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An analysis of the use of internal marketing as a tool to avoid  
workplace conflict in a customer service environment.

By

Juliana S. de Oliveira

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*“The cosmos is within us. We are made of star-stuff. We are a way for the universe to know itself”. (Sagan , 1980)*

## **Abstract**

The following dissertation aims to analyse the use of internal marketing as a tool to minimise workplace conflicts. In modern days, managers spend up to 40% of their productive time dealing with workplace conflicts. At the same time, employees show frustration about the way the feel the company they work for acknowledges their work.

In this context, we will analyse trough literature review marketing and workplace conflicts theories. Also, going through a deeper understanding of human behaviours, effective communication and social needs.

In order to test our hypothesis, an online survey was distributed to our research population, customer-service workers; specifically in retail and hospitality business. The results showed that the majority of the respondents; in fact, would like to have more internal marketing actions created to them and they relate the lack of it as one of the causes of workplace conflicts.

Key words: Conflict Resolution, workplace conflict, internal marketing

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## **Introduction**

The idea of what a job represents to an individual has changed through time. It is noticeable that older generations have a different relation to what the workplace represents to them compared to the new generations. The generation Y; for example, that includes people born between 1980 and 1995 likes to live for the present moment. In relation to their vision about what work represents to them, if they feel they are in captivity, this group has the tendency to not be afraid to change jobs. Companies might have a big challenge when it comes to attracting and retaining this group. Much more than having any job, they seek for a meaningful work environment (Sharma, 2012). This generation tends to not be afraid to change jobs when they perceive new opportunities coming from a place where they might be more appreciated (Cruz, 2007). They are also totally comfortable with technology, which makes them believe they can work from anywhere.

In comparison, the Baby Boomers; people born between 1946 and 1964, invented the 60-hour work week and the phrase “Thank God, it is Monday (Govitvatana, 2001). They also tended to stay in the workforce for a long time and would consider changing careers only if they had the chance to retire first.

From that perspective it is possible to notice that different generations will have different needs and expectations towards the employer. Most of all, those different attitudes will not change the human element. In the end, generations are formed by people and conflict is part of human existence.

The general understanding would define conflict as a process in which one party perceives that its interests are clashing with someone else's opinion (Wall & Callister, 1995). In the workplace that would not be different. Many kinds of conflict may arise; such as: among the team,

management and team, team and employer, self-conflict about how one is perceiving the job, etc.

The clash of ideas will constantly be present in daily routines in the workplace. One simple disagreement may create tension among the team and generate uncountable damages. Although, many authors may consider conflicts as something to be seen as positive. Gosnell (2019) states that positive conflict can be constructive if it promotes new ideas and provides the team with the chance of expanding their skills. It is hard to evaluate from the start of a conflict if it will be positive or not.

If a conflict is not well managed, it can more than create dissatisfaction among the team; it can lead to the company not accomplishing its goals, which can also create something almost impossible to be controlled in the short term. Employees can start to look for new jobs and leave the company without much notice or make the company look for new staff in a moment that is not ideal for those changes.

Companies spend a lot of their investment in training their employees. The constant change of staff may cause lots of money and time. One more point to be considered is that companies with bad reputations on how to deal with workplace conflicts may struggle to find new and well-prepared employees to build their team.

Conflicts at the workplace are directly connected to human's emotions. Some authors (Ekman 1992; Scherer 1984) understand the definition of emotion as discrete, adaptive responses to the environment that surrounds the individual. Emotions can be related to human needs, and those needs can be described as physiological and psychological.

For this work, we will analyse how those emotions are connected to the human's needs based on Maslow's theory. Abraham Maslow was a psychologist from New York, and his book *Motivation and personality* (1954) is considered one of the principal sources to understand human behaviour based on human needs (Carvalho, 1991). This work will correlate how the

fulfilment of ordinary people's needs can help to minimise workplace conflicts.

The strategy that will be analysed will be how organisations can use internal marketing to motivate their staff and, with that, create an environment where conflicts can be better well managed. Winter (1985) defined internal marketing as the action of "Aligning, educating and motivating staff towards institutional objectives, the process by which personnel understand and recognise not only the value of the program but their place in it."

Therefore, we can relate that internal marketing can create motivation among the staff, focusing on their human needs. More than numbers, a company's team is formed by people with feelings and necessities. Workplace conflicts can sometimes be a response to the lack of recognition from the employer to the staff necessity of having it.

In customer service facing-roles, organisations expect that their employees represent them following their values and mission. It is also likely that the customer has an experience of excellence when purchasing a product or a service.

This dissertation will analyse that if the employee does not feel appreciated by the company the same way the customer is, there might be a tendency for conflicts to arise in the workplace. The population of this study will be specifically customer-services workers that are directly working with retail or hospitality. That particular group is popularly taken as replaceable, differing from other groups that also do some customer-service related jobs but in different fields, such as lawyers; for example, that can represent to our society a professional with a higher level of qualification. Those conflicts can happen in different states, such as employees having a clash of opinions with their superiors, conflicts with other members of the team, conflicts with staying or not in the company and most of all not delivering good quality of service to the customer. We will study that the negligence of the staff's needs as human beings can create a chain reaction of workplace conflicts that could be avoided or minimised in order to create a better workplace environment; and also, minimise the budget spent by a company

in legal actions related to workplace conflicts resolution.

This dissertation will be supported by a literature review to a broader understanding of internal marketing, the psychology of human's needs and workplace conflicts, followed by the research to support this study.

The research that will be applied quantitatively will be focused on customer service workers and how they relate to how they need to present themselves to customers and how they feel the company sees and treats them. This study will discuss how these attitudes can influence the escalation and de-escalation of workplace conflicts.

## **Aims and Objectives**

This dissertation aims to explore how the use of internal marketing can help to minimise workplace conflicts, constructing a parallel between basic human needs and how organizations work to fulfil those needs on their employees.

We will produce an understanding of how customer-service workers can or cannot develop motivation to represent the company they work for; in the way, they are expected to do. We will start from the point that companies work to provide good experiences to their final customers. This research will propose that if the same effort is not put into the staff's experiences and recognize different kinds of workplace conflicts may arise.

Therefore, we will construct knowledge about the investment in internal marketing in order to avoid or minimise workplace conflicts.

The objectives are the following ones:

- A critical evaluation of what internal marketing is;
- A critical discussion on the impacts of effective organizational communication in order to avoid workplace conflicts;
- The better understanding of the basic human needs to create a job environment where conflicts can be well managed.

## **Dissertation roadmap**

Starting with the literature review, we will find in Chapter 1 a critical understanding of what internal marketing really is. We will begin with a broad overview of what traditional marketing is and its relation with the study proposed on this dissertation. We will also analyse how effective communication is related to the rise of conflicts in the workplace, going through the roots of conflicts and the current methods used for conflict resolution. This chapter will also offer us an understanding of human physiological basic needs and how the accomplishment of them can support to minimise workplace conflicts.

Chapter 2 will be present the methodology and methods used for the research of this dissertation. In chapter 3, the data gathered from the research will be presented. The findings of the data collected will be analysed in chapter 4.

Chapter 5 will present a critical discussion of the primary research compared to the literature review, which will bring us to the conclusions of this study that will let us know if the investment in internal marketing does help to minimise workplace conflicts.

## **Chapter 1 - Literature Review**

This chapter will provide us an understand of the fundamentals of the principles of this study through the literature review. We are going through the perspective of different authors and contrasting their ideas. The analysis made in this chapter contains a deep background of marketing, workplace conflicts and the psychological preceptive of the basic human needs.

### **1.1 Definition of Marketing**

Marketing is the process by which a firm creates value for its chosen customers. Value is created by meeting customer needs (Silk, 2006). The definition of marketing can be different for some professionals. Literature provides us with a variety of terms ,but it is possible to see that all of them go around value to the customer. Marketing is about identifying human and social needs at a profit. (Kotler,Keller,Goodman,Brady;Hansen, 2019).

For this work, we will understand the concept of marketing in order to relate it to the object of study. As mentioned before, marketing creates value to the customer. The value created can minimise conflicts between company and client in a moment of divergence that can come from dissatisfaction about a product or a service. In the context of workplace conflicts, we will analyse that the employee also can be seen as a valued piece for the organization growth and if the same value is added, conflicts can be better well managed.

“Marketing is a set of human activities directed at facilitating and consummating exchanges of promises” (Kotler, 1972). From this perspective, we can start seeing that marketing works on bringing the human element to the business world. There is the assumption that when we talk about business it is only about numbers and profit. The key point for this study is to exemplify

that without the understanding of how people interact with others and how they see themselves the use of marketing as a strategy to avoid conflicts in the workplace can be hard to achieve.

The American Marketing Association (AMA) is in a constant redefinition of the meaning of marketing the most recent one is from 2017 and it is “Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large.”

In 1985 the definition was “the process of planning, and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals.”. It is noticeable that the constant redefinitions come along with how society changes and modifies the way we see individuals from different groups.

In the late ‘40s, the post-war scenario where the world was living influenced the competition between companies. Basically, before the war, the focus was on creating products that already existed but cost less. After the war, this behaviour was modified and the companies targeted on producing the same product with better quality or to create new ones that could provide benefits that the consumer was needing.

It is believed that this was the starting point to consider what could provide better benefit to the customer and not only focus on price (McKitterick,1957). Therefore, we can assume that the idea of marketing as we know it, but of course, modified with time, had started in the post-war society.

After that, the client starts to play a central role in the marketing world. More than just creating a product, companies start to work on producing products for people that have the desire to purchase them. It goes from necessity to power of choice.

From that point, marketing starts to create a form as it is known today, thinking about all the aspects of the act of the exchange between selling a product to buying it. The satisfaction of



the client became a point to be thought about. Also, services started to be seen as a valued source of profit, which did not happen before.

