THE APPLICATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AT A COMPUTER CUSTOMER CONTACT CENTRE IN CAPE TOWN

EDMORE CHINHAMO

Cape Peninsula
University of Technology

THE APPLICATION OF QUALITY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AT A
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by

EDMORE CHINHAMO

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Supervisor: Dr. Pineteh E. Angu

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DECLARATION

I, Edmore Chinhamo, declare that the contents of this thesis represent my own unaided work, and that the thesis has not previously been submitted for academic examination towards any qualification. Furthermore, it represents my own opinions and not necessarily those of the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Signed   **Date**

ABSTRACT

This research investigates the application of the quality management systems at a computer contact centre in Cape Town. It examines the issues around brand switching from the products supported by the computer customer contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. Its main interest is to interrogate the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands. It also hopes to find out whether call agents understand the interrelation between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the project uses employee responses to ascertain whether the concept of quality management is synonymous with customer satisfaction and whether employee fulfilment leads to innovation and customer satisfaction. To address the main concerns of this project, Deming's model of quality management is used as the main conceptual framework. The key concepts underlying this model are visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning/training, process management, continuous improvement, employee fulfilment and customer satisfaction.

To find out the reasons that customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands and also to respond to sub research questions, a quantitative research method was selected. A questionnaire was administered to 100 employees out of a 300 population. Although the customers' voices would have added value to the research project, the researcher decided to concentrate on employees because of the following reasons: 1) the interaction with customer begins and ends with agents, therefore agents are always aware of the reasons why customers switch brands; 2) the customers are in excess of 100,000,000 and selecting a representative sample for a mini thesis was not very feasible, given that the thesis is constrained by time and volume.

These 100 employees were randomly selected by a computer from five departments of the contact centre. A questionnaire was sent electronically to each respondent for completion. After analysing the data, it was found that the employees are aware of the reasons why customers switch brands. These reasons include poor after sales service. After - sales service encompasses

customer enquiries, sale of accessories, hardware technical support and general customer service. This implies that the employees are not poorly responding to customer queries. For example, in section 4.6, it was noted that 73% of the employees do not resolve the customer's problem at first call. Customers are likely to switch brands if that happens all the time. The findings also show that this poor after sales service results from lack of motivation from the employees. Employees also claim not to have adequate tools for their jobs, which also impacts on the nature of service delivered. The absence of efficient quality management systems in the call centre leads to customer dissatisfaction, in turn leading to brand switching. It was also found that there is a very close relationship between quality management and customer satisfaction, resulting from effective customer service and first-time problem resolution. The findings also revealed that employee motivation leads to innovation and customer satisfaction. The following conclusions were drawn from the report: continuous organisational improvement depends on effective communication, training leads to knowledge of processes and procedures, there is a link between industrial democracy and quality service and that customer satisfaction leads to brand loyalty. Recommendations of the research propose that communication, staff development, industrial democracy, management commitment, employee empowerment and introduction of a business school are central to solving the challenges which are causing customer brand switching.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DEDICATION

To my mother, Rosemary-Makawa Chinhamo

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GLOSSARY

Terms/Abbreviations/Acronyms	Definition/Explanation
TQM	Total Quality Management
Industrial democracy	Involving employees in decision making
Business process re-engineering	complete overhaul of business process
SERVQUAL	service quality
Cost of quality	The cost of maintaining quality or the cost of failing to maintain it.
JUSE	Japanese Union of Science and Engineers
Quality circle	A committee selected to deal with matters of quality within an organisation
Switchboard	A department in the call centre where all calls are received
Desktop	A department in the call centre which deals with desktop computers
Overflow	A department in the call centre which deals with both desktops and laptops
AWT	Average wait times, this refers to the time the customer waits for his or her turn to be served in the contact centre
Gurus	Authorities or people who have profound knowledge in their area of specialisation
Involvement	The concept of including employees in decision making
Taylorism	A management theory coined by Taylor meant to imply that it is management's prerogative to make decisions and set targets and

	standards for the employees
In-bound call centre Agent	An agent receiving calls.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Background to the study

Business trends in this modern and globalised world have witnessed a paradigm shift in customer service, from the company-centred approach to an outsourced customer contact centre approach, where administration is in the hands of the outsourced company. This enables companies to concentrate on their core business and dispense with unnecessary expenses and distractions from business which result from dealing with customers directly Cook (2008: 22).   Multi-national companies now turn to contact centres in continents like Africa and Asia because human resource and infrastructure set up are cheaper in these continents Kaplan et al. (2005:107).

Customer contact centres not only provide centres for service, they also provide a big opportunity for companies to increase their market share and sales. To achieve this increase, quality plays a very important role in ensuring that new purchases and repurchases are made. This means a customer contact centre can make or break an outsourced company. However, the biggest challenge faced by these contact centres is undoubtedly their ability to ensure the application of a quality management system for effective customer service.

On the African continent, South Africa has become an attractive call centre destination for multi-national companies such as Hewlett Packard, Amazon and Lufthansa. As early as 2005, there were already 100 operations servicing various industries including telecommunication, insurance, banking and financial services in the Western Cape Province of South Africa (Kaplan et al., 2005:107). Despite the proliferation of call centres in the Western Cape, the industry is constantly riddled with problems. These problems include, inter alia, an unprecedented number of customer complaints every day. A large number of calls received each day are specifically follow - up calls on issues

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that have not been resolved. The increasing number of complaints suggests high level customer dissatisfaction. This has resulted in customers avoiding repeat purchases and/or switching to products from competitors. To remedy this situation, contact centres set up a customer complaints department, which deals exclusively with queries other departments fail to resolve.

Also, apart from customers deserting the products supported by the contact centre, the industry has over the past years suffered from a high labour-turnover. For example, according to human resource internal documents, the call centre investigated in this project recorded a high labour turnover between May 2008 and May 2009, with 152 employees leaving the company. This has relegated the contact centre business to a recruitment and training organisation. To try to solve this problem, the company has restructured and initiated an Employee Wellness Forum. This platform is responsible for making and ensuring a harmonious working environment, and to an extent, evaluating and designing operational processes. However the problems have continued despite formation of the Employee Wellness Forum. The eruption of customer contact centres in South Africa has, therefore, expanded the space for research in customer services and quality management.

1.2 Aims and objectives

The background information suggests that there is a relationship between employees and customers. This relationship begins with the first interaction to the time the customer decides to switch brands. In addition to this, the agents use a system that requires them to log their activities with the customer. This means that call centre agents have a good understanding of the reasons why customers choose brands and switch brands. It is against this backdrop that the research has decided to focus on employees rather than customers.

Also, mindful that the voices of customers could have added value to this research project, it was practically difficult to incorporate customers' responses in the project because the company's client base is in excess of 100, 000, 000 and a representative sample for quantitative study of this nature

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would have been difficult to survey. Essentially, because this a mini thesis, constraints such as time and volume made it challenging to administer a questionnaire to a representative sample of a large population like the one mentioned above.

This research was initiated in effort to establish and understand the causes of problems affecting call centres. The project is based on a computer contact centre in Cape Town. For ethical reasons, the name of the organisation has been withheld. In the case study it is referred to as the customer computer contact centre in Cape Town. The centre supports products of a big brand whose name has also been withheld for ethical reasons. Information on this big brand is readily available and fits the profile needed by customer contact centres. This computer customer contact centre specialises in providing technical support to customers who own consumer computers and printers. The product lines supported include printers, notebooks and desktops. At the time of research, it had 300 in-bound agents. This figure suggests that it is one of the biggest call centres in Cape Town. At the time of this research, other call centres have fewer Agents such as Talk Talk had 9 call centre agents.

To this end, this study seeks to find out the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by the competitors. The study hopes to find out whether employees can establish the connection between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. It also intends to use employee responses to investigate the application of quality management at the computer customer centre in Cape Town and thereby establishing if quality management is synonymous with employee satisfaction and customer retention.

Furthermore, the study evaluates call centre agents' views about the expectations of customers when they call the customer contact centre. This encompasses the time the customer calls until the conclusion of the call. In line with this, an examination of the nature of service that customers get from

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the contact centre is also imperative. Finally, the project identifies gaps between customer expectations and the actual service delivered to them as well as provides recommendations to both the computer customer contact centre and to the computer service provider.

1.3 Main research problem

What are the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competition?

1.4 Sub research Questions

In order to address the research problem, this project has attempted to answer the following questions:
1. Do call centre agents understand the interrelationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty?
2. Do call centre agents understand the relationship between the concept of quality management and efficient and satisfactory customer service?
3. Does employee motivation lead to customer satisfaction?

1.5 Significance of the project

This study focuses on total quality management and its implications for the relationship between customers and customer call centres. It hopes to shed some light on the operational strategies of customer call centres and their impact on quality management. Also, the conclusions drawn from the findings can be beneficial to call centres because the researcher will outline recommendations which will assist in optimising organisational efficiency in the delivery of services. If recommendations are adopted, organisations will increase their market share and thereby boost profitability.

Furthermore, the call centre agents are likely to benefit from the recommendations as it will endow them with the necessary strategies and

skills that will promote the optimisation of quality management. In the same vein, the customers will benefit from efficient service once the recommendations are adopted by both the call centre and the call centre agents. Academics will benefit from the new insight that will have been added by the findings to the existing knowledge of quality management in call centres while the researcher will benefit from an enhanced knowledge of quality management and from establishing contacts for future research. This study will also expand the literature on quality management

1.6 Delineation of study

This research focused only on one contact centre in Cape Town. The contact centre provides technical support to consumers who own computers and printers. The research findings would be representative of similar contact centres in Cape Town. The project confined itself to one contact centre because it was carried out to fulfil the requirements of a masters degree by coursework, which requires a relatively short thesis. A masters programme thesis does not demand extensive research but provides bedrock for further study in the field of quality management.

1.7 Outline of chapters

Chapter one outlines the general introduction to the research. It begins by providing the background to the research. This background includes a description of the company and the problems it is suffering from, which prompted this research. The chapter also introduces the reader to the research questions and the significance of the study.

Chapter two traces and defines TQM as an organisation's effort towards continued improvement to satisfy the customer's needs. It discusses Deming's model of quality management as enshrined in his 14 points. Then it focuses on the basic tenets of the model: customer satisfaction, employee motivation, employee innovation, management commitment to quality and the adoption of Deming's philosophy on quality. It also discusses contemporary

quality models and assesses the relevance of Deming's model to the research as well as its applicability to a call centre quality management system.

Chapter three defines and discusses quantitative research methods. This discussion seeks to justify why a quantitative research approach is suitable for this project. The chapter concentrates on population and sampling methods, research instruments, data collection methods, procedures and analysis. Finally, the chapter describes how the questionnaire was sent to respondents and how data was captured and analysed.

Chapter four presents and analyses the research findings. The presentations attempt to establish whether or not the customers are satisfied with the after sales service offered by the contact centre. The chapter also attempts to find out if there is a relationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Finally, it attempts to establish whether the management of the call centre is committed to the application of quality management principles as advocated for by Deming's model of quality management.

Chapter five provides conclusions for the overall project. These conclusions include the following: continuous organisational improvement hinges upon effective communication, training leads to knowledge of processes and procedures, there is a link between industrial democracy and quality service and that customer service leads to customer loyalty and eventual profitability. The chapter also offers the following recommendations: communication should be made a priority and not a privilege, a business school should be set up/inaugurated by the company, employees should be included in decision making and managers should be committed to quality management. It also recommends a further study in the field which would include the contact centre's customer base.

1.8 Ethical Considerations

This study focuses on a computer customer contact centre in Cape Town and a questionnaire was expected to be filled in by its employees. Therefore the following ethical issues were considered prior to the research process:

1. The researcher sent an official letter which described the research information package to the Human Resources Manager of the contact centre.

2. The researcher then requested a letter of consent from the Human Resources Manager of the contact centre.

3. Research authority was granted and a letter of consent written by the Human Resources Manager.

4. A clause in the questionnaire indicated that participation by respondents was voluntary and that they had the following rights: to withdraw at any stage and to answer or skip questions at their discretion (see appendix i).

5. All the letters of application for and awarding of permission for this research have been withheld from the appendices for ethical reasons.

1.9 Summary

This chapter has provided a general introduction to the research. It began by explaining the background to the research which includes a description of the company and the problems it is encountering/suffering which prompted this research. The chapter has introduced the reader to the research questions and significance of the study. An outline of each chapter has also been included to provide the reader with an overview of content of the project.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to understand the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the computer customer contact centre to those manufactured by competitors, and to find out whether employees can establish the connection between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. It also interrogates employee motivation and the implications for customer satisfaction as well as the concept of quality management, efficiency and satisfactory customer service. To address these issues, the chapter revisits the literature on quality management and Deming's model of quality management: visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning/training, process management, continuous improvement and employee fulfilment. Deming's model of quality management addresses the research questions and provides the bedrock for quality management. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first section is a literature review which begins by looking at the multiple definitions of Total Quality Management, inter-changeably referred to as TQM. It then traces the origins of TQM. The second section pays attention to three quality models; the SERVIQUAL model, the means-end model and Deming's model. Finally, the chapter discusses how Deming's model addresses the research questions and why it was chosen.

2.2 Definitions of Total Quality Management (TQM)

In order to critically discuss Deming's model of quality management, it is of paramount importance to examine the concept of Total Quality Management because of its multiple definitions. This will help to explain the concepts that underlie the model of quality management developed by Deming.

TQM can be defined as the culture within an organisation which aims to continually improve performance by meeting the requirements in all functions

of the company (Holmes 1992:19). In this context, culture can be construed to mean the norms and values of any given organisation. Blake and Davies, as quoted in Dennis et al. (1972:84), refer to norms as accepted standards or models. This alludes to the point that in order to meet requirements, be it internally or externally, there has to be a set of principles and standards shared by the whole workforce. This becomes the culture within the organisation.

In the same token, the Japanese Union of Scientists and Engineers (JUSE) as quoted in Smith (2007:13), defines Total Quality Management as a set of systematic activities carried out by the entire organisation to effectively and efficiently achieve company objectives so as to satisfy customers at the appropriate time and price. Systematic activities eventually become the culture of the organisation. The above definition suggests that there is continuous engagement in activities. For that to happen, then there should be assessment and evaluation of these activities as, with time they may become obsolete and irrelevant. The same principles outlined in this definition would apply to customer service, more particularly in a call centre environment where service has to be provided at the appropriate time and within specified timescales.

Hakes (1992:3), defines TQM as a philosophy that strives to make the best use of resources and opportunities by constant improvement as a key to business improvement strategy and as the key to the management issues of the future because it is essential for efficiency and competitiveness. On the same note, Oakland (1995:18), believes that TQM is the approach to improving the competitiveness, effectiveness and flexibility of a whole organisation. In customer contact centres, improvement is of paramount importance as employees need to brace themselves not only for changes in the economic environment but also for changes in consumerism.

These definitions, as varied as they may seem, both theoretically and technically, attest to the fact that the basic tenets of TQM are continuous

improvement, systematic activities and employee involvement. They also suggest that employees are essential in the engagement of processes that will improve organisational performance. TQM emphasises a number of concepts, which all support the philosophy of customer focus, continuous improvement, defect identification and reduction, and recognition that the responsibility for quality is shared by all (Berk & Berk 1993:6).

The definitions also provide a strong foundation for a study of this nature in that although they reveal some conflicting views about TQM they; nevertheless, agree that the employee should be at the epicentre of quality management.

2.2.1 The origins of quality ideas

Tracing the origins of quality ideas will help to establish how products and services were produced and delivered prior to development of various quality models and why adoption of a quality model by Deming is essential for this study... The origins will also reveal why it became necessary to have models that would help to resolve quality problems which existed at each quality epoch.

Although the bulk of literature on the subject attributes the origins of TQM to changes at the beginning of the 20th century, there is evidence of early traces of the application of the concept even as far back as 2150 BC. The code of the Hammurabi (Babylonian) sought to punish builders whose houses collapsed. In Germany, bakers who reduced bread sizes were punished, while even in 300 BC, Chinese inscribed the names of craftsman, slaves and officials on manufactured goods and documents to ensure traceability of poor products (Haper, Goswamy, & Kanareva in Dooley (1998:7).

Although the origins of TQM can be traced back over a long period, its modern history is attributed to the transformation and rapid growth of Japanese industry in the post Second World War years. The main reasons for changes in this period were quality control concepts applied to production and the TQM philosophies developed in Japan by Fergeubum, Juran and Deming,

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Ho, (1995). The specifics that triggered the concept of total quality management were competition and the new management approach.

a) Competition

The post - war boom years witnessed an oversupply of products on the market. Companies began to compete for customers as the customers now had a wide choice. This resulted in a shift of focus from merely producing to sell, to a strategy that was aimed at relating with customers in order to encourage them to make further purchases. During this time, business was slow, and because the market was a buyers' market, price was no longer the determinant of customer choice. Rao (1996:2) argues that changes in the global business environment were the sources of the quest for quality management; US companies like Motorola faced stiff competition from Japanese products which were of a high quality and were being produced at a lower cost and sold at a lower price. It, then, follows that any company embarking on a TQM programme is seeking to be more competitive.

Similar sentiments are echoed by Bendell et al. (1993:16) who say that as markets for products became saturated following the post - war boom, suppliers began to realise that the customer was looking for a total service, not just the product. Therefore, it was necessary to change attitudes towards customers throughout the company, to give it a competitive advantage. What Bendell et al. (1993) seem to be suggesting is that in order to produce a product that is desirable in the market place and competitive, all the departments of the company have to work together so that they holistically understand the needs of customers.

