is an internal marketing function; all those involved must be customer minded, strive to give the customer the best service, and only make a promise that can be kept. Marketing is all about satisfying the needs and wants of the customer (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 74); therefore, the success of providing a quality service rests in the hands of managers and front-line employees.

Organisational managers experience increasing pressure not only to demonstrate a customer-focused service whereby customer expectations are met, but also to find and identify ways of closing service-quality gaps. Due to the increased competition among organisations, management is forced to focus on the quality of services provided to their customers. It is, therefore, important for organisational management to understand the importance of a service culture that will enhance and encourage customer retention, growth and loyalty towards their business, and enhance their market performance.

While financial profitability and growth is the common goal of every organisation, it is also the most common measure of organisational performance. Steward (2010) explains that organisational culture and norms are the first to be investigated, in order to improve organisational performance and profitability. It is important to understand the service sector, as service processes are becoming more vital, due to their intangibility and customer participation.

Tsai and Lin (2014: 389, 391) are of the opinion that misunderstandings or a lack of understanding customer needs and expectations will result in the poor performance of a service organisation. Therefore, rendering a quality service has become an ever-challenging task for managers.

This chapter outlines the holistic concept of service culture and aspects related to it. Attention will also be devoted to service quality, the influence of service quality on organisational performance, and customer loyalty. Details are also provided on customer perceptions of service, their expectations, and customer satisfaction. The remainder of this chapter addresses the Gaps Model, with special reference to the Customer Gap and key factors that affect this gap.

2.2 SERVICE CULTURE

Researchers such as Grönroos (2007: 417) as well as Grönfeldt and Strother (2006: 266) reason that every true service-oriented organisation has a service culture. They emphasise three important points, namely that a service culture exists in organisations where there is an appreciation for quality service; that a high-quality service must be rendered towards internal and external customers, and that a service culture is an important element of any service organisation, as it affects its competitive advantage.

Literature provides a multitude of definitions of service culture. According to Grönroos (2007: 419), a service culture is when employees can be characterised as being service-oriented. Beitelspacher, Richey and Reynolds (2011: 1) define service culture as "a customer-centric culture aimed at exceeding customer expectations and creating superior customer value through the development of service and

related performance competencies". For the purpose of this study the definition as proposed by Grönroos (2007: 419) is applicable.

Numerous studies have been done and produced evidence that a service culture is of importance to organisational performance, profitability and effectiveness (see Table 2.1 Page 20). Recently, Oocharoen (2008: 1) indicated that organisational resources such as service culture could influence organisational excellence and performance. The results of the study also confirm that service culture has a positive effect on organisational performance. Results of a study by Little and Dean (2006: 473) show that service culture contributes to employee commitment towards the organisation, employee service quality capability, and potentially improves customers' experience of the service rendered. Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 198) propose that the service culture of an organisation must be built on the foundation of caring for both the customer and the employee.

Gallagher, Brown and Brown (2008) remark that "between 1990 and 2007, more than 60 research studies covering 7 619 companies and small business[es] in 26 countries have found that service culture and business performance are strongly related. This positive correlation is identified by more than 35 performance measures, including return on investment, revenue growth, customer retention, market share, new product sale and employee performance". In other words, if an organisation's service culture focuses on employees who are competent and deliver high-quality service, customers will have a positive experience and perception of service quality.

Pride and Ferrel (2010: 108) argue that a service culture has not only shaped employees' satisfaction, but may also affect the quality of service they provide and render towards customers. Service-focused employees have an interest in their customers, do more for them, and strive to find solutions to customers' problems (Grönroos, 2007: 419). Ryan, Schmit and Johnson (1996: 853) examined data for 142 branches of an automobile finance company and found that the aggregate employee attitude concerning satisfaction, teamwork and customer focus was indeed related to customer satisfaction, employee turnover and the company's financial situation.

A service culture thus reflects values and assumptions prescribing what is important; beliefs of how things work in the organisation, and norms that define appropriate and inappropriate behaviour by employees. Finally, issues in service culture must first be addressed if organisational changes are to be implemented in order to reduce the gap between what customers perceive/organisations provide and what their customers expect. Therefore, a strong service culture should include the consistent provision of high-quality service.
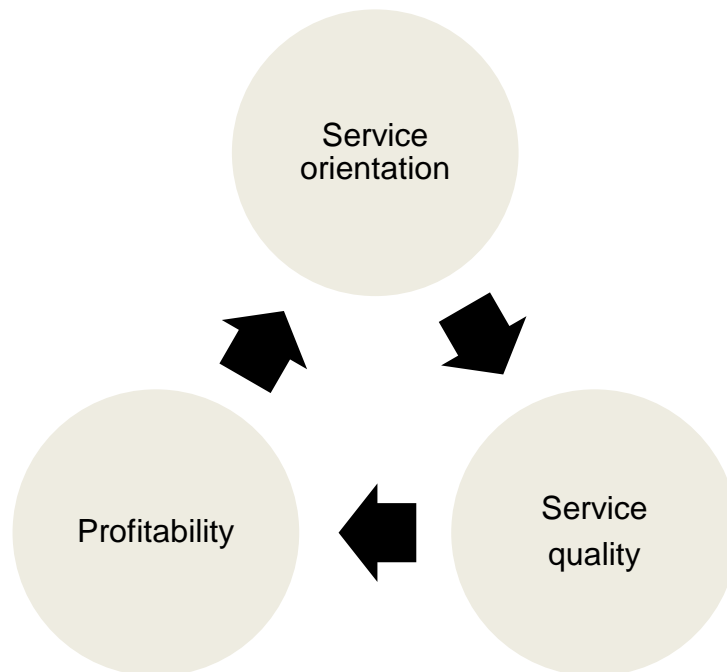
Figure 2.1: Effects of a service orientation
Source: Grönroos (2007: 419)

Figure 2.1 illustrates that profitability through a service strategy requires a service culture. Customer-perceived quality is a key determinant of profitability. Service orientation improves service quality. This, in turn, positively affects the profitability of an organisation. Service orientation, which is a characteristic of a service culture, improves the quality of service as perceived by customers, whereas service orientation among front-line employees influences and enhances the process within an organisation. This can, therefore, be considered as a chain reaction, as each variable is dependent on the other.

A service culture is required when a service strategy is introduced and implemented. There are four types of requirements for good service, namely strategic,

organisational, management, as well as knowledge and attitude (Grönroos, 2007: 421). Grönroos cautions that these requirements are intertwined and that, if all requirements are not recognised, the internal change process cannot succeed. Human resource management forms an important part of a service strategy and culture. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

First, developing a service strategy can only succeed if a service-focused strategy is developed using the business mission as the foundation for this strategy. Therefore, the service strategy must include a service vision. Grönroos (2007: 421) indicates that a business mission must support customer activities and their processes, as this creates value for the customer. Service concepts need to be clearly defined or else the organisation will lack a stable foundation for goals, resources and performance standards. These service concepts need to state what should be done, to whom, how and with which resources, and what benefits must be offered to customers.

Human resources management forms an important part of the strategic requirements and must have recruitment procedures, career planning, reward systems, and so on in place. Good service rendered by the employee needs to be rewarded and achievements need to be measured in order to enable employees to realise the importance of good service (Grönroos, 2007: 421-422; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 195).

Secondly, developing an organisation structure creates the organisation's prerequisite for good service. If management wish to achieve a high service quality, all aspects of the organisation design need to be in place for the service process. To a customer, good service means easy access to service and quick and flexible decision-making. Service-oriented organisations require a flat organisational structure with only a few hierarchical levels.

As the role of management changes, the decisions have to be made by the front-line employees who are in contact with the customers. Thus, these employees are given more responsibility and are expected to perform independently. Customers will perceive this as better quality of services, whereas front-line employees may feel that their jobs are more meaningful and motivating (Grönroos, 2007: 422-423).

Thirdly, service-oriented leadership promotes good service and includes managers' and supervisors' attitudes towards their role, their teams and how they act. Management must provide constant support so that values can spread or be upheld throughout the organisation. Therefore, management play a key role in the development of a service culture. As leaders in the organisation, managers contribute towards the culture of the organisation via leadership. Hence, it is important that managers be aware of the corporate culture in their organisation.

Communication is an important part of leadership and, therefore, management must be committed towards communication with their staff (see Figure 2.4 Page 33). On the other hand, they must be willing, and have the ability to listen to their employees. They need to accept the role of a coach and be able to encourage employee performance, but also recognise and reward good performance. Management must endeavour to get service employees involved in their planning and decision-making processes, as they may have valuable information regarding customers' needs and wants, problems, opportunities and dislikes (Grönroos, 2007: 423-424).

Finally, employees gain knowledge and attitude towards good service when they receive the necessary training. All levels of management must be motivated towards service-oriented thinking and behaviour, as employees must know how a service organisation operates, what their role is and what is expected of them as individuals. All employees need to be aware of the organisation's mission and business strategies as well as the goal and function of each department. Therefore, training programmes that include both knowledge-based training and attitude training are essential (Grönroos, 2007: 425).

2.2.1 Influence of a strong service culture

The majority of definitions suggest that the culture, from an organisational point of view, directly influences the quality of service that will be delivered by its employees. Therefore, a corporate culture that can be labelled as a service culture is essential in every organisation (Grönroos, 2007: 415).

A service culture can only be developed over a period of time and is critical for a customer-focused organisation. Therefore, an organisation with a strong service

culture seems to attract service-oriented employees, as they are favourably influenced by the existing culture. Grönroos (2007: 415) emphasises that, when employees identify themselves with the values of an organisation, they are less likely to quit, while customers are more satisfied with the service they receive. Staff turnover is lower in organisations with service-oriented values and positive attitudes towards work. This attitude is easily transmitted to newly appointed employees. Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 197) mention that a strong service climate may lead front-line employees towards appropriate task performance.

The results of a study by Yagil and Gal (2002: 223) indicate that a strong service climate has a positive effect on front-line employees' empowerment and sense of control of a service station. This, in turn, has a positive influence on customer satisfaction. Yagil and Gal also indicate that a strong service climate frees management from some control mechanisms that are necessary when organisational climate and service culture are weak.

Table 2.1 indicates the positive influence of an organisational culture, as supported in various research studies.

Table 2.1: Findings of various research studies indicating the positive influence of organisational culture

Author	Finding
Demirbag, Tatoglu, Tekinkus and Zaim (2006: 831)	There is a positive relationship between organisational culture and customer satisfaction
Dimitriades, Z.S. (2006: 783-785)	Organisation culture link to job satisfaction, commitment, service quality and turnover
Lee and Yu (2004)	Organisational culture's strength relates to organisational performance
Tsai, Y. (2011: 2)	Organisations with a positive organisational culture are more productive
Sanders, Geurts and Van Riemsdijk (2011: 107)	In a strong culture, employees show conformity in respect of organisational values, for example quality, innovativeness, cost effectiveness. Employees act according to these values.

2.2.2 Influence of a weak service culture

Hoffman et al. (2009: 294-295) indicate that every organisation has a corporate culture, but that not every organisation has a service culture. In this regard, Grönroos (2007: 421) adds that, if a non-service culture exists, it will keep employees from realising the importance of all other "hidden functions", and this will result in employees not paying attention to other service elements. A weak corporate culture represents only a few or even no clear, general shared values. This creates an insecure feeling in employees of how to react in different situations. In this respect, Yagil and Gal (2002: 216) add that a weak service culture results in service encounters managed by bureaucratic rules; this reduces the perceived control of both front-line employees and customers. It can, therefore, be assumed that the culture of an organisation may affect the quality of service delivered.

Dabholkar and Abston (2008: 960) found that the inability of front-line employees to function effectively is often governed by inadequate/poor system design, poor recovery strategies, or a lack of knowledge. They indicate that many more reasons and influences prevent front-line employees from being effective. For example, they are often in the position that there are limits to their abilities to perform and to their ability to deliver quality service to customers when they must contend with poor working conditions and improperly maintained equipment. Other influences are, among others, employee empowerment, supervisory support, task control, managerial climate, job design, and individual differences (characteristics among employees and locus of control). Zeithaml et al. (2009: 348) mention that organisational culture is another important factor, as it influences employee behaviour in service delivery.

2.2.3 Leadership and service culture

A strong service culture starts with leadership that demonstrates service excellence. Thus, leadership is responsible for the development and maintenance of organisational culture and focused strategies. Grönroos (2007: 415) states that employees tend to embrace a service culture when they notice that management is realising these values. Therefore, employees believe that a service culture is what they experience daily with management and other staff in key roles in the organisation. Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 201) state that the employees'

perception of their employers' passion for service would lead to a climate that sets service as a key strategic imperative.

Various factors are required to build and sustain a service culture. In order to achieve and maintain a service culture, human resources and internal marketing need to cooperate. Grönroos (2007: 367) indicates that managerial support is the most important type of support. Managers and supervisors maintain corporate culture and, should an organisation wish to be characterised by a service culture, management must demonstrate their commitment and support to organisational values of such a culture.

Grönroos (2007: 418) also argues that organisations must start with a strong service culture and be customer focused; sustain their established service culture, and constantly pay attention to all details. Thus, according to the author, a service culture plays a key role in the creation of value for the customer and the organisation, as it drives a service mindset. It is a great challenge for every manager to encourage front-line employees to perform their best. However, management must shape front-line employees' understanding of what the organisation stands for. Furthermore, management is considered to be role models (Korschun, Bhattacharya and Swain, 2014: 23).

Providing good service should be second nature to everyone within an organization (Grönroos, 2007: 415). A service climate will encourage the delivery of customer satisfaction and it is, therefore, important to maintain a healthy relationship with customers (Li, Frenkel and Sanders, 2011: 1825).

2.3   CUSTOMER SATISFACTION

Customer satisfaction is crucial to all organisations wishing to increase customer loyalty, thus creating an increased organisational performance. Therefore, in order to sustain organisational growth and a sustainable market share, organisations need to understand how to satisfy their customers. Customer satisfaction can only be obtained when actual performance exceeds the customer's expectation (Dehghan

and Shahin, 2011: 6), whereas dissatisfaction occurs when performance is worse than the expected performance (Chen-Yu, Williams and Kincade, 2009: 170).

Continuous research on customer satisfaction is an indicator of its importance to, and influence on organisational performance. Successful organisational performance is derived from customer satisfaction, which is critical for any organisation. Customer satisfaction can be defined as the customer's perception of a specific service encounter (Kim, 2011: 622). Lin and Wang (2006: 273) define customer satisfaction as the customer's post-purchase evaluation and response to an overall service experience.

It is interesting to note that respondents interviewed by Akbar and Parvez (2009: 25) view satisfaction as "a summary affective response of varying intensity; satisfaction focus around product choice, purchase and consumption; and, at the time of determination which varies by situation, but is generally limited in duration". It can be argued that customers form expectations based on external and internal cues; when the outcomes match their expectations, they are satisfied.

In an effort to maintain economic success, organisations strive to deliver high-quality service that will result in customer satisfaction. In this regard, Yagil and Gal (2002: 219) found a relationship between service climate and customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction can, therefore, be linked to an increase in market share, profitability, return on investment, customer retention, and customer loyalty. In addition, Dimitriades (2006: 782-783) indicate that customer satisfaction can be linked to customer retention and organisational profits. Customer satisfaction is also a prerequisite for customer retention (Chi and Gursoy, 2009: 246).

In the same research study, Chi and Gursoy (2009: 246-248) claim that, based on their findings, organisation climate relates to customer satisfaction. They also found that human resource practices influence organisational climate, which, in turn, affects customer satisfaction. These findings are supported by a more recent study by Evanschitzky, Sharma and Prykop (2012: 439, 499), who, according to their theory, indicate that the main drivers of customer satisfaction are the service quality provided by front-line employees, product quality, and value for money. It is

interesting to note that Evanschitzky et al. also found that the employees' attitude, communication style and characteristics have an impact on customer satisfaction.

It is obvious from the literature that customer satisfaction can occur at various levels in an organisation, namely with the front-line employees, the core service or the organisation as a whole (Sureshchandar, Rejendran and Anantharaman, 2002: 364). Finally, the result of customer satisfaction is customer loyalty; however, customer satisfaction is influenced by various factors, of which service quality is the most important determinant. Therefore, besides product quality and a good price, quality service is the cornerstone of customer satisfaction (Lamb, Hair, McDaniel, Boshoff and Terblanche, 2008: 13; Nam, Ekinci and Whyatt, 2011: 1009-1011).

Table 2.2 provides an additional summary on customer satisfaction, as identified by various authors.

Table 2.2: Literature review of customer satisfaction, as identified by various authors

Authors	Finding
Gronholdt, Maarten and Kristensen (2000: 513)	Customer loyalty is an outcome of customer satisfaction. Results of a study by the authors indicate that the relationship between loyalty and customer satisfaction is strongly significant
Jones and Suh (2000: 154)	The results of their study suggest that overall customer satisfaction is a predictor of customer loyalty
Delgado-Ballester and Munuera-Aleman (2001: 1240 and 1254)	Customer satisfaction leads to customer loyalty
Sachdec and Verma (2004: 106)	Customers' perception, expectation and attitude are determinants of customers' satisfaction
Grönroos (2007: 94)	Service expectations are a determinant of customer satisfaction
Eboli and Mazzulla (2007: 25)	The helpfulness of employees are determinants of customers' satisfaction
Agrawal (2008: 262-263)	Various other determinants of customers' satisfaction: employee behaviour as trustworthy, prompt service, knowledgeable, friendly, punctual and efficient

Source: Adopted from Bennett and Rundle-Thiele (2004: 516)

2.4   THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF SERVICES

Services dominate the most advanced economies in the world, some of which have more than 70% of their gross domestic product generated by services, as indicated in the introduction to this chapter. Services formed an estimated 68.4% of the South African GDP in 2013.[2] Thus, services form an important part of any economy, as "service" affects both the organisation and the customer.

Literature provides numerous meanings for "service". Service was previously viewed as something that does not add value to a society. However, contemporary society's view and importance of service is that it is something that is provided by a certain type of organization. This point of view is misleading and thus transfers the wrong signal concerning the importance and impact of services to the economic wealth of a society (Grönroos, 2007: 105). Grönroos (2007: 52) defines service as "a process consisting of a series of more or less intangible activities that normally, but not necessarily always, take place in interactions between the customer and service employees of the service provider". A service is the ability of an organisation to meet customer expectations.

Customers are vital to any organisation. Some customers spend hundreds of Rands and others even more on the services or products of an organisation. Therefore, service quality is very important, as it helps differentiate an organisation from its competitors, while it also serves as a source of promotion. It also results in greater sales, which, in turn, result in higher organisation profits. Thus, to be a market leader, an organisation can differentiate itself from the competition by providing a high service quality. Service quality does pay dividends over a period of time.

Nowadays, organisations realise the true value of service, namely they can develop and maintain a sustainable competitive advantage by means of high-quality service. Customers do not buy goods or services; they buy the benefits and services provided to them. In this regard, AVBOB offers a one-stop service through a

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[2] Retrieved from https://www.gfmag.com/global-data/country-data/south-africa-gdp-country-report [Accessed 6 November 2014].

countrywide network of funeral parlours, rendering tangible products and intangible services to a diverse customer base.

The key and probably most well-known characteristics of services are those identified by Zeithaml et al. (2009: 20-22), namely intangibility, heterogeneity, simultaneous production and consumption, and perishability. It is important to note that, according to Zeithaml et al. intangibility is the most basic distinguishing characteristic of a service. They argue that service is a performance rather than an object, as it cannot be seen, tasted, touched or felt. Thus, services are not things; they are intangible processes and/or activities. They are a deed or an effort and cannot physically be possessed; they are difficult to advertise and difficult for the customer to evaluate prior to purchase. No two services are identical.

Employees who deliver a service are often the "service" in the customers' eyes. However, because service delivery is an act between a customer and a front-line employee, the employee has to meet certain specifications of the service. For various reasons, the services rendered by employees may differ daily and are, therefore, heterogeneous. Because services cannot be saved, resold, returned or stored, they are referred to as perishable. Simultaneous production (inseparability) refers to the fact that the productions of a service are inseparable from consumption by the customer. Therefore, most of the time, customers need to be present in the production of a service (for example, visit a consultant at the bank) and they cannot take the service home. Thus, both the service provider and the customer must work together to provide a service.

Organisations offer different types of service to customers, regardless of what it is. However, due to the intangibility of a service, no service is the same for every customer. A customer's experience of a service depends on the expertise of the front-line employee. Therefore, a customer's experience of a service automatically includes both the benefit of a service and the performance, whereas his/her assessment of the service focuses on the tangible aspects thereof (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 353). Finally, one of the biggest challenges in the service process is to deliver and maintain a sustainable quality service to the customer.

2.4.1 The Services Triangle

The Services Triangle (Figure 2.2), as proposed by Kotler and Keller (2009: 396-397) and Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 206), is a strategic framework illustrating the importance of customers in the ability of organisations to keep their promises and to be successful in building customer relationships.

ORGANIZATION (Management)

Internal marketing

"Enabling the promise"

External mrketing

"Making the promise"

PROVIDERS

CUSTOMERS

Interactive marketing

"Delivering the promise"
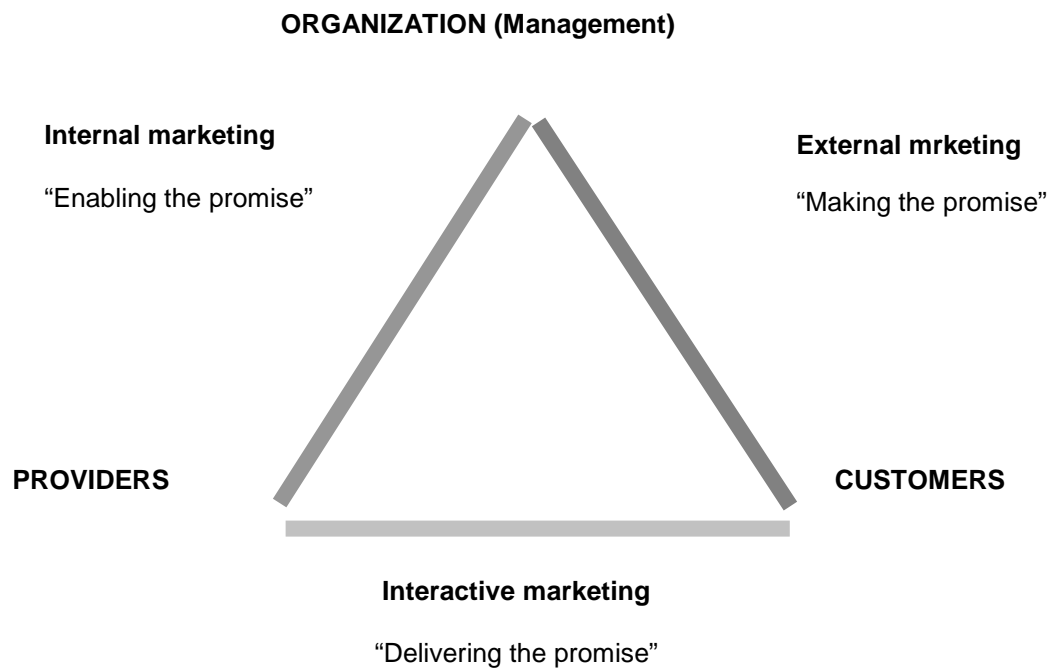
Figure 2.2: The Services Triangle

Source: Kotler and Keller (2009: 396-397)

The triangle shows the three key role players (interlinked groups), namely the organisation (management), the customers and the service providers who are bound together to develop, promote and deliver service quality. The providers are the front-line employees; an outsourced person/organisation may deliver the organisation's service. There are three different types of marketing, namely internal, interactive and external. These must all be carried out successfully in order for a service to succeed.