From the end of the '70s many studies started to be made about service and experiences a brand/company can provide to customers and how marketing is connected to that. Vargo and Lusch (2004) believe that the new concept of marketing relates to the focus on intangible resources, the co-creation of value and the relation created between brand and client. The authors also suggest that the concept of marketing previous to that understood that marketing was totally related to the economy. Therefore, being based on the exchange of products, emphasizing tangible resources and the intrinsic value of products.

Vargo and Lusch (2008) present the SDL (service dominant logic) theory that explains the creation of value in a service or product. This theory believes that any transaction needs to be based on the service and the product is only an object that justifies those services. It allows co-create value through permanent interactions of the companies to their clients, staff, suppliers and shareholders.

## **1.2 Definition of Internal Marketing**

As it was analysed before marketing works on bringing value and sentimental experience that connects customers and companies in a higher level than just one single purchase. Marketing focused on customer experience can create a behaviour of loyalty and trust from the customer to the company. Therefore, anticipating a better solution to possible problems of dissatisfaction. E.g., A customer would rely on paying a bit more for a product in a shop that he or she trusts that would provide a solution in case of a product malfunction than paying less in a shop with a bad reputation of customer service.

From that perspective, the business world realised that another public needed to have the same attention in order to anticipate problems, in the case of this study workplace conflicts, and

minimise the dissatisfaction of their staff.

Internal Marketing has the goal of identifying and satisfying the needs of employees as individuals and also as service providers. Internal Marketing aims to sell the concept of customer service to the staff team so they can internalize the set of values of the company (Varey, 1995).

In order to have satisfied customers, a firm needs to have satisfied employees (George, 1977).

It is interesting to notice that the understanding of internal marketing as a new approach of traditional marketing started to happen as the perception that a lot of what customers buy is labour and/or human performance, in other terms, service. (Parasuraman & Zeithaml, 1988)

For the customer, the employee represents and speaks for the firm (Hartline & Ferrell, 1966).

From this perspective, we can start to connect the fundamental role employees play as an important piece of any organization and their satisfaction within their employer can provide better results. That satisfaction also applies to the desire of an employee to keep working for a particular company without the need to change jobs in order to have their basic needs as human being fulfilled. Internal marketing assumes a demarcation line between the inside and the outside of an organization (Lewis, 2000).

Parasuraman & Zeithaml (1988) assert that internal marketing develops, motivates and retains qualified employees satisfying their needs through job products. The authors state that internal marketing is the philosophy that treats employees as customers.

When the employee realises he or she is considered a valued piece of the organisation, there is the tendency of trying to repay it with intelligence, interest, commitment, creativity and the effort of having harmony in the workplace relationships. Internal marketing provides to the workforce the security that the organization is committed to them (Pfeffer, 1995).

Mendelson (2001) stated that customer loyalty would only occur if employees of a service organization are part of this relationship-building orientation. If the company wants to focus

on this relationship-building then there is nothing more effective than internal marketing from a strategic viewpoint.

Reynoso & Moores (1996) argue that there are six fundamental steps in internal marketing campaigns: the understanding of the concept of inner awareness; the clear understanding and knowledge of customers and suppliers; the identification of the internal customers; creating an open communication channel so the internal suppliers are aware of those expectations; following the last point it is expected that the suppliers are able to work on ways of attending those expectations and the last step would be being able to measure the internal service quality. Ahmed & Rafiq (2003) define as viewing employees as internal customers, viewing jobs as internal products that satisfy the needs and wants of that public while addressing the objectives of the company.

Piercy & Morgan (1991) proposed that internal marketing campaigns should be directed to a specific internal segment in order to be a complement the external marketing actions. This concept assumes that the internal public can and should be divided based on different needs and views. Therefore, after understanding that the internal public is an important piece for the success of a company in different aspects, it is essential to be aware that the big group can have small divisions ( culture, gender, age etc.) and it is necessary to have a map of those smaller segments to be able to create actions that will speak directly to those groups.

In practice, the internal marketing can be applied in different ways. It is important that the employee is able to make an analytical study on the company's staff and after that create a marketing plan that speaks effectively with them.

There is no guide of which actions to take, it would depend on each public. Internal Marketing actions would go from offering decent conditions for the staff in terms of infrastructure, well-being while in work (proper breaks, water etc) to gifts on birthdays, team celebrations during important dates such as new year, recognition of good work etc.

## **1.2- How can effective communication avoid conflicts in the workplace?**

### **1.2.1- Impact of effective communication**

The study of conflict resolution requires de analyses of political, sociological, and phycological variables. Although, all the attempt at managing or resolving conflicts is essential to have communication (Ellis, 2005).

The pure definition of communication has been changing through time. “The continuing problem in defining communication for scholarly or scientific purposes stems from the fact that the verb ‘to communicate’ is well established in the common lexicon and therefore is not easily captured for scientific use. Indeed, it is one of the most overworked terms in the English language.” (Clevence Jr, 1991)

We, as human beings and living in society, can simply understand communication as the exchange of information. Spoken language, used in human communication, makes us have something to think with and about. The link we make when we think about it, allows us to share those thoughts with others. (Ruben, 1985).

Studies show that people have been communicating since the palaeolithic era, more than 2 million years ago. There was a limit of language but it was the start of the human need of trying to pass their culture to each other. Language started from small sounds and became more complex. Non-written communication was made through scratched bones, for example. (Schmandt-Besserat, 1997)

Starting from the point that we understand that communication is the exchange of information, we can also amplify that thought to the knowledge that we cannot resume communication to the spoken language.

Ambady & Rosenthal (1998) mention that nonverbal communication is related to any kind of communication that uses behavioural channels to express a thought, such as facial expression, body movements, vocal tones etc. This kind of communication is often spontaneous and uncontrollable. Culture can have a significant influence on how people communicate through gestures, tone of voice etc. Therefore, when we think about communication in the workplace, we have to be aware of cultural differences, in order to also avoid workplace conflicts.

For the business scenario, we can understand corporate communication as the management function that creates a framework focusing on the effective coordination of all external and internal communication. The principal purpose is to establish and maintain favourable reputations with stakeholder's groups (Cornelissen, 2010). It has an integrative function that connects all the communication, internal and external, in order to present a consistent message (Sanjeev, 2020).

From the principles presented above, we can affirm that communication can be made through multiple channels, such as verbal, nonverbal, gestures, facial expressions etc. The basic elements of communication can create effective communication through outcomes, review of outcomes, enhancement of teamwork, the targeted group and being sure issues are relevant (Gourlay, 2003).

In recent times, most companies are made of multicultural teams. Elements such as culture, gender, age etc. can be surrounded by communication barriers, but looking from a different perspective, a diverse workforce can create a unique advantage by employing new ideas, communication skills and allowing a variety of thoughts that can result in the quality of business solutions and also decision-making (Gupta, 2008).

Good communication needs to be effective, which means that the message will be received with total real understanding and clarity. Any lack of information or ambiguity can create an ineffective message that can result in a sequence of errors and misunderstandings. Therefore,

we can assume how it is crucial for organizations to work towards having good communication channels in all levels of hierarchies.

Metaphorically we can describe the employees as brain cells of the organization and communication would be the nervous system that carries and shares meaning to vital parts of the corporate body. (Das, 2013).

An organization is made of people and not only numbers. Those people have feelings and ideas they want to express. The interaction can only be made through communication, and the better we are in communicating more effectively will be the achievement of hopes and dreams (Alessandra & Hunsaker, 1993).

### **1.2.2 Understanding conflict and conflict resolution**

According to Fisher (1990) conflict can be defined as an incompatibility of values and goals among two or more parties, with attempts of controlling each other and antagonistic feelings toward each other. Much before that, Coser (1957) defined conflicts as the clash of values and interests, the tension between that is and what some groups feel ought to be. The author also concludes that conflicts can generate new norms and new institutions. It can help to educate the system not to stifle the routine of habituation and that in the planning activity the use of creativity and invention can be used.

Also, conflict can be seen as a process that starts where one of the parties perceives that the other is negatively affected or is about to in a negative way affect something related to the first party (Robins, 2005).

In the past, many authors understood conflict as something purely negative. It was considered as something that could impact in a negative way the good quality of productivity in a company, for example (Kinicki & Fugate, 2011). Recent theories present that conflicts can also have a

positive perspective, and are seen as a natural occurrence in all kinds of relationships. The critical point is to have the perception to create a solution for them. How the conflict will be handled will dictate if it is positive or negative (Rahim, 1986). Conflict can permit the understanding of the concerns of the parties. Allowing the creation of an agreement that benefits the interests of both parties. (Hussein & Al-Mamary, 2019).

We acknowledge that conflict is mostly inevitable and it is part of our daily life within all kinds of human interactions, neither personal and in the workplace. Human relations embrace interactions among people, their group relationships, cooperative efforts and conflicts. It gives us the possibility of understanding why our behaviours, attitudes and beliefs can lead to conflicts in our personal lives and in work-related situations (Reece, 2012).

Therefore, we can relate that conflicts in the workplace are very likely to exist as we are talking about the human element, which is the employee. There will be individual and collective needs that can be fulfilled in order to bring a positive outcome to workplace conflicts.

The literature presents those conflicts happen when basic human needs are denied, and peace – or the solution for the conflict- is achieved when those needs are respected (Burton, 1990).

The field of conflict resolution aims to create the re-articulation of the conflict, through the changed understanding of each other and the fulfilment of basic human needs for all and helping them to find mutually compatible satisfiers (Marchettia & Tocci, 2009).