In the Western Cape, more particularly in Cape Town, there are several computer customer contact centres which provide similar support as the one under study. In order to get business, the contact centres need to align themselves with strategies which will enable customer satisfaction and foster brand loyalty. The moment an organisation implements strategies that would retain the customer, increase market share and profitability, then, that mark the beginning of the TQM concept (Benson et al. 1991:1112). Competition for

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customers brought in a new strategy for retaining and gaining customer loyalty. This new strategy was called the new management approach.

b) The new management approach

The origins of the TQM concept can also be traced to the criticism of the works of F.W. Taylor's theories of scientific management, sometimes referred to as Taylorism. According to Littler (1978:185), Taylor's theory of scientific management can be defined as "the bureaucratization of the structure of control, but not the employment relationship." The theory argues that it is management's prerogative to deal with decision making while employees concentrate on production. Taylor believed that people were primarily motivated by money to work. Therefore, the role of management is to organise work   as efficiently as possible so that high wages can be earned. This thinking suggests that the worker was not expected to innovate, think or suggest, but merely perform the work assigned. Business in the time of Taylor could afford to apply these techniques because capacity was less than demand, so a manufacturer could supply standard and generic products to domestic markets and still make profits. With the rise of competition, Taylor's theory was no longer applicable.   Benson et al. 1991:1112) argues that business could not use the same approach; management needed to understand many aspects of the production systems, type of processes, the impact of plant location and facility layouts, planning and control systems and ways of motivating employees.

Taylor's attitudes towards the workers were laden with negative bias. This led to the inception of a new thought which claimed that all employees have an intimate knowledge of the importance of their job and are, therefore, able to make useful contributions. Oakland (1995:26) opines that encouragement of work-based teams in which all workers may contribute is ideal for motivating employees. Such contributions increase worker morale, provide a sense of ownership and improve worker management relations generally. This shift of management thinking went through an evolutionary process to TQM.

2.2.2 Tracing the paradigm shift: the quality eras

Tracing the evolution of quality is critical for this project as it traces how the recognition of the need for high quality has evolved into TQM. In each stage of development, there were quality strategies inherent to solving the problems of that particular epoch. Tracing the paradigm shifts justifies the choice of Deming's model as being the most suitable conceptual framework for this research...

Thomas Kuhn, quoted in Dooley (2008:3) defines paradigms as universally recognized scientific achievements that for a time provide models and solutions to problems for a community of practitioners. Paradigms are only aspects of normal science that describe work and beliefs within a particular era. When those beliefs are overtaken by events, they get replaced by another set of beliefs. This definition can be used to illustrate how the concept of quality management has developed over time. Any discussion about tracing the paradigm shifts in the evolution of TQM would be incomplete without reference to the marketing eras. The evolution of quality management is closely related to the evolution of marketing; from the product concept, production concept, selling era, marketing era to relationship marketing (Frederick & Webster Jr, 2005: 124-126). The discipline of quality at a specific age was in itself an account of the business environment of that age. The concept TQM has also shifted from one epoch to another; largely dependent on the business beliefs of that time Dooley, (2008:3). Quality has evolved from inspection, statistical process control, quality assurance, to Total Quality Management. The quality eras are discussed in detail in the following sections.

a) Inspection

Inspection refers to the measuring, examining and testing of products and process to determine conformity. The concept of inspection was used to decide whether the finished product met the requirements of the customer or the specifics of the design. The purpose of inspection was:

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(i)   to ensure that no defective product left the factory or workshop;

(ii)   to detect any problems in the product

(iii)   to maintain compliance; and

(iv)   to inspect quality (Holmes, 1992:122)

This means that the product was only inspected for quality at the end of the process. Holmes (1992:124) argues that quality should be in-built and not solely subject to inspection. However the inspection process did not alleviate the costs of quality, all it did was identify faulty products without preventing their production. Bendell et al (1993:15) agrees that inspection may lead to a "hit and miss" type of operation where the only way of protecting the customer from defective products or service may be to put a great deal of emphasis on end point inspection. Apart from the problem of making quality inspectors redundant, the problem of inspection was to detect the problem of a product or service in its finality, when it was no longer redeemable.

b) **Quality assurance**

The quality assurance phase on the road to TQM ushered in a holistic organisational thinking towards production or delivery of service. The emphasis in the era was the functional approach to production to prevent production failures. The approach was to involve all the departments of the organisation, but with top management only being partly involved (Tsiotra & Gotzamani, 1994:65).

Although this was done, a cause for concern was the fact that management was peripherally involved in the process (Gavin, 1988:37). The view of quality was a problem to be solved not an opportunity to create competitive edge for the organisation. As long as management remained detached from the organisation, the quest for quality remained a dream. The continued complexity of consumer preferences required something more than just the assurance of quality: all members of a business needed to contribute to the design of products and services. This marked the inception of the Total Quality Management concept.

If inspection and quality assurance were used as a tool to manage quality at the contact centre, it would pose a lot of challenges. This is because in inspection, a service/product is inspected at the end of the process. If a product is found to be defective, it is either redone or labelled a reject. This process leads to losses, in terms of resources. In a contact centre, the environment is live, an employee cannot be allowed to make a mistake with a customer and then correct it after the call. Therefore, a more appropriate strategy that is able to proactively prevent these mistakes is needed.

Table 2.1 below summarises the quality eras and their strategic focus. The table shows that the last stage of development in quality management is TQM, the basis/foundation of which was provided by the postulations of Deming's model of quality management. The focus here is only on TQM, because it is the approach that is relevant for this project.

As postulated by Thomas Kuhn in Dooley (2008:3), the models of quality were developed in response to quality problems in each era. The following sections of the project will discuss some of these quality models.

Identifying characteristics	Inspection	Statistical quality control	Quality Assurance	Total Quality Management
1.Primary concern	Detection	Control	Coordination	Strategic Impact
2.View of Quality	A problem to be solved	A problem to be solved	A problem to be solved, attacked proactively	A competitive opportunity
3.Emphasis	Product uniformity	Product uniformity with reduced inspection	The entire production chain, from design to market and contribution of all functional groups to preventing quality failures	The market and consumer needs
4.Methods	Gauging and measurement	Statistical tools and techniques	Programmes and systems	Strategic planning, goal-setting and mobilizing the organization
5.Role of Quality professionals	Inspection, sorting, counting and grading	Troubleshooting, application of statistical methods	Quality measurement, planning, and programme design	Goal-setting, education and training, consultative work with other depts. and design
6.Who has responsibility	Inspection department	Manufacturing and engineering departments	All departments, top management peripherally involved	Everyone
7.Orientation and approach	Inspects in quality	Controls in quality	Builds in quality	Manages in quality

Table four major Quality Eras

Source: Adapted from Gavin (1988: 37)

2.2.3 Quality management in the South African context

Since the collapse of apartheid in 1994, the political and economic focus has been on the transformation of South African society towards equity. This is because the new government needed to initiate new policies that would change many of the inherited structures and policies designed to consolidate apartheid (Fiske & Ladd, (2004:ix). As a result, transformation organisations emerged like the Affirmative Action group and the Black Economic Empowerment. The purpose of these organisations was to advance the interests of previously disadvantaged racial groups, ensuring that they were also included in positions of leadership. The Black Management Forum also demanded the appointment of blacks to positions previously occupied by whites.

The situation described above can have an overall impact on quality in the following ways:

1. The employment equity is primarily concerned with race and gender and does not put emphasis on qualifications. This implies that even when people are not qualified to do a job which falls vacant, they are employed on the merit of their race or gender. In the process, quality is compromised and the customers are not satisfied with the services provided.

2. The situation drives companies into a political landscape at the expense of quality service. When someone is dismissed for incompetence, it becomes a political issue.

There is no literature on quality management specifically written to deal with these challenges in South Africa. Therefore, the mainstream literature and models on quality will be used to address the research questions.

2.3 Quality models

The SERVQUAL model, the means - end model and Deming's model, are the three models of quality management chosen to address the research

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questions. The SERVQUAL model, developed by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1988, is a scale of 22 items that provide quantitative measurement of customer perceptions of service quality. Gutman (1981:116-121) further defines the means-end chain as a cognitive model, consisting of interconnected perceptions that influence a consumer when selecting products that enable him or her to enjoy the benefit of making these purchases. The belief is that the three concepts of price, perceived quality and perceived value play a major part in influencing buyer decisions. Deming's model of quality management revolves around his systematic approach to problem solving, which is popularly known as the Deming Cycle or the Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle.

The Deming's, SERVQUAL and Means - end models present varied views on how to influence buyer behaviour using quality. But, traces of similarities can be found if reference is made to the definitions outlined in earlier sections of the research, for example Smith (2007:13) defines Total Quality Management as a set of systematic activities carried out by the entire organisation to effectively and efficiently achieve company objectives so as to satisfy customers at the appropriate time and price. All the models have been designed in response to the need to satisfy customers. The models will be discussed in the ensuing sections of the project with an indication as to why the Deming model presents answers to the research questions.

2.3.1 The SERVQUAL model

The SERVQUAL model, coined by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry in 1988, is one of the widely used models of customer service quality measurement. Kouthouris and Alexandris (2005: 103) argue that the model proposes five dimensions by which service quality is measured:
   a) Reliability; the ability of an organisation to deliver on its promises efficiently
   b) Assurance; the employees' ability to win customer trust and confidence
   c) Tangibles; the outlook of an organisation's physical environment, which include facilities, equipment and even the presentation of employees.

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d) Empathy; the willingness of employees to provide a tailor-made service to each unique customer.

e) Responsiveness; The willingness of employees to provide prompt service.

The SERVQUAL model is a scale of 22 items that provide quantitative measurement of customer perceptions of service quality. To date, the model remains the most useful management tool because it aims to identify the gaps which exist between customer expectations and customer perceptions of the service. The following points from Bateson (1995:524-534) attempt to show the gaps that exist in service quality:

1. There can be a difference between consumer expectations and the management of consumer expectations. Management may have little or no understanding/knowledge of what the customer wants and put emphasis on the provision of services other than those not wanted by the customer.

2. The Management perception - service quality specification gap. Managers may primarily be concerned with short - term profits or other commitments that hinder quality service.

3. The Service quality specification-service delivery gap. This is when the employees are unable or unwilling to perform the service at the desired level.

4. The delivery - external communication gap. The media and advertisements can affect customer expectations.

The arguments raised in the SERVQUAL model are all embedded in Deming's model of quality management. The SERVQUAL model discusses management issues, employee issues and process issues which are all incorporated in Deming's 14 points.

The main claim of the SERVQUAL model is the measurement of the gaps that exist between the service a customer expects to get from an organisation and the actual service which they get. The challenge to this model is that sometimes it becomes too subjective. Customer experience and perception of

service is dependent on customer mood at the time the service is rendered, and this situation makes it extremely difficult to measure the gaps. For example, in this computer customer contact centre, if an owner of a defective computer calls the contact centre to report /complain their expectation is that they will get a new unit, but the process at the contact centre dictates that their old unit must be repaired. This situation will make the customer angry and this emotion, in the end, would distort any measurement that is made. In addition to this, the SERVQUAL model discusses the difference between service delivery and external communication and points out that media can affect customer expectations. This implies that depending on a third party for the provision of quality service is unrealistic because reporters can be biased.

2.3.2 The means – end model.

The means – end model is attributed to the works of Rokeach, Howard Vinson, Scott, and Lamont who first developed a quality conceptual framework based on price, perceived quality and perceived value, Gutman (1981:116-121). The belief with this model is that these three concepts are major determinants of customer behaviour over their perception of quality. According to Gutman (1982:60), the model is based on two assumptions about consumer behaviour: values, (the desirable end-states of existence) play a prominent role in influencing purchasing patterns and that "that people cope with the tremendous diversity of products that are potential satisfiers of their values by grouping them into sets or classes so as to reduce the complexity of choice." Gutman (1981:116-121) also describes the means-end chain as a cognitive model, consisting of interconnected perceptions that influence a consumer to select products that enable him or her to enjoy the benefit of these purchases.

a) The concept of perceived quality

Perceived quality is viewed as the customer's feelings and perceptions about the performance of a product Zeithaml (1988:3). The same author argues that perceived quality is an abstract idea that results from the customer's

perceived quality of a product. It should be noted that perceived quality is different from objective or actual quality. The model supposes that the behaviour of consumers is largely influenced by the consequences they derive from the consumption of a product whose attributes have a desirable end (Gutman, 1982:61). This concept of perceived quality is quite subjective as it is dependent on the feelings of a customer at that particular time. It is quite difficult to measure and verify perceived quality, as it is an intrinsic abstraction.

b) The Concept of perceived price

According to Zeithaml (1988:10) price is what a customer "sacrifices" in exchange for a product or service. Jacoby and Olson (1977), as quoted by the same author, attempt to distinguish the object price, which is the real price of a product and the perceived price, which is the price abstraction by the consumers. They argue that some customers do not encode price in their heads in numerical terms, but do so by means of labeling it as cheap or expensive. Zeithaml (1988:10) also argues that prices differ in demographic groups, rendering it quite difficult to use it as an influence on consumer purchase behaviour. In some instances, price can be taken as a cue for quality products. However, a lot of variables have to be considered; in some instances, if consumers perceive that there is a greater risk of an unsatisfactory product if it is cheaper than another product, then they will opt for the product with the higher price (Gutman, 1982). The concept of price is never concrete; some consumers purchase and repurchase products, not because cheaper ones do not add value to the end result, but because of their income bracket.

c) The Concept of Perceived Value

According to Zeithaml (1988:13) there are as many definitions of value as there are consumers. The general consensus on these varied definitions is that in the end, consumers agree that value is what gives a customer satisfaction at the end of consuming a product or service. The author believes

that value is a higher order abstraction where consumers have an abstract idea of what they call idea. The author sums up the definition of perceived value as the consumer's overall assessment of the utility of a product based on perceptions of what is received and what is given.

The means-end model of quality service emphasises the perceived quality, perceived value and perceived price as the bases for consumer purchase and behaviour. Everything that is perceived by the customer exists in abstraction and becomes very difficult to measure. The means-end model lacks a methodology of getting to the end; hence it will not be adopted for this research.

For this project, the Deming model of quality management will be adopted because it has tenets which answer the research questions. For example, the project sought to establish if employee motivation leads to customer satisfaction. The key concept underpinning Deming's concepts has indicated that employee fulfillment is at the core of customer satisfaction. It is worth noting that all the models which followed after Deming's model rest on the shoulders of its postulations.

2.3.3 Deming's model of quality

The foundations of Deming's theories revolve around his systematic approach to problem solving which is popularly known as the Deming Cycle or the Plan-Do-Check-Act Cycle. Deming was active in the transformation of the management of business from Taylor's perspective of focusing on production to a consumer - focused management style aimed at delighting the customer (Ho, 1995:23). These theoretical foundations are discussed in isolation below.

a) The Deming Cycle

According to Senapati (2004:685), the Deming Cycle involves the following:
   a) Plan – plan on the process map the organisation will follow in the

production.

b) Do – act on the processes as determined in the plan of action

c) Check – audit the results to trace variability with a view to reviewing process

d) Act – "Act on the gap between the intended goals and achieved results"

The Deming Cycle is probably the most powerful part of/ the foundation of his model. This is because both the systems approach and the 14 points are embedded in the cycle.

b) Deming's System Approach to problem solving

According to Anderson et al. (1994:483) Deming's organisational sub-systems comprise the internal and external cooperation or collaboration of all stakeholders, which are employees, stakeholders, shareholders and government. In the context of this study, emphasis will be placed on the cooperation of sub-systems within an organisation, which Anderson et al. (1994) refer to as internal cooperation. These sub-systems, with reference to this project, are the five departments, namely the switchboard, which receives all call entries; the technicians; Human Resource; Accounting; and Marketing, Security and Finance. Promoting or fostering internal cooperation amongst employees promotes relationships that are essential in the production and delivery of services.

Deming's System Approach to problem solving views an organisation as a sum of sub-systems or departments which perform functions complementing each other. This implies that meeting and exceeding customer expectations is the task of everyone within the various sub-systems. If the marketing department carries out research on a service/product needed by a customer properly, then the design department will design according to that customer's specification and this makes it easier for the marketing department to market the product because there is already market (Ho, 1995: 25).

Deming believes that consumers are the most essential component of the

product line, hence meeting and exceeding their expectations is everyone's responsibility within the organisation. Everyone in the organisation gets to participate if all the departments in the organisation interact with all the activities of the organisation. What is important is the identification of customer requirements and that there should be consumer satisfaction at every transaction interface (Oakland, 1995:98)

The departments within this computer customer contact centre can be looked at using the Deming's Systems Approach. They represent sub-systems which interact with each other in order to provide service. For example, the switchboard receives calls, transfers the calls to the relevant technical department and the technical department then resolves the customer's problems. If there is no cooperation or systematic approach to the customer's problem, the provision of service will be compromised.

The systems approach hinges on communication and interaction between departments. Sometimes, if there is a lack of communication then departments do not necessarily interact with each other. In the contact centre, the switchboard may transfer calls to the wrong department or the technical department may not communicate changes in the processes. Using Deming's approach, these challenges can be overcome by giving training to the employees on how to do the right things right the first time and on the importance of good communication. Deming's systems approach is grounded on the premise that the long - term objective of an organisation is for the employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers and the environment to win. Failure to accomplish in one area implies that everybody in the system suffers loss. Anderson et al (1995:480) further assert that "in cooperative environments, persons A and B work together to achieve mutually beneficial goals; by cooperating, both individuals can achieve more than each could through independent or competitive actions." Individuals who work towards the same goal often put their effort together.