External marketing entails the normal work (for example, pricing, promotion, distribution) that management engages in to develop customer expectations, but also to make promises regarding the service to be delivered. Any form of communication to the customer prior to service delivery is viewed as part of the

external marketing process; therefore, any promises that were made in this process must be kept (for example, promotion, price). To ensure that promises are kept, management must not only recruit, train, motivate and reward front-line employees, but also provide them with resources to deliver organisational promises (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 206).

Interactive marketing (also known as real-time marketing) entails front-line employee skills. This is where employees or any outsourced persons/organisations (subcontractors) break a promise, resulting in dissatisfied customers. Management need to encourage and support front-line employees and contractors to deliver on the service promise. However, front-line employees, who might be unable and unwilling to deliver, will contribute to the failure of the organisation. This action will ultimately cause the service triangle to collapse (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 206).

The sides of the service triangle should be aligned. In other words, all three sides of the triangle must be integrated to ensure that the organisation can achieve service quality. Once this is achieved, a service culture can be maintained through the effective management of all role players. Excellence in one component will thus be insufficient. In order to achieve service quality, the organisation must recruit effective employees, provide proper training, reward and motivate front-line employees, and provide the necessary technology and equipment to keep up with promises. For example, a promise made through external marketing must equal the service delivered (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 396-397). Finally, this model also highlights the notion that the service supplier and the customer are in contact. Thus the process is visible and the customer is in a position to identify weaknesses.

2.5   SERVICE QUALITY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

The concept of service quality has led to a great deal of ongoing discussion and research, especially in literature regarding services marketing. In this context, existing literature (Pride and Ferrell, 2010: 229; Grönroos, 2007: 436-437; Kotler and Keller, 2009: 169; Lamb et al., 2008: 414) provides evidence that service quality plays a critical role between the organisation and its customers. Many businessmen believe that service quality is the only competitive advantage that can be sustained

in the long run. From the growing number of books on the topic, it is clear that service quality is a prerequisite for the survival of any organisation; it is critical in both determining customer satisfaction and achieving competitive advantage; it affects repurchase intentions of customers and, therefore, plays an important role towards long-term profitability. According to the Gaps Model, service quality can be viewed as the difference between customers' expectations of a service and their perceived service (also referred to as the Customer Gap).

The key factor in gaining and maintaining a competitive advantage is the capability to deliver outstanding quality service to customers (Lamb et al., 2008: 414; Ladhari, Pons, Bressolles and Zins, 2011: 951-952).

Research has shown that service quality is the outcome of internal policies. These, in turn, result in customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Service quality is also directly linked to customer retention and organisational profitability (Grönroos, 2007: 124). Service quality can be used as an advertising medium for word-of-mouth advertising and can help attract new customers (Pride and Ferrell, 2010: 368; Grönroos, 2007: 361-362). According to research findings by Shahin and Samea (2010: 4), service quality strategies are, in fact, a set of guidelines for all the staff in an organisation. These strategies need to be communicated by management and must distinguish one organisation from another.

British Airways realised that many airlines offer the basic core product, but not all of them offer it in the same manner. Therefore, they decided to differentiate themselves by "how" they offer their product, namely through excellent service and quality (Lamb et al., 2008: 19). Shahin and Samea (2010: 4) indicate that, if no service quality strategy exists, the organisation will not create a customer-oriented service. Therefore, management should design strategies based on customer expectations that can be profitable to the organisation. These strategies should include the organisation's vision, setting future objectives and targeting decisions.

Both the act of service and the purchasing of a product must leave customers satisfied and happy so that they can recommend the organisation to friends and family. Negative publicity is not good for any organisation, as it attracts a negative

perception from customers. Therefore, it can be stated that service is about corporate image and that corporate image is as important as quality service. Results of a study by "RightNow" Technologies in 2008 indicate that 87% of customers stop doing business with an organisation due to poor service. Results also indicate that loyal customers do not note the prices, because they consider quality service more important.[3]

Pride and Ferrell (2010: 368) indicate that customers base their judgement of quality of service on various factors to enable them to choose one service over another. One of the most problematic challenges management faces is how to deal with service quality. In this regard, the authors identify five dimensions of service quality used by customers to judge service quality, namely reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles (see Figure 2.3 Page 31). According to Pride and Ferrell (2010: 368) reliability (the ability to perform the promised service) is the most important dimension in determining customers' evaluation of service quality.

Various authors identified a number of factors that are critical, from the customer's point of view, in terms of service quality. For instance, Sureshshandar et al. (2004: 365) identified core service, product; human elements of service delivery (responsiveness, assurance and empathy); tangibles of service, and social responsibility. Mathies and Burford (2011: 643) found that an important prerequisite of customers regarding employees' understanding of customers' needs is "listening". They also found that front-line service employees meet customer needs when they provide quality service that has a product or tangible service outcome. In their study, 672 female respondents indicated that "knowing your customers' needs and wants" and "to ensure that they leave satisfied" are their prerequisite for quality service.

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[3] Retrieved from http://www.ehow.com/about_6505645_importance-customer-service-organization.html. [Accessed 31 July 2013].

Analysis of customer expectations
• Marketing research • Open communication with employees

Service quality specifications
• Service goals • Management commitment to service quality

Employee performance
• Employee training • Evaluation and compensation systems

Management of service expectations
• Advertising • Good internal communication

Service quality
• Tangibles • Reliability • Responsiveness • Assurance • Empathy
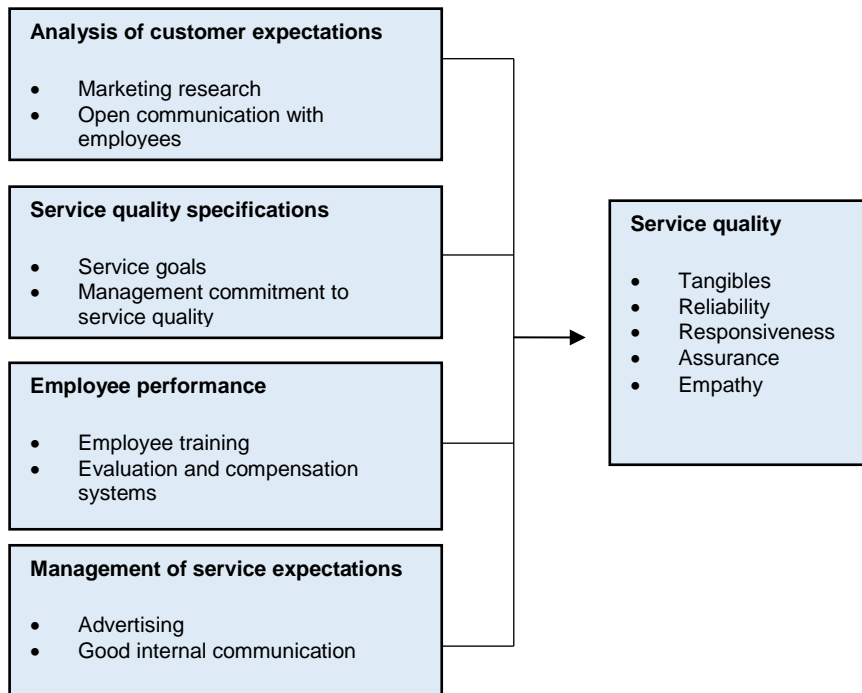
Figure 2.3: Service Quality Model

Source: Pride and Ferrell (2010: 370)

Research by Shahin and Samea (2010: 4) clearly shows that management should pay more attention to service processes. They state that perceived service is directly influenced by service delivery, and that service delivery is a result of employee performance.

Providing quality service is a difficult task, as all customers have experienced poor service at times. Therefore, it is important for organisations to take steps to increase their service quality by considering the four factors that affect it, namely an analysis of customer expectations, service quality specifications, employee performance, and management of service expectations (Grönroos, 2007: 361-362; Pride and Ferrel 2010: 370).

2.6   CUSTOMERS' EXPECTATIONS OF SERVICES

Customers have certain wishes with respect to how they want a service. Pride and Ferrell (2010: 368) indicate that it is important to determine what customers expect and then develop a service that meets or exceeds that expectation. Therefore, it is crucial to differentiate between the quality expected by a customer and the real quality of service that is provided during a service process and the customer's perception.

There are numerous definitions of "customer expectations", but the most common are those by Zeithaml et al. (2009: 32) and Zeithaml and Bitner (2003: 2), namely that customer expectations can be defined as "the desires or wants of customers" or "predictions made by customers about what may happen during a transaction or exchange". Customer expectations are based on their expectations, and the purchase of a product must match their value-oriented processes.

It is important to note that customers have different types of expectations about services. In the literature on services marketing, Zeithaml et al. (2009: 76-83) identified desired service (highest expectation) and acceptable service (what the customer will accept). Against this background, they identified factors that influence customer expectations (see Figure 2.4 Page 33). The difference or gap between the two levels is called "the customer's zone of tolerance". On the level of the desired service, they identified "personal needs, lasting service intensifiers, derived service expectations and personal service philosophy", whereas on the level of acceptable service expectations, the authors identified "temporary service intensifiers, perceived service alternatives, customer self-perceived service role, situational factors and predicted service", as sources of influence.

The most important factor in a customer's judgement of service quality is service expectations, as these are influenced by past experiences, word-of-mouth communication from other customers, or advertising. Every customer is unique in his/her own way as s/he has different needs, wants and expectations. For instance, s/he expects reliable service and low prices and wants to receive what s/he paid for.
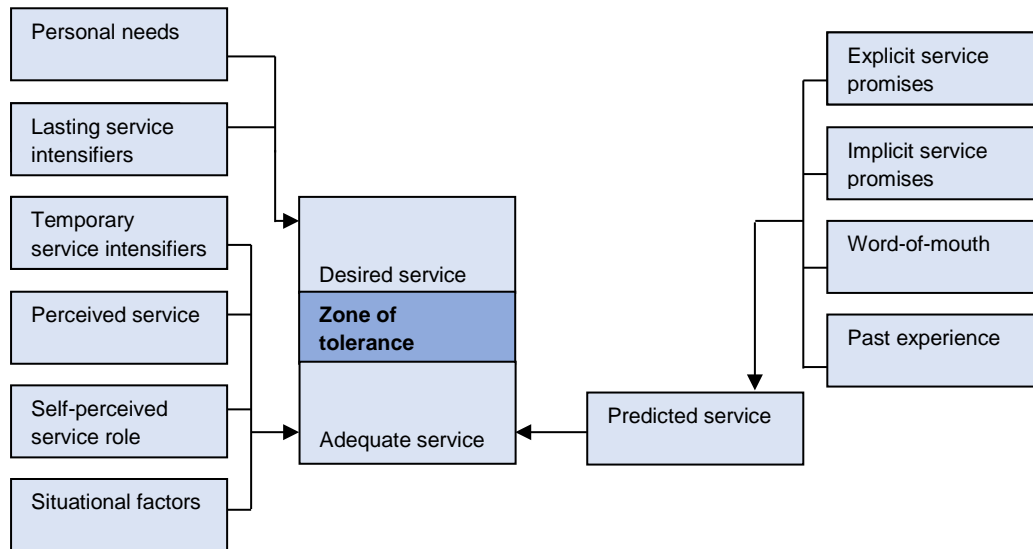
Figure 2.4: Factors that influence customers' service levels
Source: Zeithaml et al. (2009: 87)

Research indicates that customer expectations have different characteristics, namely, what customers think should form part of a service encounter; what they expect from a service provider; what they hope for, and what they wish for. Therefore, customer expectations can be regarded as expressions of what they believe service providers should offer (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2003: 2). In their work on managing customer expectations, Hu, Kandampully and Juwaheer (2009: 112) found that customers consider not only the purpose of receiving a service, but also the possibility that they will receive it (expectation).

The gap between what customers expect and what they experience will affect customer satisfaction. In other words, when customers' expectations are higher than their experiences, they have a negative perception of satisfaction. When customers' expectations are lower than their experiences, they have a positive perception of satisfaction. Thus, customers' expectations of service quality have an effect on customer experience and customer satisfaction.

Finally, customer expectations can be managed through accurate and appropriate communication. This can be achieved by means of marketing (for example, advertisements), as no organisation can afford to raise customer expectations above the level of organisational performance (see Figure 2.3 Page 31) (Pride and Ferrel,

2010: 370). According to Pride and Ferrel, improved service quality and increased customer satisfaction reduce the gap between customers' expectations and their perceived level of performance. This is an ongoing task for any organisation.

2.7   CUSTOMERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SERVICES

Customer satisfaction and its importance to the success of organisations are widely discussed in marketing literature (Sachdev and Verma, 2004: 93; Grönroos, 2007: 94). Satisfaction is related to customer needs and it is, therefore, important to find out which services should be improved in order to increase customer satisfaction. Customer satisfaction can occur at various levels in an organisation, for example satisfaction with a frontline employee, with the core service, or with the organisation as a whole (Chi and Gursoy, 2009: 246). Therefore, front-line employee performance and customer satisfaction are key contributors to organisational success, because customer needs and the fulfilment thereof are important for the survival of any organisation. A satisfied customer will always return.

Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 37-38) identified factors of service quality that are critical from the customers' point of view, "namely core services/service product; the human element of service delivery; systematization of service quality, the tangibility of service and social responsibility". It is important to note that, according to them, it has also become clear that these factors influence customer satisfaction. Chi and Gursoy (2009: 246) further indicate that customers with a poor perception of service quality also have a poor level of satisfaction. The same applies to customers with a medium/high perception of service quality and whose results indicate that their perception of service quality is medium/high.

Sureshchandar et al.'s (2002: 371) study shows that, although there is a correlation between service quality and customer satisfaction, service quality is likely to be influenced by variables such as advertising, other forms of communication, the service rendered by front-line employees, and the experiences of other market players. Therefore, they suggest that management should endeavour to improve not only customers' satisfaction, but also their perception of the organisation's overall

service quality (Sureshchandar et al., 2002: 371). Therefore, the key to customer satisfaction is to exceed their expectations.

In their study, Lin and Wang (2006: 271-282) found that perceived value had a high impact on customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Their final results indicate that customer satisfaction, perceived value and trust accounted for 85% of the variance in customer loyalty. Results also indicate that 62% of the variance in customer satisfaction was explained by perceived value. These results support prior studies, namely that customer satisfaction and perceived value are important predictors of customer loyalty and that customer satisfaction is the result of customer perception of value received.

Finally, to enhance customer satisfaction, an organisation can engage in efforts to improve the value perceived by their customers by focusing on activities with a high importance rating (Lam, Shankar, Erramilli and Murthy, 2004: 308). Of all service products, quality is one of the most expected by customers. Therefore, a high and unique way of quality will win customers and make them loyal towards an organisation in the long run. In other words, the key to a competitive advantage is to deliver quality service that will enhance customer satisfaction.

The role of front-line employees in service quality and customer satisfaction will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

2.8 THE RELEVANCE OF CUSTOMER RETENTION AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

In competitive environments, an increasing number of organisations apply their strategies to attract customers, to keep these customers as long as possible, and to encourage customers to increase their purchases by developing personal and lasting relationships with them. Khan (2014: 109) further indicates that relationship marketing can increase customer retention, if management build long-term relationships with their customers.

These relationships must benefit both the customer and the organisation. By building strong customer relationships and focusing on the factors that influence these relationships, management will be able, over time, to understand their customers' expectations. Khan (2014: 109) further indicates that the objective of a marketing strategy is to deliver value to customers. Organisations' level of relationship marketing strategies is positively correlated with both organisational performance and the level to which strategic competitive advantage is achieved in the marketplace. This can, over time, contribute to the closure of Gap 1.

Customer loyalty is vital to organisational performance, as loyal customers will generate more sales, a steady cash flow and improve profits and thus be the key to organisational success and profitability. A loyal customer is a major asset to any organisation, as s/he reduces the need to seek new customers (Dimitriades, 2006: 782-785; Albarq, 2013: 701).

Therefore, customer loyalty refers to the behavioural intentions of the customer and the likelihood that s/he will return to the organisation (Salanova, Agut and Peiró, 2005: 1217). Research has shown that excellent employee performance is related to customer loyalty, and that a favourable service climate also has a positive influence on customer loyalty (Pride and Ferrel, 2010: 371). Various other factors also explain why customers remain loyal to an organisation, namely customer satisfaction with service, the image of the organisation, the satisfactory manner in which complaints are handled, communication between the organisation and its customers, and trust in the service provided (Ball, Coelho and Vilares, 2006: 392).

In view of the importance of customer loyalty to organisations, the results of a study by Lin and Wang (2006: 279) indicate that customer loyalty is affected by perceived value and customer satisfaction, on the one hand, whereas customer satisfaction plays an important role in perceived value and customer loyalty, on the other. There is thus a positive link between customer loyalty and organisational profitability. Lin and Wang further explain that loyal customers are less likely to switch to another organisation because of price. Loyal customers will rather make more purchases than non-loyal customers; they are less likely to shop around and provide repeat business. The loyal customer will help promote the organisation by word-of-mouth,

business referrals, and provide references. In fact, a loyal customer is an organisation's best advertising medium; increases sales by purchasing a wider variety of products, and will also make more frequent purchases. A loyal customer spreads positive word-of-mouth and makes positive recommendations. Other dimensions of customer loyalty are resistance to switching to another organisation, identifying with the service, and preference for a particular service (Dehghan and Shahin, 2011: 4; Kheng, Mahamad, Ramayah and Mosahab, 2010: 57).

Salanova et al. (2005: 1224) conducted a research study in which 114 units (58 hotel receptionists and 56 front-desk staff for restaurants) and 342 contact employees participated. From each unit, 3 employees and 10 customers participated. Their results indicate that there is a link between service climate and customer loyalty. In addition, their study also shows that the greater the service climate, the highest the customer loyalty, and the highest the customer loyalty, the greater the service climate. Their results thus indicate that a positive service climate can be associated with customer loyalty. Their findings are also in line with previous research indicating a positive relationship between service climate and customer loyalty. Finally, customer satisfaction can be viewed as a basis for customer loyalty. It is clear from the literature that there is a relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Ball et al., 2006: 392).

The Gaps Model of Service Quality, definitely the best known service-quality model, is used to improve service quality and plays a significant role in services marketing literature. It implies that all service quality gaps need to improve and be closed in order to increase customer satisfaction.

Closing the Customer Gap (the gap between customer expectations and their perception of service) is important in rendering a quality service, which is also the basis of the Gaps Model. This model provides information to management and helps them understand how service quality emerges. Service quality and customer satisfaction are two of the core concepts in an organisational environment, and the key to a sustainable competitive advantage.

2.9   THE GAPS MODEL OF SERVICE QUALITY

Parasuraman et al. (1983, 1985, 1988, 1990, 1991, 1993) did intensive work on service quality and developed an extended model of service quality based on the gaps between customer expectations of service and what they perceive. This model is called the Gaps Model of Service Quality (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 400, Grönroos, 2007: 114; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 48-51; Clow and Kurtz, 2004: 86-100).

The authors of the Gaps Model of Service Quality point out that a customer's perception of service quality depends on the four gaps that exist in an organisation/customer environment. They found that closing the gap between what customers expect and what they perceive is critical in delivering a quality service. From a managerial point of view, the identification of service quality gaps is a useful approach, since this Model serves as a framework for organisations to improve their quality of service and their marketing services.

Organisational management finds this Model useful in identifying differences between standards and delivery to those standards. The difference can be used to explain customer satisfaction and to identify areas in need of improvement. Once a gap is identified a plan can be developed to bridge the gap. However, a gap analysis involves internal and external analysis, where external analysis relates to communication with customers, and internal analysis relates to service design and service delivery. Furthermore, this Model shows how information with respect to customer expectations and front-line employees' interpretation and perception of customers' requirements has been altered (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 49).

The Gaps Model of Service Quality comprises two main categories, namely the Customer Gap and the Provider Gap. These Gaps occur within a service-providing organisation. The Customer Gap represents the difference between a customer's expectation and perception of a service encounter. The Provider Gap consists of 4 Gaps, namely the Listening Gap, the Services Design and Standards Gap, the Service Performance Gap and the Communication Gap (Seth, Deshmaukh and Vrat, 2005: 916; Grönroos, 2007: 115). These four Gaps, which occur within service organisations, are responsible for the Customer Gap.

In order to close the Customer Gap, the Provider Gaps (Gaps 1 to 4) need to be closed. The Marketing Association of Australia and New Zealand proposes that the following equation thus applies: Customer Gap=f (Gaps 1 to 4) (Yadav and Dabhade, 2013:82). Thus, the magnitude and the direction of each Gap in the Model will affect the quality of service. Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1243) found that the Customer Gap is an outcome of all the other Gaps.

To compete successfully, organisations need to understand customers' perceptions of quality as well as the manner in which service quality is influenced. Currently, more organisations are realising that their key challenge is managing quality service. Organisations are experiencing service gaps, due to the perception and expectations of their customers; this, in turn, generates opportunities for organisations to improve their services and systems. Research indicates that the service quality gaps affect service delivery; therefore, management should endeavour to prevent these gaps as early as possible (Shahin and Samea, 2010: 6).

2.9.1 The Customer Gap
The Customer Gap, also referred to as "Gap 5" (see Figure 1.1 Page 3) (Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2011: 1241; Kong and Muthusamy, 2011: 148; Renganathan, 2011: 159; Shahin and Samea, 2010: 2) is the central focus of the Gaps Model and can be defined as "the distance we have with our customers, a measure of the degree of disconnection we have with them" (Gafo, 2010). In other words, the bigger the disconnection, the bigger the Customer Gap will be. This Gap represents the difference between what customers expect and what they perceive.

Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1245) indicate that the Customer Gap can be written as "Expected quality by a customer = perceived quality – expected quality". Thus, the gap between a customer's expectations and a customer's perceptions leads to customer dissatisfaction. Organisations experience this Gap, due to the difference in customers' expectations and perceptions of service quality (see Figure 2.6). Therefore, in order to satisfy customers, this Gap needs to be closed so that competitive advantage can be achieved by exceeding customer expectations. Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien also states that the result of the Customer Gap can be predicted, namely that the higher the Customer Gap, the

higher the risk of generating customer dissatisfaction and losing customer loyalty will be. This Gap consists of five dimensions of service quality, namely tangibles (all physical facilities and equipment as well as front-line employees and other staff appearances), reliability front-line employees ability to perform a service as promised by the organisation), responsiveness (the willingness of the organisation to listen to their customers), assurance (this is the skills, knowledge and courtesy of front-line employees), and empathy (caring for the customers as well as individual service to the customers) (see Figure 2.3 Page 31) (Pride and Ferrell, 2010: 370). The customer's evaluation of the service quality dimension will be influenced by the service delivery process (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 170).

According to Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1241-1247), Renganathan (2011: 162), Urban (2009: 633) as well as Shahin and Samea (2010: 2), the main factors leading to this Gap are:

- Gap 1: Management does not know what their customers expect; thus their perception of customers' expectations differs from customer's actual needs and desires.

- Gap 2: Management does not select an appropriate service design and standards; thus, even if they are aware of customers' needs, these may not be turned into appropriate service specifications.

- Gap 3: Organisations do not deliver according to service standards; thus, service quality specifications are not met.

- Gap 4: Organisations do not match performance promises; thus their market communication activities are not consistent with their service delivery.

2.9.2 The Provider Gap

This Gap consists of four internal quality gaps (organisational) that represent quality losses and that interact with one another in many ways. In order to close the Customer Gap, all these Gaps (Gaps 1 to 4) need to be closed (Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2011: 1243).

Gap 1: The Listening Gap

This Gap represents the difference between the customer's expectation towards a service and the organisation's perception of the customer's expectation towards the quality of service offered (see Figure 2.5).
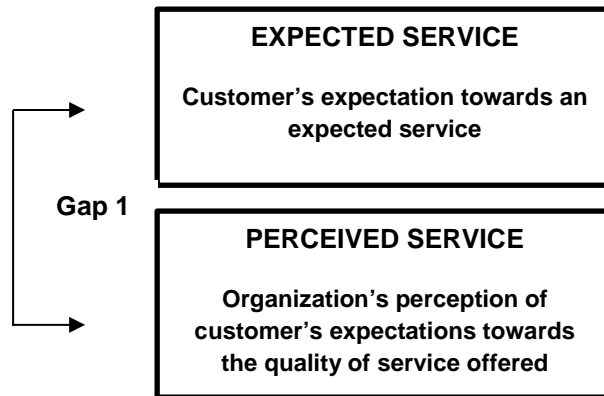
Figure 2.5: Gap 1: The gap between a customer's expectation and the organisation's
perception
Source: Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1241)

Differences in this Gap occur because management are not aware of their customers' expectations. This means that management do not know and are unable to predict the factors that constitute a high-quality service. Therefore, this Gap occurs mainly due to inaccurate and insufficient information obtained from market research; the incorrect interpretation of customers' expectations; inadequate service recovery; poor communication in the organisation, and poor flow of information between all parties involved (Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2011: 1241).

Gap 2: The Service Design and Standards Gap

This Gap occurs because of the difference in the organisation's understanding of customers' expectations towards service and the quality of service provided (see Figure 2.6).
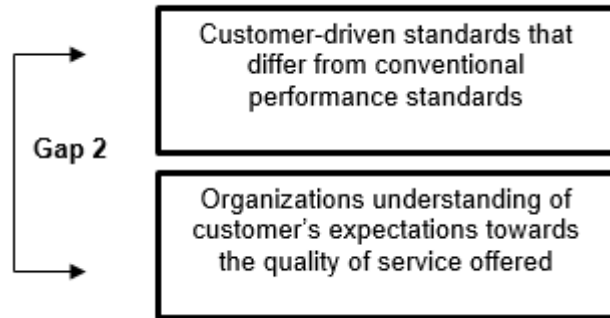
Figure 2.6: Gap 2: The gap between the organisation's perception and the characteristics of a quality service

Source: Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1242)

In other words, service-quality specifications are not consistent with those of management's perceptions of quality expectations; thus a lack of management commitment towards service quality. Therefore, the following factors affect the size of the Gap, namely insufficient planning procedures by management; lack in clear setting of goals; poor service design; absence or lack of customer-defined service standards, and setting service quality goals (Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien, 2011: 1242; Grönroos, 2007: 116).

Gap 3: The Service Performance Gap

This Gap occurs when quality specifications are not met by performance in the service delivery process, due to shortcomings in human resource policies (front-line employees); supply and demand do not match; poor management of service operations; insufficient internal marketing; customers not fulfilling roles, and technology and systems that are not according to specifications. In other words, this Gap occurs when there is a discrepancy between specifications and service delivery (see Figure 2.7).

Figure 2.7: Gap 3: The gap between the quality of service delivered and service provisions
Source: Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1242)

The most important variables in this Gap are thus employees, customers and intermediaries and the need of organisations to synchronise demand and capacity.

In specialist literature, it is stated that the Service Performance Gap is directly associated with the Customer Gap and that this Gap also has a significant effect on service quality (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 400). In this regard, Salanova et al. (2005: 1217) confirm that service performance is directly related to service quality. In other words, promises relating to service quality not only have an impact on this Gap, but also involve Gaps 1, 2 and 4. Furthermore, according to Salanova et al., the occurrence of the Service Performance Gap generates the costs of eliminating service failures. These are costs that would affect the financial results of an organisation.

Gap 4: The Communication Gap

This Gap means that the promises given through external communication (market communication) are not in line and consistent with the services delivered (see Figure 2.8).
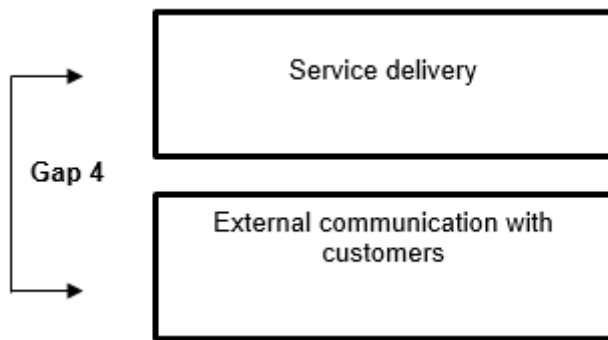
Figure 2.8: Gap 4: The gap between promised quality service delivery and external communication

Sources: Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1242)

Customers assessed the information provided by family, friends and commercials; the main reasons for this Gap are poor market communication; too many promises; inappropriate pricing; inadequate horizontal communication, and poor management of customers' expectations. Employees responsible for advertising as well as marketing employees responsible for promotions must be held responsible for the lack in external communication.

2.10   CLOSING THE PROVIDER GAP

In an ideal environment, customers' expectations and perceptions of service delivery would match; however, if that is not the case, a gap occurs. The secret to closing the Customer Gap is to close the Provider Gap (gaps 1-4) and to keep it closed. Therefore, Grönroos (2007: 114-118); Fitzsimmons and Fitzsimmons (2008: 109); Wolniak & Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1242); Clow and Kurtz (2004: 93-100); Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 48-51) as well as Kotler and Keller (2009: 402-406) identified the following strategies to close the Provider Gap in order to close the Customer Gap:

Gap 1 The Listening Gap:

The above authors propose various strategies to minimise or close Gap 1. Improved marketing research can be used to understand customers' expectations. The best-known survey, namely the SERVQUAL survey, may be an option. In this survey,

customers are requested to provide ratings of the service-quality dimensions (reliability, responsiveness, empathy, tangibles, and assurance). The authors also suggest upward communication (in other words, management must have some form of customer contact); better communication between management and front-line employees; a reduction in the number of levels of management; keeping and improving relationships with current customers rather than attracting new ones, as a current customer costs less than attracting a new one, and service recovery. This Gap is perhaps the easiest of all the Gaps to close.

Furthermore, the said authors also proposed different strategies for service recovery, namely that management must do the right thing first; they must follow up complaints; solve problems immediately; provide adequate and logic explanations to customers; treat customers fairly; develop a long-term relationship with their customers; learn from previous experiences, and listen to customers who leave the organisation. However, if problems are due to bad management, a change of management or better knowledge regarding service competition is required (Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 51).

Gap 2 The Service Design and Standards Gap:
Grönroos (2007: 114-118) as well as Kotler and Keller (2009: 402-406) propose various strategies to narrow or close this Gap. They indicate that commitment to service quality by management and service providers is more important in closing the quality gap than any other planning procedure. Therefore, all service standards set by the organisation must be based on customer requirements.

As indicated earlier, services are intangible and process-oriented and it is, therefore, difficult to communicate. Both front-line employees and customers play an important role in the process of identifying customers' needs for a new service. The development of new services (service innovations) is an important driver of competitive advantage. Therefore, in order to narrow or close this Gap, management, service providers and front-line employees must be committed to service quality and should agree on specifications and goals to deliver quality service. Management needs to ensure that all services are clearly designed; that new services are developed, and that existing services are improved. With this in

mind, Service Blueprint is a unique tool for service development and design. This tool provides a graphic breakdown of the service systems in an organisation. This visual process portrays all the steps in a logic order and is a useful technique in developing a new service (Grönfeldt and Strother, 2006: 131-138).

In addition, hard and soft service standards, which are solely based on customers' requirements and expectations, must be set and in place and they must reflect customers' expectations of service quality. This can have a positive result on the closure of Gap 2 as well as on the Customer Gap. It is important to note that tangibles (servicescape) such as interior and exterior attributes have an enormous impact not only on how customers interpret messages sent out by an organisation, but also on the evaluation and experience of their service. Management may make use of designers to create a service environment that supports the services offered by the organisation. Therefore, by using servicescape, Provider Gap 2 can finally be closed effectively (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 83).

Gap 3 The Service Performance Gap:
The evidence of previous research by Grönfeldt and Strother (2006: 131-138), Grönroos (2007: 116-118), as well as Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 84-110) identified a number of variables to close this Gap, namely employees, customers, intermediaries (for example, retailers, agents, and so on) and the need of organisations to synchronise demand and capacity.

The role of front-line employees is critical in the closure of this Gap. Therefore, human resources must ensure that the best candidates are appointed; provide the necessary training to enable them to deliver according to service-quality standards; ensure that the necessary support systems (tools and techniques) are available for front-line employees to do their job, and to have measures in place to retain the best front-line employees. Front-line employees must also take responsibility for a job done. This gap could be narrowed through the improvement of internal communication, empowerment of front-line employees and to find and develop solutions to service problems (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 50).

Secondly, the role of customer in the organisation is equally important, and management must understand their customers; develop strategies to enhance customer participation; reward customers for their contribution in the organisation, and find ways in which to control and motivate intermediaries to organisational goals. Demand and supply must match in order to deliver quality service.

Front-line employees, as the key role players in this Gap, are discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

Gap 4 The Communications Gap:

The closure of this Gap depends on various factors such as the proper coordination of communication in and outside an organisation. Management and front-line employees must be in agreement regarding their communication to customers. Therefore, the service promises made by front-line employees and the organisation itself must not be overpromised. Management should pay more attention to their advertising campaigns and ensure that they are accurate and realistic. Advertising objectives must address service variables such as intangibility, heterogeneity, perishability and inseparability. Advertising campaigns should be an actual statement of what the target market is about to receive – for example, price and quality. This contributes to the creation of customer loyalty and brand awareness. Management must not only manage customers' expectations, but also educate customers in terms of the service process (Grönroos, 2007: 116; Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 180-198).

2.11   SUMMARY

The literature studied confirms Grönroos's (2007) conclusion that the gap analysis should be used not only to guide management in an effort to find reasons for quality problems and losses, but also to discover ways in which to close those gaps. By the same token, it is also essential that management understand customers' expectations and that the gaps in service quality be identified. The information obtained can assist management in identifying cost-effective ways to close these gaps. Thus, every organisation should analyse its own specific quality gaps, beginning with customers' expectations and complaints. Literature studies indicate that customer satisfaction leads to repeat purchases. These, in turn, lead to loyal

customers. These, in turn, lead to enhanced brand equity and subsequent higher profits. Therefore, in order for organisations to obtain a higher customer loyalty, management need to continuously endeavour to increase value as perceived by their customers by increasing service quality and enhancing customer satisfaction.

Understanding the factors that have an impact on service quality and customer satisfaction is of great importance to every service organisation. Thus, to enhance AVBOB's service quality perception amongst their customers, the Customer Gap needs to be closed. The Provider Gap (gaps 1-4) needs to be closed by management and front-line employees.

CHAPTER 3

FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES AS KEY ROLE PLAYERS IN THE SERVICE PERFORMANCE GAP (GAP 3)

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Given the competitiveness of the service sector in the world, especially in developed countries, but also in South Africa, increasing attention is being paid to the various strategies to improve customer service. In order to differentiate themselves from their competitors in some way, many organisations are focusing on the quality of customer service as their means of differentiation, whereas other organisations tend to develop a closer relationship with their customers in order to increase customer satisfaction and customer loyalty (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 33-54).

There is substantial evidence in the literature on service marketing to confirm that customer service is a major factor for organisations, not only to gain and increase their market share, but also to compete in the competitive market of the 21st century. Organisations that provide a customer-oriented quality service that meets or exceeds customer expectations have a major competitive advantage (Grönroos, 2007: 94, 144-147; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 36-51).

Although technology and physical resources offer valuable support, organisations depend more on their front-line employees than on any other staff members. The reason being that these employees are in a position to follow up on some critical aspects such as quality service rendered, attend to customers' wishes, and take corrective action when required. The importance of front-line employees has been confirmed in various studies such as that of Grönroos (2007: 366), Zeithaml et al. (2009: 374), Grönfeldt and Strother (2006: 38-40), as well as Baptiste (2008: 291) who have indicated that these employees are a crucial resource for any organisation. The importance of front-line employees is directly linked to Provider Gap 3, namely the Service Performance Gap.

It is also important to bear in mind that some services are delivered in the workplace (for example, a radio station), whereas others are delivered at the customer's home (for example, plumber or postman), or at the service site (for example, a hairdresser or airline baggage-handling staff). Thus, in most of the services rendered, the customer needs to be physically present. This study focuses on service delivery at a service organisation, more specifically AVBOB, which means that the customer and front-line employee are physically present and thus forced to interact with each other.

In the literature, front-line employees are referred to as those employees who interact with customers directly thus customer-contact employees (Grönroos, 2007: 365), whereas Zeithaml et al. (2009: 351) refer to them as "service employees".

In addition, the interaction between the customer and the front-line employee provides a potential for an organisation to both improve service quality and achieve customer loyalty. Customers are not concerned about the profit they are generating for the organisation; they rather expect the organisation to meet their needs. Although the "customer" may be an individual or a member of a group, it is important to bear in mind that the organisation must be geared to the customer's wishes and needs (Dimitriades, 2006: 783-785).

With this in mind, Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 196) indicate that front-line employees contribute directly to service quality, because their attitude and behaviour impact on the customer's evaluation of services. They also point out that management need to endeavour to enhance a positive service climate that will guide front-line employee behaviour and ensure quality.

Therefore, strategies must be developed with an eye on the customer who must be viewed as an asset that needs to be valued, developed and retained. It is, therefore, important to bear in mind that, from a customer's point of view, the most important service impression occurs during a service encounter when the customer and front-line employees interact. It is, therefore, important to note the role of front-line employees in service delivery.

CUSTOMERS

| Frontline | Frontline | Frontline | Frontline | Frontline | Frontline | Frontline | Frontline |

Supervisor

Supervisor

Manager
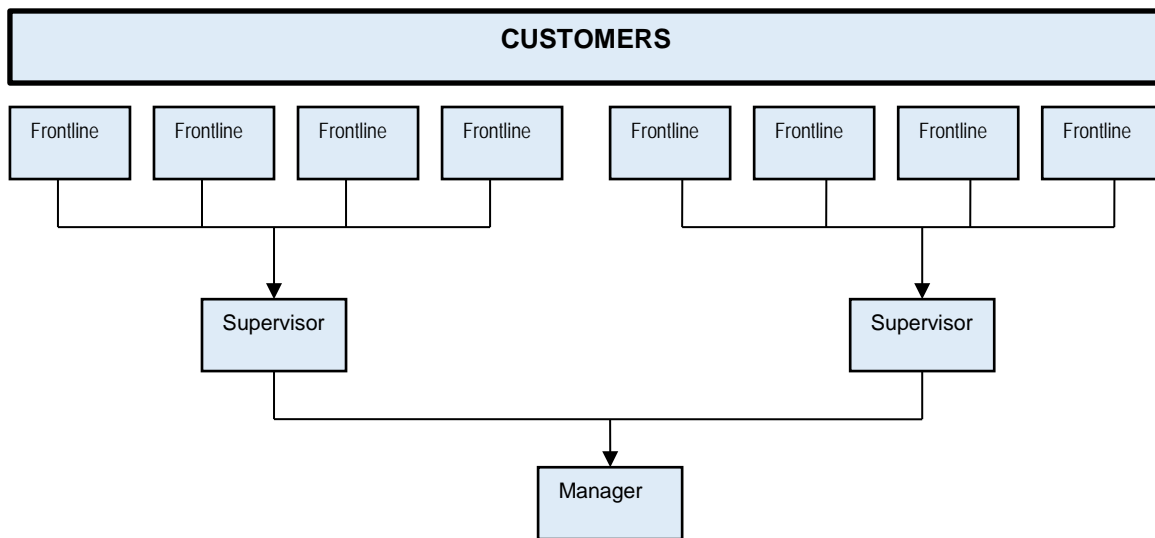
Figure 3.1: Focus on customer-oriented service delivery

Source: Zeithaml et al. (2009: 376)

3.2   GAP 3: THE SERVICE PERFORMANCE GAP

The fundamental reason for the occurrence of this Gap is that human resource issues are not in place (Grönroos, 2007: 116-118). This means that front-line employees are unable or unwilling to perform a service at the desired or prescribed level. Wolniak and Skotnicka-Zasadzien (2011: 1242) and Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 50-51) state that this Gap is the difference between the standard of service quality and the actual service delivered.

There are different reasons for the existence of this Gap. Grönroos (2007: 116-118) and Ueno (2010: 76) indicate that this Gap is mainly due to organisational specifications that are too rigid and front-line employees who are not in agreement with, and do not adhere to these specifications; organisation specifications that are not in line with the corporate culture; poor management of the service operations, and a lack of internal marketing, technology and systems.

In other words, the most important variables in this Gap are employees, customers and intermediaries. In specialist literature, it is stated that the Service Performance Gap is directly associated with the Customer Gap and that this Gap also has a

significant effect on service quality (Kotler and Keller, 2009: 400). Furthermore, according to Kotler and Keller, the occurrence of the Service Performance Gap generates the costs of eliminating service failures. These costs would affect the financial results of an organisation.

This chapter focuses on the role of front-line employees. In the following section, the role of the front-line employees, the reasons for the occurrence of this Gap as well as strategies for closing this Gap are discussed.

3.3   THE ROLE OF FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEES

It is important to note that the people's component plays a crucial role in the service-delivery process. "People" refers to front-line employees, customers and all other human role players involved in the service process. In the case of AVBOB and all service organisations, front-line employees provide a link between external customers and the internal operations of an organisation; their role in customer care cannot be sufficiently emphasised (Lamb et al., 2008: 414).

These employees are vital for the success of any organisation. They are in immediate contact with the customer and are instrumental in the inter-active marketing process. The employment of suitable front-line employees will enhance and contribute to the success of any organisation. In fact, they are so essential that Zeithaml et al. (2009: 352) regard them as "the service" and "the organization in the customer's eyes". What makes them so special is that they are employed to attend to the customers' wishes and demands and to follow up on the quality of service rendered. They are the first contact employees in the service-delivery process and act as part-time marketers for the organisation. Not only do they serve the customer, but they also represent their employer. Thus, front-line employees play a crucial role in service delivery, as they are contributing towards an organisation's future and success. Such organisations are recognised by the abilities of their skilled and motivated front-line employees.

Customer satisfaction, through focused quality customer service, remains the key to profitability and, in many instances, front-line employees are the reason for customers returning to AVBOB. However, they can also be the reason why customers do not return, as everything they do or say may influence the customer's perception of the organisation.

In addition, front-line employees act as representatives of an organisation and can thus directly influence customer satisfaction. Therefore, they play the role of marketers. They act as a human advertising board when selling a product or service. For example, an off-duty employee may act unprofessionally or make a rude remark – this will reflect negatively on AVBOB. In some instances, employees such as bank assistants or professional nurses may wear a company uniform. In addition, customers often tell stories of dreadful experiences at service-delivery companies, in which a front-line employee often plays a prominent role therein.

Front-line employees are also the brand of their organisation. An example is Morrison's, a company in the United Kingdom, whose effective front-line employees deliver quality service. They are committed to a sustainable and high-quality customer service, while their strategy is to provide the best customer service and to develop the best-trained and motivated staff. In 2010, the company had over 131 000 employees, serving over 11 million customers weekly. The company also won the Employer of the Year Award in 2011, which demonstrates their focus on staff and their ability and commitment to exceptional customer service.

To enable them to develop their front-line employees to satisfy customers in the best possible way, Morrison's focus on training, coaching and communication. Front-line employees are encouraged to engage with customers; this leads to repeat trade by some of the 11 million customers visiting their store weekly. The company believes that the four key components of quality customer service are information, specialist attention, after-sales service, and convenience. The company also believes that it is more cost effective to retain its customers than to attract new ones.

The lesson learned from this company is that effective management involves the understanding of employee behaviour, training, motivating and rewarding front-line employees to exhibit those behaviours.[4]

On account of their role as bridging workers, front-line employees are the first to interact with customers and are, therefore, in a privileged position because they not only spend a great deal of time directly with customers, but also collect first-hand market information (Coelho, Augusto and Lages, 2010: 31).