The study of conflict resolution started post-cold war, and more than analysing solutions for big nations disputes, it included conflicts as a general phenomenon such as domestic politics, industrial relations, communities, families and individuals (Ramsbotham, et al., 2011). The authors also affirm that conflict resolution relates to the deep-rooted sources of conflict are addressed and transformed. Which can be seen as the attitudes not being violent anymore and the structure of the conflict has been changed.

From the perspective of understanding that conflicts are caused by the clash of interests of two parties, the way this conflict will be handled after the acknowledgement of its existence is the negotiation method used to work on a solution for it.

Fisher & Ury (2011) , in the book *Getting to Yes*, presented an interest-based negotiation model that has been used as the base for modern negotiations, and it highlights some fundamental points, such as: to separate people from the problem, facilitate communication, work on how to overcome obstacles, use objective criteria, and focus on core concerns and interests. The authors stated in their book:

“The most powerful interests are basic human needs. In searching for the basic interests behind a declared position, look particularly for those bedrock concerns that motivate all people. If you can take care of such basic needs, you increase the chance both of reaching agreement and, if an agreement is reached, of the other side’s keeping to it. Basic human needs include: security economic well-being a sense of belonging recognition control over one’s life as fundamental as they are, basic human needs are easy to overlook. In many negotiations, we tend to think that the only interest involved is money. Yet even in a negotiation over a monetary figure, such as the amount of alimony to be specified in a separation agreement, much more can be involved.”

### **1.2.3 Workplace Conflicts**

After understanding what conflict is and how its impacts can be positive or negative depending on how the solution will be managed, we can bring this study to the workplace environment.

Brookins & Media (2002) state that

“Employee conflict in the workplace is a common occurrence, resulting from the differences in employees' personalities and values. Dealing with employee conflict in a timely manner is important to maintaining a healthy work environment. Believing that a



small conflict will simply disappear is an inaccurate assumption to make because simple conflicts can grow into major problems if not dealt with appropriately. Managers should understand the common causes of employee conflicts, so that a solution is found before the issues become unmanageable”.

In recent times, it is known that people can spend more time at work than in their homes. The most common routine is monday to friday, from 9 am to 6 pm, for example adding the commute time makes the workplace the second home of a lot of work around the world.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, people were working from home but they could not disconnect from their work. Many times, working overtime or not being able to separate their personal lives from the workplace conflicts.

Studies show that managers can spend from 25 to 40 per cent of their work time trying to deal with workplace conflicts (Ilgaz, 2014). This can affect the productivity of the manager, employees and the group as a unity. Scholars today work on the basis of six causes of workplace conflict presented by Bell (2002) and two additional ones added by Hart (2019).

The eight workplace conflict causes are:

- 1- Conflicting needs: The competition between workers for recognition, scarce resources and a bit of power in the company's pecking order.
- 2- Conflicting styles: The individuality of each person can interfere in the way they approach others and problems.
- 3- Conflicting perceptions: Which means that workers can have a different viewing of the same incident.
- 4- Conflicting goals: Workers can have different internal priorities. It can usually happen when associates have different tasks for the same goal.
- 5- Conflict Pressures: It can happen when associates or departments have different tasks with the same deadline.

- 6- Conflicting roles: It may happen when one member of the staff is assigned to perform a task that does not fit his or her expertise or when another employee is assigned to perform the same job.
- 7- Different personal values: It may happen when associates do not accept diversity in the workplace. It may lead to segregation, gossip and conflict.
- 8- Unpredictable policies: It may happen when there is an absence of clear policies or they are constantly changing. Staff should not have to guess what the company's rules are.

Conflict in the workplace, if not well managed, can create a series of damages to the employees, such as physical, emotional and mental well-being. Therefore, also damaging the goals of the company (Caudron, 1998).

When talking about Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) in the workplace Mahony & Klaas (2008) states that managers should evaluate how effective it can be in order to provide employees a voice and workplace justice. Important to notice that each case is unique and outcomes may always differ.

The use of ADR is getting popular because of its more-friendly approach to solving workplace conflicts. The methods are known as facilitation; when a third party usually familiar with the case tries to facilitate the communication, conciliation; it is an informal process made usually by messages with the help with a third party and mediation; when a neutral third-party act as a facilitator between the parties trying to create a communication channel and possibly reaching an agreement (Oni-Ojo, 2014).

It is noticeable that there are many improvements on how conflicts in the workplace are being taken care of after they have already happened or when they are happening. Although, the anticipation of conflicts could save time and money for companies and also have a positive impact in the employees' lives. Therefore, well-prepared managers should always consider their time and effort they are investing in conflict management (Oni-Ojo, 2014).

## **1.3 How companies can build trust among employees in order to avoid workplace conflicts**

### **1.3.1 Definition of teamwork**

In old English, the meaning of teamwork, according to the Oxford Dictionary (1966) was “work done with a team of beasts”. Only after the 19<sup>th</sup> century, we started to have what we today know as teamwork. In recent times, the Cambridge Dictionary (2021) defines teamwork as “the activity of working together in a group with other people, especially when this is successful”.

Our society and way of living make it almost impossible to work alone. In all aspects of our lives, we need help from someone else. We are co-dependent beings, and in the workplace environment that would not be different. It was presented before that conflict is also part of our society and it is constantly present in our daily routines, also if it is not well managed, it can cause great damage to companies.

The ability of a team to work together can be considered teamwork. Also, if they can have effective communication between them, to anticipate and meet each other's demand and to be able to have an environment of trust that can result in a coordinated collective action (Smelser & Baltes, 2001).

More than that, the idea of working as a team can lead to better results and performance. Individuals will try to improve their performance for their own benefit and also for the group. If the group works together, having the idea of unity there are big chances of having a small quantity of conflicts or if they happen there is a higher possibility of being able to control it more easily. An environment with more harmony and productivity among the team can be seen in groups with higher levels of mutual trust (Vaziri, et al., 1988).

Collective-oriented individuals perform better than individually-oriented professionals because the ones working as a group tend to take advantage of the benefits that only teamwork can provide. They have the capacity of taking other team members' feelings and attitudes into account and believe that the team in general works better than the individuals (Baker & Salas, 1992).

The integration of resources and inputs working in harmony to achieve an organisational goal, having prescribed roles for every organisation member, and also when challenges are equally faced can be considered teamwork (Fajano, 2002).

Employees are individuals that when working for an organisation become part of a team. Jackson (1992) considers some different kinds of work units in an organisation, such as Functional team; this team is made of employees from the same section having the manager as the main sole having the junior staff reporting to him. Cross-functional team; workers from different areas and expertise come together often to make decisions without the need of a manager. Usually, they are from the same hierarchy. Leadership teams; where the top managers make all the decisions. Self-directed teams; the work happens without the need of a manager's presence.

The construction of a team does not happen occasionally, most of all it is needed that individuals feel safe and trust their team workers and company. Trust can lead to successful negotiations, conflict management and positive relationships between employees and employers (Spielberger, 2004).

Even though the idea of a team is brilliant, it is still made of individual people and conflicts may happen no matter what. Nonetheless, if those people understand that they are a part of a group and they must get to a solution without compromising the rest of the group and project, they will more easily accept an alternative form of dispute resolution, such as mediation, without having the problem escalated (Brett & Goldberg, 2017).

For a good team to be built more than having goals, the individuals need to believe in the company they are working for. The organisation needs to be able to create an environment of personal realisations in order for the group to want to work as a team.

### 1.3.2 Maslow's theory – Hierarchy of needs

The hierarchy of needs theory was created by Abraham Maslow, a psychologist from the United States of America, and this theory presents an explanation for human motivation. Maslow believed that people have a number of basic needs that need to be satisfied before moving up to another level of satisfaction in order to pursue more emotional, social and self-actualizing needs (Cherry, 2020).

The hierarchy of needs is represented in the following way:



Image 1: Maslow's hierarchy pyramid of needs (McLeod, 2020)

This five-stage model is divided in two parts: deficiency, related to the first four levels, and growth needs, related to the top level. The deficiency needs may happen when there is a deprivation and they can motivate people when they are unmet. The desire to fulfil those needs

can become stronger with time. For example, the longer someone is prevented from sleeping, the more tired this person will be (McLeod, 2018).

On the other hand, the growth needs come from a desire to grow as a person and not the lack of something. When those needs have been satisfied in any way, the person is able to proceed and reach the highest level, the self-actualization.

The pyramid is originally divided into five levels (Maslow, 1954). From the bottom to the top, they are:

- Physiological needs: It refers to the biological needs we depend on for our survival and without them our body will stop working. That is considered the most important need in the hierarchy. E.g: Shelter, clothing, water, food and sleep.
- Safety needs: It represents our need to feel safe. It includes different aspects of our lives, such as: security of employment, of our bodies, of stability, also order and law and freedom from fear.
- Love and belongingness: The third level represents the human need for belonging. It is our need to be part of a group, either a professional one and a group of friends and family. It is involved by the need for trust and acceptance.
- Esteem: Maslow divided this level in two categories, esteem for oneself that relates to personal achievements and independence and the other one is the desire for reputation, having respect from others, it can be related to prestige.
- Self-actualization needs: The highest level in the pyramid and it is related to our biggest potential of self-fulfilment. Personal and professional growth (MASLOW, 1970).

Although, it is noticeable that self-actualization is an ongoing process of becoming rather than a state of perfect happiness. (Hoffman, 1988) Maslow believed that everyone can and has the desire of moving up to higher levels, especially self-actualization. Although, the progress can

be often interrupted by the failure of meeting the lower levels. Examples such as divorce or professional dissatisfaction may stop the progress of an individual (McLeod, 2018).

In the workplace scenario, many managers base their opinions and decisions on what employees need to be inspired by Maslow's theory. As this employee advances in his or her position in the company, the employer tends to provide opportunities to satisfy the higher needs of the pyramid (Gawel, 1996).