The systems theory works well in an organisation that has management which is committed to quality management. In some instances, heads of

departments may be operating at different levels of quality understanding and may have personality clashes which render cooperation amongst departments impossible. Sometimes, management styles may stifle this cooperation by employing short - term productive goals that have adverse long term effects. However, such situations may be prevented by adopting Deming's 14 points which guide management on how to remain focused on the continuous improvement of quality systems. The table below summarises, Deming's 14 points, from which the basic tenets of quality are adapted.

TABLE 2.2
  Concepts Underlying the Deming Model

Visionary Leadership
The ability of management to establish, practice, and lead a long-term vision for the Organization, driven by changing customer requirements, as opposed to an internal Management control role. This is exemplified by clarity of vision, long-range orientation, coaching management style, participative change, employee empowerment, and planning and implementing organizational change.

Internal and External Cooperation
The propensity of the organization to engage in noncompetitive activities internally among employees and externally with respect to suppliers. This is exemplified by firm-supplier partnership, single-supplier orientation, collaborative organization, teamwork, organisation wide involvement, systems view of the organization, trust, and elimination of fear.

Learning
The organizational capability to recognize and nurture the development of its skills, abilities, and knowledge base. This is exemplified by companywide training, foundational knowledge, process knowledge, educational development, continuous self-improvement, and managerial learning.

Process Management
The set of methodological and behavioral practices emphasizing the management of process, or means of actions, rather than results. This is exemplified by management of processes, prevention orientation, reduction of mass inspection, design quality, statistical process control, understanding of variation, elimination of numerical quotas, elimination of management by objectives, elimination of merit-rating reward systems, understanding motivation, total cost accounting, and stable employment.

Continuous Improvement
The propensity of the organization to pursue incremental and innovative improvements of its processes, products, and services. This is exemplified by Continuous improvement.

Employee Fulfillment

The degree to which employees of an organization feel that the Organization continually satisfies their need. This is exemplified by job satisfaction, job Commitment and pride of workmanship.

Customer Satisfaction

The degree to which an organization's customers continually perceive that their needs are being met by the organization's products and services. This is exemplified by customer-driven focus

Source: *Extracted from Anderson et al (1995:480)*

Table 2.2 above summarises the key concepts underlying Deming's model of quality management. These concepts include visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning/training, process management, continuous improvement, employee fulfilment and customer satisfaction. These concepts will be used to answer the research questions throughout the project.

2.4 Implementing Deming's model

Implementing best practice in an organisation can take two forms, which are known as Total Quality Management and Business Process Re-engineering. Total Quality Management refers to continuous organisational improvement while Business Process Re-engineering refers to a complete and sudden overhaul of business and business structures. Deming's model leads to Total Quality Management.

The implementation of Deming's concepts will be discussed in conjunction with a great deal of work from Gupta, a contemporary quality proponent who has produced a great deal of work on Six Sigma. The six sigma approach to quality management is an extension of Deming's 'Plan, do, check and act cycle' discussed in section 2.3.3 a) The six sigma is an improvement framework based on the following concepts: define measure, analyse, improve, control and report. Planning in Deming's model is equivalent to "define" in the six sigma, "Do" in Deming's model is equivalent to "measuring, analysing, and improving" in the six sigma, lastly, "act" in Deming's model is equivalent to reporting in the six sigma (Senapati, 2004:480). This clearly shows that the work of Gupta (2006) dovetails and extends the key concepts of Deming's model and, therefore, will be used to answer the research questions.

a) Planning and defining the status quo

The implementation of TQM begins by defining the organisation's quality status (Berk (1993:16). Defining the existing quality status requires visionary leadership as postulated by Deming's key concepts. This however is echoed by Bendel et al. (1993:67) who argue that improvements within an organisation begin by answering questions such as 'Where are we now?' 'What do we want to do?' and 'How do we get there?' It is in this phase that critical customer requirements, goals and objectives, process maps and process baselines are set. Answering questions about what an organisation

wants to do, how it is to be done and understanding customer requirements is key in the planning phase of TQM (Gupta, 2006: 27)

b) **Quality audit**

A Quality audit is described by Ho (1995:181) as a systematic and independent examination to determine whether or not quality activities and their related results in the company, together with planned arrangements, are implemented effectively and at the same time suitable to achieve objectives. Once these activities have been assessed in this way, it becomes easier to describe the opportunities for implementing quality and the baseline for improvement (Gupta 2006:28). If the variability of a process is not in place (mathematically), the ability to produce to specification cannot be guaranteed (Holmes 1992:5). Controls should be instituted over every process, so that the production goes according to plan. This is very important as it allows the company to continuously improve departmental functions. Because quality is an abstract concept, statistical techniques such as, averages, standard deviation and probability can be used to identify variation in a process. The following are performance measurement,

c) **Examination of existing process designs**

In the analysis phase, checks and balances are done to establish what the root causes of variation are. In this phase, causes of customer dissatisfaction are established as well as opportunities for improvement. The start of a quality process is the examination of existing process designs using the following instruments:

(i) **Pareto analysis**

The Pareto principle states that a relatively small proportion of items account for a relatively large number of variables linked to it. This principle is sometimes referred to as the 80-20. In simple terms, it to postulates that 80% of the company's revenue is accounted for by 20% of its customers, Rao et al. (1996:181). This principle can be used to identify problems and opportunities

that can be exploited for customer satisfaction and company profitability. The purpose of Pareto analysis is to align the processes with the opportunities for profitability that have been identified. However, Gupta, (2007: 34) argues that most of the problems encountered by an organisation stem from just a few causes.

(ii) Cause and effect analysis- Fishbone/Ishikawa diagram

The cause and effect diagram attempts to trace a problem to its related causes. It is also called the fishbone diagram (owing to its shape which is like a fish bone) and the Ishikawa diagram (named after Kaoru Ishikawa who developed it in 1953, (Rao et al. (1996:188). It is suitable in a random brainstorming session where solutions to a problem are being sought. It is the best way to list potential causes of problems. The fishbone diagram is essential in brainstorming the actual causes of customer brand switching. It allows for deeper analysis of the problem at hand. For example, the questions can be asked 'Is it Agents' behaviour that is causing customer dissatisfaction, if yes, why?'

(iii) Improvement of process designs: statistical process control

The quality process can best be improved through the use of the following basic statistical tools: Histograms, check sheets, Pareto diagrams, graphs, scatter diagrams, cause and effect diagrams and control charts. Some of these tools will now be dealt with in detail (Gupta, 2007:86)

(iv) Control charts

Control charts are essential tools that are used to determine the existence of a variation within a process. Control charts were developed by Shewhart in 1920. According to Rao et al. (1995:233), a control chart is used to monitor outputs or inputs of processes; this is called statistical process control. There are two control charts; control chart for attributes and control charts for variables, but the bottom line is that all these control charts are meant to

control processes within limits of tolerated variation and to control abnormal trends in the process.

(v) Probability

Probability has been described as the chance or likelihood of a particular outcome out of a number of possible outcomes for a given event (Trevor, 1999:109). Sometimes quality managers use the probability of an event through repeated experimentation or empirical observation to verify its occurrence. In the light of the explanation, probability becomes an important tool in decision making by management. For example, a probability technique can be used to estimate daily absenteeism from data collected over 250 working days, however such enumerative analysis cannot be used as the sole study of absenteeism as there could be other factors to it. Nevertheless this sort of analysis is essential in helping management to forecasting the likelihood of employees not coming to work.

Use of probability in business makes it easy, particularly in a call centre environment, to make forecasts on call volumes and attendance. If management is able to forecast call volumes in a contact centre, it means that the correct number of employees can be scheduled in order to reduce the average wait time, thereby satisfying customers. A reduced workload is also part of employee fulfilment.

2.5 The relevance of Deming's' concepts to contact centres

The application of the key concepts underlying Deming's model is mainly for competitive advantage. But how does this concept help in creating competitive advantage? The following sections of the research will attempt to discuss the relevance of Deming's ideas and how they can assist strategic managers to become competitive in computer customer contact centres. The first is its ability to reduce costs.

a) Profitability/reduction of costs

One of the reasons for adopting Deming's quality ideas is its ability to reduce costs. Quality costs refer to the cost an organisation incurs either through its effort to conform to the requirements of a customer or the costs it incurs as a result of failing to conform to customer requirements, However, it is important to ask if the adoption of Deming's quality ideas always reduces costs. In light of the preceding, quality costs can be divided into two: conformance and non-conformance costs (Wilson, 1995). It is paramount for these costs to be discussed in isolation:

Conformance costs-costs incurred for trying to meet quality expectations.

(i) Preventive costs, incurred by an organisation to prevent defective product/final service, Ho, (1995: 13). Berk and Berk (1993:50) argue that such costs include replacement of machinery and process improvement.

It is essential for the computer customer contact centre to incur these kind costs because they are likely to result in customer satisfaction. These costs include: induction of new agents to processes and procedures of the contact centre, refresher courses on processes and any other training that will increase customer service efficiency.

When customers contact a call centre, they normally are looking for a first call resolution to their problem (Coscia, 1999:38). This means that customers do not want to repeatedly call the centre to have their issues resolved. Longer turn-around times often result from employees who are not conversant with processes. Therefore, it is imperative for an organisation to incur costs of training its staff repeatedly to make them confident.

(ii) Appraisal costs are costs related to the detection of defects (Gupta, 2006:30). They include inspection cost, and other planned evaluations used to ascertain conformity of the product or service.

Appraisal costs are incurred during appraisal or replacement of computers. In a call centre environment, these costs pertain to use of state of the art technology required in a call centre. Capturing customer detail, requires faster machines and sophisticated computer software. A company would rather incur the costs of this than wait until there is a breakdown.

Non-conformance- This refers to the price the organisation pays for not conforming to requirements. They are two - pronged:

(i) Internal failure-costs are associated with rework, for example, typing errors or engineering mistakes. These are within a call centre's control. These types of costs result from the company's failure to recruit proper personnel to perform efficiently. A call centre environment is a live environment; Therefore, it means that there is little room for mistakes.

Internal failure costs result in unnecessary compensation to customers. The customers are also often addressed in wrong names or deliveries made to wrong addresses. Apart from inconveniencing the customer, it is costly as couriers, telephones and other resources need to be used again.

(ii) External failure costs- These are customer dissatisfaction, pricing errors, penalty, rejected jobs, lost customer trust and excess inventory. The effect of external failure costs is precisely loss of customers. To a computer customer contact centre, this would imply computers being booked for repair more than once for the same issue. This results in loss of both trust and goodwill from the customer.

Consequently, it becomes expensive to restore customer confidence. Most of rejected jobs also result in compensation to the customer. Training remains an integral part of customer service (Schiffauerova & Thomson, 2006: 5).

The following graph attempts to summarise the conception that failing to meet customer requirements is expensive.
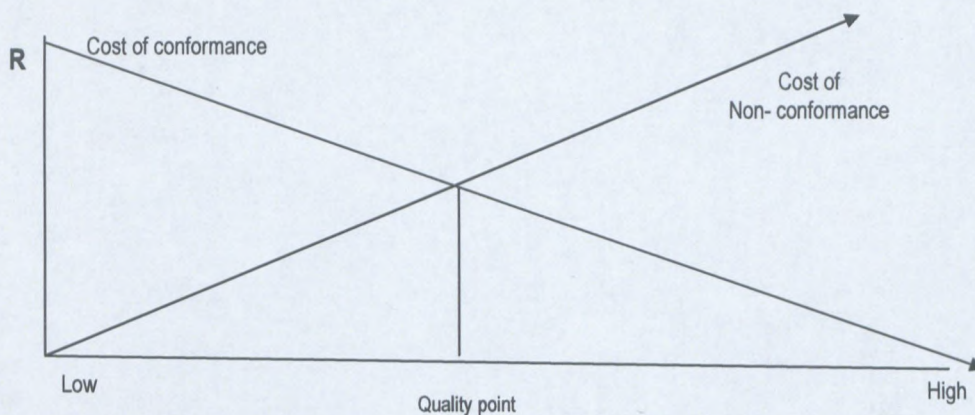

Fig. 2.1 Cost of quality

Source: Mupemhi (2006)

This graph indicates that an organisation's cost of quality is at its lowest when it conforms to the requirements of a customer. The reason for this is that there are no re-dos, no wastage of material and zero defects. An Interesting analysis from the graph in relation to the computer customer contact centre is that it is expensive for a call centre not to conform to quality. Where conformance to quality is 100%, the cost of quality is low and conversely, where there is no conformance at all, the cost of quality is high. What this implies is that when the call centre does not have calls in queue or very short waiting times, then it is providing customer service at a low cost (Oakland 1995:263).

b) Employee motivation

Industrial Democracy is a situation where Golden and Rutternburg (1942: xx) describe as predominantly worker - inclined management system. Deming's model of quality management asserts that employees should be motivated in order to satisfy the customer. Employee motivation comes with empowering employees as equal partners in decision making. Historically, the relationship between employees and management was based on conflict. Today, management has increasingly become aware that successful efforts to

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increase productivity, improve quality and lower costs require employee involvement and commitment. Some labour unions have come to recognise that they can help their members more by cooperating with management rather than fighting it (Golden and Rutternburg 1942). The buy-in of employees in management decisions is two pronged: it makes it easier for management to implement change aimed at customer satisfaction and it motivates them.

c) Continuous improvement/Kaizen tien

According to Oakland (1995:263), Kaizen tien, sometimes referred to as quality circle, refers to a philosophy of continuous improvement of all employees in an organisation, so that they perform their tasks better each day. This system has an effect of generating ideas from employees. (Ho, 1995:47) defines quality circles as a small group of staff working together to contribute to the improvement of the enterprise, respect humanity and build a cheerful workgroup through the development of the staff's infinite potential. The essence of a quality circle is to identify, investigate, analyse and solve work related problems. Quality circles comprise the leaders who are usually immediate supervisors and supervisors of the member, facilitators, who are managers of quality circle programmes, and management. These groups represent the industrial society where each employee is accorded an opportunity to suggest anything that improves the process flow.

The ultimate goal of continuous improvement is to satisfy the customer. The means to continuous improvement is training, which in turn, leads to continuous improvement.

2.6 Challenges to Deming's theory

Although Deming's theoretical postulations provide bedrock for quality management, there are some flaws inherent in his theory and it is not applicable to a contact centre environment. These challenges are listed in the next section:

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1. Deming emphasises the elimination of numerical goals for workers. In a call centre environment, employees are very difficult to manage if there are no goals set for them. If managers cannot measure the performance of employees, it implies that they cannot manage them.

2. Deming also says that it is management's responsibility to work continually on the system. The issue of quality is everyone's responsibility. In a contact centre environment, it is not possible to separate the service from the person providing the service. Even if the managers take it upon themselves to improve quality, without the buy-in of employees, the exercise is futile.

These challenges can be dealt with in the following ways. Firstly, a quality circle described in detail in section 2.6.2 would be ideal to ensure that quality commitment should not be the prerogative of management. The quality circle will comprise members from all departments of the contact centre and management. In terms of targets, the contact centre would have to set daily, weekly and monthly targets which would help to evaluate performance.

2.7 Conclusions from literature review

In line with the objectives of the research and the conceptual framework used for the research, the following conclusions were drawn from the literature reviewed in this chapter:

a) Continuous organisational improvement improves efficiency

All the definitions of Total Quality Management, as varied as they may seem, both theoretically and technically, attest to the fact that the basic tenets of TQM are continuous improvement, Berk and Berk (1993: 6). The conceptual framework used in the study also seems to suggest that organisations have to thrive to improve themselves to increase operational efficiency.

b) Employee involvement is a key element of quality management

Berk and Berk (1993) also suggest that employees are essential in the engagement of processes that will improve organisational performance. According to Oakland (1995: 263), the concept of Kaizen Tien attempts to involve employees by grouping them into committees and sub-committees which are responsible for the implementation of quality projects. Involvement of employees leads to motivation.

c) Contact centres should focus on customer needs

TQM emphasises a number of concepts, which all support the philosophy of customer focus, continuous improvement, defect identification and reduction and recognition that the responsibility for quality is shared by all. All these efforts by an organisation are fruitless if they do not include the interest of the customer. Oakland (1995) emphasises the importance of the voice of the customer in manufacturing or delivery of service.

d) Management should take the lead in quality management

All the efforts of implementing quality management can be hindered by the absence of management commitment. It is management that authorise both finance for the projects and time for quality meetings.

2.8 Summary of chapter two

This chapter has attempted to define TQM as an organisation's effort towards continued improvement to satisfy the customer's needs. In a bid to trace the paradigm shifts in TQM, the quality eras have been outlined as inspection, statistical quality control, quality assurance and Total Quality Management. The chapter has also discussed Deming's model of quality management, the SERVQUAL model and the means-end model. After careful study and analysis of all the models, Deming's model was chosen because of its ability to answer the research questions. The following conclusions were drawn from the literature review; Continuous organisational improvement improves efficiency, employee involvement is a key element of quality management,

contact centres should focus on customer needs and that management should take the lead in quality management. The following chapter will confine itself on the methodology selected and how the research was justified to select the methodology.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

This project investigates the reasons that customers give employees of the contact centre when they decide to switch brands from the products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. It also hopes to find out employees' views about the connection between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. Furthermore, one of this project's ultimate goals is to establish if employee motivation leads to customer satisfaction. A quantitative research method is selected in order to address the research questions. The research design and methodology chosen ensure that the responses provided, is in line with Deming's model of quality management whose key concepts include continuous organisational improvement, learning/learning, employee fulfilment, visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation and customer satisfaction.

