

**CUSTOMER SERVICE CHALLENGES IN A SOUTH AFRICAN  
CASINO.**

**A PARTICIPATORY INTERVENTION.**

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**January 2019**

## **Declaration**

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled “Customer service challenges in a South African casino. A participatory intervention” has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by myself.

Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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## Abstract

**Background:** In an era of global competition, customer service (CS) remains a key differentiating factor for organisations to gain a competitive advantage. Due to heightened emotions experienced by customers when winning and losing, customer mistreatment and difficulties associated with cross-cultural interactions, the casino environment remains a challenging context for the provision of excellent CS on the frontline. Literature is scarce regarding the development of interventions to improve CS within the South African casino industry. The aim of this study was to gain an understanding of CS challenges facing frontline staff within a South African casino, and develop, implement and evaluate a participatory intervention to address these challenges.

The main objectives were to: 1) To identify challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent CS and generating solutions these challenges; 2) To equip slots hosts with observational skills to identify body language to pre-empt a customers' need for assistance; 3) To equip slots hosts with skills on how to deal with difficult customers and communicate effectively when dealing with customers; 4) To improve the cultural awareness of slots hosts to enhance their ability to deal with diverse customers 5) To determine the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing CS challenges, motivate slot hosts to exceed customer expectations and provide recommendations to management for improving CS.

**Method:** A case study using intervention research and a multi-phase mixed method design was used. Intervention research was conducted over three phases including a situation analysis, implementation of the intervention and process evaluation. For the qualitative aspect of the study, purposive sampling was used to conduct semi-structured interviews, focus groups and observations in the situation analysis to identify CS challenges facing frontline staff. These findings were thematically analysed and used to develop the CS intervention using Lewin's Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze Change Management Model as a theoretical framework. The researcher used the participatory action research approach to both develop and facilitate the intervention. At the end of the intervention, a training evaluation questionnaire was implemented for the quantitative aspect of the research. Three indexes were developed based on face validity including learnings gained, perceptions of learning and evaluation of facilitation. In addition, T-tests and One Way ANOVA were used to analyse the quantitative data. In the process evaluation phase, a second round of semi-structured

interviews, focus group and observations were conducted to determine the effect of the CS intervention.

**Results:** The qualitative results showed that poor equipment, inadequate CS processes and high workloads were highlighted as key factors impeding service. In addition, the study found that frontline staff from disenfranchised groups responded to perceived discrimination from customers through disengagement, withdrawal or slowing down of service behaviours. These responses were interpreted as poor CS, but were found to be defensive behaviours to reduce expected discrimination. In line with emotion contagion theory, positive or negative interactions with customers were found to shift the mood states of frontline staff, which in turn affected subsequent service interactions. The quantitative results of the workshop evaluation questionnaire suggested increased skills efficacy from learners in terms of learnt CS techniques such as identifying body language leading to customer complaints, as well as being better equipped to deal with difficult customers and customers from different cultures. The intervention also motivated staff to provide better CS with a series of interventions being recommended in future for encouraging sustainable CS behaviours.

**Conclusion:** The study established clear guidelines for management to develop, implement and evaluate a participatory intervention to address CS challenges within a casino context. The participatory approach of the intervention was found to be beneficial for knowledge-sharing, allowing for co-creation of workshop content, providing a forum for open communication on CS issues and building ownership of CS issues amongst staff. Further research is recommended to better understand the dynamics and effects of cross-cultural interactions on the frontline, so as to develop tools and techniques to assist staff to respond constructively in such situations and improve frontline CS in the organisation.

## Acronyms

ACSI	American Customer Satisfaction Index
AR	Action Research
CRM	Customer Relationship Management
CS	Customer Service
CQ	Cultural Intelligence
EI	Emotional Intelligence
GMDP	Gaming Management Development Programme
HRM	Human Resource Management
MSMCS	Multi-level System Model of Customer Service
OCB	Organisational Citizenship Behaviours
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PIM	Participatory Intervention Model
SERVQUAL	Service Quality (instrument for measurement)
TL	Transformational Leadership

## Definition of Terms

**Body Language or non-verbal communication:** The messages without words that people send to each other during interactions including aspects such as physical distance, eye contact, posture, hand movements, facial expressions, hand-shake styles and leg placement

**Consumer sovereignty:** The power of the consumer to determine what products and services are produced by firms in line with customer needs.