Therefore, it is possible to notice why Maslow's theory has been used in the business world and why it is considered so important. Most of all, companies need the human force and this element needs motivation. Understanding people's needs can improve the way managers deal with different kinds of workplace conflicts. Employers that want to understand how to motivate their staff need to know what energizes human behaviour (Organ & Hamner, 1978).

The motivation can be unique in different fields and jobs scenarios. A salesperson can be motivated by money only and a customer service professional may prefer recognition (Morgan, 2020). Although the job motivations can be different, in order to avoid workplace conflicts, the basic human needs can always be seen as a relevant piece of information and a start point in how to deal with workplace conflicts.

### **1.3.3 Job involvement and how it can impact attitudes towards workplace conflict**

We acknowledge that people can spend more time of their week, for example, at work than spending at home. All this time consuming can impact an individual's lives in many ways and also reflect how they will act toward workplace conflicts. The state of psychological identification with work can be defined as job involvement. People can feel stimulated or drawn

in a deeply their work (Brown, 1996). The quality of life of someone can be strongly impacted by how involved in or alienated from work this person might be feeling (Levinson, 1976).

Companies need to consider job involvement of their employees as a primary determinant of organizational effectiveness and its outcomes, such as the role of conflict (Clinebell & Shadwick, 2005). Job involvement can also be defined as how an individual can feel identified with his or her job and also as a psychological self-investment in the work. Which can be understood as the need to find self-expression at work (Lodahl & Kejnar, 1965). There is a tendency of employees when they feel that they are not being treated well to enforce negative attitudes towards the employer and co-workers (Akinbobola, 2011).

It is noticeable that for a company to function effectively, it is relevant that employees more than to perform their prescribed role; they have to engage in attitudes that go further than their formal obligations. Individuals that are involved emotionally in their jobs and consider it an important aspect of their lives tend to spend some extra effort on reaching the company's goals and creating a better social environment (Katz & Kahn, 1978).

In a market-type organization, such as retail companies, rewards tend to be effective on performance and also situational factors. This actively demonstrates that employees are likely to perceive the connection between job involvement and how he or she is being rewarded by the company (Ouchi, 1980). Therefore, employees will create a closer relation to the company he or she is working for, starting from the point that rewards are being provided. Those rewards can come from different sources; e.g., recognition for good work among the team, financial reward, gifts, job security and safety etc.

Research shows that employees with a high level of involvement in their jobs tend to find solutions to their conflicts, when possible, and therefore minimise the use of official forms of



dispute resolution (Colvin, 2004). The time devoted by managers to trying to find solutions for disagreements among the team could be better used in a productive way if employees were more emotionally involved in their jobs (Colvin, 2004). Which means that it is impossible to have a zero-conflict work scenario. Conflicts in the workplace will happen sometimes, and the key point is to know how to create tools to minimise them. The creation of a job involvement atmosphere can result in having those conflicts being managed in a more friendly way.

There is also a negative side of job involvement. Researches have shown that in some cases, the level of job involvement was higher than needed. When situations of one not being able to detach from work, it affects the individual personal life, causing a work-family conflict (Higgins, et al., 1992). Leading to stress, anxiety and unhealthy attitudes. Personal and professional lives may walk very closely together. One may affect the other, either in a positive or negative way. Putting this fact in a workplace conflict resolution scenario, it is important that the employer, overall, be kin to the fact that employees have human needs and the balance between life into and outside work matters. Greenhaus, Collins and Shaw (2002) reflect those individuals that are able to invest psychological involvement in their balanced lives, professional and personal, tend to express more positive attitudes at work. The opposite might happen to individuals that cannot create a healthy balance, therefore expressing much more negative attitudes in the workplace.

## **Chapter 2 – Research Methodology and Methods**

This chapter aims to demonstrate how the research intends to be carried out. The options of studies available and the choices that were chosen to better support the aims and objectives. The research method will help to add occurrence and objectivity to the proposal.

According to Saunders (2007), methodology can be understood as a term to define the theory approach the researcher will use and the term methods refers to the procedures that need to be followed to analyse the data that provided to the research information.

Kothari (1990) states that research methods can be understood as the techniques that will be used to conduct the study and the methodology can be considered the systematic way to solve the research questions.

### **2.1 – Research philosophies**

The research philosophy that will be adopted is based chiefly on how the researcher sees the world. Practical procedures will influence the philosophy and the assumptions that will be made will define the methods used to support the best strategy for the study (Saunders, et al., 2007).

It is understood that interpretivism integrates human interest into a study. Researches that follow an interpretative methodology assume that access reality can be made through social constructions such as language, consciousness, shared meanings, and instruments (Myers, 2008).

Saunders (2007) analysed that interpretivism is a philosophy that states that in order to understand distinctions amongst people in our position as social actors, the research should focus on taking an empathic perspective.

When we consider human's needs and reality, we have to fathom that this is a process of constant change. The reality to an individual cannot be regarded as the same to everyone.

Therefore, affirmations based on human's needs will vary according to particular circumstances. This research will focus on trying to understand the link between the human need for psychological and physiological fulfillment based on the workplace scenario in order to connect internal marketing actions to the minimization of workplace conflicts.

## **2.2 Research Approach**

This research will follow an inductive approach with data gathered from literature review and primary research. The inductive approach is used to propose new theories differing from the deductive approach that is considered to be used when testing a theory (Walliman, 2006).

Bernard (2011) said that research-based on deductive approach “involves the search for pattern from observation and the development of explanations – theories – for those patterns through series of hypotheses”. Therefore, the hypotheses brought to this study based on the literature review and the research aims to develop theories related to the subject of this dissertation.

“Research using an inductive approach is likely to be particularly concerned with the context in which such events were taking place. Therefore, the study of a small sample of subjects might be more appropriate than a large number as with the deductive approach” (Saunders, et al., 2007).

## **2.3 Research strategy**

There is an extensive variety of strategy options available to work on during research. The survey is considered one of the most popular ones and is most commonly used for descriptive and explanatory research (Saunders, et al., 2007).

Saunders also states that “surveys are popular as they allow the collection of a large amount of data from a sizable population in a highly economical way.” The questionnaire is often used and it is directed to a sample of the population of the research. The data acquired from the questionnaires can be standardised and used for comparison.

Therefore, this work adopted survey as the strategy as the main outcome is to be able to comprehend the opinion of the majority of the population in order to create an analyse of patterns compared to the literature review and further development of conclusions.

## **2.4 Research Choice**

The academic world presents us with several choices to work on research. Mono-method is the one that gathers information using only one type of methodology, either qualitative or quantitative (Saunders, et al., 2007).

There is also available to researchers the option of using mix-methods for a study and it is based on the use of qualitative and quantitative research combined (Bryman, 2006).

“Quantitative research involves the process of objectively collecting and analysing numerical data to describe, predict, or control variables of interest.” (McLeod, 2019).

This work will use mono-method and quantitative questionnaires, using closed questions. The quantitative strategy will allow us to acquire information in order to find patterns, predictions and cause-effect based on the behaviours that are being studied. The qualitative research was not chosen due to the limited time to collect data from the questionnaires as a considerable number of the population would not be willing to spend an extended time developing their answers.

## **2.5 Time-horizon**

The cross-sectional research applies to a study made based on data and population of a specific period. This type of study is considered observational, not relational or casual.

This dissertation will be based on a cross-sectional time horizon as the study will be carried during a short period of time. The longitudinal could not be considered for this study as it applies to the collection of data during an extended period of time.

## **2.6 Research Limitations**

My research will be based on non-probability methodology; therefore, it cannot be used for generalization purposes. It is essential to highlight that the population will have a limited number of respondents for the questionnaire. The self-selected population might not reflect the views of the whole population of customer-service workers worldwide.

Some factors, such as culture, gender and age, can interfere on the perspective each individual will have on the points studied.

Also, this study will provide a subjective result and they might not reflect the understanding of a wider group belonging to the research population.

Furthermore, the limited time may also influence the estimation of data analysis and literature.

## **2.7 Ethical Considerations**

This research will have as the base of its primary research individuals that are currently employed and might be worried about putting their job positions; and future relocation of in a different company at risk with the information provided. Therefore, this dissertation will be ethically based on the confidentiality and total anonymity of the respondents. Any information provided by them will be kept private and safe.

### **Chapter 3 – Presentation of data**

As stated in the previous chapter, the study that supports the investigation and collection of data of the primary research of this dissertation was conducted using the survey as the principal strategy. Google forms was used as an online tool to reach the research population and gather the data needed. This was a convenient and trustable choice as the online platform helps researchers create questionnaires and evaluate the data. The link of the survey was shared through social media platforms to the research population specifically. The study took place from 13<sup>th</sup> September 2021 to 11<sup>th</sup> September 2021.

Sixteen questions formed the questionnaire that was shared with the research population that is defined as customer-service professionals focused on retail or hospitality. Each question was evaluated by the supervisor of this dissertation, which aims to answer the main question of this study. A brief introduction of the research objectives was given to the participants. It was also provided to them information about ethical concerns, data protection and how to contact the ones involved in this research, such as the conductor of the research (Juliana de Oliveira), supervisor (Nadia Bhatti) and Independent Colleges Dublin.

Appendix A includes the survey introduction and Appendix B the complete survey questions.

The results of the survey are the following:

### 3.1 Data from question number one

Do You work in retail?