No organisation can be successful if front-line employees are not happy in their working environment. Bearing this in mind, front-line employees are also linked to customer satisfaction. The service profit chain confirms this relationship (see Figure 3.2) and indicates that there are links between service quality, employee satisfaction, employee productivity, value of the service provided to the customer, customer satisfaction, customer retention, and customer profits. Thus, according to the service profit chain, customer satisfaction is influenced by the value of service quality, while service quality is influenced by customer loyalty (Klopper et al., 2006: 206: Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 195).
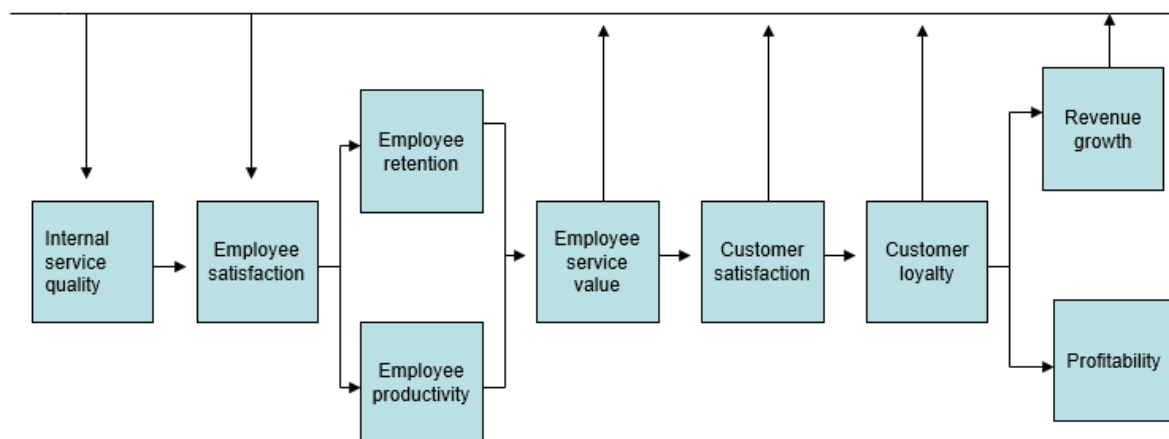
Figure 3.2: The service profit chain
Source: Zeithaml et al. (2009: 354)

Front-line employees' willingness, appearance and manners influence the degree to which customers are satisfied with the service rendered to them.

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[4] Retrieved from www.thetimes100.co.uk. [Accessed 23 August 2013].

3.4 FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEE SERVICE QUALITY ISSUES

In the literature on service marketing, work and non-work factors have been identified as having an influence on front-line employee performance (see Table 3.1). Not only do these factors influence the effectiveness and competency of front-line employees, but they also widen the Service Performance Gap.

Table 3.1: Factors contributing to front-line employee service-quality issues

Authors	Factors
Marin-Garcia, Bonavia and Losilla (2011: 3-6)	Uncertainty among front-line employees as to what is expected of them results in their being less cooperative, not committing themselves, and having no trust in the organisation.
Coelho et al. (2010: 31-45)	Front-line employees hold unstructured jobs
Gudergan, Beatson and Lings (2008: 28)	Individual characteristics of front-line employees. For example, their need for feedback, role motivation, communication style, and organisational commitment. Some of these factors can also influence the service behaviour of front-line employees.
Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng and Tse (2007: 152)	Service climate and ineffective leadership also significantly influence employees' service quality. Front-line employees are not always trained to understand customers. In fact, they are often underpaid and untrained. This results in low levels of motivation, job dissatisfaction, a high staff turnover, and mostly dissatisfied customers.
Karatepe (2013: 614-616)	Front-line employees are underpaid and experience role stress as well as family-work conflict and family conflict; family interference with work-related responsibilities. Front-line employees are undertrained, underpaid and overworked.
Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 146-150)	Role ambiguity, role conflict, role overload, employee/job mismatch, performance measured on quantity and not quality, lack of empowerment, lack of common purpose, lack of management commitment and role tension are factors that contribute to staff dissatisfaction and ineffectiveness.

Kumar, Kee and Manshor (2009: 211-214)	Role ambiguity and conflict, poor employee job-fit, inappropriate supervisory control systems, lack of teamwork, poor technology job-fit and lack of perceived control as factors that influence employee effectiveness.
Zeithaml et al. (2009: 357)	Emotional labour, person/role conflict, organisation/client conflict and interclient conflict.

Not only do the above factors influence front-line employee performance, but their behaviour is also influenced by organisational culture and the values and norms of the organisation. Organisational culture is "the glue" that keeps an organisation together and is the way in which an organisation exerts control over its employees and their behaviour (Grönfeldt and Strother, 2006: 267). In addition, their perceptions of the organisation's service culture and subsequent support by management have an important influence on their behaviour, work effort, job satisfaction and service quality (Yoon, Beatty and Suh, 2001: 513; Marin-Garcia et al., 2011: 3) (see Figure 3.3). Unfortunately, a leader who does not have a strong leadership and who does not realise the organisation's values will not build and sustain a service culture.
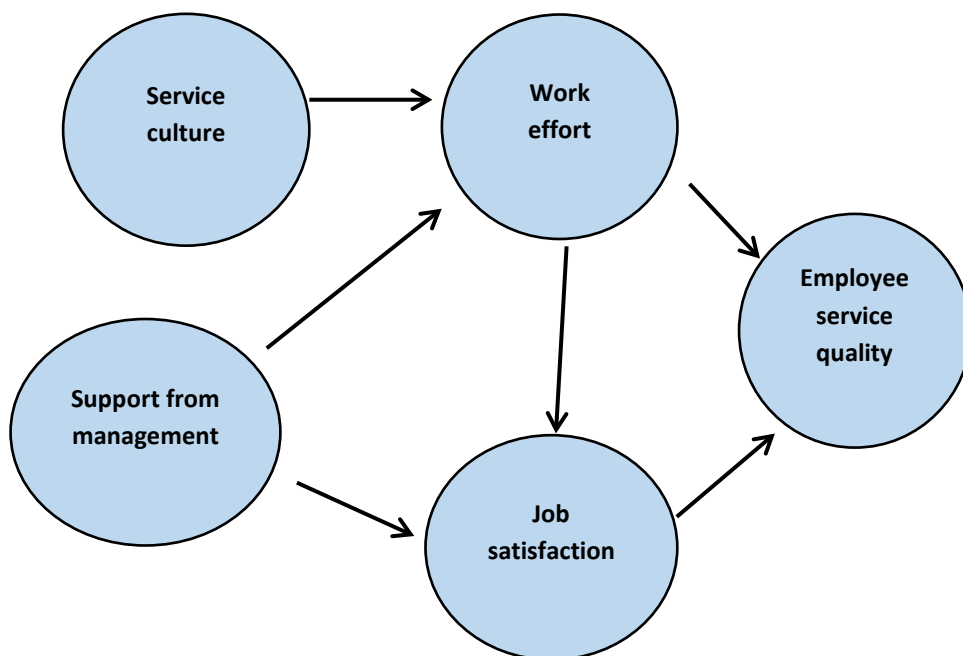
Figure 3.3: Influence of work climate on front-line employee service quality
Source: Yoon, Beatty and Suh (2001: 512)

A discussion of some of the factors that contribute to front-line employees' service-quality issues now follows.

- *Emotional labour*

In the literature on service marketing, much has been mentioned regarding emotional labour. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 133) refer to emotional labour as those jobs that go beyond physical and mental skills needed to deliver a quality service. This includes actions such as smiling when serving a customer, eye contact, showing interest and engaging in a conversation with customers of whom some are unknown to front-line employees. These actions require emotional labour from the front-line employees who may experience a bad day and are still expected to put on the face of the organisation when dealing with customers.

Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 133) also indicate that there are two types of displayed emotional labour, namely "surface acting and deep acting". In the former, front-line employees are required to act as being happy and empathetic, whereas, in the case of AVBOB, front-line employees are expected to feel and experience the emotions of the customer.

Mudie and Pirrie indicate that emotional labour creates stress, as front-line employees may experience a decrease in job satisfaction and be emotionally exhausted. They also point out that, if front-line employees are unable to master emotional labour, they will endeavour to evade the situation.

Kinman's (2009: 118-130) and Wong and Lin's (2006: 726-728) findings are consistent with those of Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 133), namely that emotional labour can lead to emotional exhaustion and job dissatisfaction. It could also result in psychological distress that has an impact on employee well-being; it may also "spill over" into other domains of the employee's life, leading to conflict between work and home roles, sleeping problems, exhaustion, irritability and even social withdrawal. In addition, Mudie and Pirrie explain that emotional labour may also impair family life and leisure activities and point out that emotional labour is present in approximately two-thirds of workplace communication (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 133).

- *Role ambiguity*

Front-line employees do not often understand what management expect of them, and become frustrated with customers (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006:147; Coelho et al. 2010: 34).

- *Person/role conflict*

Present economic circumstances compel an increasing number of women to enter the workforce. However, due to work responsibilities, new demands may conflict with specific roles within the traditional family. On the other hand, the husband may find that his household duties increase when his wife is working (Hsu, 2011: 234). For these reasons, front-line employees may find that they have little time left for family responsibilities, and this may increase the likelihood of conflict between work and family responsibilities (Hoffman, et al. 2009: 300; Lin et al., 2013: 178-179; Clow and Kurtz, 2004: 97; Netemeyer, Maxham and Pullig, 2005: 130-133).

Empirical research by Mathies and Burford (2011: 636-637) indicates that gender differences in service roles still prevail. They argue that, in some organisations, either male or female front-line employees dominate front-line services. They continue by stating that women, in general, tend to fill front-line employee positions, whereas men are usually associated with technical competence and practical tasks. According to the authors, women experience higher levels of role ambiguity, role conflict, more mental stress and emotional labour than men. They also explain that female front-line employees tend to be more emotionally exhausted and take on greater responsibilities. Therefore, they find it more difficult to separate their work and non-work tasks.

Zeithaml et al. (2009: 356) mention that role/person conflict may arise when employees are requested to wear specific clothing or change their appearance to suit job requirements. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 147) argue that role conflict may arise in situations where employees are in a subordinate role, which implies that the service provider has no expertise or ability to deliver the service.

- *Lack of empowerment*

Empowerment is the process whereby front-line employees are given the power and autonomy to act and exercise control over job-related issues and situations. When employees have no autonomy or may not use their discretion when handling customers, they may find their jobs very frustrating (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149).

- *Organisation/client conflict*

Zeithaml et al. (2009: 357-358); Hoffman, et al. (2009: 301) and Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 203) address this issue stating that this type of conflict arises between the organisation (management) and the customer. A demanding customer may cause an employee to choose whether to follow organisation rules or satisfy customer demands. Conflict is greatest when the front-line employee believes that the organisation's policies are wrong and that he must decide whether or not to follow these policies.

- *Interclient conflict*

This occurs when a front-line employee is serving a few customers simultaneously and spends additional time with one customer, for example a bank teller meeting the customer's needs. Waiting customers may become annoyed and dissatisfied because their needs are not met. Front-line employees may find it difficult to serve many customers simultaneously (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149; Hoffman, et al., 2009: 302; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 204).

- *Performance measured on quantity*

Performance measured on quantity and not quality is another factor, as some organisations are more interested in employee efficiency than employee effectiveness and in the number of customers they serve. Such circumstances may dishearten front-line employees' experiences, placing additional demands and pressure on front-line employees (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 204-205).

- *Role overload*

When jobs are badly designed, front-line employees are expected to do more than they can. This causes frustration and dissatisfaction with employee performance (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 148).

- *Lack of a common purpose and of management commitment*

Front-line employees may feel isolated in their positions, as they may believe that fellow front-line employees and management do not back them. They may also feel that management say one thing and do another. This may cause front-line employees to become disenfranchised (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149).

- *Quality of job performance/Productivity*

Some organisations expect front-line employees to be both effective and efficient, as management expect them to deliver quality service. Front-line employees experience additional pressure as they find it stressful to be simultaneously cost effective and productive (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149).

- *Employee/job mismatch*

Unsuitable persons are often appointed as front-line employees because of poor recruitment and selection processes. In addition, some organisations are not concerned with customer satisfaction and quality service, thus resulting in high turnover rates among front-line employees (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149).

- *Role tension*

Any of the above dissatisfactions can cause role tension. Not only does role tension affect the level of front-line employee commitment, but it can also reduce job satisfaction, and increase high levels of absenteeism and staff turnover (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 149; Lin et al., 2013: 178).

As indicated earlier, front-line employees play an important role in any service organisation. However, in some instances, they may be the cause of customer dissatisfaction. Many reasons and factors within the organisation can contribute to

their dissatisfaction and high staff turnover. However, management can prevent this from happening by managing effectively and implementing strategies.

3.5 MANAGING THE FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO FRONT-LINE EMPLOYEE SERVICE QUALITY ISSUES – CLOSE PROVIDER GAP 3

In order for AVBOB to close the Service Performance Gap (Provider Gap 3), a combination of strategies is needed to ensure that front-line employees are willing and able to deliver a quality service and that they are motivated to perform according to organisational requirements (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 131-149; Ueno, 2010: 76; Hoffman, et al. 2009: 306-312; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 210-219; Clow and Kurtz, 2004: 97-99).

Research on the Service Performance Gap has identified critical factors such as employees, customers and intermediaries in order to close this Gap (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 92; Zeithaml et al., 2009: 38-39). Numerous studies have identified front-line employee performance and their contribution towards the closure of Provider Gap 3 as being important (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 38-39; Urban, 2009: 631-645).

Similarly, Dabholkar and Abston (2008: 959-961) findings are in line with those of Zeithaml et al. (2009: 38-39), namely that co-operation, perceived control and employee-job match affect the Service Performance Gap. It has become clear that employee-job match emphasises the importance of job design, employee selection and development in service performance. In addition, employee-job match, perceived control, shared values, and supervisory control lead to trust and commitment. This, in turn, leads to co-operation and ultimately ensures good service performance.

Human resources can motivate front-line employees to deliver a customer-oriented service. Zeithaml et al. (2009: 360-375) and Ueno (2010: 76) put the following strategies forward to deliver service quality through effective front-line employees: hire suitable people; develop people to deliver service quality; provide needed support systems, and retain the best employees (see Figure 3.4). The importance of

attracting, developing and retaining good front-line employees cannot sufficiently be emphasised.

The different strategies proposed by various authors such as Mudie & Pirrie (2006: 37), Ueno (2010: 76), Grönroos (2007: 393-404); Zeithaml et al. (2009: 360-375) and Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 210-213) will now be discussed.
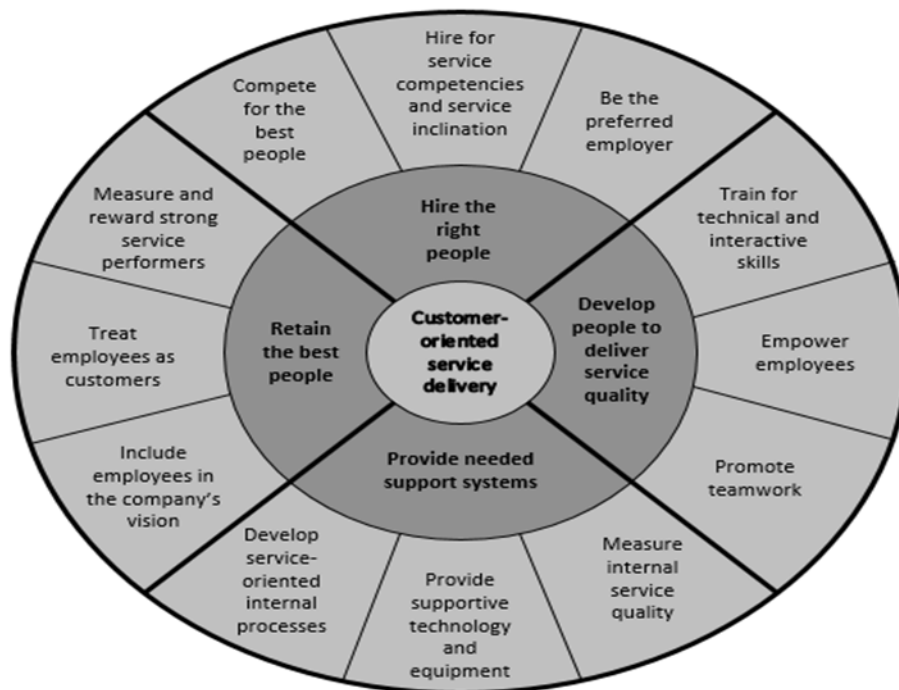
Figure 3.4: Human resource strategies for delivering service quality through people
Source: Zeithaml et al. (2009: 361)

3.5.1 Hire suitable people

The main concern of human resource management is to focus on the recruitment and hiring of effective employees. Thus, in order to deliver an effective quality service, organisations should focus on recruiting effective employees.

There are many reasons why employees are productive and effective. First, they can only be effective if human resource policies are efficient, for example the suitable person is recruited for the job; employees understand the roles they play in the organisation; adequate and modern technology is available; appropriate salaries are paid, and recognition is given for work done. In addition, front-line employees are empowered and encouraged to be team players (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 92).

Responsibilities at home and at work are sources of dominant stress. The unavailability of time for the individual him-/herself results in decisions regarding work life. These, in turn, affect decisions about life at home and vice versa. In the long term, this may result in tension which impacts on front-line employees' health (Ueno, 2010: 76-77; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 210-211).

3.5.1.1 Compete for the best front-line employees

In order to recruit the best people, organisations must identify these employees and compete with other organisations. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 148) suggest that organisations need to act as marketers to recruit the best employees and that the key characteristic of employers is to provide opportunities for personal and career growth. According to Mudie and Pirrie, when evaluating an organisation as a potential employer of choice, employees examine the following factors: reputation, culture, leadership, treatment of staff, opportunity for career growth, compensation, and benefits.

3.5.1.2 Hire front-line employees for service competencies

Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 148) suggest that organisations attract new front-line employees whose abilities and values can contribute to the organisation. They also indicate that front-line employees must possess the skills, knowledge and potential to perform the job. Potential employees must be screened to determine whether they are interested in performing a service-related job (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 211).

3.5.1.3 Be a preferred employer

To gain competitive positioning in order to attract and retain the best employees is to be the preferred employer in a specific industry or location. An organisation must endeavour to outperform its competitors by attracting the best and most talented employees and by offering them the necessary training, career opportunities, internal support, and attractive incentives (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 365-366). An employer of choice can retain employees by including them in the organisation's vision, treating them as customers, as well as measuring and rewarding strong service performers.

3.5.2 Develop customer-oriented front-line employees

In order to develop and maintain customer-oriented front-line employees who are focused on delivering quality service, an organisation must develop its employees by providing the necessary training, promoting teamwork, and empowering them (Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 211).

3.5.2.1 Empowerment

A number of authors have discussed and researched the empowerment of front-line employees in service delivery and the fact that empowerment contributes positively to the morale of front-line employees (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 255; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 211-213; Grönroos, 2007: 401-404).

Empowerment is a means of improving workers' satisfaction and increasing their performance. Boshoff and du Plessis, (2013: 211-213) view the empowerment of front-line employees mainly as a strategy to provide them with greater discretion and autonomy. In fact, they found that there are different levels of empowerment, namely full empowerment (also called flexible empowerment), limited empowerment, and no empowerment.

Through full empowerment, front-line employees are given the latitude to decide what would be best in order to solve a service problem. Some kind of authority is delegated to the front-line employee through "limited empowerment". Similarly, Bradley and Sparks suggest that non-empowered front-line employees be trained to refer problems to superiors who will then deal with customers.

Gudergan's et al. (2008: 31-32) findings reveal that full empowerment of front-line employees results in a higher satisfaction rate than the other two levels of empowerment. However, results also indicate that there is no significant difference between the other two forms of empowerment. Therefore, research has shown that full empowerment of front-line employees can turn frustrated customers into satisfied ones. It has also become clear that, when front-line employees use an accommodating communication style, customer satisfaction varies depending on the empowerment strategy used. By the empowerment of front-line employees, customers may experience that they are being treated as special.

Grönroos (2007: 402) argues that, besides empowerment, front-line employees must also be enabled to take responsibilities. This includes support from management, knowledge support to analyse a situation in order to make a proper decision, and technical support to provide front-line employees with the necessary information to address situations.

Empowering front-line employees has the following benefits: they respond more rapidly and more directly to customer needs and dissatisfied customers; they are more satisfied with their jobs and feel better about themselves; customers are treated with enthusiasm; empowered front-line employees are a valuable source of ideas, and create good word-of-mouth referrals and increased customer retention (Grönroos, 2007: 402-404).

3.5.2.2   *Provide the necessary training*

An important human resource strategy is employee training, as this may help reduce anxiety and frustration. Training programmes for front-line employees will provide them with the necessary technical skills, knowledge and interactive skills to deliver service quality (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 366-367; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 217). Technical skills may be taught through formal education (for example, McDonald's Hamburger University) or through on-the-job training where theoretical and work experience is combined (for example, internship programme). However, some organisations have formal training programmes. For example, Honda has a training programme which involves going to 21 cities to train 7 500 people (Pride and Ferrel, 2010: 528). Front-line employees also need training in interactive skills which, according to Grönroos (2007: 373), are intertwined with technical skills.

Based on their review of literature, Gudergan et al. (2008: 31-32) indicate that front-line employees require training in order to understand the service-delivery system in an organisation and to manage interactions experienced with customers. Gudergan et al. also mention that the service capabilities of front-line employees affect the level of customer service rendered. This implies that front-line employees can, with the necessary training and organisational support, serve customers effectively.

Successful organisations invest in training and ensure that the training suits their organisational goals, mission and strategies.

3.5.2.3   Promote teamwork

The aim of teamwork is to help organisations attend to internal problems by allowing team members to study and solve problems. The benefit of teamwork is that it lowers work stress, provides emotional support, and increases employee motivation. Therefore, by promoting teamwork, organisations can enhance the ability of employees to provide and deliver excellent service. Many organisations have a Service Blueprint, which portrays their integral service system and enables employees to understand their roles as well as those of the customer (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 143; Coelho et al., 2010: 36; Boshoff and du Plessis, 2013: 216).

Mudie and Pirrie, (2006: 143) indicate that another way of promoting teamwork is to reward the team instead of the individual. This will encourage team effort and team spirit.

3.5.3 Provide a support system

Many organisations require their employees to take responsibility for customers without providing an internal support system. In this respect, Grönroos (2007: 367, 397) states that front-line employees can only be effective if internal support systems are aligned with their need to be customer focused. Therefore, without a customer-oriented internal support system, proper conditions for the delivery of quality customer service do not exist. It is, therefore, nearly impossible for front-line employees to deliver quality service without a supportive system.

The following strategies are aimed at ensuring a customer-oriented internal support.

3.5.3.1   Measure internal service quality

Organisations can deliver better quality, customer-oriented service by ensuring the internal service quality. To measure and reward internal service is one way in which to develop and support internal service relationship (Grönroos, 2007: 398). Therefore, before an organisation can start developing an internal service quality, it should first measure customers' perceptions of internal quality. Grönroos, (2007: 398) indicate that an internal customer service audit can be used to implement a culture of internal service quality. Audit results assist with the identification of customers, customer needs, how they are doing, and possible improvements. Therefore, measuring internal service quality enables organisations to design an effective service-delivery process.

3.5.3.2   Develop a service-oriented internal process

Internal procedures must support quality service performance in an organisation. To best support front-line employees and to meet customer needs, the organisation's internal procedures and processes should be designed with customer value and satisfaction in mind (Grönroos, 2007: 396).