This chapter describes the research design and methodology used to collect data for the project. It theorises the quantitative research method and provides a description of the contact centre's operations. The chapter also discusses the research instruments, procedure, sampling methods and the strategies used for the analysis of the data.

3.2 Quantitative research method

A quantitative method is defined by Allen, Titsworth and Hunt (2009:6) as any approach that uses systematic observations to account for and generalise about human behaviour. Furthermore, they describe systematic observation to mean that which is intentional, replicable and valid. The researcher must be able to replicate his findings to rule out any chance of having caused the results himself. Creswell (1994:1-2) defines a quantitative study as an "inquiry

into a social or human problem, based on testing a theory composed of variables, measured with numbers and analysed with statistical procedures in order to determine whether the predictive generalisations of the theory hold true." Quantitative research is used mainly to address issues about relationships among measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena. The idea is to validate relationships and to develop generalisations (Leedy & Ormrod 2005:94-97).

Listed below are some of the situations in which quantitative research methods are appropriate (Zikmund & Babin 2007; Kimbler & Ferrell, 2007).

> 1. Where researchers need to attach numerical values to their findings.
> 1. When researchers want to come up with hypotheses and models.
> 2. In experiments.
> 3. When researchers want to observe, explain, predict and perhaps control phenomena.

For this study, considerations were made to match the research goals to the appropriate quantitative research method(s) and to establish an appropriate sample size. Sampling means the selection of a small portion or a small number of units from a population as representative or having particular characteristics of the total population (Denscombe, 2008:141; Depoy & Gibson, 2008:234-235; Kerlinger & Lee 2000:164; Thomas & Smith 2003: 225) as quoted in de Vos et al (2011:223). These characteristics include the following:

1. Members of the sample are employed in one of the 5 departments of the contact centre at the time of research.

2. All the respondents are customer care agents.

To allow for generalisation of the research findings to the entire population, the research sample should be statistically large enough to be considered representative of the entire population. Details of the sample population are given on Table 3.4.. For example, de Vos et al. (2011:223) states that people

make generalisations like "politicians are corrupt,." but such statements are made inconclusive by the somewhat limited experiences from their environment and samples which are inadequate. In order to deal with this challenge, a sample of 100 respondents has been taken out of a population of 300 as per the guideline from de Vos et al. (2011:225). Data collection methods in quantitative research vary from research to research depending on both the nature of the research and the research objectives. These data collection methods include questionnaires, checklists, structured observation and structured interview schedules (Antonius 2003:2). The methods for collecting empirical data for a quantitative research project include physical mail, electronic mail and online surveys, face to face: telephone and computer aided telephone surveys. In cases where the respondent answers the questionnaires unaided by the researcher, then the survey is called a self administered survey (de Vos 2011:181-190).

3.2.1 Using a quantitative approach in this study.

A quantitative research method has been selected for this study because of the following reasons:

1. The research findings can be generalised to the entire population because the research sample used is statistically large enough.

2. In order to answer the research questions on why customers are switching brands from those supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. Quantitative research was used to discover relationships between measured variables with the purpose of explaining, predicting and controlling phenomena. The intent is to establish, confirm or validate relationships and to develop generalisations

3. Data collection is simple and can be done quickly without wasting time or research resources. An electronic questionnaire was sent to each employee's work e-mail address to be completed and returned electronically.

4. It allows for isolation of the variables under study, for researchers to control for extraneous variables, for them to use standardised procedures to collect some form of numerical data, and to use statistical procedures to analyse and draw conclusions from the data.

5. When dealing with sensitive topics self administered anonymous surveys can be use to provide useful data that may not be collected in face to face situations.

6. Quantitative research results involve reliable numerical figures that can be used by planners and/or managers to make strategic decisions (de Vos et al (2011:63-64).

7. Quantitative research is unlike the qualitative approach where the emphasis is on answering the "how questions" to understand the whole (Allen et al. 2009:3). Quantitative research is used in this project to answer the "what questions" in an attempt to generalise about a certain type of behaviour.

3.3 Description of the computer customer contact centre

a) The organogram

All the departments of the call centre are housed on the same floor of the premises that the company occupies. There are five departments in total: switchboard, laptops, desktops, printers and overflow. When a customer's call comes through, it is received by switchboard. The switchboard then transfers the customer to the relevant department which deals with that customer's specific product. The four technical departments are desktop support, laptop support, printer support and overflow, which is the department that deals with both laptops and desktops should there be a queue in those departments.

The company organogram has been included in the report to give a helicopter view of the interaction between the employees and management, information relay and the overall company strategy.

Fig 3.1: the contact centre organogram
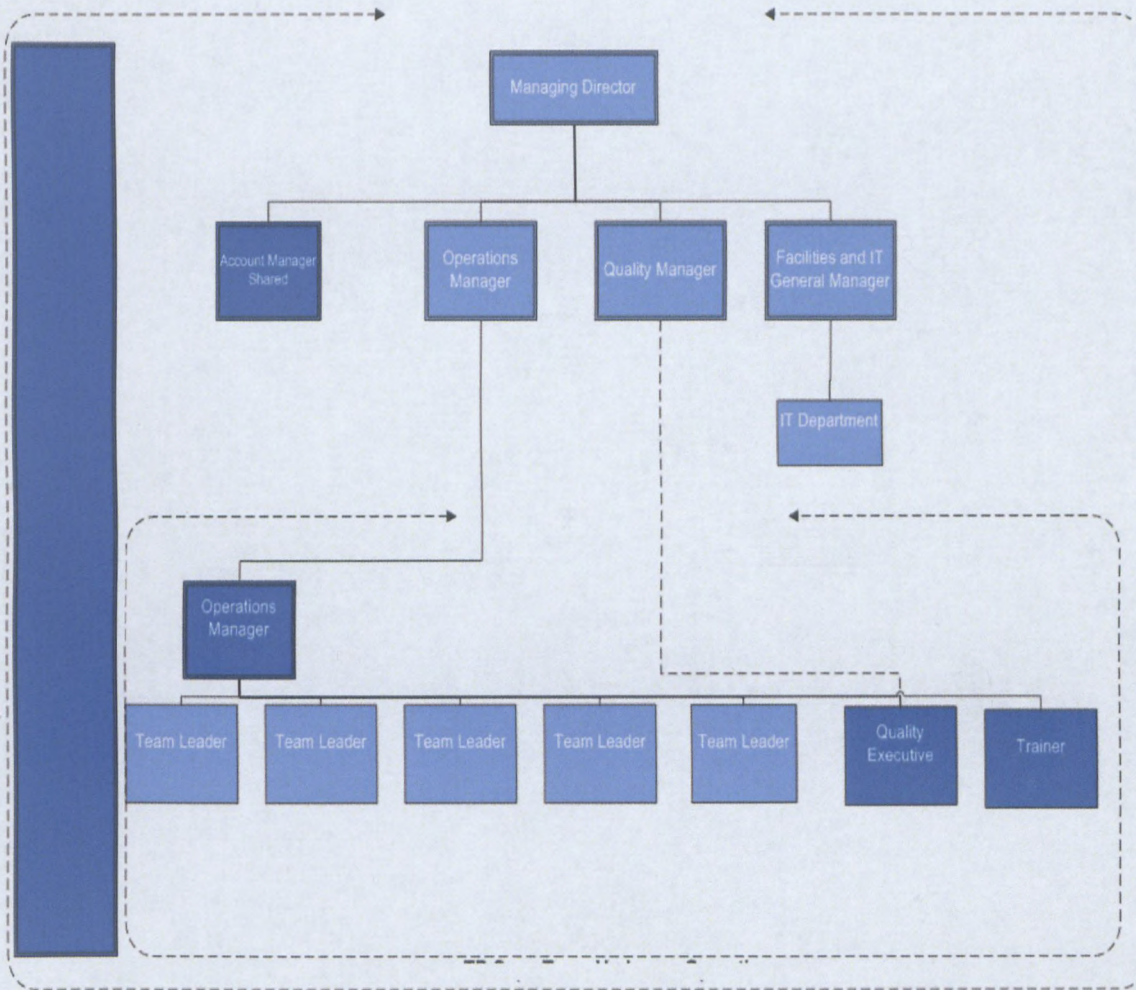
The employees in the call centre are expected to deal with the following metrics:

a) Average speed of answer: time taken to answer a customer

b) Average waiting time: amount of time a caller is in the queue waiting for an answer

c) Average talk time: total time a caller is connected to telephone service with an agent.

d) Adherence: personal time management

e) After call work: time taken by employees to wrap the call

All these metrics have targets which vary from one department to another. If agents get these metrics right, then there is a likelihood of customers satisfaction.

3.4 Research process

The aims of this study are to establish the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by the competitors. This will also give the researcher an opportunity to establish if there is a correlation between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction. The research will investigate if quality management is synonymous with employee satisfaction and customer retention. The basic tenets of Deming's model of quality management will be used to address the research questions. These include visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning/training, process management, continuous improvement and employee fulfilment, motivation of employees, management commitment to quality, innovation and customer satisfaction.

3.4.1 Population and sampling

According to de Vos et al. (2011:223), a population is the totality of persons, events, organisation units, case records or other sampling units with which the research problem is concerned. Barker (2003:380) describes a sample as a small portion of the total set of objects, events or persons from which a representative is made. It is important to emphasise the representativeness of the sample because generalisations made for the sample should also be observable or made in any other group selected from the subjects.

The use of a sample in this study was appropriate because using the total population would be costly and time consuming (Sarantankos, 2000:139). Even if it were possible to study the whole population, in this case all 300 employees, time constraints and the cost associated with it would have made it impossible. Use of samples, therefore, makes the research accurate (de Vos et al 2011:225). It becomes important to come up with a sampling procedure that is relevant for the research.

3.4.2 Sampling method

The probability sampling method was used to draw up the sample. The probability sampling method, sometimes known as the simple random sampling method, is defined by de Vos et al. (2011:226) as the method of drawing a sample of a population so that all possible samples of fixed size n have the same probability of being selected. The probability sampling or simple random sampling was chosen because it is the sampling methods where each individual case in the population has an equal chance of being selected (Marlow, 2005:139). In order to collect data for this study, 100 out of 300 call centre employees were randomly selected by a computer.

Table 3.1 adapted from de Vos et al. (2011:225), helps to justify why 100 respondents were chosen:

Table 3.1: Guidelines for sampling

Population	Percentage suggested	Number of Respondents
20	100%	20
30	80%	24
50	64%	32
100	45%	45
200	32%	64
500	20%	100

Source: de Vos et al. (2011)

3.4.3 Target population

The target population of employees is the 300 employees of the contact centre in Cape Town. Out of this population, a sample comprising 100 employees was randomly selected from all the five departments of the contact centre. From each department, 20 were randomly selected. Seventy seven percent of respondents were in the age segment 20 – 30 years, while twenty three percent were in the segment 31- 40+. The majority of respondents were found in the age segment 20 – 25 which constitutes forty percent of the respondents. Three percent were above age 40. All these respondents were customer care Agents. Seventy percent of the respondents were Matriculants (Matriculants are learners who have completed Grade 12 level of the South African Education system), twenty seven percent were college graduates and and three percent had honours degrees. As indicated in the earlier sections of the research, the voices of customers could have added value to this research project, it was practically difficult to incorporate customers' responses in the project because the company's client base is in excess of 100, 000, 000 and a representative sample for quantitative study of this nature would have been difficult to survey. Essentially, because this a mini thesis, constraints such as time and volume made it challenging to administer a questionnaire to a representative sample of a large population like the one mentioned above...

3.4.4 Questionnaires

A questionnaire has been defined by Babbie (2007:246) as a "document containing questions and or other types of items designed to solicit information appropriate for analysis." Questionnaires are used to obtain facts and opinion about the research questions. According to de Vos et al. (2011:186-189), there are six different types of questionnaires, namely: mailed, telephonic, delivered by hand, self-administered, group administered and electronic questionnaires. In this research, electronic questionnaires were sent via e-mail to the employees to respond to and return by e-mail. Questions contained in a questionnaire can vary: there can be open questions, closed questions, dichotomous questions, multiple-choice

questions, ordinal questions, scaled questions, statements, matrix type questions and follow up questions. These types of questions may be blended together depending on how the researcher is conducting his research (de Vos (2011:186).

Owing to the uniqueness of the industry and the need to keep the questions as short as possible, technical, questions have been used in this research. This means that the researcher used a great deal of language which is used exclusively in call centres, for example, "first call resolution" means that the customers have their problems resolved at first attempt by the call centre Agents and that this is likely to result in customer satisfaction.

The two types of questions used for this research were closed questions and statements. Closed questions are defined by Maree and Pietersen (2007:61) as questions providing for a set of responses from which the respondent has to choose one or sometimes more than one response According to de Vos et al. (2011:198) closed questions are used for the following reasons:
a) All the possible, theoretically relevant responses to questions can be determined in advance and the number of possible responses is limited.
b) Closed questions are easier to analyse than other types of question when the sample used is relatively big.
c) Answers to closed questions are easy to code and statistically analyse
d) There is no room for respondents to waffle.
An example of a closed question used in the research is: For how long have you been with the company? The response options to choose from are; 0-6 months, 7-12 months, and so on

According to de Vos et al. (2011:199) statements are useful in obtaining data of a subjective nature. Statements can be either negative or positive. An example of a statement used in the research is: my company is committed to employee retention and growth. The choice of responses offered is: strongly disagree, disagree, agree and strongly agree.

3.4.5 Validity and reliability

According to Blanche, Durrhei, and Painter (2006:147), validity is the degree to which a measure does what it is intended to do. Furthermore, de Vos et al. (2011:172-173), refers validity to "the extent to which an empirical measure adequately reflects the real meaning of the concept under consideration." This is echoed by Leedy and Ormron (2005:28), that the validity of a measuring instrument is the extent to which the instrument measures what is supposed to be measured. In this specific instance, a questionnaire was chosen for the following reasons:

1. Content validity: the questions used ensure that sufficient content is covered to address the research questions. The questions used provide an adequate sample of items that represent the concept being measured, de Vos et al (2011:173).

2. Since items for responses are carefully chosen to represent the concept being measured, questionnaires do not give room for respondents to waffle; responses are particular to the concept scrutiny.

3. Questionnaires have face validity. This means that they are structured not only to measure the attributes under consideration, but also to appear as a relevant measure of those attributes.

4. Questionnaires are reliable instruments of data collection because they are able to yield consistent numerical results each time they are used, they do not change unless there are changes to the variables being measured, de Vos (2011: 173).

In order to ascertain validity and reliability, the respondents were selected randomly from different departments and were of different ages and gender. This implies that each element of the population had equal opportunities of being selected.

3.4.6 Procedures

1. An e-mail seeking permission to carry out research at the computer customer contact centre was sent out to the Human Resource Manager of the contact centre and permission was granted.

2. Out of a sample of 300 employees, a sample of 100 employees, 20 from each of the five departments, namely: laptops, desktops, switchboard, printers and overflow, was randomly selected by a computer from the company's employee database.

4. Questionnaires were sent to the employees' work e-mail in-boxes. The employees were asked to complete and return the responses by e-mail.

3.5 Data processing

Responses from questionnaires were captured on an excel spreadsheet as they were received from respondents and the results were analysed separately for each question. The respondents' data on the excel spreadsheet were used to draw up frequency tables. Inferential statistics was used to generalise a measure taken on the small number of cases that had been observed to the larger set of cases that had not been observed.

3.6 Summary

This chapter discussed research design and methodology. A quantitative method was selected to carry out the research. Out of a population of 300 employees, 100 were selected from each of the five departments (laptops, desktops, printers, switchboard and overflow). Twenty were selected from each department. A self-administered questionnaire was sent to all respondents electronically and returned also be email. Results were analysed on a spreadsheet.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This research was initiated by an effort to establish and understand the causes of problems affecting call centres. To this end, the aim of the project sought to establish the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the research. These findings are based on the basic tenets of Deming's model of quality management (enshrined in his 14 points) which were used to address the research questions. The tenets, also echoed in Swiss (1992:357-358), include visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning/training, process management, continuous improvement, employee fulfilment and customer satisfaction. The presentations deal with questions raised in the research on employees' views about the connection between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction, and to establish if employee motivation leads to customer satisfaction.

From a population of 300 employees, 100 were randomly selected by a computer from the contact centre's five departments. A self-administered questionnaire was sent to these respondents. They completed the questionnaires and returned them electronically. Since the research was supported by the company, it was easy to get responses from the employees, so a 100% response rate was realised.

The language used in the questionnaire is exclusive to and widely used in a call centre environment. The researcher used the call centre technical language because it is the one which is best understood by the employees of the call centre and carries deeper meaning than otherwise interpreted by someone outside the call centre industry. This had an advantage of extracting

as much information as possible from what the Agents know technically and at the same time keeping the questionnaire short. For example, first call resolution in a call centre environment would be used to describe a situation where the customer's problem is resolved at first call.

The chapter begins by presenting the employee distribution first because employee distribution within a company is critical in showing cultural expectations from the company under study. This is followed by the age ranges within a company, this can also be used to define the level of service provided by employees since it is generally accepted that the more mature employees are, the more they are likely to handle complaints maturely. The educational qualifications would help to trace the level of skills of the employees. The other presentations are directly linked to customer experience.