54 responses

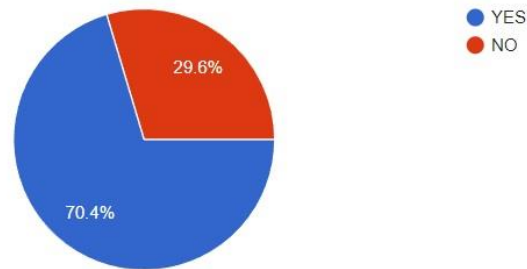


Image 2: Graphic of question 1

Regarding the respondent's segmentation in customer-service professional positions 70.4% declared to work in retail and 29.6% do not entitled themselves as retail professionals specifically.

### 3.2 Data from question number two

Do you work in customer-facing role? E.g: Customer Service

54 responses

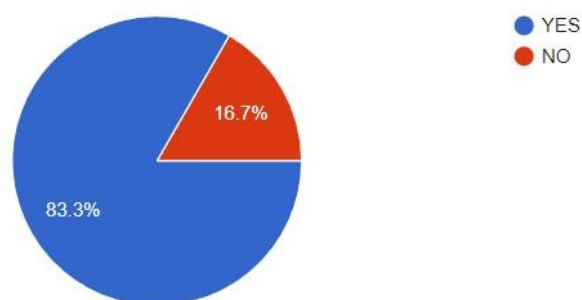


Image 3: Graphic of question 2

Question two provide us the information that 83.3% of the respondents include themselves as being on customer-facing role professional current positions and 16.7% do not included themselves in the same category.

### 3.3 Data from question number three

How many years of experience do you have in a customer-facing role?

52 responses

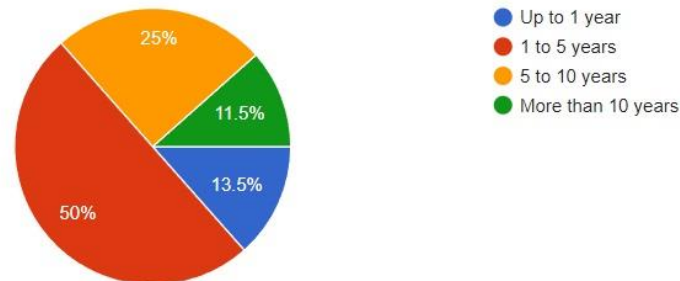


Image 4: Graphic of question three

Question number three brought to us a wider perspective regarding the time the respondents have been working with customer-service. 50% of the research's participants declared to be on their professional position from one to five years. 25% declared have been working for five to ten years. 13.5% declared they have been enrolled professionally up to one year and 11.5% more than ten years.

### 3.4 Data from question number four

In your opinion, is your employer concerned about the customer's experience with the company?

54 responses

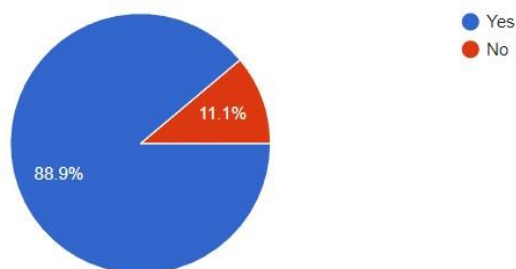


Image 5: Graphic from question number four

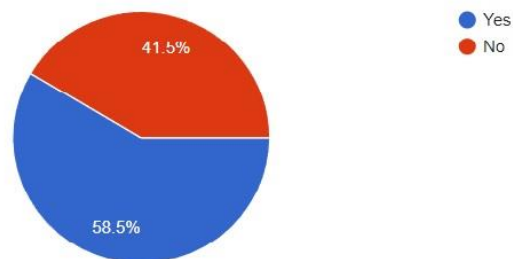


In question number four, 88.9% of the respondents confirmed that their employer is concerned about the customer's experience within the company they work for. Only 11.1% declared that they do not have this perspective from their employer.

### 3.5 Data from question number five

In your view, does your employer work to satisfy the customer, even if the customer is wrong e.g. even if a complaint is not merited, does your employer tend to agree with the customer?  
Does your employer work to satisfy the customer in any case?

53 responses



**Image 6: Graphic from question number five**

In question number five, 58.5% of the respondents declared that they agree that their employer work on to satisfy the customer even if he or she is not in a position to complain about something. 41.5% opposed to that idea and declared do not believe that their employer would accept a customer's complaint in those specific conditions.

### 3.6 Data from question number six

Does your employer regularly engage in marketing actions/strategies in order to promote customer satisfaction?

54 responses

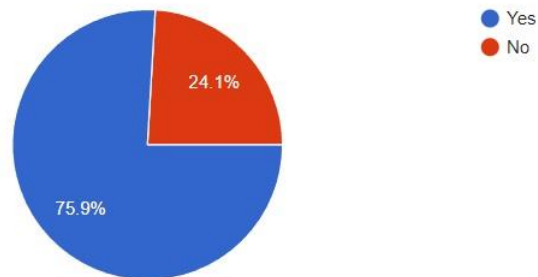


Image 7: Graphic from question number six

In the seventh question, 75.9% of the respondents acknowledge that the company they work for, works in order to promote customer satisfaction. Opposing to that, only 24% declared that their employer does not invest in the same kind of actions.

### 3.7 Data from question number seven

Does your employer regularly engage in marketing campaigns that provide benefits and/or gifts with clients E.g: free gifts, discounts, promotions, exclusive events?

54 responses

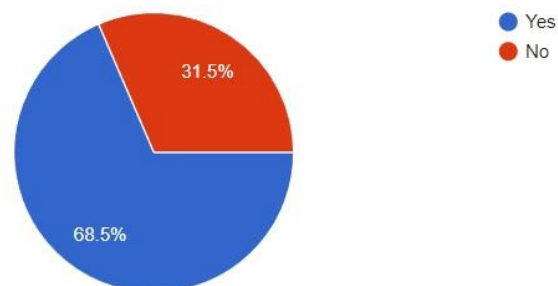


Image 8: Graphic from question number seven

In question number seven, 68.5% of the respondents stated that their employer use as a regular strategy marketing campaigns that provides special offer to customers, such as: free gifts, discounts etc. Otherwise, 31.5% of our group of participants declared that their employers do not invest in that kind of actions.

### 3.8 Data from question number eight

Considering the marketing campaigns from the last question. Does your company do similar ones focused on the staff ?

54 responses

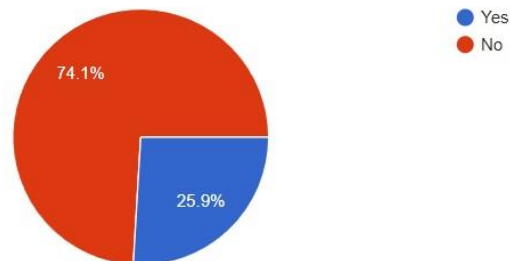


Image nine: Graphic from question eight

Question number eight illustrates that 74.1% of the respondents do not believe their employers work on the creation of marketing campaigns promoted to the staff as a public. In the other hand, 25.9% of the respondents declared to agree and have the perception that their employers do create marketing campaigns focused on the staff as a public.

### 3.8 Data from question number eight

### 3.9 Data from question number nine

Does your employer consistently remind staff that the customer is the priority and must to be satisfied, no matter what?

54 responses

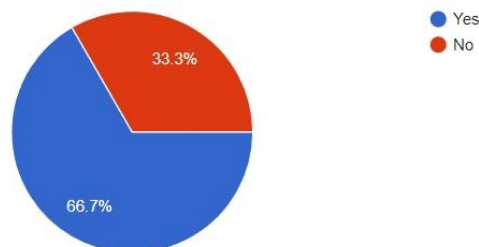


Image ten: Graphic from question number nine

Following the search for a wider perception of the line that divides customer and staff, question number nine illustrates that 66.7% of the respondents agree that their employer prioritizes the customer's satisfaction no matter what. We had 33.3% of objection to this statement.

### 3.10 Data from question ten

Do you feel that your employer does not treat staff with the same respect they treat customers?

54 responses

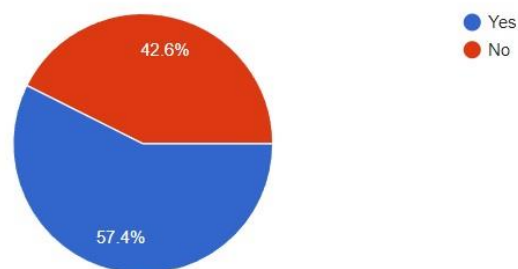


Image eleven: Graphic from question number ten

In question number ten, 57.4% of the respondents understand that their employer does not express an equal level of respect comparing clients and staff. Although, 42.6% of the respondents oppose to this point of view.

### 3.11 Data from question eleven

Would you like to be seen as a valued part of your company in the same way the customer is ?

54 responses

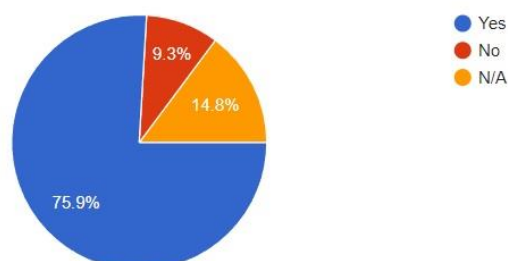


Image twelve: Graphic from question eleven

This question presented us with a high statistic that 75.9% of the respondents declared that they would like to be seen valued part of the company, having the same level of importance they believe the customers have. Completing those answers, 14.8% declared not applicable, which means they do not consider that statement as something they think during their daily work routine and 9.3% declared do not want to have the same importance as the customer have to their employer.

### 3.12 Data from question twelve

Would you like to be taught about special occasions ( e.g: Your birthday, Christmas, Women's day (when applicable) etc ) by your employer such as the clients are?