3.5.3.3   Provide supportive technology and equipment

In order for front-line employees to deliver service quality, they need to have the right tools, equipment and technology available. Without the necessary equipment and technology, front-line employees will feel frustrated (Grönroos, 2007: 395-396).

3.5.4 Retain the best front-line employees

Zeithaml et al. (2009: 371) and Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 217-218) indicate that the primary goal of human resources is to hire suitable employees to train, develop, motivate and encourage them to deliver a customer-oriented service.

3.5.4.1   Include front-line employees in the organisation's vision

Employees need to share a mutual understanding of an organisation's vision in order to adhere to its objectives. Therefore, they must understand how their work fits into the bigger picture of the organisation. Whereas some employees remain with one

organisation because they are focused on the organisation's vision and goals, others may do so because of their salary, rewards and other benefits. An organisation's vision must be clear, motivating, and be communicated to employees frequently (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 371).

Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 217-218) argue that the written communication of organisational policies and the requirement that front-line employees read such documents may contribute to the organisation's objectives. The authors explain that some human resource practices (for example, training, performance reviews, and job descriptions) may foster a positive organisation climate and can be used to communicate the importance of customer service.

3.5.4.2   Treat front-line employees as customers
Zeithaml et al. (2009: 373) emphasise that, when employees feel valued and taken care of, they will remain with the organisation. Zeithaml et al. are of the opinion that, if employees are treated fairly, they will also treat customers better, thus resulting in greater customer satisfaction.

Mudie and Pirrie (2006:131-150) and Grönroos (2007: 383-396) imply that, when front-line employees understand the importance of service, they will be more motivated and hard working. Little and Dean (2006: 464) investigated employees' commitment and opinion of the quality of service they deliver. Results indicated that front-line employees will deliver quality service to customers when they experience positive management approaches towards them.

However, organisations can conduct internal market research to determine whether the employees' needs for job and work-life are met. Besides the mentioned research, advertising and different forms of communication directed to employees may increase their commitment and sense of value towards the organisation (Zeithalm et al., 2009: 374).

3.5.4.3   Measure and reward strong service performers
Results of an empirical research by Peiró, Martinez-Tur and Ramos (2005: 786) indicate that service organisations must be more service oriented and thus introduce

a reward system for front-line employees who focus on service quality. They further explain that the front-line employee who knows that s/he will be rewarded for delivering quality service will probably make an effort to understand the customers' perceptions of services. Other examples in literature claim that rewarding is important. For example, Slătten (2010: 4-8) claims that a reward system has a motivating effect on front-line employees and that it may motivate them to deliver a high-quality service. Therefore, a reward system that is perceived as fair may motivate front-line employees to do their best when interacting with customers.

Pride and Ferrell (2010: 529) indicate that employees must receive attractive compensation that motivates and retains the most effective individuals. Pride and Ferrell mention that decent compensation programmes encourage the correct treatment of customers. They emphasise that the advantages and disadvantages of different compensation methods be considered. The Contained Store in the Unites States of America is an example of an organisation paying employees' salaries that are 50% to 100% higher than those paid by their rivals (Pride and Ferrell, 2010: 530).

Beitelspacher et al. (2011: 3) indicate that, when front-line employees perceive rewards for quality service rendered, the service quality perspective from the customer's point of view will be enhanced. The results of a study by Peiró et al. (2005: 786) support the previous research, namely that front-line employees who perceive that they are rewarded for delivering quality service will probably make more effort to understand customers' perceptions of service.

3.5.5 Person/Role conflict
Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 147) suggest that, in order to minimise role conflict, human resources must design jobs whose scope is pitched on the abilities of the employee who will perform the task; prioritise the tasks that an employee is expected to fulfil, and define these tasks in terms of what customers expect. They further mention that human resources also need to ensure that performance is measured on customer-focused tasks and that employees receive training in time management.

3.5.6 Job satisfaction

Söderlund and Rosengren (2008: 552) investigated whether an employee should smile while interacting with customers in order to impress them. In fact, some companies such as Wal-mart, Disneyland, MacDonalds and Body Shop instruct their employees to smile. Söderlund and Rosengren (2008: 552) found that this type of enforcement by management to display a certain type of behaviour causes stress and is exhausting for the employee. Thus, front-line employees are often restricted to a set of rules and procedures that contribute to their being demotivated. Lee, Nam, Park and Lee (2004: 251) found that job satisfaction, empowerment, service training and service reward have a significant effect on organisational commitment. Lee et al. (2004) indicate that empowerment is a key factor in enhancing front-line employees' job satisfaction, as they thereby obtain the power to make on-the-spot decisions.

Chi and Gursoy (2009: 246) findings claim that front-line employees' job satisfaction is as important as customer satisfaction for the success of an organisation. However, numerous factors such as job characteristics, personality traits, personal belief system, self-esteem and values, group norms as well as demographic and organisational factors may affect employees' job satisfaction (Gil, Berenguer and Cervera, 2008: 923). Gil et al. (2008: 923) further mention that front-line employees' job satisfaction is one of the main reasons why they develop good service, thus influencing customers' satisfaction, customers' perceptions of service quality and competitiveness.

Literature on service marketing suggests that satisfied front-line employees perform their work better and thus contribute to the increasing level of customer satisfaction (Zeithaml et al., 2009: 354). Zeithaml et al. (2009: 354) also mention that, if front-line employees are part of a solid service culture and receive management's support, this may lead to increased job satisfaction and simultaneously influence customers' perceptions.

3.5.7 Managing emotional labour

Kinman (2009: 118-130) points out that emotional display rules can be communicated to employees by means of organisational vision statements, staff handbooks, training, performance appraisals, and organisational socialisation processes. Gudergan et al. (2008: 32) mention that emotional motivation provides front-line employees with a sense of belonging and a desire to do well, as they have a positive feeling towards the organisation. According to Gudergan et al., front-line employees with a strong emotional attachment to an organisation display high levels of customer service.

3.5.8 Internal communication

Organisations need to coordinate and integrate communication across all departments to enable employees to deliver quality service. In addition, internal marketing communication must be managed and communicated accurately to employees. Good management will choose an appropriate communication channel to achieve this (Grönroos, 2007: 388).

3.6 SUMMARY

In order to provide high-quality service, AVBOB needs to make changes in the organisation's culture. Management need to put these in place by implementing a service strategy. Only then can Provider Gap 3 be closed. Excellent service requires front-line employees who feel and are empowered, motivated by management and participate in training. Currently, the demands for quality service are high and organisations in the services market must have a management team and front-line employees who can provide a service that fulfils customers' needs. Due to the importance of the service encounters, managers must manage their front-line employees to ensure that their attitude and behaviours contribute towards the delivery of quality service.

Front-line employees' positive attachment to the organisation impacts on their approach to customer service. They need to feel valued in their positions in order to experience a positive devotion towards the organisation. Therefore, front-line employees play a crucial and dynamic role in the closure of Service Performance

Gap 3. The closure of this Gap mainly depends on their attitude, competencies, skills, commitment, trust, communication, and work in a complex relationship.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to explain the research methodology used for this study. The different stages of the process, namely purpose of the research, problem statement, research objectives, methodology, ethical considerations and summary, will be discussed individually.

Quinlan (2011: 130, 482) state that methodology focuses on the overall research process and the kind of tools and procedures to be used in order to gather data from the identified population. It also focuses on the individual steps in the research process and the most "objective" procedures to be used. Quinlan further explains that research methodology provides an indication to the reader of how the research was conducted.

4.2   PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

According to Cooper and Schindler (2014: 121-124), research has different meanings to different people. They indicate that research not only refers to a search for knowledge, but that it is also a process of systematic and methodical investigation. They point out that academic research is the search for new knowledge or information on a specific topic, whether it is a contribution to existing knowledge by means of study, observation, or experiment and comparison.

The purpose of research can be described as follows: to discover answers to questions; to review existing knowledge; to investigate a problem, and to provide a solution to a problem (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 445).

Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 3) describes the business research process as a systematic and objective process of collecting, recording and analysing data in order to make business decisions whilst Cooper and Schindler (2014: 653) describe the

business research process as "the ordered set of activities focused on the systematic collection of information using accepted methods of analysis as a basis for drawing conclusions".

Business research is of great importance as a management decision tool and plays an important role in the development and implementation of new strategies (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 2-3). This business research study was conducted not only for the above reasons, but also with a view to building and contributing to current theories. In the event of new facts and evidence, the results of the study may support or persuade people to accept the contribution.

4.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 45) the problem statement introduces the problem that is addressed in a specific business decision area.

Bearing the above definition in mind, the motivation for this research study stemmed from the fact that product- and service-oriented organisations tend to provide a sustainable quality service to both internal and external customers. To be a successful service-delivery organisation, quality service and effective front-line employees go hand in hand. Quality service delivery is dependent on the front-line employees of an organisation. However, front-line employees do not always deliver a sustainable quality service. Many factors and circumstances in their personal and work lives influence both their effectiveness as employees and the quality of service they render. Some of these factors are relationships in the workplace, the work environment, as well as the employees' personality and socio-economic circumstances. Front-line employees are often not aware of how these affect their service rendered. This ineffectiveness contributes directly to the existence of the Customer Gap.

4.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Quinlan (2011: 481) defines research objectives as the steps taken by the researcher to accomplish the aim of the research. On the other hand, Cooper and Schindler (2014: 271) indicate that the research objectives "are the researcher's version of the business problem". Thus, the research objectives give an indication of what the researcher wishes to achieve in his/her research.

The primary objective of this study was to determine the factors that influence front-line employees in their delivery of a sustainable quality service.

The secondary objectives of this study were:

a) To examine the aspects that influence the Customer Gap;
b) To investigate the role of front-line employees in narrowing the Customer Gap;
c) To identify personal circumstances that impact on the effectiveness of front-line employees;
d) To identify professional circumstances that influence the effectiveness of front-line employees;
e) To investigate front-line employees' commitment towards rendering a quality service;
f) To discuss the role and awareness of management in respect of front-line employees' role in service delivery.
g) To set up a blueprint of steps for recommendation for the management of service-delivery organisations.

4.5 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Cooper and Schindler (2014: 665) point out that the research question can be viewed as the preferred hypothesis that best states the objectives of the research. Quinlan (2011: 40) explains that a research question indicates the issues that need to be resolved. Thus, a research question can be defined as the researcher's translation of the research problem.

Since this is a descriptive research, questions such as who, when, where and how need to be answered (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 134). The following research questions are formulated:

- What factors influence front-line employees to deliver a sustainable quality service?
- What aspects influence the Customer Gap?
- What is the role of front-line employees in narrowing the Customer Gap?
- What personal circumstances influence the effectiveness of front-line employees?
- What professional circumstances influence the effectiveness of front-line employees?
- How committed are front-line employees towards rendering a quality service?
- What is the role and awareness of management in respect of front-line employees' role in service delivery?

4.6   METHODOLOGY

4.6.1 Literature study
Secondary data (literature) related or similar to the research topic was reviewed. Existing verifiable literature, such as publications, academic journals, electronic databases and the Internet, was reviewed to ascertain and interpret what has been written and published on the research topic.

In this regard, literature was summarised in two chapters. In Chapter 2, the Gaps Model in service delivery was discussed and, in Chapter 3, front-line employees as key role players in the Service Performance Gap were discussed.

4.6.2 Research design (see 1.4.2 Page 8)
A research design is defined as the master plan that specifies the methods and procedures for collecting and analysing information obtained (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 124-125). Therefore, a research design can be regarded as a framework for a research project that focuses on the end product, namely what kind of study is being

planned and the kinds of results to be achieved. An appropriate and suitable research design must be decided upon prior to conducting a research study.

- *Types of research design*

According to several researchers (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 104, 369; Quinlan, 2011: 308; Bryman and Bell, 2007: 155, 578), there are two types of research design, namely quantitative and qualitative. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010 3) as well as Bryman and Bell (2007: 425-426), the quantitative research approach involves the collection and analysis of numerical data and the application of statistical tests. Quinlan (2011: 380) and Cooper and Schindler (2014: 144-148) define quantitative data as numerical data, and quantitative data analysis is thus the analysis of quantitative data, using statistical methods. The data is the result of counting things and placing them into a category. Quantitative data is precise and concise; variables can be measured, controlled and/or manipulated (Quinlan, 2011: 380; Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 144-148).

Quinlan, (2011: 380) and Cooper and Schindler (2014: 144-148) also state that, in this type of analysis, the variable is the unit of measurement. Such a variable has more than one value. For instance, in gender, there are two values, namely male or female. It has become clear that quantitative research is thus an established statistical method for the analysis of data. On account of the above reasons, this research study used the quantitative research design to collect data.

It is important to note that, unlike in qualitative research, according to Quinlan (2011: 308), the researcher will never refer to "me", "I" or "the researcher" in quantitative research.

On account of the following reasons, the qualitative research design was not used. According to the researchers Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 370-371) and Bryman and Bell (2007: 425-426), qualitative research is concerned with words rather than numbers and it also involves the collection of data in the form of drawings, maps or visual data and is gathered through interviews and observations. Quinlan (2011: 105) indicate that qualitative data represent feelings, beliefs, opinions, ideas, understandings and thoughts. Qualitative research is unstructured and the

researcher is not in search of facts but rather explore experiences, perceptions and understandings. Words like "explore", "describe" and "construct" are used (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 425-426).

- *Types of research*

Quinlan (2011: 182-188) and Sekaran and Bougie (2010:103-105) indicate that there are different types of business research, namely descriptive, exploratory, and causal. The type of business research is determined by the information required for the research problem.

Quinlan (2011: 399) indicate that, in descriptive research, the phenomena are described as they exist, and that this type of research is used to obtain and identify information on characteristics pertaining to certain issues or problems. As indicated earlier, the characteristics of a population are described, whereas questions such as who, when, where and how are answered (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 134). The authors further explains that there are different design techniques for descriptive research, namely surveys (questionnaires), experiments and observation, and that data is reported in the form of frequencies, percentages and averages.

Exploratory and causal research was not decided upon for the following reasons. According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 103) and Bryman and Bell, (2007: 38-66) exploratory research is conducted when some information or facts are known but more information is required to clarify and define the nature of a certain problem whilst causal research is conducted to attempts to reveal a causal relationship between variables.

Bearing this in mind, descriptive research was decided upon for the following reasons:

- Descriptive research is often undertaken to describe characteristics of a group of employees in an organisation (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 106).

- Cooper and Schindler (2014: 21) indicate that descriptive research attempts to determine the extent of differences in perception, needs, attitudes and characteristics of a subgroup.

- Descriptive research offers ideas for future research (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 107).

- Descriptive research may help the organisation make some decisions regarding their employees (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 107).

- Reliability in this type of research is high (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 147).

- Descriptive research is used to summarise quantitative data (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 147).

- Statistical techniques such as frequencies, mean or standard deviation are used to summarise the information (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 107).

- In many instances, descriptive information is all that is needed to solve a business problem (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 147).

4.6.3 Primary data-collection method

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 185), there are three main data-collection methods in survey research, namely interviewing, administering questionnaires, and observing people/phenomena. Quinlan (2011: 220) indicate that there are various methods of data collection, namely diaries, focus groups, interviews, observations and surveys, and that a researcher must find the most appropriate way to collect the necessary data/information. Bryman and Bell (2007: 56-57) and Quinlan (2011: 221-224, 326) indicate that a survey is a research technique in which information is gathered from a sample of people, using various data-collection methods such as questionnaires, surveys and interviews. According to these authors, questionnaires are structured data-gathering instruments that are widely used in research. Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 225) indicates that self-administered questionnaires are those completed by the respondents themselves.

Thus, the primary data-collection method adopted for this research was the survey method. Self-administered questionnaires prove to be the most suitable method for the following reasons:

- Self-administered questionnaires are less expensive and less time consuming compared to interviews and telephone surveys (Quinlan, 2011: 222; Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 665).

- Respondents are of the opinion that they remain anonymous while they can complete the questionnaires in their own time (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 225, 230).

- Questionnaires were completed without the researcher's involvement

- A very broad range of topics resulted in a broad range of data being collected.

English is one of the official languages and, because the vast majority of the population has command of English, the questionnaires were only available in English (see Annexures B and C).

4.6.4 Questionnaire design

Researchers such as Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 197), Bryman and Bell (2007: 731), and Quinlan (2011: 192) defined a questionnaire as a pre-formulated, written set of structured questions. It is an efficient data-collection mechanism used to gather data in survey studies. In fact, Quinlan (2011: 336-337) indicates that key issues such as the content of the questionnaire, the order, construction and presentation of the questions, and the length of the questionnaire are important when designing a questionnaire. An important advantage of questionnaires is that they can be used for large-scale surveys.

The data-collection instrument consisted of two different questionnaires (primary data), which were used to gather data relevant to the research objectives and research questions. Questionnaires were based on the literature reviewed and relating to the research topic such as accredited journals, the Internet, articles and academic publications and were discussed with both the researcher's study leader and the statistician. Questions were also adopted from the work of Lee et al. (2004: 251-264). The questions were thus designed to be relevant, accurate, understandable and short. To maintain continuity, the questions were grouped by topic, with each section containing a set of questions relevant to that topic. Questions were placed in logical order (Buglear, 2005: 607).

According to Quinlan (2011: 293), Bryman and Bell (2007: 258), as well as Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 200), there are some basic types of questions, namely closed questions and open-ended questions. Open-ended questions enable respondents to give their personal opinion in their own words. This type of questions is used to explore the respondents' understanding, feelings, opinions and beliefs. Respondents often provide long responses, making it difficult to code. Another disadvantage is that answers are not prepared in advance and it is, therefore, difficult to analyse them statistically.

With closed questions, the respondents are asked to select an answer from a number of predetermined alternatives. The researcher provides a limited and strict set of options to choose from. Researchers tend to favour closed questions, as they are less time consuming and easier to code; quick to analyse and record; easier and quicker for respondents to complete; due to a variety of answers, closed questions may help clarify the meaning of the question to respondents; closed questions are convenient when collecting factual data (Quinlan, 2011: 293; Bryman and Bell, 2007: 260-262).

Therefore, on account of the above advantages, it was decided to use closed questions for both questionnaires. However, a few open-ended questions were included in the questionnaires, with the aim of collecting management's personal opinion regarding the "evaluation of frontline employees in terms of work achievement" and, secondly, establishing "how frontline employees are rewarded for good performance". Front-line employees were asked to indicate the number of years that they are in the service of AVBOB.

Content of the questionnaire

The two questionnaires were constructed as follows:

One for front-line employees (Annexure B) and one for management (Annexure C).

Questionnaire for front-line employees (Annexure B)

This questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B (Buglear, 2005: 607).

Section A of the questionnaire was divided into different subsections (A to L), with a set of questions concerning a particular topic such as Organisation climate; Empowerment; Training/Systems/HR; Rewards; Job satisfaction; Management; Front-line employees; Customer service; Service quality; Commitment, and General. These questions were used to assess the role of front-line employees in the organisation, thereby answering the primary and secondary objectives of the research.

Subsection A of the questionnaire consisted of open-ended questions, and respondents were asked to indicate how long ago they were appointed by the organisation and if they held a previous position in the organisation. These questions were placed first in order to encourage response (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 221-223).

Throughout **Subsections B to L**, five-point Likert-scale questions (closed questions), based on and identified in the literature research (Chapters 2 and 3), were used. Buglear (2005: 114) indicates that "the numerical scale used to produce the figures forms the basis of the analysis of quantitative data". He also mentions that scale questions enable the researcher to compare the ranking of different respondents with ease. Quinlan (2011: 326) indicates that scale questions are used widely in research as a structured data-gathering method.

The respondents were thus instructed to indicate their degree of agreement with a list of statements supplied by the researcher. The questions consisted of an option between "Strongly disagree/Disagree/Unsure/Agree/Strongly agree" (Quinlan, 2011: 225, 327).

Likert-scale questions were used for the following advantages:
- Questions are turned into statements (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 152,155).
- A number of statements can be provided in a list, as they do not take up much room (Sekaran and Bougie, 2010: 152,155).

- The more points in the scale, the more data can be gathered (Quinlan, 2011: 327).

- This type of questions can be pre-coded (Quinlan, 2011: 327).

- Likert-scale questions were used to capture front-line employees' opinions and perceptions regarding service delivery, AVBOB and management.

Section B of the questionnaire focused on demographic issues, including respondents' gender, age, marital status, home language, cultural group, highest qualification, how they get to work, and their area of residence. The last two questions were included for use in significance testing, namely to show whether there were any significant relationships between personal circumstances that influence front-line employees' effectiveness and commitment towards rendering a quality service. Descriptive statistics were used in compiling this section of the questionnaire.

Questionnaire for management (Annexure C)

This questionnaire was divided into Sections A and B (Buglear, 2005: 607).

Section A of the questionnaire was divided into two subsections, namely A (Leadership) and B (Employees). These sections included open-ended and closed questions.

Section B of the questionnaire focused on demographic issues, including respondents' gender, age, marital status, cultural group and highest qualification.

4.6.5 Validity and reliability

Quinlan (2011: 42), Bryman and Bell (2007: 41), Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 158), as well as Cooper and Schindler (2014: 257, 260) indicate that validity is an important criterion for research, as it is concerned with the validity of the research findings. Content validity was assured by means of a literature review pertaining to literature applicable to the research questions. Therefore, the questionnaires that provide the data needed are the correct data-collection method for the research, as they were based on literature reviewed.

According to the above researchers, reliability measures the accuracy of the research findings. The population used in the research and the data-gathering method is appropriate. Thus, if the same research is repeated and the same results are obtained, the research can be deemed to be reliable. Therefore, Cronbach's alpha was used to test internal reliability in this study (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 164). The closer Cronbach's alpha is to 1, the higher the internal reliability, whereas 0 is an indication of no internal reliability.

4.6.6   Sample selection

According to Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 445), sampling is the process of selecting elements from the population in order to represent that population. Sampling enables the researcher to establish some unknown characteristics of a population.

The reasons for sampling in this research study are lower cost; greater accuracy of the results; greater speed of data collection, and availability of population (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 338-339).

Research population

Literature provides various definitions of a population. Quinlan (2011: 29 and 143) defines a population as all elements that the researcher focuses upon and to which the obtained results should be generalized. De Vos, Strydom, Fouché and Delport (2005: 193) indicate that a population refers to all individuals who share the same attributes in which the researcher is interested.

The population for this research study consisted of front-line employees and managerial staff who were involved in service delivery in the employment of AVBOB during the months starting in June 2013 and ending in November 2013 and who were willing to participate in the research study.