**Cultural intelligence (CQ):** A person's ability to grasp cultural norms, behave in culturally appropriate ways and manage others effectively in culturally diverse situations.

**Customer loyalty:** A strong commitment to re-purchase a specific product or service consistently in future.

**Customer mistreatment:** Behaviour such as screaming at staff, irrational criticism and destructive comments which can result in reduced self-esteem and self-worth.

**Customer relationship management (CRM):** Involves organisations using research, databases and technology in the generation of customer profiles that indicate customer needs, behaviours and responses to marketing.

**Customer value:** The difference between the benefits obtained from using a product or service and the costs associated with acquiring and using the product or service.

**Customer sabotage:** This is a result of employees being mistreated and refers to dysfunctional behaviours with the motive to harm the customer through creating delay in service processes, rescinding the employee-customer relationship and reducing service quality through counteractive behaviours, such as hanging up the telephone on customers

**Customer satisfaction:** The cumulative satisfaction that includes all of a customers' experiences with a product or service over time.

**Customer service (CS):** The mixture of activities or strategies of a firm that aim to create a rewarding consumer experience to enhance service quality and to ensure customer satisfaction.

**De-escalation:** Involves using both verbal communication and body language strategically to calm down a person or increase their self-control

**Directive leadership:** This form of leadership is autocratic and task-orientated in nature and involves providing clear expectations to employees through hierarchical goal-setting and role-clarification.

**Emotion contagion theory:** A theory which purports that during communication interactions, the expressed emotion of a sender impacts the emotion of a receiver.

**Emotional intelligence (EI):** The capability to perceive and influence emotional information without necessarily comprehending it, as well as to understand and manage emotions without necessarily perceiving feelings well and completely experiencing them.

**Employee engagement:** The zest, commitment and absorption that individuals have for their work and the energetic behaviours they exhibit for the best interests of the organisation.

**Group culture:** The pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems.

**Intervention research:** A form of research characterised by the identification of a problem and the subsequent, research, design and development of an intervention to address the problem. The last step involves a process evaluation of the intervention. Each of these steps is part of a change strategy seeking to create behaviour change.

**Organisational Citizenship Behaviours (OCB):** refers to role behaviours that are outside the job description, which are not formally rewarded or necessitated by the Human Resources System, however which enhance organisational operations.

**Organisational climate:** Employee perceptions of what the organisation is like in relation to policies, practices, procedures and incentives.

**Organisational commitment:** The strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in a firm.

**Organisational culture:** Refers to the shared values, beliefs and implicit assumptions that steer employee's actions as well as traditions and patterns of behaviour within a company.

**Participatory Action Research (PAR):** An approach to inquiry that is grounded in participation, action and experience, and that entails critical reflection to create new insights on an issue which are tested through an iterative research process in order to improve

practice. PAR aims to solve problems within a context, by researchers engaging with individuals involved in that environment to collect data to identify problems, identify appropriate intervention solutions and implement and evaluate those interventions.

**Self-efficacy:** Looks at how individual's beliefs in their capabilities to impact their environment effects their actions, which in turn produces expected outcomes.

**Servant leadership:** A form of leadership that focuses on the development of employees to realise their potential by building self-confidence and involves the leader being a positive role model who develops trusting relationships who provides support and resources to team members.

**Service:** Actions, processes and performances provided or co-created by one entity for consumption by another entity or individual.

**Service-scape:** The physical environment in which the service is provided and in which employees and the customer interact.

**Service climate:** Staff members' shared sense and shared meaning construed from policies, practices and procedures focused on service quality that they experience, as well as the importance attributed to service quality they observe in work behaviours that are rewarded, supported, and expected in an organisation.

**Service delivery system:** The service delivery system is comprised of various elements which impact service delivery process and include the physical design of the service environment, technology, people, and systems for process control.

**Service quality:** The difference between what the customer expects and what the customer perceives to be receiving from the service provider.

**Slots host:** Frontline service staff member whose main role is to respond to customer enquiries, complaints, pay jackpots and deal with machine faults.

**Slots technician:** Frontline staff member who is responsible for fixing mechanical faults on slots machines and are radioed by slots host to fix machine breakdowns.

**Transformational leadership:** A form of leadership that involves leader behaviours which inspire and motivate team members to exceed performance expectations.