54 responses

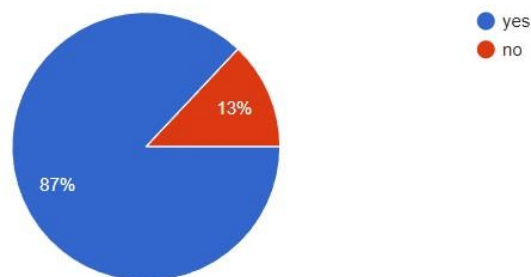


Image thirteen: Graphic from question twelve

In question number twelve, 87% of the respondents declared that they would like to be thought about in special occasions, such as: birthdays and special dates in general. Only 13% of the respondents declared they would like to be remembered on those same dates.

### 3.13 Data from question thirteen

In your view, have conflicts arisen in your workplace because of a failure on the part of your employer to treat employees as well as customers are treated?

53 responses

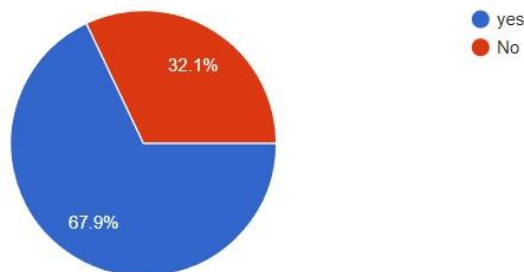


Image fourteen: Graphic from question thirteen

Starting the understand of workplace conflicts directly, 67.9% of the respondents declared that they believe conflicts have arisen for the staff do not feel considered to have the same level of importance the customers have. Opposing this idea, 32.1% declared do not agree with this statement.

### 3.14 Data from question fourteen

Are you dissatisfied with your employer and are you considering changing your job based on the difference between how employees and customers are treated in the company?

54 responses

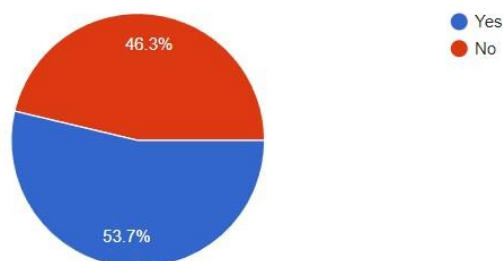


Image fifteen: Graphic from question fourteen

In question number fourteen, 53.7% of the respondents stated they consider the possibility of changing jobs based on the level of difference the customer is treated comparing to the staff team they are part of. However, 46.3% declared they do not consider to make the same change based on the statement of the respective question.

### 3.15 Data from question fifteen

If you work in a physical shop, in your view, are customers provided with a higher standard of facilities e.g. o customers better bathrooms, seats, ventilation etc., compared to the areas reserved for staff use only?

53 responses

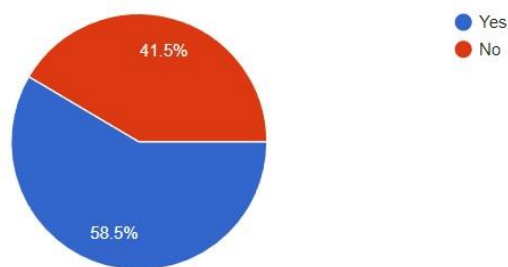


Image sixteen: Graphic from question fifteen

Considering physical shops, 58.5% of the respondents declared that in their perspective there is a considerable difference between the facilities provided to customers, such as toilets, comparing to the ones provided to the employees. We had 41.5% of the respondents declaring they do not agree and that in their work space there is no difference.

### 3.16 Data from question sixteen

Do you think that if employees were generally treated better by your employer that there would be a higher quality of service provided to customers by employees of the company?

54 responses

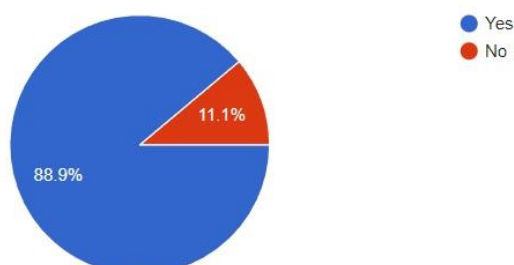


Image seventeen: Graphic from question sixteen

Our last question of the survey, illustrated to us that 88.9% of the respondents agree that if there was a better balance on the way the employers treat their employees, the final customer would receive a higher quality on the way the services are provided to them. Still, 11.1% of the respondents do not agree with the statement of the question and do not think the quality of the service provided could be better if their employer had different actions within the employees.



## **Chapter 4 – Data analysis and findings**

This chapter will summarize the data presented in the previous chapter and create the specifics relations to the literature review. Each question will be analysed individually.

### **4.1 Analysis of the survey**

This survey was directed to 54 customer-service professionals. The market of customer service can have a considerable difference in the perception of values offered to the employees according to its segment. It is understood that some professional fields might be considered more important than others. We can exemplify this comparison by mentioning the idea of the value some organizations would invest in a lawyer that represents their business to clients, to retail professionals that are also representing the company they work for.

This dissertation focused on retail and hospitality professionals as there is the widespread belief that they represent a lower category of workers. At the same time retail companies have high expectations of how their employees will represent their interests to clients. The first question presented that 70.4% of the respondents declared to work in retail, which is a significant amount and it will give a more solid view of the answers that will follow.

The next question specifically determined that a higher number were made of customer-service facing roles workers when 83.3% made this affirmation. In order to understand better the time of experience the respondents have been working in retail, the third question evaluated how many years of experience are in their positions, and the answers are the following: 50% declared to be working in retail from one to five years; 25% from five to ten years; 13.5% up to one year and 11.5% more than ten years. This answer brought to our research a considerable variety in years of experience working in retail, which can also bring us to a better understanding of the perception in the relation of workplace conflicts and how the employees feel valued or not by their employers.

The answers in question four showed that 88.9% of the respondents do believe that their employer is concerned about the customer's experience, opposing to only 11.1% that do not have the same perception. That is an interesting result as it starts to show us that in the point of view of the majority, having the customer's validation of the service offered is a daily routine in their professional lives and expectations.

The fifth question intended to go deeper into the previous understanding and looked to determine if the employees considered that their employers would stand by the customer's side no matter what, even if the customer is wrong. We had 58.5% confirming this perception. This attitude tends to happen a lot. Some companies in order to avoid losing a customer in the future accept some requests that technically should not be made. This attitude can be stressful for some employees; sometimes, as they tend to follow the rules established by the companies, but if a customer complains to higher levels, such as a manager, exceptions need to be made.

Looking to narrow our perspective of understanding of the action taken by the companies to engage with their customers in a business vision, in question number six we can see that 75.9% of the respondents agree that their employers are in a constant process of engaging marketing actions in order to promote customer satisfaction. As we previously analysed in the first chapter, marketing fosters the creation of value from the companies to their customers. It was also understood that marketing activities searchers the facilitation of exchanges of promises between firms and consumers. The majority of answers confirms that there is this internal knowledge by companies to create marketing campaigns as they are investing on it constantly. Although, we still had 24,1% of respondents that do not see the same style of actions being taken in their workplaces.

In order to give us a better insight of what kind of marketing campaigns the respondents could be thinking about it, the following question directly asked if it was the use of benefits and gifts to the customers the actions made, such as: free gifts, discounts, promotions and exclusive

events. We had 68.5% confirming it and 31.5% denying it. The results differ a bit from the previous questions, which can lead us that the idea of marketing can differ and not everyone sees it as only the benefits mentioned in the respective question.

We will start to improve our understanding of the comparison of the view on how staff; in general, feel or not feel appreciated by their employees in question eight, where 74.1% declared that they think their employers do similar campaigns to the team and 25.9% do not think those kinds of actions are made.

Although, in question nine, we had the confirmation that no matter what happens, the customer is the priority and must be satisfied. We had 66.7% of respondents confirming their position about this statement and 33.3% do not agree with it. Therefore, having the customer as the one always entitled as the right one does not happen in all the scenarios.

When questioning the respondents if they feel that their employer does not treat the team with the same respect demonstrated to clients, 57.4% agree with the statement and 42.6% do not think that is their workplace reality. It is important to notice that the meaning of what is respect can differ from person to person, depending on their gender, culture etc. According to the Cambridge Dictionary (2021) respect can be defined as: “polite behaviour to someone, especially because the person is older or more important than you”. Therefore, for the purpose of this work we will see respect as the understanding that someone can be more important or as important as you.

In question eleven, 75.9% of the respondents affirm that they would like to be seen as a valued part of the company they work for the same way the customer is. We had 14.8% declaring they do not consider it as something important for them and 9.3% declared they do not want to be seen as the same value as the customer. It is interesting to see the fact that more than half of the respondents seek for some kind of recognition and to be seen as someone that adds value

to the place they work for. As we saw in the previous chapter, esteem is on the higher levels of the Maslow's theory of basic human needs. Therefore, something to be considered important. Also, completing the idea of recognition the following question went to the specific point of being thought about on special occasions, such as birthdays, Christmas etc. It was proposed in this question the understating of being remembered would be considered important to the respondents and we had 87% confirming it. A higher number of respondents would like to be considered and thought about on determinants occasions, such as the clients are. We had only 13% disagreeing with it.

Question number thirteen asked if, in their view, conflicts have arisen in their workplace because the staff was not being treated as well as the customers. We had 67.9% confirming the statement and believing that there are real workplace conflicts happening due to the subject proposed in this study. The results also showed that 32.1% of the respondents do not believe situations of having conflicts arising due to the different relevance staff and customers would have to the company happen in their workplace environment.

Directedly questioning if the respondents are dissatisfied with their employer and are currently considering changing jobs based on the difference on how employees and customers are treated, we had 53.7% confirming and 46.3% opposing to this idea. We can see that it is a balanced number, but the majority is declaring that changing job is a real possibility based only in the personal dissatisfaction caused by the no fulfilment of their needs of recognition.