Types of sample design

Quinlan (2011: 208), Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 267-268); Bryman and Bell (2007: 182), as well as Cooper and Schindler (2014: 341-344) identified two types of sampling design – probability and non-probability sampling. Non-probability sampling can be defined as "a sampling technique in which units of the sample are selected

on the basis of personal judgement or convenience" Sekaran and Bougie (2010: 442). Therefore, the sample cannot be generalised to the population. Non-probability sampling was used, as it is less time consuming and inexpensive (Serakan and Bougie, 2010: 276).

According to Quinlan (2011: 213-214), Bryman and Bell (2007: 197-202), as well as Cooper and Schindler (2014: 358-360), there are three types of non-probability sampling methods, namely convenience, quota, and snowball sampling.

Convenience sampling can be defined as the sampling method "used to obtain those units/people most conveniently available" (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 655). Convenience sampling was used in this research. Questionnaires were distributed to different branches of AVBOB. However, not every front-line employee and manager were identified and asked to complete a questionnaire, because there was no census or list of names of the population available. Thus, there was no sampling frame from which a sample could be drawn randomly. Not every front-line employee and manager had an equal opportunity of being included in the research (Quinlan, 2011: 213). Therefore, results can thus not be generalised to the entire population of AVBOB and, unfortunately, external validity cannot be ensured. However, non-probability sampling, if carefully controlled, may provide acceptable results (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 359).

4.6.7 Data collection

A letter of permission to collect data was obtained from the head of the Department of Business Management, University of the Free State (see Annexure A). There was also a verbal agreement between the Department of Business Management and senior management of AVBOB. In order to protect the respondents, they were informed not to write their names on the questionnaires and, therefore, no provision was made to do so.

The names and telephone numbers of different AVBOB branches were obtained. AVBOB regions are divided into various branches, each under its own management. Branch managers were approached or contacted by telephone and requested to participate in the study. However, hardly any response was received. Therefore, an

AVBOB employee was approached and requested to deliver and collect the questionnaires when s/he was doing his/her routine visits to branches. Questionnaires were also faxed or sent by email to some of the branches. These were delivered and collected during office hours, weekdays and from the months of June 2013 to November 2013. Self-administered questionnaires were only handed to those respondents who were willing to participate in the research study.

The aim and importance of the study was communicated and explained; care was taken that the same respondent did not complete more than one questionnaire. Assurance of confidentiality was also given to the respondents prior to data collecting. This was also confirmed by a covering letter attached to the questionnaire (Annexure D).

Table 4.1: Sample size of respondents

Region	Branch	Frontline employees	Managers
Bloemfontein	Bloemfontein, Bloemfontein Region, Bloemfontein Life	7	8
	Botshabelo	3	1
	Christiana	1	1
	Ficksburg	5	1
	Hartswater	2	1
	Hennenman	1	-
	Kimberley	5	1
	Klerksdorp	1	1
	Kroonstad	4	1
	Ladybrand	3	1
	Postmasburg	2	1
	Prieska	-	1
	Virginia	3	1
	Welkom	5	1
	QwaQwa	8	1
Pretoria	Groblersdal	1	1
Johannesburg	Alberton	2	-
	Roodepoort	1	1
East London	Aliwal North	2	1

	Colesberg	1	2
	Cradock	1	1
	De Aar	2	1
	King William's Town	1	1
Durban	Bethlehem	5	-
	Newcastle	1	1
	Harrismith	-	1
	Warden	-	1
Cape Town	Beaufort West	1	1
	Bellville	2	1
	Bredasdorp	2	1
	George	3	1
	Mossel Bay	2	1
	Oudtshoorn	-	1
	Stellenbosch	2	1
	Strand	1	1
	Tygervalley	1	1
	Worcester	1	-
	Wynberg	1	-

Every manager and every front-line employee did not complete the questionnaire as, in some instances; they were either out of town, out of office, on leave, busy with a customer, or on sick leave.

4.6.8 Statistical analysis of the data
A total of 123 questionnaires were completed: 82 by front-line employees and 41 by managers.

The data analysis began once the data had been collected, as raw data must be converted into meaningful information. The raw data was edited to detect errors and omissions. Missing values occur when respondents skip or refuse to answer a questionnaire item. Therefore, the missing data (blank spaces) were kept as they were, because the number of missing values is small and non-random (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 68).

The questionnaires were screened and coded, and the data entered on an Excel spreadsheet. The data obtained was analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The Department of Industrial Psychology, Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, assisted the researcher in the analysis and interpretation of the data.

The results were interpreted using inferential statistics. Cronbach's alpha measured item reliability. Inferential statistics, according to Quinlan (2011: 399), are used in quantitative data analysis for prediction. Descriptive statistics such as percentages and charts were also used.

4.7   ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS IN BUSINESS RESEARCH

The quality of a research study depends on the integrity of the researcher. All parties involved in research should exhibit ethical behaviour (Quinlan, 2011: 27).

The aim of ethics in research is to ensure that participants do not suffer adverse consequences (Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 28-34). According to Cooper and Schindler, a researcher should follow three guidelines, namely to explain the study benefits; to explain participant rights and protection, and to obtain informed consent. These ethical principles were adhered to during this study, as respondents were informed that this is a Master's study for academic purposes (see Annexure D). They were also assured that their contribution to the research is confidential and that they will not be identified at any time or during the research. Thus, to protect the respondents (anonymity), they were also informed not to write their names on the questionnaires and no provision was thus made to do so. No one was compelled to participate in the research study and respondents were informed that their participation is voluntary.

4.8   SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research methodology of the study, the selection of respondents, the method used to collect data as well as the analysis thereof was explained. Chapter 5 is a discussion of the results obtained.

CHAPTER 5

RESEARCH RESULTS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides the main findings of the study as well as a discussion of the findings. The chapter is divided into two sections, namely Part A and Part B. Part A is a discussion of the demographic results for front-line employees and managers. Part B focuses on the empirical results.

The research study includes some sensitive issues to which the respondents may not give their truthful answer.

5.2.   DESCRIPTION OF THE RESPONDENTS

The population for this research study included front-line employees and managerial staff involved in service delivery who was in the employment of AVBOB from the beginning of June 2013 to the end of November 2013 and who were willing to participate in the research study.

The respondents completed a total of 125 questionnaires, of which 123 were usable for the study and 2 were incomplete. The results are thus based on 123 questionnaires. Front-line employees completed 82 questionnaires and managers completed 41 questionnaires.

5.3   PART A – DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS

The demographic variables for both front-line employees and managers, for which data was collected, included gender, age, marital status, cultural group and highest qualification. Additional data with regard to "home language", "how respondents get to work" and "respondents' residential area" was only collected from front-line employees. The purpose of the demographic information is to provide insight into the characteristics of the respondents.

Part B of the questionnaires provides questions relating to the demographic information of respondents.
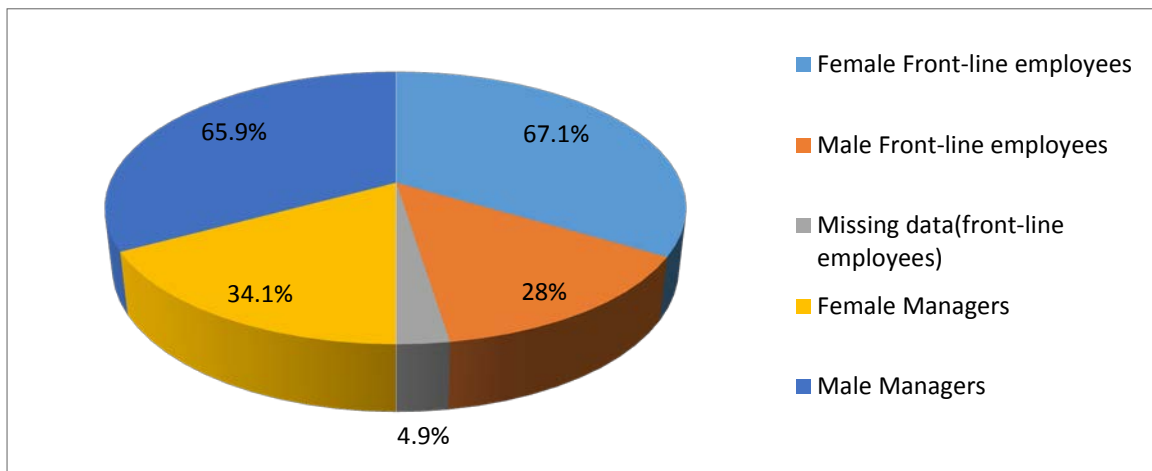
Figure 5.1: Gender profiles of front-line employees and managers

Discussion

Figure 5.1 clearly shows that there are significantly more female (67.1%) than male front-line employees (28%), and that the majority of the managers are male (65.9%). Only a small percentage of the managers (34.1%) are female.

Table 5.1: Age profile of front-line employees and managers

Age in years	Front-line employees (n=82)		Managers (n=41)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 20	2	2.4	-	-
21-30	30	36.6	5	12.2
31-40	29	35.4	11	26.8
41-50	13	15.9	14	34.1
51-60	4	4.9	7	17.1
Over 60	-	-	2	4.9
Missing	4	4.9	2	4.9
Total	82	100	41	100

Discussion

Table 5.1 shows that the largest percentage (72%) (n=59) of the front-line employees are between 21-40 years, whereas 20.8% (n=17) are between 41-60 years. There are no front-line employees in service who are older than 60 years and

this may be due to the retirement age being 60. The vast majority of the managers are in the age group 41-60 years (51.2%) (n=21). Only a small percentage (16%) (n=39) are in the age group 21-40 years.

Table 5.2: Front-line employees' language

Language	Front-line employees (n=82)	
	Frequency	Percentage
Afrikaans	35	42.7
English	6	7.3
Sotho	22	26.8
Tswana	6	7.3
Xhosa	9	11
Zulu	1	1.2
Missing	3	3.7
Total	82	100

Discussion

The largest percentage of the front-line employees speaks Afrikaans (42.7%) (n=35). The reason may be that people in the Cape Town region and those from small towns such as Christiana, Hartswater, Prieska and Kimberley are mainly Afrikaans speaking. The second largest majority of the respondents speak Sotho (26.8%) (n=22). The reason may be that Black people in the Free State (Bloemfontein, Botshabelo, Ficksburg, Henneman, Kroonstad, Ladybrand, Welkom, Virginia) and Qwa Qwa are Sotho speaking.

Table 5.3: Front-line employees' and managers' cultural groups

Culture	Front-line employees (n=82)		Managers (n=41)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Asian	-	-	-	-
Black	46	56.1	10	25
Coloured	11	13.4	5	12.2
White	23	28	25	61
Missing	2	2.4	1	2.4
Total	82	100	41	100

Discussion

The majority of the front-line employees who agreed to participate in the study were Black (56.1%) (n=46), White (28%) (n=23) and Coloured (13.4%) (n=11). The majority of the managers who participated in the study were White (61%) (n=25), Black (25%) (n=10) and Coloured (12.2%) (n=5).

Table 5.4: Front-line employees' and managers' qualification

Qualification	Front-line employees (n=82)		Managers (n=41)	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Below Grade 12	16	19.5	7	17.1
College/Technicon Certificate	4	4.9	1	2.4
College/Technicon Diploma	8	9.8	6	14.6
Grade 12	43	52.4	19	46.3
University Degree	-	-	4	9.8
Missing	11	13.4	4	9.8
Total	82	100	41	100

Discussion

The majority of the front-line employees (52.4%) (n=43) and managers (46.3%) (n=19) are in possession of Grade 12. None of the front-line employees are in possession of a university qualification; however, over 14% of them have a post-matriculation qualification. Four managers (9.8%) (n=4) have a university degree and 17% a post-matriculation qualification.

Tables 5.5 and 5.6 do not form part of the demographic information. These were placed under "Demographics" (Part B of the questionnaire), in order to gain insight into how front-line employees get to work and where they reside so as to establish whether these factors influence their performance at work.

Table 5.5: Front-line employees' transport system (n=82)

Transport system	Frequency	Percentage
Bicycle	-	-
Bus	5	6.1
On foot	21	25.6
Hike	1	1.2
Own transport	23	28
Pool vehicle	-	-
Taxi	29	35.4
Other	-	-
Missing	3	3.7
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.5 indicate that the majority of the front-line employees (35.4%) (n=29) travel by taxi, because the majority of them are Black and reside in the township. Of the frontline employees, 28% (n=23) have their own transport, while 25.6% (n=21) walk to work. Furthermore, 6.1% (n=5) of them make use of buses. Only 1 (1.2%) respondent indicated that s/he hikes to work.

Table 5.6: Front-line employees' residential area (n=82)

Residential area	Frequency	Percentage
Farm	3	3.7
Plot	4	4.9
Town	35	42.7
Township	34	41.5
Other	4	4.9
Missing	2	2.4
Total	82	100

Discussion

Table 5.6 clearly shows that the majority of the front-line employees (42.7%) (n=35) reside in a town; nearly an equal number of them (41.4%) (n=34) reside in townships; some reside on a farm (3.7%) (n=3), and others reside on a plot (4.9%) (n=4). These front-line employees may reside in rural districts.

5.4 PART B – EMPIRICAL RESULTS (front-line employees and managers)

Table 5.7: Descriptive analysis of factors (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

Factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation
Climate	82	2.10	5	4.0	0.73
Empowerment	82	2.00	5	3.9	0.72
Training/Systems/HR	82	1.88	5	3.8	0.78
Rewards	82	1.00	5	3.3	0.86
Job satisfaction	82	2.50	5	4.0	0.74
Management	82	1.83	5	3.7	0.85
Customer service	82	1.00	5	4.4	0.64
Service quality	82	3.14	5	4.4	0.53
Commitment	82	2.80	5	4.3	0.59

Sig. at 0.05

Discussion

The highest mean score in Table 5.7 is 4.4 (Customer service and Service quality), 4.3 (Commitment), 4.0 (Organisational climate and Job satisfaction) and the least mean score is 3.3 (Rewards).

The mean (or average) is a method to describe central tendency, in other words, the arithmetic average. In order to calculate the mean, all values are added up and divided by the number of values (Quinlan, 2011: 400; Bryman and Bell, 2007: 359).

Table 5.8: Descriptive analysis of managers' response (n=41)

Factor	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std deviation
V3.1	39	2.00	5	4.4	0.67
V3.2	41	1.00	5	3.7	1.3
V3.3	41	2.00	5	4.3	0.84
V3.4	40	2.00	5	4.6	0.63
V3.5	41	1.00	5	4.2	0.96
V3.6	41	2.00	5	4.6	0.63
V3.7	41	2.00	5	4.1	1.0
V3.8	40	2.00	5	4.0	1.0
V3.9	41	2.00	5	4.2	0.86
V3.10	41	2.00	5	3.6	1.2

V3.11	41	1.00	5	3.6	1.2
V3.12	40	1.00	5	4.3	0.99
V3.13	41	2.00	5	4.2	0.83
V3.14	41	1.00	5	3.8	1.1
V3.15	41	1.00	5	4.0	0.97

Sig. at 0.05

Discussion

The highest mean score in Table 5.8 is 4.6 "Customers are valued" (Question 3.4) and "Front-line employee attitude and behaviour have an impact on customer evaluation of service" (Question 3.6), followed by a mean of 4.4 "Management communicate organisation objectives to front-line employees".

The least mean score is 3.6 "Do front-line employees receive regular training" (Question 3.10) and "Front-line employees are appointed according to their service competencies" (Question 3.11). Therefore, the results imply that management is aware of the value of their customers and that training and the appointment of competent front-line employees are not a high priority.

The mean (or average) is a method to describe central tendency, in other words, the arithmetic average. In order to calculate the mean, all values are added up and divided by the number of values (Quinlan, 2011: 400; Bryman and Bell, 2007: 359).

Table 5.9: I want management to know my family (husband, wife, children) (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	10	12.2
Disagree	18	22
Unsure	7	8.5
Agree	29	35.4
Strongly agree	17	20.7
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.9 clearly show that the majority of the front-line employees (56.1%) (n=46) prefer that management know their families, whereas 34.2% (n=28) indicated that they prefer management not to know their family. The reason may be that some employees prefer to keep their private life private.

Table 5.10: Does management know the family/children of every front-line employee? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	15	36.6
No	12	29.3
Only some of them	13	31.7
No reason why I should know the family	1	2.4
Total	41	100

Discussion

Of the managers, 36.6% (n=15) agree that they know the family or children of front-line employees. A small percentage (2.4%) of the managers can see no reason why they should know their front-line employees' children. However, if management knew the families of their staff, they might have a better understanding of the circumstances of front-line employees and why some do not perform, are late for work, or do not show up for work at all.

Table 5.11: Leaders have a clear vision for the future of the organisation (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree strongly	-	-
Disagree	6	7.3
Unsure	10	12.3
Agree	35	43.2
Agree strongly	30	36.6
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

It is clear from the results in Table 5.11 that the majority of the front-line employees (79.8%) (n=65) are of the opinion that management have indeed a clear vision for the organisation, whereas 6 respondents indicated that they disagree about leadership's vision for the organisation.

Table 5.12: Does your organisation have a clear vision for the future? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	31	75.6
No	8	19.5
Unsure	2	4.9
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.12 indicate that 75.6% (n=31) of the managers agree that AVBOB have indeed a clear vision for the future.

Table 5.13: What qualification is required for front-line employees? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Grades 1-7	-	-
Grades 8-12	35	85.5
Diploma	5	12.2
Degree	-	-
Other	1	2.4
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.13 show that the majority of the respondents (85.5%) (n=35) indicated that the highest qualification required for front-line employees is Grades 8-12.

Table 5.14: How frequently are evaluations done? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Every 3 months	15	36.6
Every 6 months	5	12.2
Once a year	14	34.1
Other	4	9.8
Missing	3	7.3
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.14 clearly indicate that the majority of the respondents (36.6%) (n=15) agree that front-line employees should be evaluated every 3 months. However, nearly an equal number of front-line employees (34.1%) (n=14) are evaluated once a year.

Table 5.15: In my organisation, I receive training on how to provide the best service to the customer (Frontline employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	2.4
Disagree	13	15.9
Unsure	5	6.1
Agree	29	35.4
Strongly agree	33	40.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.15 reveal that the majority of the front-line employees (75.6%) (n=62) agree that they do receive training in order to provide the best service to customers. However, 18.3% (n=15) of the front-line employees disagree.

Table 5.16: Front-line employees receive regular training (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	13	31.7
Unsure	3	7.3
Agree	12	29.3
Strongly agree	13	31.7
Total	41	100

Discussion

The majority of the respondents (61%) (n=25) indicated that front-line employees receive regular training; one third of the respondents (31.7%) (n=16) disagree. These results confirm those of Table 5.23, namely that there are front-line employees in the employment of AVBOB who do not receive training.

Table 5.17: When I experience a problem, I have the right to make a decision and handle the problem (Frontline employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree strongly	2	2.4
Disagree	5	6.1
Unsure	13	15.9
Agree	40	48.8
Agree strongly	22	26.8
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.17 indicate that the majority of the front-line employees (75.6%) (n=62) are of the opinion that they may make a decision in order to solve a problem.

Table 5.18: When a front-line employee experiences a problem, does s/he have the right to make a decision and handle the problem? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	10	24.4
No	4	9.8
Depends on the type of problem	26	63.4
Management must attend to the problem	2	2.4
Total	41	100

Discussion

The majority of the managers (63.4%) (n=26) indicated that it depends on the type of problem, whereas 24.4% (n=10) of the respondents indicated that front-line employees may make a decision.

Table 5.19: I would recommend this organisation as a good place to work in (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	-	-
Disagree	3	3.7
Unsure	12	14.6
Agree	32	39
Strongly agree	35	42.7
Missing	-	-
Total	82	100

Discussion

These results in Table 5.19 show that the majority of the front-line employees (81.7%) (n=67) indicated that they would recommend AVBOB as a good place to work in, whereas 14.6% (n=12) of the front-line employees are unsure as to whether they would recommend AVBOB as a good place to work in.

Table 5.20: I am proud to work in this organisation (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	1.2
Disagree	5	6.1
Unsure	6	7.3
Agree	27	32.9
Strongly agree	41	50
Missing	2	2.4
Total	82	100

Discussion

These results in Table 5.20 indicate that the majority of the front-line employees (82.9%) (n=68) are proud to work at AVBOB; a small percentage of them (7.3%) (n=6) disagree, and 7.3% (n=6) of them are unsure as to whether they are proud to be an AVBOB employee.

Table 5.21: I receive a performance bonus (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	11	13.4
Disagree	17	20.7
Unsure	15	18.3
Agree	23	28
Strongly agree	13	15.9
Missing	3	3.7
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.21 indicate that 43.9% (n=36) of the respondents did receive a performance bonus, whereas an alarming 34.1% (n=18) of them did not receive a performance bonus. It is interesting to note that 18.3% (n=15) of the front-line employees are unsure as to whether they receive a performance bonus.

Table 5.22: How are employees rewarded for good performance? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Bonus	10	24.4
Awards	2	4.9
Certificate	2	4.9
Trophy	2	4.9
Commission	2	4.9
None	6	14.6
Other	6	14.6
Missing	11	26.8
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.22 indicate that an alarmingly small percentage of the front-line employees (24.4%) (n=10) receive a bonus. It is interesting to note that 14.7% (n=6) of them receive a reward, certificate or trophy; 4.9% (n=2) receive commission, and 14.6% (n=6) do not receive any form of recognition.

Table 5.23: Clear performance standards for service quality are set (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	1	1.2
Disagree	4	4.9
Unsure	13	15.9
Agree	29	35.4
Strongly agree	34	41.5
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

Table 5.23 shows that more than three-quarter of the respondents (76.9%) (n=63) indicated that the organisation has set standards for service quality; a small percentage of them (6.1%) (n=5) disagree, and 15.9% of them (n=13) are unsure as to whether there are performance standards set for service quality. This is an indication that some front-line employees are unaware of what is happening in the organisation and that no or insufficient training is provided.

Table 5.24: Organisational benefits are available (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	16	19.5
Disagree	18	22
Unsure	10	12.2
Agree	25	30.5
Strongly agree	11	13
Missing	2	2.4
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.24 indicate that there is an almost equal split between the respondents who agree (43.5%) (n=36) and those who disagree (41.7%) (n=34) that benefits are available; whereas 12.2% are unaware that company benefits are available. It is alarming to note that front-line employees did not know whether company benefits are available. This is a clear indication that there might be a communication problem or that front-line employees are uninformed.

Table 5.25: Management are interested in front-line employees and their needs (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	2	2.4
Disagree	15	18.3
Unsure	14	17.1
Agree	33	40.2
Strongly agree	16	19.5
Missing	2	2.4
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.25 show that the majority of the respondents (59.7%) (n=49) indicated that management are interested in their needs; 20.7% of the respondents disagree, and 17.1% of the respondents are unsure.