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## Prologue

The idea for this research came about when I was approached by a casino organisation in Durban, South Africa to develop a customer service (CS) intervention for its frontline staff in August 2014. Three years prior to the study, I had been working as an organisational development training consultant for the organisation in developing interactive interventions for induction, team building and corporate social responsibility. I met with the departmental manager who required an intervention to motivate staff in the run up to the peak December holiday season. Challenges affecting CS in the slots machine area of the casino floor included slots hosts and technicians displaying negative attitudes and body language towards customers. A language barrier existed between frontline staff and some guests which affected service interactions. In addition, diversity issues seemed to be at play on the casino floor, stemming from cross-cultural interactions between customers and staff. The manager specifically noted that he would like hosts and technicians to be able to interpret the body language cues of customers. This would help staff to predict customers hidden needs in terms of service, by being able to identify customers needing assistance from those who were frustrated or angry as a result of service delays or machine malfunctions. Being able to interpret body language would allow hosts and technicians to provide proactive service by observing the body language cues of guests, thereby anticipating customers' needs and improving CS. The intervention aimed to understand the specific CS challenges facing frontline staff and provide staff with knowledge and skills to address those challenges, thereby improving CS in the slots department. 160 frontline staff would need to go on the training, with the sessions being a half day in duration so as to meet staffing requirements.

I then began consulting literature on the topic to begin planning the intervention. I identified a gap in the literature concerning CS interventions in the South African casino industry context, and the impact of cross-cultural interactions on service behaviours of frontline staff.

Realising the need for more evidence-based research on the development of CS interventions for frontline staff in the casino industry and the impact of cross-cultural interactions on CS in this context, I took the initiative to conduct new research which would seek to answer these important questions. The results of the study culminated in the development of guidelines for management for developing a participatory intervention for addressing CS issues at the casino, as well as new findings on the impact of diversity on service interactions in the South African casino context.

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Background

Advancements in technology and the advent of a global economy have resulted in increased global competition. In an era of intensified competition for all businesses, service is now often recognised as a key driver of competitive advantage (Kandampully & Duddy, 2001; Karmarkar, 2004; Ostrom, Bowen, Parasuraman, Patricio & Voss, 2015). The proliferation of legalized casino gambling has increased competition resulting in customer service (CS) being an integral factor in customer retention and business success (Wan, 2009; Wong & Diaka, 2013).

Whereas competing service companies are often identical in terms of facilities, equipment and service offerings, customers continue to distinguish differences in the quality of service they receive. Considering that equipment and gaming offerings to clients tend to be similar across casino organisations, some operators in the South African casino industry have been known to distinguish their products from competitors through service differentiation (Bacon, 2005). As a result, customers' personal interactions with frontline staff during the service encounter is often the differentiating factor between companies boasting similar service environments and equipment (Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremler, 2012).

Traditionally, casinos compete based on providing experiences for their customers through casino games such as poker and roulette which foster a competitive thrill of winning. In addition, the physical design and architecture of casinos encourage the immersion of customers into a fantasy world separate from one's regular lived reality (Schull, 2013). The continuous, repetitive nature of slots machine gambling results in the suspension of players in a trance-like state called 'the machine zone' which creates a sense of escapism from the grind of daily life. Modern slot machines utilising the latest digital and video technology, have deposed traditional casino games as the main source of revenue in the gambling industry. As a result, the provision of excellent CS through interactions between slots machine players and frontline staff can serve as a key source of customer retention and revenue generation as well as creating a differentiating value proposition to clients.

Scholarly research in both marketing and organisational psychology maintains that the individual factors that affect the performance of service personnel, are staff attitudes (willingness) toward their job and their ability to effectively perform tasks i.e. self-efficacy and

skills (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2011). Organisational factors which can impact performance include culture, climate, leadership, job design, empowerment and management support and commitment (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2011).

Previous research shows a positive correlation between employee attitudes in service settings and service outcomes (Chow, Lo, Shah & Hong, 2006; Torvald, 2006; Tsaur & Lin, 2004). While establishment of causal relationships remain inconclusive, preliminary evidence in individual studies generally suggest that aggregate employee attitudes have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction, loyalty and financials (Harter, Hayes & Schmidt, 2002; Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremler, 2012).