In order to still compare in more specific and objective matters the perception of the difference of treatment given to employees and customers, question number fifteen debated if working in a physical shop, there is a stabilised difference between the standard of facilities provided to customers, such as: bathrooms, seats, ventilation etc, compared to the same kind of facilities provided to employees. We had 58.5% of the respondents confirming this perception and 41.5% did not agree with it.

More than emotional needs that is a touchable difference that can generate the idea that a group of individuals is better than others. Therefore, customers would deserve a better bathroom because they are a better level of human beings than the employees.

This idea can motivate workplace conflicts of different levels, but when comparing to the literature review of workplace conflicts associated the Maslow`s theory, we can see that there is a tendency of dissatisfaction from an individual to the company he or she works for. It can generate personal questioning if that is or not a good place to work and if the effort made to be there is worth or not.

The last question of our survey, asked if they think that if employees were generally treated better by their employer that there would be a higher quality of service provided to customers by employees. We had 88.9% of the respondents agreeing with it and 11.1% that do not agree with the statement. This was a significant result of our study, as we were since the beginning trying to correlate how the company`s attitude towards the staff and clients can impact the way the staff will see themselves and how they will perform.

## **Chapter 5 – Discussion**

This chapter aims to analyse in a critical way the four previous chapters and demonstrate the relation between the theories behind the literature review and the survey applied to this dissertation.

### **5.1 Discussion**

The main discussion of this dissertation is to generate a new strategy in order to avoid workplace conflicts. As we could see before, conflicts, in general, will always be part of human relationships. Two individuals with different perspectives of a specific subject can influence others in the group and create a division between the team.

The acceptance that conflicts are inevitable will help an organisation to be prepared for them and, therefore, be able to minimise its impacts and when possible, make it become something that can create a positive outcome to the company. As mentioned in the literature review, authors like Coser (1957) and Robins (2005) believe in the positive impact conflicts can bring to the workplace. Those beliefs come from the idea that the clash of points-of-view can generate a new one, mixing the best of each of both sides.

In fairness, that sounds more like an ideal than a reality. In daily routines, it is not easy to find teams with good communication skills that will provide them capacity of having active listening to the other's ideas and at the same time communicating their own beliefs in a productive way.

Thus, the workplace environment tends to provide a feeling of competition between the team. Some are looking for promotions, others for recognition of their work, others for simply personal improvements etc. Therefore, the idea of having conflicts as something positive should not be taken as a priority. We also could see previously; in reality, managers use about 40 per cent of their time dealing with conflicts. That takes a lot of their productivity and wasting

time is wasting money. The term waste was used because if workplace conflicts are taken seriously by organizations, employees will have more time to be effectively productive. The best way of doing it is acknowledging that employees are made of people with needs and not be expected that they are like machines. When coming to work, people cannot always just turn off their emotions and ideas. Of course, we expect people to be professional in the workplace and do their jobs, that is the priority. What we cannot underestimate is that sometimes personal and professional lives can get mixed.

This study also wants to propose the debate that an individual can always find a new job, but companies can lose their reputation if an employee does not represent them in the way it is expected from them to do it. That is why the population of our survey was professionals working with retail and hospitality.

Those professionals are directly dealing with the customers of an organization. They are the face and soul of a company. More than trying to sell a product or a service, they are selling the experience of buying in that specific shop. They are representing the mission and values of the organization.

Although those professionals have such important tasks, they still are an underestimated category of workers. Usually, taken for granted and also considered as easily replaceable. When talking about workplace conflicts, this category of workers tends to lose a lot when it happens. Most of all, the company can lose good staff and also good customers.

In our survey, it was noticed that the smaller percentage of respondents work with retail for more than 10 years. One of the causes brought to discussion is what motivates people to leave their career in the area. Most of all workplace conflicts; in many levels, can create the desire to change careers. This study objective aims to correlate the use of internal marketing as a tool to minimise dissatisfactions that improve conflicts.

It was analysed that a higher percentage of the respondents of the survey agree that their employer is extremely concerned about the customer's experience; in their shop, and also that they work to satisfy the customer no matter what.

It is important to notice that this is not being considered a wrong strategy. The point being questioned is if the employees would feel appreciated as well, at a point that would impact their performance.

In order to have this response, the results of our survey showed that 88.9% of the respondents think that if employees were generally treated better by their employers, there is a strong possibility of having a higher quality of services being provided to customers. We can understand by those affirmations that a slight demonstration of recognition can motivate individuals to perform better. Also, individuals that are pleased with their job tend to want to have a good workplace environment. Therefore, providing a scenario that can provide better solutions when dealing with workplace conflicts.

We had 68.9% of our respondents declaring that, in their view, workplace conflicts have arisen due to a failure on the part of their employer in treating employees as well as they do with customers. Based on that, we can see that the object of our study is; in fact, impacting the quality of work of the majority. It is important to notice that when an organization invests on the experience their customers have, this is a marketing strategy. It is all linked on the way the customer will perceive the idea of purchasing something in a determined shop.

It was also noticed that 68.5% of the respondents agree that their employers engage in direct campaigns that provide benefits to the customers, such as gifts. So, there is a combination of actions that searches for the stimulation of some kind of loyalty to be created between the company and customers. This loyalty is being created through marketing campaigns, as we could see before.



Although, the point we want to focus on is if those same styles of actions were made to retailers, workers that are every day on the shop floor representing their employer, we could have fewer workplace conflicts and constant dissatisfaction that stimulates the desire of changing jobs?

We had 53.7% of our respondents affirming they would and consider changing jobs based on the difference in how employees and customers are treated by their employer. Also, 58.5% affirm that, when working in a physical shop, there is a higher standard of facilities, such as bathrooms, provided to customers compared to the ones provided to employees. This reflects a visual division in how two kinds of groups of people are considered that they deserve to be treated by the same common provider.

The Maslow's theory showed us that physiological needs are the most important for every human being. So, considering an employee working everyday in the same place having a bathroom, as used as an example before, in poor conditions and knowing a customer that only goes there sometimes have a better one is a good reflection on how small personal dissatisfaction can start and create bigger ones.

Those minor individual problems can start to motivate colleagues to constant disagree with each other, also disagreements with their superiors and internal conflicts that will create the intention of not wanting to work at that place anymore. We had 75% of our respondents declaring they would like to be seen as a valued part of their company the same way the customer is. That shows that a higher percentage actually have the perception of how those two groups are treated. This perception can easily light up the start of the conflicts mentioned previously.

In chapter one, when analysing job involvement, we saw that Colvin (2004) mentions that researchers got to the conclusion that employees with a high level of job involvement are more likely to find themselves solutions for their workplace conflicts, no matter what was causing it. However, it is important to emphasize that this work is not promoting that employees will

always find a solution for their conflicts, in all situations, with investment in internal marketing. What is being proposed is that conflicts can be perceived in a less damaging way if the employees; in general, are involved emotionally in their jobs.

The literature review and the survey could exemplify that there is a real connection between recognition, self-realisation and the arising of conflicts. Small dilemmas can become real and constant problems in daily work routines, if the employees are not emotionally connected to their jobs. The idea of using internal marketing as a strategy to minimise workplace conflicts comes from the basis that every individual wants to feel special in some way.

Companies work to make customers feel unique and somehow important. Employees that are working at that place; everyday, giving their best want the same in order to have an internal fulfilment of self-realisation.

Having said that, we can get to the knowledge that the survey brought us a wider perspective on the objectives to be understood in this dissertation. The general overview was that the majority of the respondents were aware of the marketing strategies used by their employers to their customers. Although, they also have the perception that similar strategies are not created to them as an internal public. The lack of internal marketing actions; to the staff, as a public possibly can influence the discouragement of an individual in investing his or her time on working to have a good performance. Also, a discouragement in maintaining good relations with other members of the team, either colleagues in the same position or managers.

## **Conclusion**

This dissertation aimed to bring a deeper understanding if the investment of a retailer company in internal marketing would help to support the minimisation of workplace conflicts. Firstly, the literature review helped us to understand more broadly all the aspects that can be involved in marketing actions, workplace conflicts and human behaviour.

When we analysed the fundamentals of marketing, it was noticed that the meaning of what marketing actually is can vary from different author's perspectives. From time to time, responsible organization that would leader the marketing world need to adapt its meaning, according to the reality of that time. Most of all, we can accept that the main focus a marketing department would have is to work on adding value of its product, service, company etc to the customer.

This particular value will be measured by how customers will perceive that company. The perception will be made by the loyalty of a group of customers on always purchasing in a determined shop, buying specific brands or looking for the services of the same provider. In order to gain this loyalty, companies invest in marketing actions. There are no rules in order to know what strategies must be used. All the actions will be determined after studies of what the target public needs related to what the companies want from them.

When comes to internal marketing; that is related to our objective of study, we must see employees as also a public that needs to believe in the values of their company. It is relevant to the company that their team is prepared to advocate on their behalf. People usually advocates for things they believe on and that would not be different referring to their jobs.

In the second place, after going trough those specifics understanding of marketing, we had the chance to get into a deeper studying of what motivates some common human behaviours. We all have factors that are known as human necessities. Those psychological determinants were

brought to this study on the understanding of Abraham Maslow; a psychologist from United States, that presented his human hierarchy of needs. In our study, we used this theory on the search of the meaning of relation between personal necessities and behaviours that can lead to workplace conflicts.

Human beings; in general, still act by instinct following their inner needs. Therefore, on the base of Maslow's pyramid we could see that needs such as: water, food and clothing are the most important to all of us. Although, in our modern society it is impossible to access those items without being financially capable to afford them. The only way to do it is working.