Table 5.26: Management are interested in the well-being of the family of front-line employees (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	6	7.3
Disagree	12	14.6
Unsure	20	24.4
Agree	23	28
Strongly agree	20	24.4
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.26 reveal that the majority of the respondents (52.4%) (n=43) indicated that management are interested in their families; 21.9% (n=18) of the front-line employees do not agree and a nearly equal number of front-line employees (n=20) (24.4%) indicated that they are unsure.

Table 5.27: My personal circumstances have a negative influence on my job performance (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	26	31.7
Disagree	28	34.1
Unsure	3	3.7
Agree	19	23.2
Strongly agree	5	6.1
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

From the results in Table 5.27, it is clear that the majority of the respondents (65.8%) (n=54) indicated that their personal circumstances have no influence on their work performance; one third of them (29.3%) (n=24) agree that their personal circumstances do influence their work performance, and only a small number of them (n=3) (3.7%) are unsure.

Table 5.28: I have problems getting to and from work (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	26	32.1
Disagree	33	40.2
Unsure	3	3.7
Agree	17	21
Strongly agree	2	2.5
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

From the results in Table 5.28, it is clear that the majority of the respondents (62.3%) (n=59) have no problem getting to work; a third of the respondents (23.5%) (n=19) agree that they experience problems getting to work, and a small percentage of them (3.7%) (n=3) are unsure as to whether they have experienced transport problems.

Table 5.29: I do not always have clean clothes to wear to work (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	33	41.8
Disagree	32	40.5
Unsure	1	1.3
Agree	9	11.4
Strongly agree	4	5.1
Missing	3	3.7
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.29 clearly show that the majority of the respondents (82.3%) (n=65) indicated that they disagree and thus have clean clothes to wear to work; 16.5% (n=13) of them do not always have clean clothes to wear, and only one (n=1) (1.3%) indicated that s/he is unsure.

Table 5.30: I experience conflict between my work and family responsibilities (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	23	28.4
Disagree	31	38.3
Unsure	6	7.4
Agree	16	19.8
Strongly agree	5	6.2
Missing	1	1.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

According to the results in Table 5.30, the majority of the respondents (66.7%) (n=54) disagree and thus do not experience any conflict between their work and family responsibilities; 26% (n=21) of them do experience conflict, and some of them (7.4%) (n=6) are unsure as to whether they experience conflict between work and family responsibilities.

Table 5.31: I experience a great deal of stress at work (Front-line employees' response) (n=82)

	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly disagree	11	13.4
Disagree	23	28
Unsure	11	13.4
Agree	27	32.9
Strongly agree	10	12.2
Total	82	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.31 indicate that nearly half of the respondents (45.1%) (n=37) experience stress at work; 41.4% (n=34) of the respondents do not experience any stress at work, and 13.4% of them are unsure as to whether they experience any stress at work.

Table 5.32: Front-line employees are treated with respect (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	2	4.9
Unsure	4	9.8
Agree	16	39
Strongly agree	19	46.3
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.32 indicate that 85.3% (n=35) of the front-line employees are treated with the necessary respect. Only a small percentage (4.9%) (n=2) of them disagree, indicating that front-line employees are not treated with respect. However, 4 managers (9.8%) indicated that they are unsure.

Table 5.33: Front-line employees' attitude and behaviour have an impact on customer evaluation of services (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Disagree	1	2.4
Agree	14	34.1
Strongly agree	26	63.4
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.33 reveal that the vast majority of the respondents (97.5 %) (n=40) indicated that the attitude and behaviour of front-line employees impact on customers' evaluation of services. Only 1 respondent (2.4%) disagreed.

Table 5.34: Most common complaints among front-line employees (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Too much work to do	8	19.5
Not my work, but that of somebody else	7	17.1
Poor communication from management	5	12.2
Too much work and poor communication	5	12.2
Other	8	19.5
Missing	8	19.5
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.34 indicate that the most common complaint received by management is that of front-line employees' workload (19.5%) (n=8), while others (17.1%) (n=7) complain about doing somebody else's work. Some front-line employees (12.2%) (n=5) complain about poor communication from management, whereas an equal number of them (12.2%) (n=5) indicated that they have too much work and that communication is poor.

Table 5.35: Are you flexible in your leadership role to attend to different situations? (Managers' response) (n=41)

	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	40	97.6
No	1	2.4
Total	41	100

Discussion

The results in Table 5.35 indicate that the majority of the managers (97.6%) (n=40) are flexible in their leadership role.

Reliability testing: Front-line employees

Table 5.36 represents the mean scores and Cronbach's alpha value for all Likert-scale questions based on the factors that influence service delivery.

Table 5.36: Cronbach's alpha test for reliability (Front-line employees) (n=82)

Variable	Cronbach's alpha a	Percentage	No. of questions	Reliability
Climate	0.86	86	10	High internal reliability
Empowerment	0.78	78	5	High internal reliability
Training/Systems/HR	0.82	82	8	High internal reliability
Rewards	0.75	75	4	High internal reliability
Job satisfaction	0.89	89	4	High internal reliability
Management	0.89	89	6	High internal reliability
Customer service	0.89	89	6	High internal reliability
Service quality	0.85	85	7	High internal reliability
Commitment	0.82	82	5	High internal reliability

Discussion

The reliability for the above scales was found by computing the coefficient a. Factors were determined using a 5-point Likert scale. "Job satisfaction", "Management" and "Customer service" have the highest alpha value of .89 (89%). The lowest alpha value is .75 (75%) for "Rewards" and .78 (78%) for "Empowerment". All coefficients are found to be greater than 0.7; therefore, the tests conducted are considered to be valid and acceptable. The acceptable Cronbach's alpha value is 0.7 and above (Skeran and Bougie, 2010: 324).

Pearson Product Moment Correlation tests

The correlation coefficient (prefix) indicates the magnitude and the direction of the relationship. The coefficient can be either positive (+) or negative (-). Thus, the closer the coefficient is to 1, the stronger the relationship; 0 (nil) indicates a weak relationship (Bryman and Bell, 2007: 362; Cooper and Schindler, 2014: 473).

Table 5.37: Pearson Product Moment Correlation test showing the relationship between Service quality (factor J) and factors as identified (n=82)

Factors	Service quality Correlation coefficient	Guildford's value of *r (+ or -)*	Informal interpretation
Commitment	0.71**	0.7-0.9	High correlation Strong relationship
Organisation climate	0.62**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Job satisfaction	0.59**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Customer service	0.58**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Empowerment	0.56**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Management	0.54**	0.4 - 0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Training/Systems/HR	0.52**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Rewards	0.24*	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Definite, but small relationship

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The Pearson Correlation test was conducted to establish whether there is a relationship between Service quality (factor J) and various factors as identified from literature. Table 5.37 shows that all the values are above 0 and closer to 1. This means that Service quality is positively correlated to the factors that have an influence on it.

From the results, Commitment has the highest value (71%) and thus the strongest relationship with Service quality. In addition, Organisation climate (62%) is the next highest value and has a substantial relationship with Service quality. It is further observed that Job satisfaction (59%), Customer service (58%), Empowerment (56%), Management (54%), and Training/Systems/HR (52%) are moderately correlated to Service quality and show a substantial relationship. Rewards (24%)

have a low correlation with Service quality. However, there is a definite, but small relationship between Service quality and Rewards. The results also indicate that Rewards is less correlated with Service quality.

Table 5.38: Pearson Product Moment Correlation showing the relationship between Customer service (factor I) and factors as identified (n=82)

Factors	Customer service Correlation coefficient	Guilford's value of r (+ or -)	Informal interpretation
Empowerment	0.42**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Commitment	0.37**	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Small relationship
Management	0.36**	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Small relationship
Organisation climate	0.33**	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Small relationship
Job satisfaction	0.27*	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Small relationship
Training/Systems /HR	0.27*	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Small relationship
Rewards	0.13	<0.2	Slight correlation Almost no relationship

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The above test was conducted to establish whether there is a relationship between Customer service (factor I) and various factors as identified from literature. Table 5.38 shows that all the values are above 0 and closer to 1. This means that Customer service is positively correlated to the factors that have an influence on it.

From the results, Empowerment (42%) has the highest value, has moderate correlation and a substantial relationship to Customer service. In addition, Commitment (37%), Management (36%), Organisation climate (33%), Job satisfaction (27%) and Training/Systems/HR (27%) have a low correlation and a definite, but small relationship with Customer service. It is further observed that

Rewards (13%) has a slight correlation with Customer service and almost no relationship.

Table 5.39: Pearson Product Moment Correlation test showing the relationship between Front-line employees (factor H) and factors as identified (n=82)

Factors	Front-line employees	Guildford's value of *r(+ or -)*	Informal interpretation
Empowerment	0.76**	0.7-0.9	High correlation Strong relationship
Organisation climate	0.71**	0.7-0.9	High correlation Strong relationship
Job satisfaction	0.58**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Training/Systems/HR	0.56**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Commitment	0.53**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Management	0.52**	0.4-0.7	Moderate correlation Substantial relationship
Rewards	0.29**	0.2-0.4	Low correlation Definite, but small relationship

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Discussion

The above test was conducted to establish whether there is a relationship between Front-line employees (factor H) and various factors as identified from literature. Table 5.39 shows that all the values are above 0 and closer to 1. This means that Front-line employees are positively correlated to the factors that have an influence on them.

From the results, Empowerment (76%) and Organisation climate (71%) have a high correlation and a strong relationship with Front-line employees. Furthermore, Job satisfaction (58%), Training/Systems/HR (56%), Commitment (53%) and Management (52%) have a moderate correlation and a substantial relationship with

Front-line employees. Rewards (29%) have a low correlation and a definite but small relationship with Front-line employees.

5.4 SUMMARY

In this chapter, the research findings of the study were examined. Chapter 6 provides a detailed discussion of the results obtained, a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1   INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study was to determine factors that have an influence on front-line employees in delivering a quality service. This chapter presents an interpretation and discussion of the empirical findings as well as recommendations.

The chapter is divided into two sections, namely Part A and Part B. Part A is a discussion of the demographic results for front-line employees and managers. Part B focuses on the empirical results, followed by a blueprint of steps for service delivery. What make this chapter significant is that the results obtained lead to interesting observations and recommendations.

6.2   SUMMARY OF THEORETICAL FINDINGS

Existing sources of secondary verifiable data such as publications, academic journals, electronic databases and the Internet were reviewed to ascertain and interpret what has been written and published on the research topic. The following section briefly summarises the theoretical findings.

The most significant variables in the service-delivery process are the degree to which the service is offered and the extent to which front-line employees meet customers' needs. Customers' expectations are met when front-line employees deliver quality service. This reflects positively on the organisation, resulting in a higher market share and increase in profits. In order to achieve this, service-oriented leaders can use the Gaps Model of Service Quality as a framework. Not only does this model provide information, but it also helps them understand how service quality emerges. The two main gaps in this model are the Customer Gap and the Provider Gap. According to this model, customers' perceptions of service quality depend on the four gaps that exist within an organisation. These gaps are the Listening Gap,

the Services Design and Standards Gap, the Service Performance Gap, and the Communication Gap. In order to close the Customer Gap, these four Gaps must first be closed.

Front-line employees are the main role players in an organisation; therefore, their loyalty towards the organisation has an impact on their approach to customer service. Front-line employees play a crucial and dynamic role in the closure of Provider Gap 3 (Service Performance Gap); the closure of this Gap mainly depends on their attitude, competencies, skills, commitment, trust, communication, and work in a complex relationship.

As front-line employees have a direct influence on the service-quality dimensions, it is important to meet customers' expectations by employing front-line employees who have the ability to deliver. However, various factors may affect their effectiveness. Some front-line employees may carry mental baggage to work, whereas others may find it difficult to draw a line between personal, home- and work-related aspects. On the other hand, some front-line employees may experience role conflict, while other professional circumstances may also influence their effectiveness (e.g., employee or job mismatch, empowerment, lack of management commitment, inappropriate compensation, organisation culture, or poor communication) and their encounter with customers and thus have negative consequences for both the employee and the organisation. Front-line employees need to feel valued in their positions in order to experience a positive devotion towards the organisation.

Various strategies are put forward to deliver service quality through effective front-line employees, namely to hire the right front-line employees; compete for the best front-line employees; hire front-line employees for their service competencies; be a preferred employer; develop front-line employees who are customer-oriented; empower front-line employees; retain the best front-line employees; develop front-line employees to deliver service quality; promote teamwork; measure internal service quality, and provide the necessary support systems.

Bearing this in mind, the following section provides a detailed discussion of the findings.

6.3   DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The objective of this section is to present the empirical results of this study as well as recommendations on the presented results. This chapter is divided into two sections, namely Part A and Part B. Part A discusses the demographic results for front-line employees and managers, and Part B focuses on the empirical results.

PART A – DEMOGRAPHIC RESULTS

The demographic profile of front-line employees and managers includes gender, age, cultural groups, and qualification profiles. These questions were asked to enable the researcher to gain insight into the demographic characteristics of the respondents. Additional results obtained from front-line employees include language, transport system, and residential area. The purpose was to gain insight into how front-line employees get to work and where they reside in order to establish whether these factors have an influence on their performance at work. The questions related to this section are found in Part B of the questionnaires (Appendices B and C).

Gender: Interesting results were obtained for gender: the majority of the front-line employees are female, while the majority of managers are male.

Recommendation

Although there was an overall even representation of gender between front-line employees and managers in this study, AVBOB can consider appointing more females in managerial positions to meet the requirements of the Employment Equity Act. As can be noted, there are more males (65.9%) than females (34.1%) on the managerial side.

Age: Results indicate that the majority of the front-line employees fall in the age group 21-40 years and are thus fairly young. The conclusion can be made that AVBOB mostly recruit younger persons as the majority of front-line employees are Millennials (13-33 years of age) and Generation Xers (34-48 years old).

The results also show that the majority of the managers are 31-50 years old and range between Millennials (13-33 years) and Baby Boomers (49-67 years). The

results indicate that a large percentage of the managers are nearing retirement and have to be replaced within a few years' time. However, the study is well presented in terms of age groups.

As a result of the generation gap between managers and front-line employees, misunderstandings and conflicts may occur as people have different mindsets, views and communications styles. Thus, managers have to manage different generations in their workforce while the biggest challenge is to teach generations to work towards a common goal. In addition, due to personality differences, conflicts may occur and could cause unpleasant and uncomfortable workplace situations.

Recommendation

It is recommended that all members of staff undergo training in order to recognise generation differences and learn how to manage these differences. Managers can also encourage front-line employees to participate in cross-generation interaction, as generations can learn valuable lessons from one another. It is also recommended that staff members undergo training in conflict management, as age differences may result in misunderstanding and thus cause conflict.

Frontline employees' language: The largest percentage of the front-line employees are Afrikaans speaking, followed by Sotho-speaking front-line employees. The managers' language was not tested.

Recommendation

Although the study is well presented in terms of front-line employees' language, front-line employees must be encouraged to learn an additional language, as this may improve communication between colleagues and with customers.

Culture: The majority of the front-line employees are Black, followed by White and a small percentage of Coloured front-line employees. Results obtained from managers indicate that the majority of the managers are White, followed by Black and a small percentage of Coloured managers.

Recommendation

Although the respondents' culture can be regarded as a good representation of the country's rainbow nation, the appointment of more Black and Coloured front-line employees and managers is recommended in order to adhere to the requirements of the Employment Equity Act. Due to the many cultures with different religions, values, language, race and gender in the employment of AVBOB, training in cultural diversity is recommended for both managers and front-line employees. Such training can educate staff on how to treat and respect people of different backgrounds and thus avoid discrimination. In addition, diversity training can create a positive work environment and promote better communication and teamwork. In order to manage cultural differences effectively, managers must be sensitised regarding cultural diversity aspects such as leave requirement, work functions (food and beverage preferences), and religion.

Qualification: Although over half of the front-line employees and one third of the managers possess a Grade-12 certificate, respondents are still well educated and the results show a good spread of the respondents' educational level. Although managers are better qualified than front-line employees, their level of education is still low. However, the results indicate the overall average qualification of front-line employees and managers.

Recommendation

Human resources need to address the education requirements for managers and front-line employees. The selection and appointment strategies should be designed to target managers and front-line employees with the necessary skills. In addition, due to the different levels of education among the staff in AVBOB's employment, the organisation can introduce and provide more in-house training programmes in order to have employees on the same educational level. This will not only enhance staff competency, but also allow them to take notice of what is happening in the organisation.

Front-line employees' transport system and residential area: These two factors go hand to hand as they influence one another. They were tested as they may affect the personal and professional circumstances of front-line employees. The majority of

the front-line employees reside in town and in townships. Furthermore, front-line employees make use of a diverse transport system. The results show that the majority of them travel by taxi or walk to work. The reason why so many front-line employees make use of public transport is most probably because the majority of them reside in town or in the townships. In addition, due to high taxi fees, strikes, impassable roads, reckless driving, and high accident rate, front-line employees often prefer to walk. This is, in fact, a very unreliable system. Some front-line employees arrive late for work, never show up, are tired from walking long distances, and are in a bad mood due to their transport problems or responsibilities at home. This, in turn, results in service-quality problems as their service delivery is not up to standard. Another employee often needs to do their job; this may result in conflict between staff members.

Recommendation

Front-line employees need to be encouraged to contact the office and inform management about their situation or transport problems. It is not always viable for a company to make use of their own transport for their employees; however, should the company lose money because employees turn up late for work, a careful calculation needs to be done to compare the loss in money and transport costs.

PART B – EMPIRICAL RESULTS

In order to answer the research question *"What personal circumstances have an influence on the effectiveness of front-line employees?"*, "Front-line employees' transport system" has been identified as a personal factor, because the majority of the front-line employees make use of an unreliable transport system. A small percentage of front-line employees indicated that they "do not always have clean clothes to wear to work". This may also be a contributing factor. Not all front-line employees have the same amount of clothing. Some need to do their washing in the evening after work and thus may not have dry clothing for the next day, especially during winter months. Lin et al. (2013: 178); Wong and Lin, (2007: 726) as well as Chiang et al. (2010: 25-27) indicate that personal circumstances may lead to conflict between work and home life.

On the questions "My personal circumstances have a negative influence on my job performance"; "I do not always have clean clothes to wear to work"; "I experience conflict between my work and family responsibilities", and "I have problems to get to work and back home", front-line employees indicated that this does not influence their effectiveness. However, their answers can be understood as that they did neither read nor interpret the questions correctly.

Recommendations

Although only some front-line employees experience a transport problem, they still make use of an unreliable transport system. Managers can encourage front-line employees to inform them when they experience a transport problem. In addition, front-line employees can be encouraged to form clubs and travel together. Not only can they save on travelling costs, but it is also a more secure alternative to some of the transport systems used. Management may consider the possibility of front-line employees wearing a corporate uniform or have a standard look for all staff. Thus, female and male front-line employees may dress in the same way and colour. However, it must relate to the nature of the employees' jobs and apply to both men and women.

In order to answer the research question "*What professional circumstances have an influence on the effectiveness of front-line employees*?", training, rewards, organisational benefits, work stress and work overload were identified as professional circumstances that influence front-line employees' effectiveness.

The above results are in line with the findings of various authors such as Zeithaml et al. (2009: 348, 360-375), Grönroos (2007: 415), Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 146-150), Gudergan et al., (2008: 28) as well as Karatepe (2013: 614-616), as discussed in Chapter 3.

Hui et al. (2007: 152) indicate that front-line employees are often undertrained, whereas Karatepe (2013: 614-616) indicate that front-line employees experience role stress, are overworked and experience family-work conflict. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 133, 146-150) and Kinman (2009: 118-130) indicate that emotional work causes stress, as some front-line employees may act as being happy and empathetic, while

others feel and experience the customers' emotions. This can result in front-line employees being emotionally exhausted. Kinman (2009: 118-130) also indicates that performance is measured on quantity and not quality. Kumar et al. (2009: 212) identified poor technology and job suitability; Pride and Ferrell (2010: 529) indicated that front-line employees must receive compensation, while Chi and Gursoy (2009: 247) claimed that uncertainty among front-line employees about what is expected from them results in them being less co-operative, not committing themselves and having no trust in the organisation. In addition, Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 195) found that the inability of front-line employees to function effectively is sometimes governed by inadequate/poor system design, poor recovery strategies, or a lack of knowledge.

Recommendations

Human resource management is an important part of the strategic management of every organisation. The following recommendations are made.

As far as training is concerned, all levels of management must be motivated to service-oriented thinking and behaviour, as front-line employees must know how a service organisation operates, what their role is and what is expected of them as individuals. All front-line employees need to be aware of the organisation's mission and business strategies as well as the goal and function of each department. Therefore, training programmes that include knowledge-based training (e.g., product, system and team training) as well as attitude training are essential, as this will enable front-line employees to deliver quality service through teamwork (Grönroos, 2007: 425).

Rewards are a powerful way to encourage front-line employee performance. Human resources need to implement a uniform reward system to ensure that front-line employees receive the same kind of recognition for good work. Rewards should be presented to front-line employees on a regular basis. There are various ways of rewarding front-line employees for good work. However, rewards in the form of money do not always constitute a strong reward, as front-line employees also expect to feel that they are valued. Acknowledgement is another form of reward; therefore, a "thank-you", a compliment, or time off work may also be viewed as a form of reward.

Front-line employees should be informed that excellent service is appreciated and recognised in AVBOB's rewards system. Clear guidelines relating to performance standards for service delivery must be set by management and communicated to front-line employees. These documents must be distributed among AVBOB branches. Management need to ensure that front-line employees read, understand and sign these documents. In addition, they need to set specific, quantifiable and measurable goals for front-line employees and measure their performance through customers' opinions.

The unavailability of organisation benefits to some front-line employees places additional stress on these employees. Human resources must ensure that benefits are available to all front-line employees. In addition, they need to ensure that front-line employees understand their service contract and as to whether benefits are available or not.

As front-line employees experience work stress, balance-training programmes are recommended to gain control and balance between professional and personal circumstances. De-stress activities such as action cricket or a fun day can be arranged to help alleviate front-line employees' work stress.

Work overload creates work stress; thus training in time management can enable front-line employees to work more "intelligently". Human resources, via management, can encourage front-line employees to collaborate with other employees who do similar work. Suggestions could be made to front-line employees as to how to prioritise work. Promote teamwork, as this provides emotional support to front-line employees and enhances their motivation. Ensure that front-line employees understand their job descriptions to enable them not only to focus on what is exactly expected of them, but also to avoid pressure due to work overload. Stress management is suggested to provide front-line employees with the necessary skills to handle work pressure. In this regard, management must ensure that a service blueprint is available at every AVBOB branch to enable front-line employees to understand their role in both the process and the organisation.

In order to answer the primary research question:

(d)   "What factors influence front-line employees to deliver a sustainable quality service?"

and some secondary research questions:

(e)   "What professional circumstances have an influence on the effectiveness of front-line employees?"