## **1.2 Problem Statement**

CS research conducted by the Disney Institute ahead of the FIFA World Cup in 2010, revealed poor or indifferent attitudes of some frontline employees in the South African tourism industry, poor training and general education, inadequate hiring practices, a lack of urgency from staff, the prevalence of autocratic leadership styles and an emphasis on technical skills rather than interpersonal skills in the tourism industry (Department of Tourism, 2009). The Disney Institute also found that many frontline service workers often had not experienced for themselves high levels of CS or “being served” in the types of establishments that they worked in within the tourism industry.

In comparison, this study aims to investigate and understand CS challenges facing frontline staff in Casino X from both a staff and management perspective. Casino X is based in the Durban area on the east coast of South Africa. The researcher was contacted by the organisation to assist with various CS challenges including customer complaints due to poor attitudes of frontline staff towards customers as well as negative attitudes and poor body language of staff towards customers (Han, 2017; Soderland, 2017). In addition, during service interactions many frontline staff would not communicate relevant processes to customers they were assisting, resulting in customers being uncertain and uninformed as to what was being done to resolve their query and when they could expect a response. Furthermore, management were eager to upskill staff on how to pre-empt service requests from customers through identifying body language cues as well as motivate staff ahead of the peak holiday season. Management also reported diversity issues during intercultural service interactions between frontline staff and customers which were to be addressed through the CS intervention. A greater awareness of

cultural difference and language barriers was needed by slots hosts, due to the impact of diversity on service interactions within the context of both a diverse customer and staff group. The nature of the Casino X which comprised largely a staff complement of Black and Indian frontline employees and a majority customer base of Indian and White customers made for an interesting and diverse dynamic during service interactions. As discussed in more detail in the research methodology chapter, in comparison to other casinos in the larger hospitality group, Casino X had the highest footfall per square meter resulting in a more service interactions occurring in the casino environment than other franchises in the country. This made Casino X a more attractive case in comparison to other casinos in the hospitality group for investigating CS challenges and diverse service interactions. Various research studies suggests that diversity can have an impact on service interactions (Hoobler & Smallwood, 2002; Kang, 2012; McMahon, 2011; Wan, 2009; Zourrig, Chebat & Toffoli, 2014).

Kang (2012) maintains that communication skills play a crucial role in inducing positive interaction between customers and employees. In a survey of empirical studies linking diversity with business performance, McMahon (2011) states that the impact of diversity is more striking in service industries due to the greater degree of interpersonal interactions in such contexts. In providing services to clients, personalized CS can be affected by diversity, which is likely to affect service performance. A lack of intercultural awareness and intercultural communication skills can therefore contribute to poor CS interactions when dealing with diverse customers (Zourrig et al., 2014). Language barriers as well as differences in non-verbal behaviour between different cultural groups can create misunderstandings leading to poor CS interactions (Hoobler & Smallwood, 2002). Wan (2009) found that the diversified workforce in Macau (through influx of expatriates managers) created many challenges for casino management, with conflicts and misunderstandings often arising due to communication challenges linked to cultural differences and language barriers.

A review of the literature reveals a lack of empirical research regarding the impact of diversity on CS interactions, as well as a gap in academic research on CS challenges within the context of the South African gaming industry. More specifically from a case perspective, this study seeks to shed more light on the CS challenges facing frontline staff as well as the impact of diversity on CS interactions within the slots gaming area at Casino X.

### **1.3 Rationale of the study**

With little research into CS from a frontline perspective in the South African casino industry (Balmahoon, 2005; Wannenburg, 2008) and future growth prospects for the industry remaining encouraging (PWC, 2016), the study contributes significantly by creating a better understanding for employers of the challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS, thereby contributing to improving service and customer satisfaction levels. In addition, the study is unique in its inquiry into the impact of diversity on CS interactions, which remains an overlooked area in the services marketing literature. Increased understanding of this topic within the South African context can provide opportunities for CS improvement and increased employee engagement for employers in the industry. In addition, this study takes a novel approach by implementing intervention research through conducting a situation analysis, developing a participatory intervention addressing CS challenges from the collected data and conducting a process evaluation of the intervention. As a result the study provides useful guidelines for management to improve CS across similar cases within the gaming industry.

### **1.4 Aims and Objectives of the study**

The overall aim of the study was to develop, implement and evaluate an intervention addressing CS challenges facing frontline casino staff.