4.2 Employee distribution

The employees were asked to indicate the racial grouping they belong to. For this question, a hundred percent response rate was realised. The graph (4.2) below summarises the responses to this question.

Analysis of results

The above table indicates that thirty seven percent of the employees at the call centre are Coloureds, twenty three percent Blacks, twenty seven percent Whites and only thirteen percent Asians. The statistics indicate that the racial grouping with the least number of respondents is the Asians. The coloureds are ten percent and fourteen percent more than blacks and whites respectively.
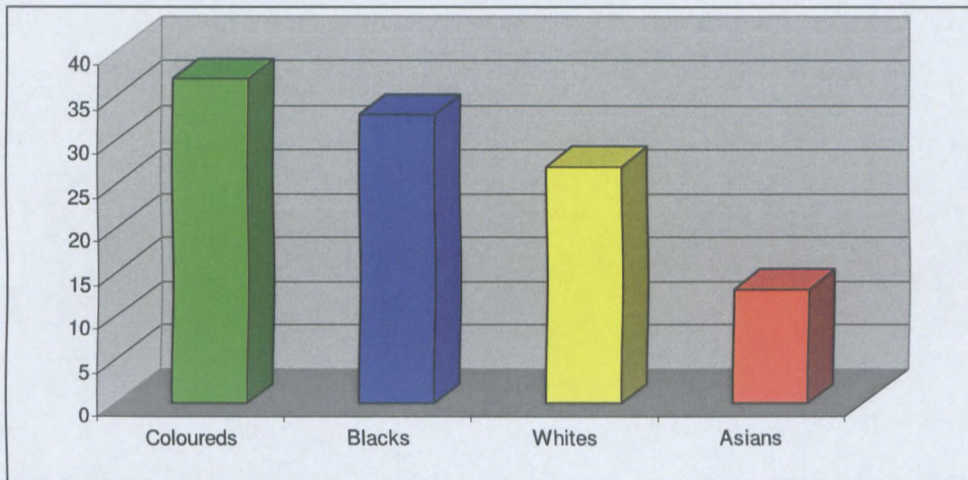
Fig 4.2: Employee distribution

Discussion of results

As evidenced by Deming's model of quality management, employee motivation and innovation is critical in quality management, particularly in customer satisfaction. The statistics seem to suggest that there is a multi-cultural society at the contact centre. Priorities on handling issues vary from one culture to another. This means that an issue that is regarded as urgent by one group may be regarded as less important by another, making it difficult for management to balance the interests of all the groups. Instead of paying attention to all races within the contact centre, managers tend to unwittingly or willingly pay attention to dominant racial groupings at the expense of minority groups. Blalock (1967), as quoted in Semyono et al. (1984:260), postulates that "provided that minority competition underlies prejudice, there should be a positive relationship between minority percentage and discrimination. This situation leaves employees of minority groups' de-motivated thereby affecting customer service." The statistics also show diversity of employees in the contact centre. Warren et al. (1993:591-593) argue that "Newly formed culturally diverse groups still perform less effectively on complex problem-solving tasks than newly formed culturally homogeneous groups." Diversity affects quality management in the long run.

4.3 Age segments in the company

The employees were asked to tick the ranges applicable to their ages. Responses to this question were used to establish the demographics of the contact centre which would help in understanding the causes of certain behaviour traits which in the long run affect performance. Once performance is affected, then quality of work is also affected. This question generated a 100% response rate.

Analysis of results

From the sample, seventy seven percent of respondents are in the age segment 20 – 30 years, while twenty three percent are in the segment 31-40+. Majority of the respondents are found in the age segment 20 – 25, which constitutes forty percent of the respondents. Three percent are above age 40.
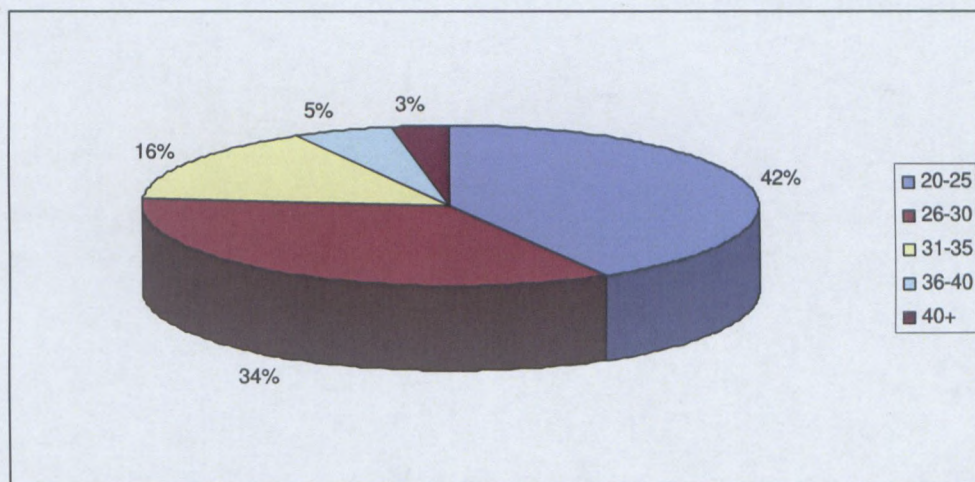
The responses are summarised in figure 4.3.

Fig 4.3 the age segments in the company

Discussion of results

In order to have effective customer service and motivated employees, any organisation, in this particular instance the contact centre, needs to continuously train its employees. This is only possible if the workers stay with the company for a long time. The above graph indicates that the highest percentage of employees is in the age segment 20-30. In their research; on turnover in the labour force, Robert, Sinclair, Michael, Leo and Wright (1972:709 -764) investigate Weekly Probabilities of Entering and leaving employment. Part of their findings is that the characteristics of people associated with high labour turnover include people who are "somewhat younger". With reference to the same research conclusions, the age range 20-30 can be considered "somewhat younger." It follows that the company is at risk of losing the bulk of its employees. This forces the company to hire and train new employees all the time. The probability of employees leaving and changing their jobs is "much higher early in workers tenure on the job" (Robert et al. (1972:709 -764). This affects TQM in the sense that the organisation is always hiring and training employees, but not developing them. New employees take a long time to settle down and to make themselves conversant with processes and procedures of the company. This might be a contributory factor to why customers switch brands.

Although there seems to be a gender bias, the research by Robert et al. (1972:709-764) indicates that men who are mature do not usually change jobs; they are stable. Apart from product knowledge, experienced and mature employees are able to handle customers in a more effective way than inexperienced ones. If an organisation has stable employees who do not change jobs frequently, it means that the organisation is likely to have agents who are experienced in dealing with customers and who will, therefore, be able to provide satisfactory customer service. Customer satisfaction is an essential component of quality management.

4.4 Educational qualifications

In this question, employees were asked to indicate their educational qualifications whether their level was matriculant, diploma, bachelor's degree or honours. The question was asked in order to have an understanding of whether the employees have attained or acquired the skills required for their jobs. If employees possess skills required for the jobs they do, this leads to employee self - confidence, followed by customer satisfaction and eventually by innovation.

For this question, there was a 100% response rate. Figure 4.4 indicates educational qualifications of the employees.
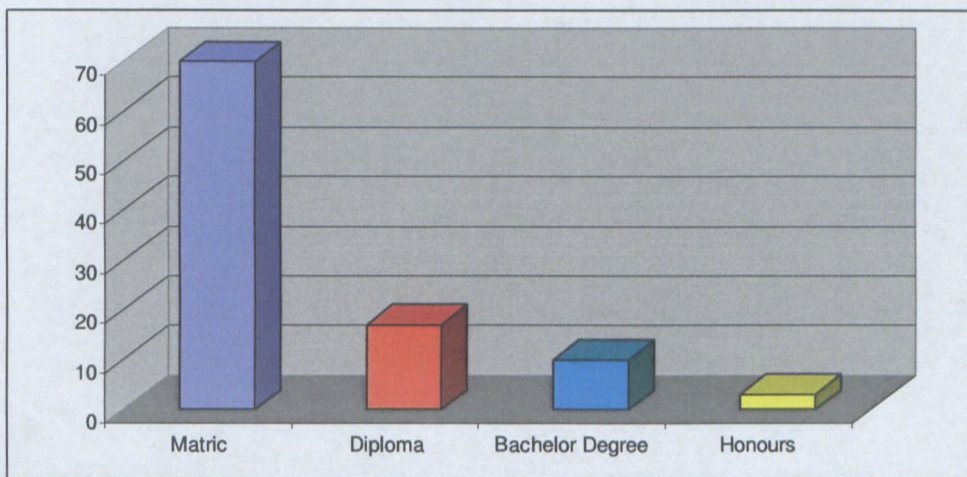

Fig 4.4: Educational qualifications

Analysis of results

The majority of agents (70%) employed by the company are Matriculants. Matriculants are learners who would have completed Grade 12 level of the South African Education system. The agents who are college graduates constitute twenty seven percent. There is a small percentage (3%) of the respondents who have an honours degree. Based on trends in the industry, the following may explain reasons why the company hires matriculants:

1. Some companies pay remuneration which is commensurate with experience, so if employees are hired straight from school, then the company benefits from paying lower wages.

2. Other companies are sincerely committed to skills development and apprenticeships. Employing Matriculants gives companies an opportunity to develop their employees' skills data base.

Discussion of results

Deming's model advocates for employee innovation as one of the essential elements of effective quality management and customer satisfaction. Innovation results from a vast knowledge of processes and procedures. Knowledge of processes and procedures of the contact centre eventually leads to customer satisfaction (Zairi, 1997:66). High percentage of respondents, 70%, only attained Matric educational level. One can conclude that they have not acquired the necessary skills required for computer support as the skills required for computer support go further than the matriculant level. Although, it may be argued that one can have matriculant level only and several years of experience in the field, practical knowledge is often complemented by theoretical knowledge, which can only be acquired at tertiary education. Tracy, Lewis, David and Sappington (1993:479) argue that a higher level of education leads to the assumption of high productivity on the job. They also argue that employers prefer high qualifications for skills that are not ordinary and low qualifications for skills that are transferable. Fixing computers is an idiosyncratic skill. If the company uses an on – the - job training strategy, it means customers will not get satisfactory service since the issues they raise will take too long to resolve as a result of the lack of experience by the employees.

4.5 Longevity of service with the company

In this section, the employees were asked how long they have been working for the company. This question was aimed at establishing the rate of labour

turnover. As indicated in the introductory section to the chapter, there was a 100% response rate to this question.

Analysis of results

From the total population with a hundred percent response rate, thirty three percent have only been with the company between 1 – 6 months. Between 7 and 12 months, it is twenty seven percent of the samples. In the period between 13 and 24 months, it is thirty percent, while ten percent have been with the company for over two years. Figure 4.5 summarises the responses.
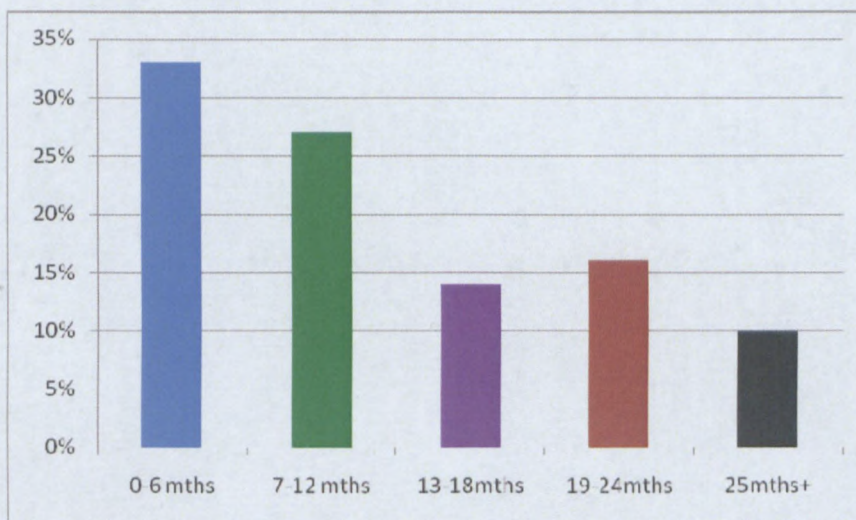

Fig 4.5summarises length of employees with company

Discussion of results

Customer satisfaction results from employees' knowledge of processes and procedures. This knowledge often results from experience gained through staying with the same employer for a relatively long period of employment. Ramlall (2004:53) postulates that the "human capital theory includes length of service in the organisation as a proxy for job relevant knowledge or ability." The author goes on to explain that the returns on skills development would only be realised after a considerable length of time. Ironically, the majority of employees, 33%, have been with the company for a period of 6 months or

under. A situation where there is high labour turnover leads to the disruption of customer service as the contact centre needs to hire and train employees all the time. This may imply that there is a high labour turnover in the organisation.

4.6 Reasons given by customers for brand switching

In order to establish the reasons given by customers for brand switching, the employees were asked what customers cite as causes. Fig 4.6 attempts to summarise the findings. For this question, there was a 100% response rate.
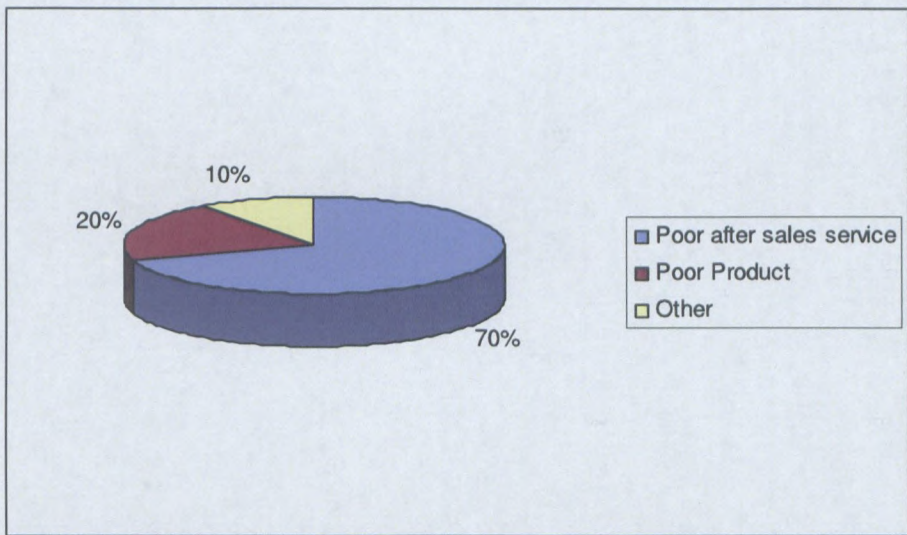

Fig 4.6: Reasons given by customers for brand switching

Analysis of the results

70% of the employees interviewed indicated that the customers cite poor after sales service as the main reason why customers switch brands. Coupled with poor after sales service, 20% of the customers cite poor products, meaning that those who blame it on poor products have no complaints with after sales service. 10% of the employees claim that there are other reasons why customers switch brands which are neither poor service nor poor products. These other reasons may include promotion by competitors and other reasons which are not central to this study.

Discussion of results

As highlighted in the conceptual framework, excellent after sales service is an essential component of quality management. After sales service include technical hardware support, sales of accessories, enquiries and general customer service. These services are the ones that determine if the customer will stay with the brand or not. If these concepts are poor, it means that processes and procedures within the contact centre are not designed to promote a quality culture that would make a customer "stick around." If 70% of employees strongly agree that customers switch brands as a result of poor service from the contact centre, then it means that there are poor structures to support the following:

a) enquiries

b) sales

c) technical support

d) general customers service

4.6.1 Resolving customers' problems at first call

The employees were asked if they are able to resolve the customers' problems at first call in order to make the customers happy. First call resolution refers to a situation where the agents provide the customer with a solution the first time the customer calls the contact centre. The term "first call resolution" is a term which is quite prevalent in call centres and has been used in the questionnaire in a similar way because it is easier for the agents to understand it. All the respondents, 100%, answered this question. Figure 4.6 indicates their responses.
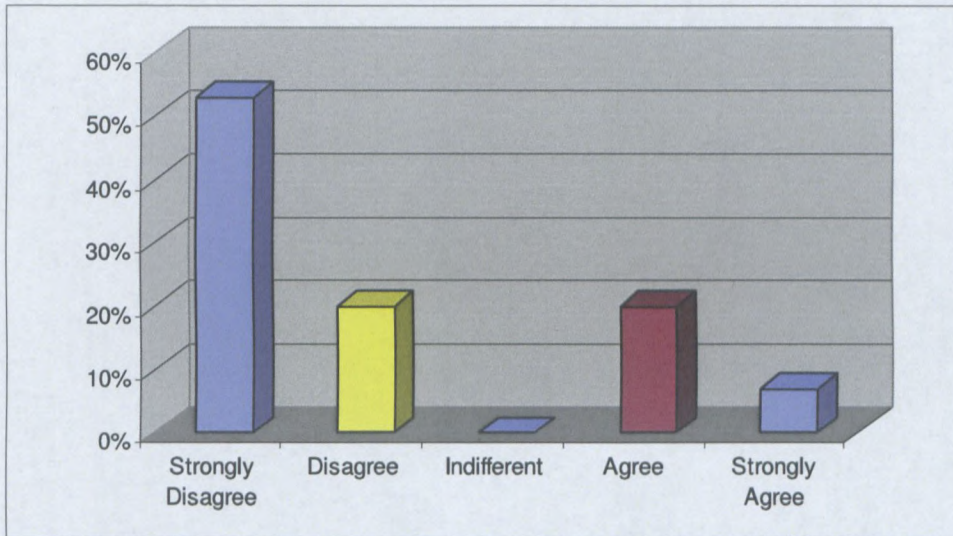
Fig 4.6.1: Resolving customer's problems at first call resolution

Analysis of results

Figure 4.6 shows that out of the hundred percent response rates was realised. Fifty three percent of the respondents do not provide first call resolution to the customers. They strongly disagreed that customers' problems are fixed at once. Twenty percent disagree that problems are fixed at first call while a similar percentage (20%) agrees that customers' issues are resolved at first call. Only seven percent provide resolutions at first call. Poor first call resolution to a problem might be caused by lack of knowledge by the agents, less motivated employees, or customers' cases may have been transferred to other departments resulting in a longer turnaround time.