(f)   "How committed are front-line employees towards rendering a quality service?".

Pearson product moment correlation was used to determine the strength of the relationship of service quality; customer service, and front-line employees, using the variables identified by Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 195-220); Grönroos (2007: 423-425) and Zeithaml et al. (2009: 348).

The recommendations for the above research questions were made after the last research question was analysed.

In order to find answers to the above research questions, the factors as identified, namely commitment, climate, job satisfaction, customer service, empowerment, management, training/systems/HR and rewards, were correlated with service quality. Some interesting and unexpected results were obtained. Findings indicate that commitment has a high correlation and strong relationship with service quality. This implies that, if front-line employees are committed, they will deliver service quality. Organisation climate and job satisfaction show the next highest correlation with service quality, as both have a moderate correlation (positive) and substantial relationship with service quality. The positive correlation of commitment, organisation climate and job satisfaction with service quality can be interpreted as that there is a probability that these factors have an influence on service quality.

It is interesting to note that rewards indicates a low correlation (positive) and a definite, but small relationship with service quality, while the remaining factors indicate a moderate correlation (positive) and a substantial relationship with service quality. The findings are interesting, as rewards were previously perceived as a contributing factor to professional circumstances.

Secondly, empowerment, commitment, management, organisational climate, job satisfaction, training/systems/HR and rewards were correlated with customer service. Once again, interesting and unexpected results were obtained. Findings indicate that empowerment has a moderate correlation and substantial relationship with customer service. Commitment and management show the next highest correlation with customer service, as both have a low correlation (positive) and small relationship with customer service. The positive correlation of empowerment, commitment and management with customer service can be interpreted as that there is a probability that these factors have an influence on customer service. It is interesting to note that "rewards" has a slight correlation and almost no relationship with customer service. The remaining factors indicate a low correlation (positive) and a small relationship with customer service.

Thirdly, empowerment, commitment, management, organisational climate, job satisfaction, training/systems/HR and rewards were correlated with front-line employees. The results indicate that empowerment and organisation climate have a high correlation and strong relationship with front-line employees, whereas job satisfaction has a moderate correlation and substantial relationship with frontline employees. The positive correlation of empowerment, organisation climate and job satisfaction with front-line employees can be interpreted as that there is a probability that these factors have an influence on front-line employees. Rewards, once again, has a low correlation and a definite, but small relationship with front-line employees. All the other factors are moderately correlated and have a substantial relationship with front-line employees.

Except for "rewards", all other findings are in line with literature. Gudergan et al. (2008: 28) indicate that commitment, organisational climate and job satisfaction can have an influence on the service behaviour of front-line employees; Salanova et al. (2005: 1218) indicate that commitment has an influence on the service behaviour of front-line employees, and Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 144) state that committed employees contribute to the economic benefits of an organisation.

Gil et al. (2008: 923) indicate that job satisfaction experienced by front-line employees is one of the main reasons why they develop good service. In this regard, Gil et al. also indicate that front-line employee job satisfaction may be affected by job characteristics, front-line employee personality traits, group norms, personal belief systems, self-esteem and values as well as demographic and organisational factors.

Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 36) indicate that climate is referred to as "employee's perception of the events, practice and procedures as well as their perceptions of the behaviours that are rewarded, supported, and expected". Organisation climate reflects the human resource practices in an organisation and can be regarded as an indicator of an organisation's success. A positive organisation climate will, therefore, have more productive front-line employees. Thus, "if management are to leave the development of an appropriate organisational culture to emerge from front-line employees themselves, and are not trying to "control" the organisational culture, then management need to ensure that they recruit people with the right values", and "if front-line employees perceive management as failing in proper support, encouragement and rewards, it is no surprise if customers perceive the service as unsatisfied" (Mudie and Pirrie, 2006: 137).

Specialist literature indicates that empowerment of front-line employees contributes positively to their morale (Grönroos, 2007: 401-404), whereas Boshoff and du Plessis (2013: 112-113) view empowerment of front-line employees as a "strategy" to provide them with greater discretion and autonomy. Mudie and Pirrie (2006: 149) indicate that, when front-line employees have no autonomy or may not use their discretion when dealing with customers, they may find their jobs very frustrating. If front-line employees are empowered, they will have the knowledge, skills, and authority to focus on the customers. The correct implementation of empowerment of front-line employees forms part of an organisation's internal marketing process and can have an impact on front-line employees' job satisfaction, which may, in turn, improve customer contact (Grönroos, 2007: 130; 402).

The results relating to "rewards" is not fully in line with literature (Pride and Ferrel, 2010: 529) and Zeithaml et al. (2009: 374) and with previous findings (e.g., Slătten, 2010: 4-8; Liao and Chuang, 2004: 450; Beitelspacher et al., 2011: 3, and Peiró et

al., 2005: 786). According to these authors, rewards have a motivating effect on front-line employees and encourage proper treatment of customers. Rewarding front-line employees may encourage and motivate them to deliver a service of high quality.

If management cannot lead by example or are not capable of encouraging front-line employees to be service minded and customer oriented, the organisation's ability to deliver a quality service will decrease. Service-oriented leadership, including managers' and supervisors' attitudes towards their role, their teams and how they act, promotes good service. Without constant support by management, values cannot spread or be maintained throughout the organisation. They play a key role in the development of a service culture and, because they are leaders in the organisation, they contribute to the culture of the organisation via their leadership (Grönroos, 2007: 367, 422-423).

The results relating to "rewards" may be ascribed to the fact that front-line employees receive a diverse reward system (e.g., bonus, trophy, certificate, and so on) or that some are unsure as to whether they receive any rewards and, therefore, do not really care. Some front-line employees may be happy with their jobs and more driven by passion for what they are doing. For them, rewards are less important. In addition, some front-line employees may gain a sense of accomplishment from their work, while others may view their fringe benefits or social rewards as sufficiently rewarding. When front-line employees have a clear understanding of what it takes to be rewarded and to receive recognition, they will probably feel more supported by AVBOB and, therefore, display more loyalty (Arnolds and Venter, 2007: 17).

Recommendations

In order to enhance front-line employees' role in delivering sustainable quality service, human resources need to address the following recommendations. First, internal marketing activities/strategies must be addressed. Managers are the key to success; therefore, improving management's commitment towards, and support of front-line employees must be encouraged. Managers need to undergo leadership training in order to understand and support their organisation's values and culture. They must personally demonstrate that they are customer focused and service

oriented, live up to it and behave accordingly. They must also physically support front-line employees to perform in a customer-focused and service-oriented manner. Furthermore, the implementation of a service profit chain may help managers define their own role in AVBOB, but will also assist them in developing the best strategies.

Communication between managers and front-line employees must be encouraged and operational decisions should be managed down to front-line employees in order to keep them informed and understand what is expected of them. As far as front-line employees are concerned, verbal and written upward communication must be improved to enable managers to understand front-line employees' needs. It is also recommended that front-line employees understand the type of behaviour that can be rewarded by AVBOB. Understanding an organisation's rewards system can directly and indirectly influence customer-oriented behaviour.

Finally, human resource management forms an important part of the strategic requirements and must have recruitment procedures, career planning, and a reward system in place. Good service rendered by the front-line employees needs to be rewarded and achievements need to be measured to enable front-line employees to realise the importance of good service. Rewards must be linked to AVBOB's vision, and a good rewards system must be easy to manage and understand. In order for management to achieve a high service quality, all aspects of the organisation's design need to be in place for the service process. A discussion of AVBOB's strategic action plan with front-line employees will enable them to notice how they contribute towards achieving strategic goals. In addition, a service-oriented organisation requires a flat organisational structure with only a few hierarchical levels.

It is recommended that AVBOB address the identified factors and draw up a service blueprint to explore and identify front-line employees' roles in the organisation in delivering a sustainable service quality.

6.4 BLUEPRINT OF STEPS FOR MANAGERS OF SERVICE DELIVERY ORGANISATIONS

In order to achieve the last objective (g) "To set up a blueprint of steps for recommendation for the management of service delivery organisations", the following blueprint is presented:

1.   Always recruit the best front-line employees.

- Compete for the best front-line employees.
- Hire the best front-line employees for their service competencies.
- Strive to be the employer of choice.

Loyal and effective front-line employees are an asset to any service-delivery organisation and, in order to benefit from them as an investment, human resource management requires a strategic approach. Processes and practices must be redesigned in order to support the development of these members of staff. Recruit and carefully select the best front-line employees by evaluating and testing them for their skills and knowledge to do the job. When an organisation's goals and training initiatives are linked, an employer can be labelled as the employer of choice.

2.   Develop front-line employees to be service-oriented.
- Provide the necessary technical and skills training to all front-line employees.
- Empower all front-line employees.
- Promote teamwork among front-line employees.

Training programmes should be integrated throughout the organisation and aligned with the organisation and performance objectives. Provide comprehensive technical and job-specific skills training to front-line employees to enable them to take responsibility. The implementation of a service blueprint can assist front-line employees in knowing where and how they fit into the process and organisation. Set team goals and reward front-line employees when these goals are achieved.

3. Provide the necessary support systems to all front-line employees.

- Measure internal service quality.
- Provide the necessary supportive technology and equipment to all front-line employees.
- Develop service-oriented internal processes.

Supply the necessary equipment, technology and internal support systems such as access to intranet, e-mails, websites, and customer information databases to enable front-line employees to provide an effective service. Measure internal service quality between departments annually, and redesign internal processes to be customer oriented.

4. Retain the best front-line employees.

- Include all front-line employees in the organisation's vision.
- Treat all front-line employees as customers.
- Reward front-line employees for successful performance and excellence.

The organisation's vision needs to be clear and motivating, and must be frequently communicated to front-line employees to enable them not only to share in, and understand the organisation's vision, but also to adhere to the organisation's objectives. Make front-line employees feel valuable, treat them fairly and let them feel that they are taken care of. Conduct internal market research to determine whether front-line employees' job and work-life are met. Introduce a decent compensation programme and a fair rewards system for employees who focus on service quality.

The above blueprint of steps must be regarded as a valuable tool towards the quality service-delivery process for AVBOB.

6.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

Finally, the primary objective, namely to determine factors that influence front-line employees in their delivery of a sustainable quality service, was achieved based on the research findings in Chapter 5.

The following six secondary objectives were also achieved:

a)   To examine the aspects that influence the Customer Gap was achieved in Chapter 2.

b)   To investigate the role of front-line employees in narrowing the Customer Gap was achieved in Chapter 3.

c)   To identify the personal circumstances that influence the effectiveness of front-line employees was achieved in Chapters 3 and 5.

d)   To identify the professional circumstances that influence the effectiveness of front-line employees was achieved in Chapters 3 and 5.

e)   To investigate front-line employees' commitment towards rendering a quality service was achieved in Chapters 3 and 5.

f)   To discuss the role and awareness of management in the front-line employees' role in service delivery was achieved in Chapters 2 and 3.

g)   To set up a blueprint of steps for recommendation for the management of service-delivery organisations was achieved in Chapter 6.

6.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY AND FUTURE RESEARCH

As in any research, there are some limitations to this study. For example, the study was restricted to AVBOB, and only front-line employees and managers at some of the branches completed the questionnaires. Secondly, a relative small number of front-line employees (n=82) and managers (n=41) serves as the sample. It was not an easy task to distribute the questionnaires to the respondents, and to receive the questionnaires back from them. In addition, it was difficult to convince the respondents, especially managers, that the questionnaires were distributed solely for academic purposes.

This research also provides room for future research. The research can be extended to several other service organisations within the funeral industry to generalise the findings. It would be interesting to observe whether the same factors show a positive relationship when tested in another service organisation in the funeral industry. It could also be extended to a more diverse group of service providers. Secondly, another potential area for investigation is the role of managers and their strategies towards a competitive advantage and sustainable quality service in AVBOB. Thirdly, service encounters between front-line employees and AVBOB customers can be investigated to determine and identify discrepancies in the service encounter between these two parties and to identify ways to deliver a service that best suits their customers. Fourthly, customer satisfaction is an outcome of service quality and it can be investigated to determine AVBOB customers' level of satisfaction with the service they receive.

6.7 CONTRIBUTION

The contribution of this study is not only to identify personal and professional circumstances that influence front-line employees in their delivery of a sustainable quality service, but also to demonstrate the important role that front-line employees play in a service organisation.

6.8 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter presented and discussed the theoretical and empirical findings, recommendations based on these findings, and recommendations regarding future research.

Human resources are considered an important part of AVBOB to maintain a competitive advantage. The organisation's challenge is to recruit and retain front-line employees. In this study, the relationship of service quality, commitment, and front-line employees with various factors was tested. The most significant findings of the study are the positive correlation with commitment, organisational climate, empowerment, job satisfaction and management. Furthermore, transport has been identified as a personal circumstance that has an influence on front-line employees'

effectiveness, while clothing may also be a contributing factor. Training, rewards, organisation benefits, work stress and work overload have been identified as professional circumstances that influence the effectiveness of front-line employees.

Finally, bearing this in mind, for AVBOB to compete successfully, it is essential that management use the Gaps Model of Service Quality to identify areas that need improvement. For AVBOB to close the Service Performance Gap, the other three gaps within the Provider Gap (Gaps 1, 2 and 4) must also be closed in order to close the Customer Gap. To achieve excellent service quality through effective front-line employees, all internal marketing strategies must form an integral part of strategic management. In addition, top and middle management as well as supervisors must work together to demonstrate leadership, changes in organisational culture, and their support for the internal marketing processes. Literature suggests that managers can, through effective recruitment, training, rewards system and the creation of a favourable organisation climate, contribute towards the effectiveness of front-line employees to deliver a sustainable quality service. All the recommendations in this study are practical and can be applied and achieved by AVBOB.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A – Permission to hand-out questionnaires for research purposes

Appendix B – Questionnaire for Front-line employees

Appendix C – Questionnaire for Managers

Appendix D - Purpose of research and confidentiality

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA

UFS
UV

24 May 2013.

Dear Participant

PERMISSION TO HAND-OUT QUESTIONNAIRES FOR RESEARCH PURPOSES

I hereby grant permission to student JM Fourie to hand out questionnaires at AVBOB
Agencies for research purposes of her Master's Degree.

Abovementioned student is doing research on *"The critical role of frontline employees in
a service organization"*.

We kindly request you to participate in the research by completing the questionnaire.
Your identity will be protected at all times and information obtained will be strictly
confidential.

Thanking you for your participation.

Yours faithfully

Dr JH van Zyl

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR FRONTLINE EMPLOYEES

Mark with "x" where applicable

SECTION A
A.

1. How long ago were you appointed by the organization	
(a) Less than 5 years	
(b) 5 – 10 years	
(c) 10 years and more	

2. What is your position within the organization? Post Level?		
3. (a) Have you had another position in the organization before?	**Yes**	**No**
(b) If "yes" what was your position?		

B: Climate

Mark with "x" where applicable	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. Management are flexible to meet the needs of different situations					
2. Leaders have a clear vision for the future of this organization					
3. Proud to work at this organization					
4. I believe that the success of this organization depends on meeting the customer's needs					
5.I would recommend this organization as a good place to work					
6. The organization has a formal performance review process					
7.In my organization clear performance standards for service quality are set					
8. Individuals on all levels are recognized					
9. In my organization we work as a team					
10. I have job security in my workplace					

C: Empowerment

1. When I experience problems I have the right to make a decision and handle the problem?					
2. Frontline employees may participate in decision making processes					
3. Frontline employees may make decisions in order to provide excellent service					
4.Have responsibility and authority to act independently					
5. I am empowered to accommodate and act on customer requests					

D. Training/Systems/HR

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1 Training programs are in place					
2. Supportive equipment are provided					
3. Internal support systems are available and up to date (e.g. customer records)					
4.Training fits the organizations goals and strategies					
5. I receive the necessary training to enhance my ability to deliver a quality service					
6.The organization uses performance measurement to identify areas that needs attention					
7 Organizational benefits are available (pension etc)					
8. In my organization I receive training on how to provide the best service to the customers					

E. Rewards

1. Salary increases are market related					
2. Incentives are provided					
3. I am recognized for my contribution towards quality service					
4. I receive a performance bonus					

F. Job satisfaction

1. Working conditions are acceptable					
2 Job responsibilities are clearly defined					
3. I consider my job as pleasant					
4. I feel satisfied with my overall job environment					

G. Management

1. Management communicate regularly with frontline employees					
2. Management are interested in frontline employees and their needs					
3. Management are interested in the wellbeing of the family of frontline employees					
4.Management set clear performance standards for service quality					
5. Management distribute work fairly amongst frontline employees					
6. Management is flexible and adjusts his/her leadership style according to the needs of different situations.					

H. Frontline employees

1. I may make a decision and use my own judgment in order to get the job done					
2. I have the opportunity to give feedback to management					
3 .I form long term relationships with my customers					
4. I am committed in providing a quality service to customers					
5. I have the required knowledge to assist customers					

I. Customer service

1. I voluntary assist customers even if it means that it may go beyond my job requirements					
2. I go out of my way to make a customer feel satisfied					
3. I help customers beyond what is expected from me					
4.I frequently go out of my way to assist a customer					
5.I meet performance requirements when serving a customer					
6. Customers are treated with empathy					

J. Service Quality

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. In my organization we work hard to meet customer needs					
2. Customers are valued					
3. I provide a quick and prompt service					
4. I perform the service right the first time					
5. In my organization we are dedicated to provide the customer with the needed support					
6. In my organization frontline employees responds immediately to customer complaints					
7. I am interested in solving customer problems					

K. Commitment

1. I will make personal sacrifices if it is to the benefit of the organization					
2. I am proud to work at this organization					
3. I work hard to meet customer needs					
4. I am never to busy to help a customer					
5. I make personal sacrifices to help the organization succeed					

L. General

1. My personal circumstances have a negative influence on my job performance					
2. Management is unaware of my personal circumstances and problems					
3. I have problems to get to work and back home					
4. I want management to know my family (e.g. husband, wife, children)					
5. I experience conflict between my work and family responsibilities					
6. Management is interested in the wellbeing of my family					
7. Although I am committed to my organization my family comes first					
8. My personal circumstances have no influence on my work					
9. I do not always have clean clothes to wear to work					
10. I consider myself as over worked an under paid					
11. I do not always feel like smiling at customers					
12. I experience a lot of stress at work					
13. Service is provided according to industry based standards					
14. I know which aspects of service is important to customers					
15. I must learn to provide a better service					
16. I have the power to make on-the-spot decisions					
17. I understand my role in the organization					
18. Management understand when I experience a family crisis					
19. My personal circumstances influence the way I treat customers					
20. Dress code has an influence on customer perception					

SECTION B: Geographic details

Mark with x where applicable

1. What is your gender?

Male	Female

2. Age Group	
Less than 20 years	
21-30 years	
31-50 years	
51-60 years	
More than 60 years	

3. Marital status	
Single	
Married	
Divorced	
Widow	
Widower	
Living with a partner	
Other	
Specify:	

4. Home Language	
Afrikaans	
English	
Sotho	
Tswana	
Xhoza	
Zulu	
Other	
Specify:	

5.Cultural Group	
Asian	
Black	
Coloured	
White	
Other	
Specify:	

6. Highest Qualification

7. How do you get to work?	
Bicycle	
Bus	
Foot	
Hike	
Own Transport	
Pool vehicle	
Taxi	
Other	
Specify	

8. Residing Area	
Farm	
Plot	
Town	
Township	
Other	
Specify:	

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE FOR MANAGERS

Section A

1.   What is your current position within the organization? _____

2.   Post Level_____

3.   When did you start at the organization? _____

4.   What are your responsibilities in your present position? _____

_____

_____

A.   Leadership

Mark with x where applicable

1.   Are you flexible in your leadership role to attend to different situations?

Yes		No	

2   How do you deal with a difficult situation?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
First ask the frontline employee what is the problem					
Greet the customer and then attend to the problem					
Apologize to the customer and then attend to the problem					

3.   Do you agree with the following?

	Agree strongly	Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Disagree Strongly
1. Management communicate organization objectives to frontline employees					
2. Action are taken by management when frontline employees provide them with an idea					
3. Frontline employees are treated with respect					
4. Customers are valued					
5. Management is of the opinion that frontline employees are committed in providing a quality service to customers					
6. Frontline employee attitude and behavior have an impact on customer evaluation of services					
7. Every frontline employee receive personal skills training to deliver a better service to customers					
8. Management motivate supervisors to support frontline employees					
9. The organization has training programs for frontline employees					
10. Frontline employees receive regular training					
11. Frontline employee are appointed according to their service competencies					

12.Management treat frontline employees with respect					
13. Work objectives and responsibilities are clearly communicated by management					
14.Organizational goals and frontline employees are considered when making decisions					
15. I show sincere interest in the welfare of the families of frontline employees					

4. Does management know the family/children of each frontline employee?

Yes		No		Only some of them		No reason why should know family	

5. Does your organization have a clear vision for the future?:

Yes	No	Unsure

B. Employees

1. What qualification is necessary for frontline employees?

Grade 1-7	
Grade 8-12	
Diploma	
Degree	
Other	
Specify:	

2. When a frontline employee experiences a problem, does he/she have the right to make a decision and handle the problem?

Yes		No		Depends on the type of problem		Management must attend to the problem	

3. How are frontline employees evaluated in terms of working achievement?

_____

_____

4. How frequent are evaluations done?

Every 3 months	
Every 6 months	
Once a Year	
Other	
Specify:	

5. How are employees rewarded for good performance? _____

6.   Most common complaints amongst frontline employees are:

Too much work	
Not my work but that of somebody else	
Poor communication from management	
Other	
Specify:	

SECTION B
Geographic details

1.Gender

Male	Female

2. Age Group	
Less than 20 years	
20-30 years	
31-40 years	
41-50 years	
51-60 years	
More than 60 years	

3. Marital Status	
Single	
Married	
Divorce	
Widow	
Widower	
Living with a partner	
Other	
Specify:	

4. Cultural Group	
Asian	
Black	
Coloured	
white	

5. Highest Qualification

24 May 2013

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Dear Sir/Madam

I am conducting a research study to obtain my Masters degree in Business Management in the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences at the University of the Free State. The title of my research study is *"The critical role of front-line employees in a service organization".*

Your co-operation in completing the attached questionnaire is kindly requested and appreciated. It will take you about 6 minutes to complete. There is no risk involved in participating in the study. Your participation is voluntary and all information will be treated as confidential.

Should you have any questions regarding the study or questionnaires, I can be contacted at: 051-4013425 (office hours) or 083 335 1868 or fouriejm@ufs.ac.za.

By completing this questionnaire you are automatically giving informed consent that the information obtained may be used as a contribution towards my research.

Yours sincerely

Marina Fourie