In order to address the overall aims of the study, the specific objectives were:

1. To identify challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent CS
2. To equip slots hosts with observational skills to identify body language allowing staff to pre-empt a customers' need for assistance
3. To equip slots hosts with skills on how to deal with difficult customers and communicate effectively when dealing with customers
4. To identify the challenges facing slots staff in dealing with customers from diverse groups and suggest solutions to these challenges
5. To determine the effectiveness of the intervention in addressing CS challenges and motivating slot hosts to exceed customer expectations
6. To identify possible solutions to challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent CS

## **1.5 Research questions**

In lieu of the research objectives, the study asked the following research questions and are set out according to the different phases of the intervention research:

### *Phase 1: Situation Analysis and Phase 2: Implementation of the Intervention*

1. What are the challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent CS?
2. How can body language be used to improve frontline CS?
3. What strategies do slots hosts use to deal with difficult customers and communicate effectively when dealing with customers
4. What are the challenges facing slots staff in dealing with customers from diverse groups?

### *Phase 3: Process Evaluation*

5. What is the level of effectiveness of an intervention addressing CS challenges and motivating slot hosts to exceed customer expectations?
6. What are the possible solutions to CS challenges facing slots staff?

## **1.6 The Role of the Researcher in the Study**

As mentioned above, this study was commissioned by Casino X in order to improve CS of frontline staff in the slots machine department in the run up to the peak holiday season. Prior to the study, the researcher had worked as a consultant to the organisation, being involved in developing interactive training interventions related to induction and team engagement as well as being involved in social responsibility initiatives on behalf of the organisation. As a result, the researcher had developed a sustained relationship with management and an internal network within the Human Resources Department in the three years preceding the study. Thus the researcher had experience in working with the organisation prior to the study, therefore developing an understanding of the culture and familiarity with internal procedures. The researcher acknowledges his subjective bias as a result of his long-standing relationship with the organisation.

## **1.7 Theoretical Contribution**

This study contributes to the body of knowledge by addressing a gap in the academic literature concerning CS challenges facing frontline staff in the South African casino industry. As mentioned earlier, the study is unique in developing a participatory intervention to both diagnose and address CS challenges and diversity issues in cross-cultural service interactions within a casino environment. The intervention also sets out to develop staff skills in preempting customer needs for service through identifying body language cues as well as motivating staff.

The study adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to gain a theoretical understanding of CS and the various factors affecting service from an organisational and individual level perspective. Literature from a various disciplines including Human Resource Management, Industrial Psychology, Management Studies, Services Marketing, Psychology, Sociology as well as Information Technology domains were explored. The study is situated within the Implementation Science literature which seeks to employ interdisciplinary methods to increase uptake of effective interventions in the real-world. Implementation science research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to assess implementation outcomes including acceptability, adoption, appropriateness, cost, feasibility, replicability, penetration and sustainability (Kemp, Jarret, Kwon, Song, Jette, Sapag, Bass, Murray, Rao & Baral, 2019). Three conceptual models including the socio ecological model, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes were combined to develop a new conceptual framework, the the multi-level systems model of CS (MSMCS) model. The MSMCS model served as a holistic organising framework for representing the situated context and relationships between relevant concepts and theories within the study and provides a theoretical contribution to the CS literature.

## **1.8 Methodological Contribution**

A strength of the study was the use of a mixed method design where the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods served to enrich the research findings. This intervention utilized multiple methods of data collection allowing for triangulation of findings from interviews, focus groups, participant observations and questionnaires thus allowing for internal validity as well as a deep, immersive understanding of the case being investigated by the

researcher. The qualitative aspect was more heavily emphasized in the research and allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of slots hosts, technicians, supervisors and managers in terms of challenges faced in trying to provide excellent CS as well as obtain a rich, in-depth understanding of the context and work processes. Moreover, the study goes beyond previous studies by investigating CS challenges from two different perspectives by approaching the research topic from both staff and management viewpoints (Balmahoon, 2005; Wannenburg, 2008). As a result, the study gains critical insight from different perspectives into understanding staff and management experiences within the context of the casino as a work environment.