Discussion of results

The statistics provided in figure 4.5 show that the majority of customers call more than once before their issues are dealt with. Customers do not want to waste resources by calling more than once nor do they want to be doing the same thing all over again. For example, trouble shooting of a computer may take up to three hours depending on what has broken down. If these sessions are repeated for customers, then the process becomes tedious. Put together,

the total percentage of agents who do not provide first call resolution is 73%. This figure is almost indicative of an absence of customer service.

Resolving the customer's problems at first call leads to long - term benefits for an organisation. These long term benefits, as outlined in Deming's model, include customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. Walker (1995) and Dobbins (1996), quoted in Feinberg et al. (1996), confirm that customers who have had satisfactory service are more likely to repurchase and spread a positive message about the brand by word of mouth, than those who have not. This satisfaction often comes from having their issues resolved with one call. Zairi (1997:66), postulates that quality systems can help in the development of a culture that can lead to doing "right things" "right first time."

The percentage of respondents who agree and those who strongly agree constitute only 37% of those who do not agree. Customers whose problems fail to be resolved at first call are likely to switch brands because they do not want to be calling the contact centre for the same thing more than once.

4.6.2 After sales service

This question asked the respondents to indicate how happy customers were with the after sales service provided by the contact centre. This is because happy customers are more likely to stick to the brand than unhappy ones. For this question there was a 100% response rate.

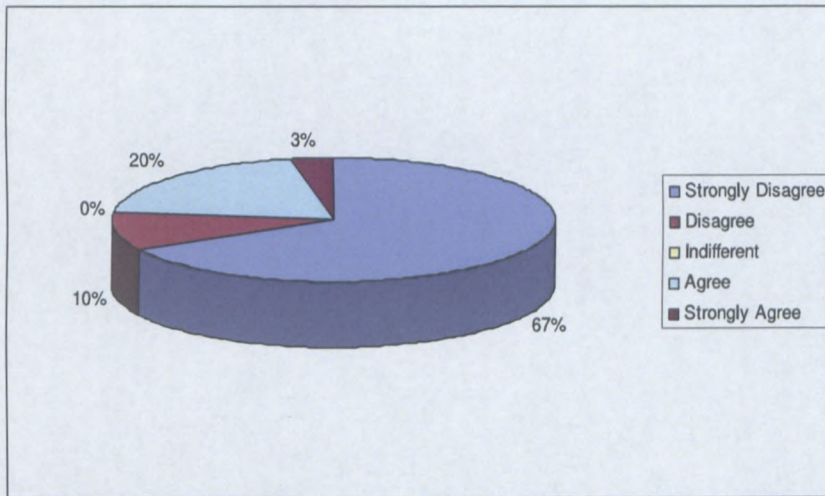The following pie chart (figure 4.6.2) summarises the responses.

Fig 4.6.2: After sales service

Analysis of results

Sixty seven percent of the respondents indicated that they strongly disagree with the statement that customers were happy with the after sales service. Ten percent disagree. The total number of respondents who generally disagree that customers are happy with after sales service is seventy seven percent. Respondents who agree with the statement constitute twenty percent of the total sample, while those who strongly agree are three percent.

Discussion of results

The total respondents who both disagree and strongly disagree that customers are happy and confident with the after sales service gives a picture of how the agents perceive after sales service at the contact centre. At seventy seven percent, it implies that the majority of agents are not happy with the service they are giving to customers.

After sales service is an essential marketing tool which is used to ensure that customers enjoy using a company's product or service, and at the same time to reduce cognitive dissonance. This element of marketing dovetails well with Deming's model which advocates that collective efforts lead to eventual customer satisfaction. The after sales service can also be linked to employee

motivation because after sales service can only be effective if the employees are happy. Asugman et al. (1997:11) believe that one way being used by organisations to reinforce or change customers' feelings about a product is good after sales service. The same argue that even if a product is of a high quality, as long as the after sales service is poor, customers can reject it. After sales service is affected by both employee motivation and training, which constitute essential elements of quality management. Customers who are not happy with the service are more likely to desert the company brand than the twenty three percent who are happy.

4.6.3 Nature of calls received (first or second time callers)

In this section, the employees were asked to respond to a question about whether the calls they received were the first or follow up calls from customers. The responses are indicated in figure 4.6.3. Again, for this question, there was a 100% response rate.
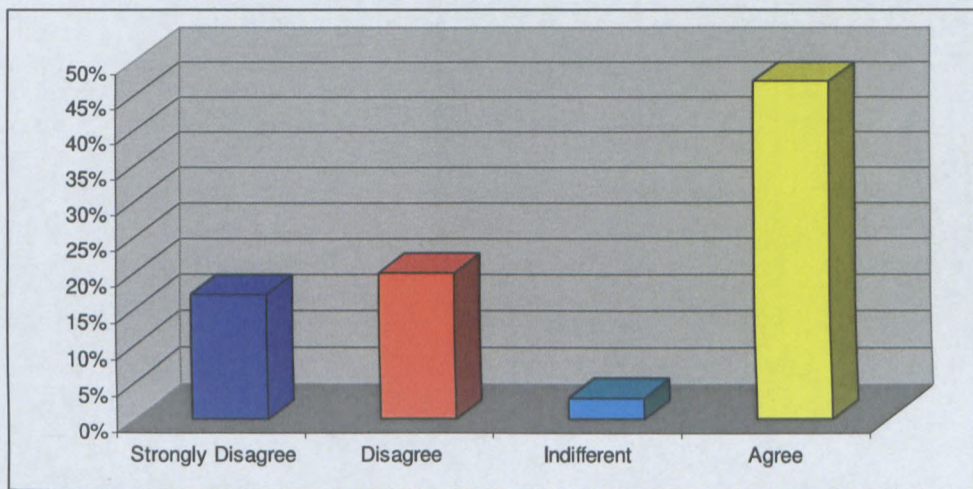

Fig 4.6.2: **Nature of calls received (first or second time callers)**
Analysis of results

The bar chart shows seventeen percent of respondents strongly disagreed, while only twenty percent disagreed. Forty seven percent of the respondent agreed while only thirteen percent agreed. The total of respondents who

agreed is sixty percent, while that for those who disagree is thirty seven percent. Only 3% of the respondents were indifferent.

Discussion of results

If customers have to call more than once to get their issues resolved, it means that they are disgruntled customers. Again, Deming's model emphasises the importance of customer satisfaction and the implications for TQM. Satisfaction of the customer is the reason for departmental synergy. The foregoing presentation of results indicates that quality systems can help in the development of a culture that can lead to doing "right things" "right first time" (Zairi, 1997: 66) If the total number of those who agreed that most of the calls received are follow up calls (64%) is higher than those who did not agree (36%), it means that there must be an absence of customer satisfaction. This is so because if the majority of customers have to follow up on issues, they are frustrated customers. The customers of this modern and globalised world are now so demanding that they want instant resolutions to their problems failure of which they would switch brands to other manufacturers.

4.7 Interrelationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty

The employees were asked if satisfied customers often stay with the brand they support. This question was asked to establish if there is link between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty. There was a hundred percent response rate to this question.

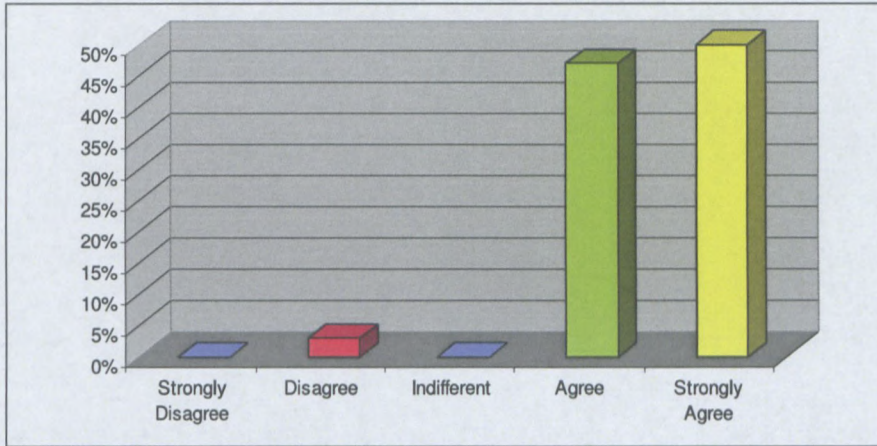Fig. 4.7 below summarises the findings

Fig 4.7: **Interrelationship between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty**

Analysis of findings

The above statistics indicate that there is only 3% of the respondents who feel that it does not necessarily follow that satisfied customer remain loyal to the brand. Forty percent of the employees agree that customers who are satisfied stay with the brand. Fifty percent of the employees strongly agree that satisfied customers remain loyal to the brand. The total of the respondents who agree that satisfied customers are loyal to the brand is ninety seven percent.

Discussion of results

The findings above seem to suggest those customers who are satisfied are likely to stay with the brand than those who are dissatisfied with customer service. This also suggests that there is a link between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty.

4.8 Relationship between quality management and customer satisfaction

In order to establish link between quality management system and customer satisfaction, the employees were asked if customer satisfaction results from efficient quality management system. This helped to find out if the contact centre employs good quality management systems which help to satisfy customers and prevent them from switching brands. For this question, there was a 100% response rate. Fig. 4.8 below summarises the findings:
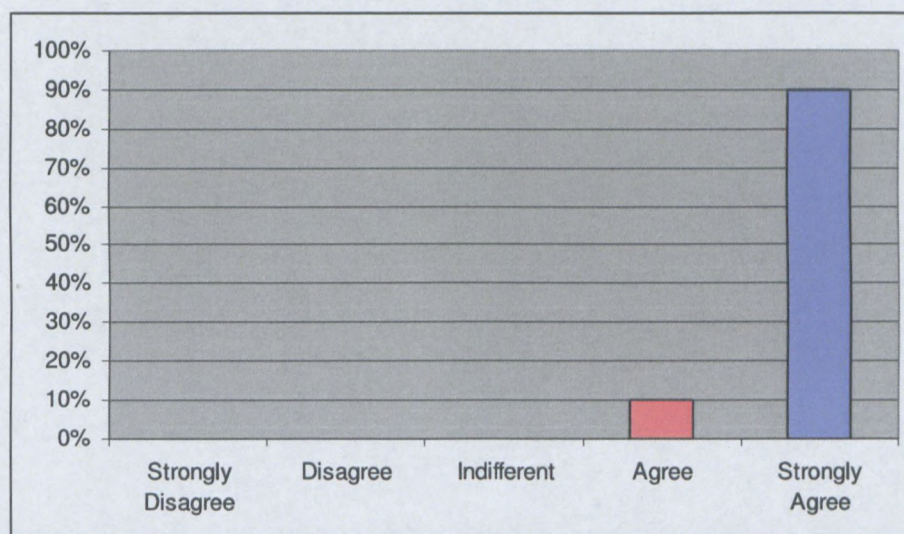

Fig 4.8: The relationship between quality management and customer satisfaction.

Analysis of results

Fig. 4.8 shows that 90% of the employees strongly agree that customer satisfaction results from an efficient quality management system, while 10% agrees.

Discussion of results

As pointed out in section 4.6.2 of the research, customers who remain loyal to the brand are customers who are happy with customer service. Hallowell (1996:27) postulates that there is a relationship between customer

satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. Oliver, (1999) as quoted in Chaudhuri, Morris and Holbrook (2001:82) suggests that a decision by customers to be loyal to a brand is a result of long standing relationships that are built over time

The customers of the call centre will be compelled to switch brands by the absence of satisfactory customer service as long as there are no existing structures that promote the concept of quality management.

4.8.1 Employees' tools for the job (equipment used by employees)

The following bar chart illustrates respondents' assessment of the suitability of the tools they use for their job. There was a 100% response rate on this question.
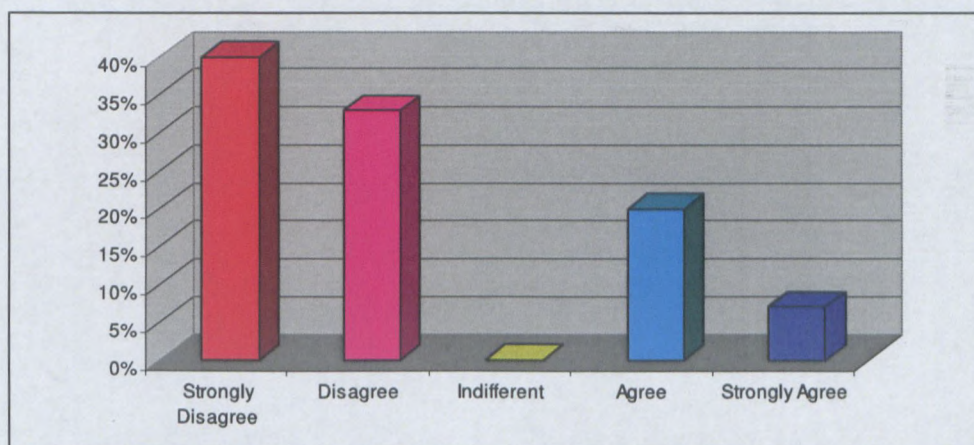
Fig 4.8.1: Employees' tools for the job (equipment used by employees)

Analysis of results

These results show that forty percent, out of a response rate of hundred percent, strongly disagree that they do not have adequate tools for their job. The tools range from appropriate software, chairs, to computers. Thirty three percent of the agents disagree that they have adequate tools for the job. The total number of the agents who disagreed that they have adequate tools for

their jobs, regardless of the magnitude, is seventy three percent. Those who agree are twenty percent and those who strongly agree are seven percent, which makes the total twenty seven.

Discussion of results

The majority of the agents indicated that they do not have adequate tools for the job. If they profess that they do not have tools for the job, it means they will not be able to do what they are required to do by the dictates of their job, which is customer service. Deming's model argues that employee fulfilment is one of the key concepts of quality management. It is not possible to expect agents to provide good service when they do not have all the tools required for their job. If good service is denied, then customers are likely to switch brands.

4.9 Employee motivation and satisfactory customer service

The employees were asked if they were able to provide satisfactory customer service as a result of motivation. Motivation of employees is an essential component of both quality management and customer service. The idea was to establish if switching of brands was also caused by employees who are not motivated. Fig. 4.9 summarises the findings:
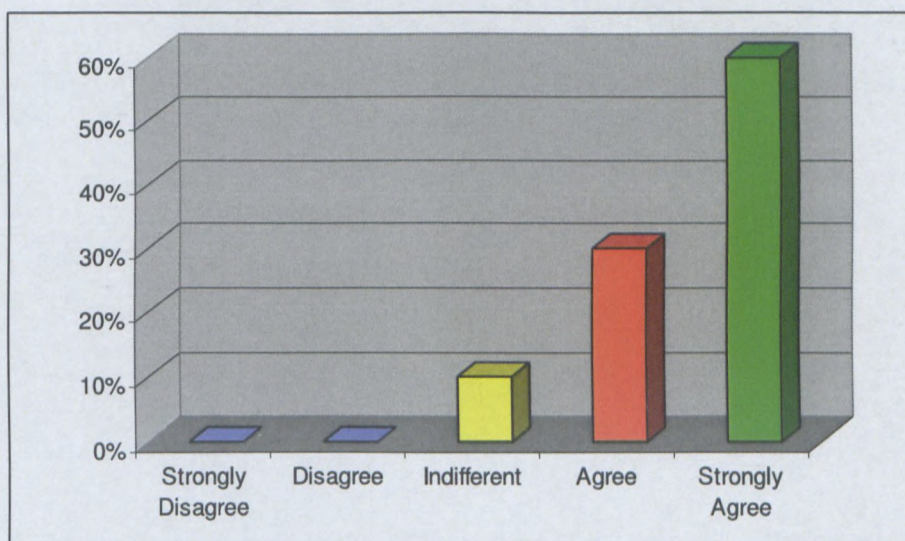

67

Fig.4.9: Motivation and satisfactory customer service

Analysis of the results

The above figure shows that 10% of employees are just indifferent on whether employee motivation leads to satisfactory customer service, 30% of the employees agree while 60% strongly agree. The total numbers of employees who agree to this supposition are 90%.

Discussion of results

According to the above statistics, the employees have emphasised themselves; at 90%, that if they are not motivated, they will not be able to satisfy customers. It means that motivation is an important element of quality management as it encourages recurrent behaviour. Employees who are motivated often exceed their expectations.