Employment comes on the second level of the pyramid defined as safety needs. So, when someone starts working, it is considered that this individual will be financial capable of sustaining his or her basic human needs.

Our study aimed to show that those needs go further than that. Once an individual gets a job, the future actions will show if he or she will stay in that job or search for changes. In our workplace conflict resolution scenario, we understand that dissatisfactions in the workplace; in most cases, are likely to generate some kind of conflicts.

It would be easy if the human basic needs could be fulfilled only with the first and second levels of the hierarchy. We live in a society of interactions. We all as a group of beings that cohabit in the same spaces, we need to follow rules. Although, we have our own needs that go up to the higher levels of the pyramid.

Therefore, each individual having their own desires, sharing the same physical space and of recognition in the workplace tend to have constant clash of ideas. It was previously showed that personal dissatisfactions can create situations where conflicts will be inevitable. It can affect the daily routines for some considerable members of the team, make the team be less productive, make management spend their efforts in solutions and also motivate individuals to search for new positions.

The proposal of analysing if internal marketing would help to minimise workplace conflicts, comes from the curiosity of how people react to recognition. More than that, how people can have different behaviours if they feel their needs are not being fulfilled but they need to work to make others have the recognition they believe they are not having.

Internal marketing are strategies that helps employees to feel they are remembered by the company they work for. Those actions work to motivate and generate a spirit of unity among the team. Thus, it also gives some kind of belonging and safety with the subtle message from the organization; as a reminder, saying we see you individually and appreciate your work. It also helps to motivate the employees in advocating on behalf of the company, as an advertising. After connecting the aspects of knowledge from Maslow's studies and the theoretical proposal of what internal marketing is, we could make the relation with the minimization of working place conflicts. In general, people will mix their personal and professional lives. The inner desires can; most times, influence the behaviours and actions of individuals.

On the account, we can state that those human comportments; when strategically recognized by the company, can be used on the prevention of workplace conflicts. The organization can create strategies in order to anticipate some of those needs and create internal actions that provides some fulfilment to each individual. Also, considering the human factor companies should be aware that behaviours can change according to the environment and stimuli offered by the working conditions.

In our survey, we could clearly notice that our population of study notice that they are not as appreciate as they would like to be. If we take all our theoretical study and bring it to the reality of our population, we can make a relation between their disappointments with their employer and future; or present; possible workplace conflicts. Remembering that the kind of conflicts that can arise are extremely particular. They could be related to colleagues, management, working conditions and the company's policies themselves.

On the whole, when talking about human's behaviours we can not generalize any action. We can take our study as an overall view of patterns. The analyses made can support the creation of actions to organizations that aim to anticipate the reasons that can lead to workplace conflicts. It is important to notice that each scenario will be unique and companies must be aware of their particularities.

The field of alternative dispute resolution, in recent times, is growing and getting stronger. Options, such as mediation, aims to create a communication channel between the conflicting parties. However, as we could see communication itself also comes from non-verbal attitudes, facial expressions etc. The idea of having actions that would minimise conflicts before them happening could provide to companies more income and, more than that, less waste of productive time. Also, if the situation had to go to mediation or arbitration anyway, the results of it could be much more satisfactory. This analogy can be made believing that the employees would be more comfortable expressing their opinions, as they would see the company as a reference of authority that gives them support. Moreover, employees would see the company as an employer that values their job and they as individuals. This action could provide employees confidence to desire good workplace environments and work towards the solutions to workplace conflicts.

Most of all, we also can conclude that workplace conflicts can generate a great loss of productive time of the team and; more than that, loss of positive financial outcomes to organizations. Therefore, this study supports that the investment in internal marketing can motivate the creation of a spirit of belonging among the team. This feeling can provide to the team the sensation of safety; that can be financially and also emotionally, promoting attitudes that will work towards the search of harmonious workspaces. In conclusion, we can state that those attitudes in daily routines can; in fact, help to minimise workplace conflicts in short and long terms.

## **Reflection**

My choice for the object studied in this dissertation comes from one of my professional experiences here in Ireland. Back in 2018, I had the chance to work for a traditional retail company here in Dublin. I was a sales assistant. Before working there, when I was only a customer, I remember how I could feel enchanted by the design of the shop, incredible brands and the way the employees would treat us. I also felt confident enough to make any purchase there because the shop seemed trustable sufficient to me. Therefore, it seemed like a great place to work also.

I have held a bachelor degree in advertising and marketing since 2011, so working with sales would not be a big challenge for me. The scenario I faced when I started working in this particular shop was totally different from the one I had before. The staff's areas had such bad condition. The bathrooms were usually broken and, in general, in bad shape. The team was forbidden from using the ones directed to customers. Not only that, but we could not even drink water while working on the shop floor.

It was no dream working there, and it sounded more like a nightmare. Those terrible conditions applied only to the employees working direct to the public, with retail. The employees working in the office also had excellent facilities even though it was expected from us, on the shop floor, to represent the mission and values of the company.

My previous experience with marketing always made me wonder that those lack of investment in the employees, the ones that were actually were making the sales happen, was not really smart. I could see many marketing actions being created for customers, but none was being made to retailers.

More than that, I could see dissatisfaction growing among my colleagues and myself. We were impatient with customers, especially during busier times. Also, constantly questioning our

superior's work and position. Conflicts among direct colleagues were often happening for what can be considered silly reasons. The thing is that those conflicts were becoming frequent.

When I started to study workplace conflict, I constantly had my previous experiences in mind. It was hard but also satisfactory being able to create this work that searchers to express my theory. I wanted to use both of my academic backgrounds, and I believe I could make it.

I did my Masters in Dispute Resolution during the Covid-19 pandemic, and it was a daily challenge. I had to watch classes from home without having the appropriate infrastructure, share my apartment with others that were working from home and many other challenges. Also, working in this dissertation itself was tiring. I had to give up on many personal events in order to complete it.

However, I could not be happier with the job presented here. I am incredibly proud of myself for getting here and finishing this work. I would like, once again, to thank everyone involved in this work along the way.



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## Appendix A

Introduction given to population of the research before the survey:

### MASTER OF ARTS IN DISPUTE RESOLUTION

#### IMPORTANT NOTES

##### Purpose

This research has an academic purpose only.

There is no direct benefit from answering the questionnaire, but your participation will have an importance in the development and further understanding of the topic.

##### Confidentiality

Any answers provided will be sent to a link at Google Forms, and the data collected will be stored online in an electronic format protected by a password. Information such as name, email address or IP address will not be collected by the platform. As a result of this, all responses are completely anonymous, and no identification is required.

##### Aim

This research aims to identify if the use of internal marketing to employees that work with customer service can help to minimize workplace conflicts

##### Concerns

In case you have any doubts or concerns in relation to this research, you are welcome to contact the research supervisor Nadia Bhatti (nadia.bhatti@independentcolleges.ie) and the research candidate Juliana de Oliveira (juuli.oliveira.88@gmail.com) , who is a registered student at Independent College Dublin undertaking the degree of Master of Arts in Dispute Resolution.

In case you feel that this research has not been able to maintain ethical principles, please contact Independent College Dublin at the contacts below:

Independent College Dublin at Block B, The Steelworks, Foley St, Dublin 1, or by email: [info@independentcolleges.ie](mailto:info@independentcolleges.ie)

Proceeding with the questionnaire, you are automatically indicating that:

You have READ and AGREED with the above information.

You agree to participate in this research VOLUNTARILY.

You are 18 years or over.

Thank you for your time and for assisting me in the completion of my master's degree.



## Appendix B

Survey questions:

- 1- Do You work in retail? ( ) yes ( )no
- 2- Do you work in customer-facing role? E.g: Customer Service. ( ) yes ( )no
- 3- How many years of experience do you have in a customer-facing role? ( )Up to 1 year ( ) 1 to 5 years ( ) 5 to 10 years ( )more than 10 years
- 4- In your opinion, is your employer concerned about the customer's experience with the company? ( )yes ( )no
- 5- In your view, does your employer work to satisfy the customer, even if the customer is wrong e.g. even if a complaint is not merited, does your employer tend to agree with the customer? Does your employer work to satisfy the customer in any case? ( ) yes ( )no
- 6- Does your employer regularly engage in marketing actions/strategies in order to promote customer satisfaction? ( )yes ( )no
- 7- Does your employer regularly engage in marketing campaigns that provide benefits and/or gifts with clients E.g: free gifts, discounts, promotions, exclusive events? ( )yes ( ) no
- 8- Considering the marketing campaigns from the last question. Does your company do similar ones focused on the staff? ( ) yes ( ) no
- 9- Does your employer consistently remind staff that the customer is the priority and must to be satisfied, no matter what? ( )yes ( ) no
- 10- Do you feel that your employer does not treat staff with the same respect they treat customers? ( ) yes ( ) no
- 11- Would you like to be seen as a valued part of your company in the same way the customer is? ( ) yes ( )no ( ) N/A
- 12- Would you like to be taught about special occasions ( e.g: Your birthday, Christmas, Women's day (when applicable) etc ) by your employer such as the clients are? ( ) yes ( )no
- 13- In your view, have conflicts arisen in your workplace because of a failure on the part of your employer to treat employees as well as customers are treated? ( )yes ( )no
- 14- Are you dissatisfied with your employer and are you considering changing your job based on the difference between how employees and customers are treated in the company? ( ) yes ( )no
- 15- If you work in a physical shop, in your view, are customers provided with a higher standard of facilities e.g. o customers better bathrooms, seats, ventilation etc., compared to the areas reserved for staff use only? ( ) yes ( ) no

16- Do you think that if employees were generally treated better by your employer that there would be a higher quality of service provided to customers by employees of the company? ☐ yes ☐ no