4.9.1 Employee retention

The agents were asked if the company was committed to employee retention. The question was used to measure the company's commitment to employee retention and welfare. This question had a 100% response rate.
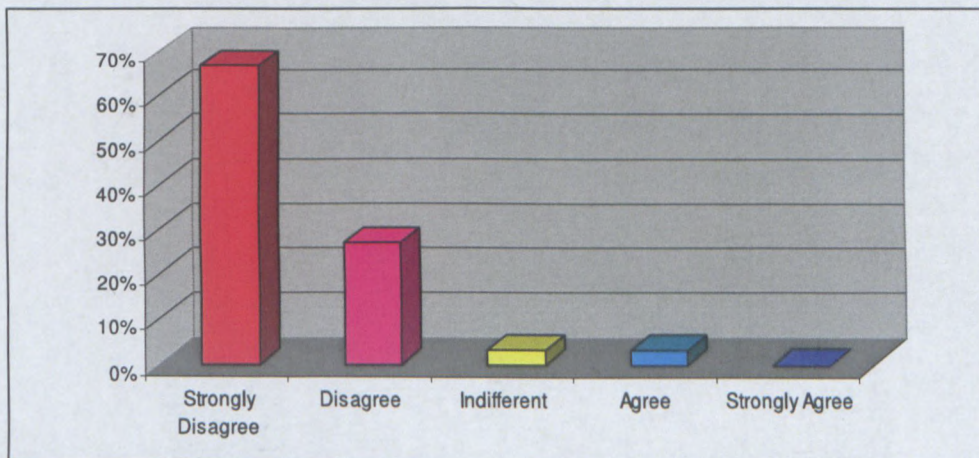

Fig 4.9.1: Company Commitment to employee retention

Analysis of results

The results show that sixty seven percent of the Agents feel that the company was not at all committed to employee retention hence they strongly disagreed. Twenty seven percent disagree with this supposition. Three percent were indifferent while three percent agree that the company is committed to employee retention. Figure 4.9.1 above shows the employees' responses.

Discussion of results

The total percentage of employees (94%) who both disagree and strongly disagree that the company is committed to employee retention represents employees who are not motivated to do their jobs properly. De-motivation of employees can lead to either poor customer service or high job turnover. Ramlall (2004:52) indicates that there is a huge impact on organisations that lose critical employees, especially when considering their experience. Data obtained from section 4.5.1 above shows the following; from the total population with a hundred percent response rate, thirty three percent have only been with the company between 1 – 6 months. In the range 7 and 12 months, it is twenty seven percent. For the period between 13 and 24 months, it is thirty percent while only ten percent is over two years. The statistics seems to suggest that the company may not be committed to retaining its employees.

At the time of research thirty three percent had only 6 months or less with the company. Loss of experienced workers can affect profitability of the company in the long run Fitz-enz (1997), as quoted in Ramlall (2004:52), actually provides figures by further clarifying that "the average company losses are approximately $1 Million for every 10 Managerial and Professional employees who leave the organisation." This clearly indicates the absence, by the contact centre management, of a commitment to quality by failing to retain critical employees.

4.9.2 Employee participation in decision making

The agents were asked if the company involves them in matters relating to their jobs and career. This is because Deming, in his model of quality management, considers employee fulfilment as a key concept in quality. Asking agents this question showed whether employees are involved in decision making. For this question, there was also hundred percent response rate. The following pie chart summarises their responses.
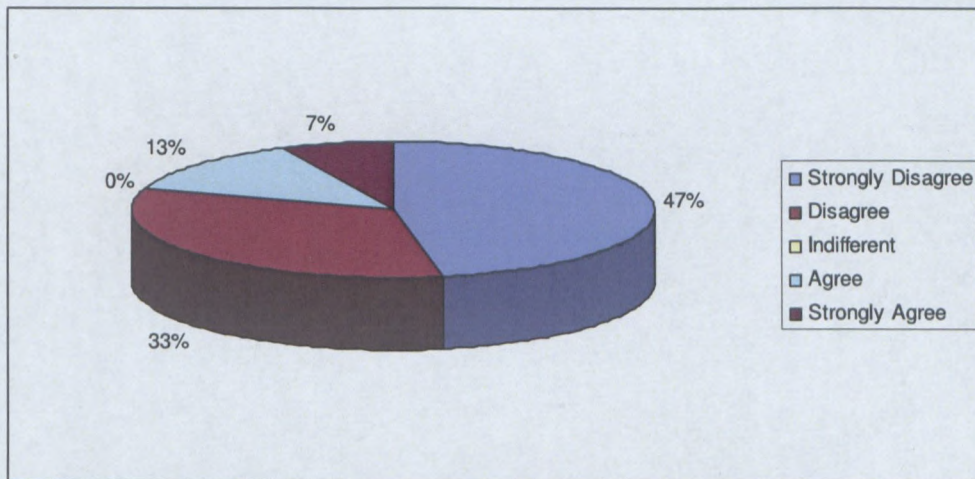
Fig 4.9.2: Employee participation in decision making

Analysis of results

The pie chart indicates that out of all the employees, forty seven percent indicated that they strongly disagree that they are involved in the matters of their job welfare and career, thirty three percent disagree, thirteen percent agree while seven percent strongly agree.

Discussion of results

The statistics show that most of the agents (80%) make little or no contribution to their career development plans. Involving agents means

empowering them; empowering them implies that the agents become very innovative and motivated. Oakland (1995:26) argues that continuous improvement that is undertaken by those involved in a process to satisfy an internal customer introduces elements of 'bottom up' issue identification and problem solving, which contrast with the traditional 'top down' management. Bendell et al (1993:17) reiterates that TQM is a strategic approach which recognises that each employee of the company is a guru in their particular role or function, and only that employee is the person who is capable of initiating positive change in the organisation.

The effect of not involving employees is not minimal; the employees will tend to relax where they have answers to problems that affect them. If these answers are not forthcoming, then the agents will not relax. The customers then get disadvantaged in the end.

4.9.3 Management meetings in the past 12 months

Management meetings in this research imply strategic meetings between staff and management or feedback sessions. These meetings may take place at team level or across all departments. The employees were asked this question in order to establish formal and recorded group interaction between agents and management. For this question, there was a hundred percent response rate. Table 4.1 illustrates meetings held at team level with team leaders. These meetings took place in the past twelve months.

0 - 5 times	6 - 10 times	11 - 15 times	16-21 times	21 times +
Laptops	desktops	switchboard	printers	overflow

Table 4.12 Management meetings in the past 12 months per department
Laptops, desktops, switchboard, printers and overflow are all departments of the contact centre.

Analysis of results

The table indicates that Laptops held meetings in the range 0-5 times, , desktops 6-10 times, switchboard 11-15 times, printers 16-21 times and overflow over 21 times. Three departments fall within 0-15 range of meeting frequency. Out of all the five departments, only two managed to have over sixteen meetings. Sixteen meetings at least indicate the presence of strategic meetings.

Discussion of results

Managers need to evaluate and communicate employees' performance of the employees with a view to rewarding and recognising good performance and to coach and motivate others into excellence. Bishop (1987:39) seems to suggest that recognition of performance leads to a greater incentive by employees to excel. Table 4.1 may also imply that employees are frequently groping in the dark, with the greater part of their information being relayed through the grapevine. If there is an absence of evaluation of strategy, it will be difficult to improve performance and satisfy customers.

Robins (1993) as quoted in Ramlall (2004:53) defines motivation as the willingness of the employees to put their maximum contributions towards organisational goals. If there are no meetings held to solicit innovation and review performance, how then would management ensure continuous organisational improvement? Deming's model of quality management advocates for employee motivation in order to improve customer service. Management is supposed to use these meetings to communicate change. For Piderit (2000:784) employees are likely to blame managers for changes that would have not been communicated properly rather than take the blame themselves. The result of this is that they leave the organisation because of frustration.

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4.10 Summary

The chapter has analysed and presented the findings of this study. It began by looking at racial groups within the contact centre to establish if there is a homogeneous or heterogeneous society. It was found that there is a heterogeneous society, which in its infancy poses challenge for TQM by way of preferences and cultural diversity. The key issues which have emerged from the findings are that there is a lack of communication within the establishment, there is a high labour turnover, the employees are not conversant with the processes and management is not committed to quality service.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Introduction

This project sought to investigate the application of quality management systems at a computer contact centre in Cape Town. It was initiated in an effort to establish and understand the causes of problems affecting call centres. Three models were used in the literature review: the SERVIQUAL model, the means-end model and the Deming's model of quality management. This chapter focuses on conclusions drawn from the research findings and makes recommendations to the company. The chapter also attempts to summarise the highlights of the study. The conclusion looks for relationships between the findings and TQM. Finally, it offers recommendations for improvement of service quality at the call centre.

5.2 Summary of objectives

The project sought to find out whether the employees of the call centre were familiar with the reason for brand switching by customers, from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by the competitors. The study hoped to find out whether employees can establish the connection between quality management, brand loyalty and customer satisfaction.

It also intended to use employee responses to investigate the application of quality management at the computer customer centre in Cape Town and thereby establishing if quality management is synonymous with employee satisfaction and customer retention.

Furthermore, the study evaluated call centre agents' views about the expectations of customers when they called the customer contact centre. This encompasses the time the customer called until the conclusion of the call. In

line with this, an examination of the nature of service that customers got from the contact centre was made. Finally, it provided recommendations to both the computer customer contact centre and to the computer service provider.

Main research question

What are the reasons customers give to call centre agents when they decide to switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competition?

Sub- research Questions

In order to address the research problem, this project has attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Do employees understand the reasons why customers switch brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors?

2. What are call centre agents' views about the connection between customer satisfaction and brand loyalty?

3. Do call centre agents understand the relationship between the concept of quality management and efficient and satisfactory customer service?

4. Does employee motivation lead to customer satisfaction?

Research methodology

To address the research questions a quantitative research method was selected. A questionnaire was administered to 100 employees out of 300 employees. These 100 employees were randomly selected by a computer from the departments of the contact centre. A self-administered questionnaire was sent to these respondents. They completed the questionnaires and returned them electronically. Since the research was supported by the company, it was easy to get responses from the employees, so a 100% response rate was realised. Data responses from the questionnaires were captured on an excel spreadsheet as they were received from respondents

and the results were analysed separately for each question.

The data collected were used to address the research questions using Deming's model of quality management, whose key concepts include the following; visionary leadership, internal and external cooperation, learning, process management, continuous improvement and employee fulfilment. Analysis of the data led to a number of conclusions from the research:

5.3 Constraints of the research

The research was constrained by the fact that the customer base was too large to come up with a representative sample for a mini thesis. This caused the researcher to focus on the perception of employees on reasons of brand switching from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competition. The sampling guidelines provided by de Vos et al. (2011) indicated that researching on a population of customers in excess of 100, 000, 000 is tedious and limited in scope.

5.4 Conclusions drawn from the research

When the research was completed and the information analysed, the following conclusions on the research were made:

5.4.1 Poor after sales service leads to customer brand switching

One of the key concepts in Deming's model of quality management is customer satisfaction. This concept hinges on effective after sales service for customers, Oakland (1995). A conclusion drawn from the research is that customers who are not happy with the service are more likely to switch brands than those who are. In case of the contact centre, the customers complain and cite poor after sales service as a cause of brand switching. After- sales service includes customer enquiries, sales of accessories, hardware technical support and general customer service.

5.4.2 Employee motivation leads to customer satisfaction

From the findings forty seven percent of employees indicated that they strongly disagree that they are involved in the matters of their job welfare and career, thirty three percent disagree, thirteen percent agree while seven percent strongly agree. , Employees who feel part of the system and who are included in the governance of the company, in terms of setting out targets and general processes and procedures, are more likely to give their maximum output than in an authoritarian company. Employees tend to commit more to targets which they set themselves. Bendell et al (1993: 17) reiterates that TQM is a strategic approach which recognises that each employee of the company is a guru in their particular role or function, and only that employee is the person who is capable of initiating positive change in the organisation.

5.4.3 Customer satisfaction leads to brand loyalty

As evidenced by the research, customers who are satisfied by a service remain loyal to the brand. Hallowell (1996:27) postulates that there is a relationship between customer satisfaction, customer loyalty and profitability. Oliver, (1999) as quoted in Chaudhuri, Morris and Holbrook (2001:82) suggests that a decision by customers to be loyal to a brand is a result of long standing relationships that are built over time.

Deming's model of quality management proposes that customer satisfaction is a key concept in quality management. It increases company profitability and customer loyalty. According to Anderson, Fornell, Donald and Lehmann (1994:55), "In general, high customer satisfaction should indicate increased loyalty for current customers, reduced price elasticities, insulation of current customers from competitive efforts, lower costs of future transactions, reduced failure costs, lower costs of attracting new customers, and an enhanced reputation for the firm. Increased loyalty of current customers means more customers will repurchase (be retained) in the future". According to Deming, customer satisfaction comes as a result of the contact centre working as a system, with all the employees supporting each other. This

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exercise requires a great deal of communication amongst employees regardless of whether they are management or general workers.

5.5 Recommendations to the company

The project was on the application of quality management at a computer customer contact centre in Cape Town. Its main aim was to establish why customers are switching brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. Following analysis of the data and the conclusions made on the study, the researcher would like to come up with the following recommendations are made, which may be followed or used as guidelines to make customer experience at the computer customer contact centre more pleasant than it is at present.

5.5.1 Communication must be improved within the contact centre

In earlier section of the research, it was indicated that one of the key concepts of Deming's model of quality management is continuous improvement. Continuous improvement depends on effective communication. The project has revealed that the majority of agents indicated that there is poor communication in the company. In any organisation, communication remains an integral part of its excellence. If management fails to communicate with the employees, they interpret this as lack of attention, implying that managers do not care about them (Stanton et al., 1991:203). Further this, the authors indicate that if the agents are not given proper communication channels, they turn to the grapevine. When employees turn to unofficial sources of information, management runs the risk that employees will not only pick up wrong information but dangerous information. This situation will create tension and mistrust among the employees in the contact centre. In order to improve communication the following tools should be used;

a) Intranet

In order to improve communication, effective use of the intranet should be made. The intranet is the contact centre's internal communication website. It allows only internal users for electronic mail, newsgroups, chats and online meeting applications. The agents have no time to walk to notice boards to read notices because their duties require them to sit at the phone at all times. They can only read during their break times which are sometimes even too short for that. The intranet will be the most effective way to ensure broad coverage and wide readership of current information. This is because during their periods of redundancy, when call volumes are low, the agents can browse the intranet and get as much information as possible. The intranet can be used to convey information including the contact centre code of conduct, changes, the Managing Director's messages, news flashes, employee correspondence and jokes.

Curry and Stancich (2000) carried out a research to establish if the intranet is an intrinsic component of strategic information management. In the project, they cite convenience, availability, accessibility and compatibility as the benefits of the intranet.

The intranet can pose challenges. These include posting of wrong information by the agents, it is costly and agents may not read posted information. For these challenges, the contact centre can make editing rights only to responsible authorities. Agents must only be allowed saving rights on information requested from them. In terms of costs, it is difficult to control them because the agents are expected to be online as and when they are not on calls. The benefits of having the intranet outweigh the costs.

b) Employee Wellness Forum

The employee wellness forum is a committee responsible for creating an harmonious working environment for employees and the employers by pro-actively address employees' concerns before they become problems.

Sometimes employees listen to their peers better than they would to management. The company should make effective use of this Employee Wellness Forum to communicate issues that are strategic to the company. After a strategic meeting, the Forum should also be allowed to give feedback or to solicit ideas from employees. This concept ties in well with one of the key concepts in Deming's model of quality management; employee fulfilment. The employee wellness forum may be used to solicit new ideas.

Feedback to the employees if often difficult because it is almost impossible for agents to attend meetings when they are supposed to be ready to take calls at all times. The wellness Forum should be able to convene a meeting prior to the start of, or at the end of a shift.

5.5.2 Introduce a business school

Since the bulk of employees are matriculants, the contact centre must start contemplating establishing a business school. The business school should be aimed at providing, among others, the following courses:
(i) Personal development
(ii) Consumer behaviour
(iii) Quality management
(iv) Budgeting
(v) Staff development workshops.
(vi) Customer service
In the earlier sections of the project, fifty three perecent of the respondents do not provide first call resolution to customers' complaints. This might be as a result of several factors, one of which could be that the agents lack knowledge on processes and procedures. So the business school will serve as a source of product knowledge skills and will equip the agents with a basic understanding of business. The company will benefits from increased customer satisfaction and innovation from well trained employees.

Employees who undergo this kind of training have some form of fulfilment. This fulfilment endows them with confidence that will make them innovative.

Innovation is a driver of quality performance. All the other courses will help them with life skills such as knowing how to budget money, so that they will be able to plan and attain their needs. Having a basic understanding of business improves employees' respect for ethics so that they will not engage in activities that prejudice the contact centre.

In order to prevent the company from becoming a training ground, an employee must agree to serve the company for at least six months before they leave the organisation after undergoing any training. Training costs will be recovered from the employee's last salary in the event of their leaving the company before the expiration of six months.

5.5.3 Management should retain employees

The research has shown that ninety four percent of the employees feel the company is not committed to employee retention. Ramlall (2004:52) indicates that there is a huge impact on an organisation that loses critical employees especially when considering their experience. Data obtained from section 4.5.1 shows the following; from the sample population thirty three percent have been with the company between 1 – 6 months only. Between 7 and 12 months, there is twenty seven.
In the period between 13 and 24 months, it is thirty percent, while ten percent have been with the company for over two years. The statistics seem to suggest that the company may not be committed to retaining its employees.

Loss of experienced workers can affect profitability of the company in the long run, Fitz-enz (1997), quoted in Ramlall (2004:52), actually provides figures by further clarifying that "the average company losses approximately $1 Million with every 10 Managerial and Professional employees who leave the organisation." This clearly indicates the absence of a commitment to quality, by the contact centre management, since they are failing to retain critical employees.

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The company may retain its employees using the following strategies:

a) Adopt a cafeteria benefit system

Owing to diverse age groupings, the company must offer a cafeteria benefit system. A cafeteria benefit system refers to a situation where the employees are asked to choose benefits which they want from an array offered by the company (Synclair et al., 2005). These benefits include medical aid, pension and provident fund, and saving schemes. The reason the contact centre must adopt this strategy is seventy seven percent of the respondents are between 20 and 30 years old. These employees are too young to be tied up to benefits like pension because they would find it difficult to understand why they should start saving for pension when they are only 20 years old (Synclair et al., (2005:3) argue that an effective compensation strategy helps an organisation to ensure that it retains critical employees. This is important for continuity and consistency for the organisation.

The danger with this benefit system is that it creates beggars when employees retire because none of the employees will voluntarily take a pension deduction. The company can, however, invite qualified advisers from time to time to talk about personal money management.

b) Reward long serving employees

The company should reward long serving employees. This at least will motivate other employees to stay longer with the company and thereby gain a wealth of experience which is essential to good customer service. Findings in section 4.5.1 of the research show that the highest percentage of employees has been with the company between 1 and 6 years. Rewarding long service will show the employees that the contact centre cares for them.

If the company retains its employees, they are likely to gain experience over the years on how to service customers well. This will eventually lead to customer satisfaction and employee fulfilment.

5.5.4 Include employee input in decision making/ industrial democracy

Employees should be included in decision making in order to make them willing to participate in strategic issues affecting the company. In the research, the agents indicated that they are not consulted in matters affecting their welfare, including targets, rosters, procedures and even their future. There are several levels at which the contact centre can empower the employees, these are participation, involvement, collective bargaining, the use of quality circles, an employee wellness forum and empowerment.

The terms employee involvement, employee participation and employee empowerment are used in some instances inter-changeably and sometimes wrongly. According to Farnham and Dennison (2003), no matter how they are used, they are a manifestation of including employees in decision making, a situation which the authors describe as a predominantly worker inclined management system. Use of one of the levels of employee engagement enables employees to influence decision making. These will be discussed in detail below.

a) Participation

At this level, the workers are free to participate. Their participation does not warrant any inclusion of their suggestions into management policy (Oakland, 1995:27). The author goes on to explain that employee participation can either be direct or indirect, formal or informal for a loosely tied team or for a department . Ramsay (1997) refers to this as the balance of power between owners of capital and labourers, where employee participation would be a reactive approach to challenges caused by shifts in the balance of power.

b) Collective Bargaining

Collective bargaining is the process whereby management and workers

negotiate on wages and general working conditions. Historically, the relationship between a labour union and management was based on conflict. Management has increasingly become aware that successful efforts to increase productivity, improve quality, and lower costs require employee involvement and commitment. Some labour unions have come to recognise that they can help their members more by cooperating with management, rather than fighting against it Farnham and Dennison (2003), indicate that in most instances, employers and employees do not arbitrarily enter into an agreement without assistance from a third party. This affects the development of TQM as there is no mutual trust between the two. If employers and employees negotiate for salaries, it averts threats of strikes and strike action itself, reduces labour turnover and promotes employee fulfilment. This would imply that there are no disruptions, and that the provision of service and quality standards becomes attainable.

d) Quality circles or Kaizen teams

According to Oakland (1995:263), Kaizen refers to a philosophy of continuous improvement of all employees in an organisation, so that they perform their tasks better each day. This system has the effect of generating ideas from employees. Ho (1995:47) defines quality circles as a small group of staff working together to contribute to the improvement of the enterprise, to respect humanity and to build a cheerful workgroup through the development of the staff's infinite potential. The essence of a quality circle is to identify, investigate, analyse and solve work related problems. Quality circles comprise the leaders who are usually immediate supervisors and supervisors of the members, facilitators, who are managers of Quality Circle programmes and management. These groups represent the industrial society where each employee is accorded an opportunity to suggest anything that improves the process flow.

e) Consultation through Employee Wellness Forums

Employee consultation is basically an all inclusive approach to issues within an organisation (http://www.acas.org.uk). Employees are very keen to perform to the best of their knowledge and capabilities if they are consulted on issues surrounding them. Besides, this gives employers an opportunity to understand the views of their employees. Consultation takes place to assess employee attitudes about and perceptions of experiences they are encountering. Employees are generally asked to respond to a set of specific questions regarding how they view such organisational aspects as decision-making, leadership, communication effectiveness, satisfaction with their jobs, co-workers and management. This has an overall effect of proactively resolving the employees' problems without creating a meltdown of relations between employers and employees. Employees will feel a sense of belonging to the organisation and, therefore, will be willing to give their maximum output.

f) Involvement

Employee involvement is defined by Farnham, Horton, White and Dennison (2003) as a strategy that is aimed at securing the willing acceptance of employees in achieving the organisation's objectives. According to Oakland (2002), the workers here are taken as production tools and are merely involved, in their individual capacities, in issues that help management achieve their objectives. Management merely involves them because they have the technical skills to do the job. At this level, management uses divide and rule. Involved workers want to align themselves with management yet the rest view management with suspicion. The essence of this level to management is to solicit the support and contribution of the employees.

g) Empowerment

Employee empowerment is quite a difficult concept to define. In order to define it, it is essential to start by attempting to define what power is. According to Rose (2001:5), power is the "extent to which one party to a

relationship can exercise authority over the other. But would management hand over a blank cheque to employees to make decisions and amend processes as they wish? The concept of empowerment then seems to suggest that for very small matters that are not strategic to the company, employees may make decisions without consulting management. In the Marxist perspective, empowerment would be equitable control of resources which would allegorically imply an almost equated decision making matrix with management". Oakland (1995:26) argues that for effective leadership, it is necessary for management to get very close to employees. Management must develop effective communication – up, down, and across the organisation and take action on what is communicated. In other words, everyone must encourage good communication between management and employees. In this light, Oakland (1995:26) argues that continuous improvement undertaken by those involved in a process to satisfy an internal customer introduces elements of 'bottom up' issue identification and problem solving which contrasts with the traditional 'top down' management. Bendell et al., (1993:17) state that TQM is a strategic approach which recognises that each employee of the company is a guru in their particular role or function, and that the employee is the only person capable of initiating positive change in the organisation. This is nothing more than a smoke screen used by management to empower employees in task related decision making. Sometimes managers engage in TQM just as a way of covering up their autocratic management styles. Such behaviour may also be found in the call centre.

In countries like South Africa where there is Black Economic Empowerment, it has become very difficult to manage quality. This is because most of the black managers employed as a result of affirmative action may not be committed to or has an understanding of quality issues. This is not because they do not want to implement quality, but may be that they do not have adequate training in quality matters.

5.5.5 Management should be visionary and commit to quality issues

As advocated for by Deming's model, management's role is to create a constancy of purpose for the improvement of product and service. Management should be visionary to create a culture or a system which can ensure that quality systems work. If things go wrong within the processes or for the output, it is the management which gets blamed. The majority of the agents indicated that they do not have proper tools for their jobs, something which management should tackle before even delegating work. They are the ones who define the path to be followed by the agents. Bendell et al. (1993:67) argue that improvements within an organisation begin by answering questions like "Where are we now?" "What do we want to do?" and "How do we get there?" It is in this phase that critical customer requirements, goals, objectives, process maps and process baselines are set.

According to Powell (1995:19), management's commitment to quality issues involves almost a "near-evangelical, unwavering long term commitment by top management. If the top management, as it is now, is not committed to quality issues, no matter how much the middle managers try to implement it, it will be to no avail".

5.6 Proposed implementation plan

The research proposes the following action plan;
Phase 1 introduction quality management
a) Selection of a committee comprising 5 people from all departments to constitute the quality committee/circle (Kaizen Tien)
b) Committee draws up a quality document
c) Management should sign up for the quality document
d) The committee meets once every week to discuss wastage and operational plans, strategy and targets for each week as per the quality document.
e) Committee decides on the quality audit process and audits the process as per agreed timelines.
e) Introduction of a business school for staff development workshops.
f) The quality committee decides on the course content in line with operational and customer needs.

Phase 2-company reforms

a) Selection of a committee for collective bargaining, 50% employee 50% employers to deal with reward issues

c) Share participation scheme; the company should consider shedding some of its shares to long serving members as a strategy to retain talent and effective employees.

5.7 Areas for further research

This research focused only on one contact centre in Cape Town and it was carried out to fulfil the requirements of a masters degree by coursework. This document itself is a mini thesis, which means the volume is relatively small and the time for the entire research process, relatively shorter. This often impacts significantly on the focus of the topic and the number respondents use in the study. . It is partly because of this constraint that the researcher decided to focus on employees only. In light of this, it presents an opportunity for further research in quality management at doctorate level. At this level the, researcher can expand the sample to include customers of products supported by this contact centre. This will provide a fascinating space for a comparative analysis of the perspectives of customers and employees.

5. 8 Summary of chapter five

The chapter began by restating the main aim of the research: to establish why customers are switching brands from products supported by the contact centre to those manufactured by competitors. Out of a population of 300 employees, 100 were randomly selected to which a self-administered questionnaire was electronically sent for response. The chapter then stated conclusions drawn from the research, which included the following: continuous improvement of the organisation depends on effective communication, training leads to knowledge of processes and procedures, existence of a link between industrial democracy and quality service and customer satisfaction leading to brand loyalty. Recommendations made to the company ranged from encouraging management to retain critical employees,

improving communication, introducing a business school, introducing industrial democracy and having visionary leadership.

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Cape Peninsula
University of Technology
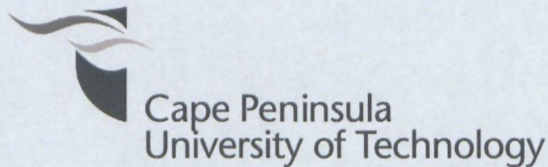
Faculty of Informatics and Design
MTech: Public Relations Management (Questionnaire for Research Project)

Research Topic "The application of quality management systems at a computer customer contact centre in Cape Town.

This research is being done for academic purpose as part of the requirements for the completion of a masters' degree.

You have been selected to respond to this questionnaire by the fact that you are in the computer customer contact centre .Your contribution is needed to conduct an analysis of quality management at this computer customer contact centre

This is purely for academic research .All information you will provide that may be personal will remain confidential.

How to complete this questionnaire
- Person completing this questionnaire should be an employee of the contact centre

- Please place an "x" in the block that best describes your answer to the question.

All enquiries regarding this research and questionnaire may be addressed to:
Edmore Chinhamo (Researcher)   Tel :(+27)796245761   South Africa
73 New Church Street (Cape Town)   E-mail:chinhamoedmore3@gmail.com

Should you feel that you need to exit the research at any point of research, you may do so without prejudice. You also have the right to skip and answer any questions as you may please.

The researcher would like to express his sincere thanks for your valuable time and contribution to make this research possible .Your information and feedback is of paramount importance to the project. Your willingness is highly appreciated.

1. Indicate your race by ticking the appropriate box below:

	Black
	White
	Coloured
	Asian

2. In which age range do you fall?

	20 - 25
	26 - 30
	31 - 35
	36 - 40
	40+

3. What is your educational qualification?

	Matric
	Diploma
	Bachelor's Degree
	Honours Degree
	Masters

4. Which department do you work for?

	Logistics
	Laptops
	Desktops
	Printers
	Switchboard
	Overflow

5. For how long have you been employed by the company?

	0-6 months
	7-12 months
	13-18 months
	19-24 months
	25 months +

6. On what basis are you employed?

	Hourly Contract
	Fixed Term

	contract
	Permanent
	Other (specify)

7. What reasons do customers give for switching brands?

	Poor after sales service
	Poor product/Hardware

8. Customer satisfaction results from an efficient quality management system

Strongly disagree
Disagree
indifferent
Agree
Strongly agree

9. If I am motivated, I ensure that my customers are satisfied with my service

Strongly disagree
Disagree
indifferent
Agree
Strongly agree

10. Of all calls you handle on a daily basis, all customers get first call resolution.

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

11. Customers are confident of your company's after sales service for the products supported

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

12 Most of the calls received from customers are follow up calls on unresolved issues

	Strongly disagree

	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

13. In assisting customers, I can confirm that I have all the tools of my job at my disposal

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

14. If a customer's issue has not been resolved, who does he/she blame?

	The product
	The customer service Agent
	The company

15. All the happy customers with first call resolution often promise to stay loyal to the brand

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

16. All the unhappy customers threaten to use products from other companies

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

17. 0n a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being negative, 5 average and 10 positive, how would you rate your performance when serving customers?

	0-3
	4-6
	7-10

18. For good customer service, my company is committed to employee retention.

	Strongly disagree

	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

19. There are opportunities for personal growth and development in my company

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

20. The company involves me in matters that affect my job and my career growth

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

21. The processes I follow are tedious and often result in customer frustration

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

22. I feel empowered to make decisions when dealing with customers

	Strongly disagree
	Disagree
	indifferent
	Agree
	Strongly agree

23. How do you rate up-down and across communication within your company?

	Poor
	Good
	Average
	Excellent

24. Tick the appropriate box for the frequency of meetings you have you had with your Team Leader for the past 12 months?

	0-5 times
	6-10 times
	11-15 times
	16-20 times

	21 times +	

25. As a customer, would you buy the products support by your company?

	Yes
	No

26. If your contract was to be extended for another 2 years, or if you are a permanent employee, would you work for another 2 years

	Yes
	No

SEPTEMBER GRADUATION 2012

NAME OF FACULTY: INFORMATICS AND DESIGN

MTECH:

NO	STUDENT NO	SURNAME	NAME/S	INITIALS	SUPERVISOR/s	QUAL CODE OLD AND OR NEW	THESIS: TITLE	EFFECTIVE DATE	CUM LAUDE	%
1	203069277	Abrahams	Rifqah	R	Pike, Ms ME	MTech: Public Relations Management (MTPRMC)	The use of social media for communication between a university of technology and fourth-year communication students	20-Aug-12	No	56%
2	202007197	Allie	Farhaana	F	Pike, Ms ME	MTech: Public Relations Management (MTPRMC)	An audit of communication structures used for public relations by IT companies, tenants and beneficiaries of the bandwidth barn	20-Aug-12	No	51%
3	208157999	Chinhamo	Edmore	E	Angu, Dr PE	MTech: Public Relations Management (MTPRMC)	The application of quality management systems at a computer customer contact centre in Cape Town	20-Aug-12	No	57%
4	205211666	*Van Diemel	Merle, Carol	MC	Pike, Ms ME	MTech: Public Relations Management (MTPRMC)	Innovative networking: the synergy between the public relations industry and a multimedia newspaper	20-Aug-12	No	53%
5	207000425	Claassen	Hester	H	Messeter, Prof J M'Rithaa, Prof M	MTech: Design (MTDESR)	Interactive tools supporting agriculture in the wine industry	20-Aug-12	Yes	76%
6	204257867	Lecanides-Arnott	Maria Constantine	MC	Cronjé, Prof JC	MTech: Design (MTDESR)	A conceptual framework for an integrated, multidisciplinary foundation programme to educate designers in South Africa	20-Aug-12	No	70%
7	209230371	Constance	Leroy David	LD	De la Harpe, Dr AC	MTech: Information Technology (MTINFR)	Alignment between business and information technology strategies: a case study at a transportation organisation	20-Aug-12	No	62%
8	194057526	*Daniel	Nolan Eric	N	Watkins, Prof JA	MTech: Information Technology (MTINFR)	The effective measurement of SME e-commerce performance in the Western Cape, South Africa	20-Aug-12	No	58%
9	206140908	Koranteng	Kesewaa	K	Mlitwa, Prof N	MTech: Information Technology (MTINFR)	Access to and use of ICT for teaching and learning amongst schools in under-resourced communities in the Western Cape, South Africa	20-Aug-12	No	70%
DTECH:										
10	208157093	El-Hussein	Mohamed Osman Mohamed	MOM	Cronjé, Prof JC Angu, Dr PE	DTech: Information Technology (DTINFR)	Toward a theory of mobile learning: the design of learning spaces for the higher education landscape	20-Aug-12	N/A	Pass

1 .... SIGNATURE ....

NAME & INITIALS: FACULTY RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR

3.. SIGNATURE...

Name & initials: HoD (Research)

2 .... SIGNATURE ....

NAME & INITIALS: FACULTY OFFICER

SEPTEMBER 2012 GRADUATION
NAME OF FACULTY: BUSINESS   (at FID)

MTECH:

NO	STUDENT NO	SURNAME	NAME/S	INITIALS	SUPERVISOR/s	QUAL CODE OLD AND OR NEW	THESIS: TITLE	EFFECTIVE DATE	CUM LAUDE	%
1	209236930	Nyatsambo	Tinashe Emmanuel	TE	Van Brakel, Prof PA	MTBISR	Influence of diverse cultural backgrounds of SME employees with regard to information and knowledge sharing	20-Aug-12	No	72%
2	208009604	Ruhode	Estery	E	Uys, Ms C Koch, Dr A	MTBISR	Information communication technology as an empowerment tool by women in SMEs in the Western Cape, South Africa	20-Aug-12	No	53%

NB: qualication code is required

1 .... SIGNATURE ....

NAME & INITIALS: FACULTY RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR

3.. SIGNATURE ....

Name & initials: HoD (Research)

FACULTY OFFICE STAMP

2 .... SIGNATURE ....

NAME & INITIALS: FACULTY OFFICER

4 .... SIGNATURE ....

ACG CAPTURED BY: NAME & INITIALS