### **1.9 Practical Contribution**

This thesis makes various practical contributions for managers and trainers within the casino industry looking to develop a participatory intervention to address CS challenges. The study establishes a framework for a participatory CS intervention designed to identify CS challenges facing frontline staff, enhance motivation as well as train staff in identifying body language cues of customers and deal with diversity issues in interacting with diverse customers. The study provides practical value to employers in the form of guidelines for management to replicate the intervention in similar contexts where required.

One of the significant contributions of the study is its pioneering inquiry into understanding the impact of diversity on service interactions within the South African gaming industry. In particular, the study adopts a unique perspective on service interactions by attempting to understand the impact of perceived stereotyping and discrimination by customers on frontline staff and the consequent impact on service delivery. The study also introduces an innovative solution to CS challenges by mobilizing technology to address specific service issues. This will be discussed in further detail in a later chapter.

### **1.10 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of the University KwaZulu-Natal and the UKZN Research Ethics Policy was strictly adhered to through obtaining informed consent from respondents. Participation in the study was voluntary and ethical principles of

anonymity and confidentiality were followed. Details of the ethical procedures followed are provided in Chapter 4 when discussing data collection.

## **1.11 Outline of the dissertation**

The structure of the thesis and the various aspects discussed in each section are set out below:

### **1.11.1 Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter, as discussed above, provides a background to the study and problem statement, sets out the objectives and research questions of the study as well as discussing ethical considerations.

### **1.11.2 Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter begins by presenting a descriptive account of the South African casino industry to provide a contextual background to the study. Thereafter a review of the literature on CS and services marketing is provided. Contemporary literature from the fields of Human Resource Management, Industrial Psychology, Sociology, Services Marketing, Management Studies as well as Psychology, addressing individual and organizational factors impacting CS, is then critically discussed. In addition, literature on the impact of diversity on CS interactions is also provided. Thereafter academic research on CS within the South African context as well as literature on participatory interventions and body language is also presented.

### **1.11.3 Chapter 3: The Effectiveness of CS Interventions**

This chapter provides a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of CS interactions.

### **1.11.4 Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

This chapter provides a clear understanding of the methodological framework within which the study was carried out. A case study research design employing a mixed methods research methodology was used in the study. Interviews, focus groups and observations were used for qualitative inquiry into answering the research questions. The quantitative aspect of the research which evaluated the intervention through the use of a questionnaire is also comprehensively discussed.

### **1.11.5 Chapter 5: Situation Analysis**

This chapter provides a description of the pre-intervention research conducted including interviews with management, a focus group with frontline staff and participant observations of the slots gaming area in the casino to gain an understanding of CS challenges and processes. Data obtained from this phase was utilized to develop the CS intervention.

### **1.11.6 Chapter 6: Implementation of the Intervention**

This chapter discusses the delivery of the intervention and entails reflections of the researcher during co-facilitation of the participatory workshops. Descriptive accounts of the researcher's experience in co-facilitating the interventions are provided.

### **1.11.7 Chapter 7: Process Evaluation**

This chapter describes the evaluation of the intervention through the use of training evaluation questionnaires. The findings of the focus group with frontline staff and post-intervention interviews with management are discussed. In addition, the findings from the post-intervention observations conducted in the slots gaming area are discussed to determine the observed impact of the intervention on frontline CS behaviours. Recommendations from frontline staff to improve CS are provided and the researcher provides guidelines to management to improve CS at the organisation. Subsequently, technological solutions to CS challenges that were not addressed through the intervention are provided. A theoretical discussion of technologies such as social media as a knowledge-sharing tool for conveying best practice service behaviours, the use of smartphone technology to assist in tracking of employee movement to improve service delivery as well as the use of virtual reality platforms as a behavioural training tool, are discussed to achieve cost-saving and efficiencies for the organisation.

### **1.11.8 Chapter 10: Conclusion**

This chapter provides a final conclusion by discussing the study's contribution to the body of knowledge, limitations of the study and provides recommendations for future research in the area.

The following chapter begins by providing a background on the South African casino industry and then delves into a comprehensive review of the literature on CS, participatory interventions, body language and diversity interactions in the service environment.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by providing a brief description of the South African casino industry and thereafter provides an understanding of the business case for excellent customer service (CS). The traditional CS literature takes the customer's perspective on service interactions, however this literature review will also adopt a critical stance by discussing CS theory from the employee's standpoint as well. A discussion of service quality, customer satisfaction and customer value then follows. Subsequently relevant literature is critically discussed in relation to the individual, interpersonal and organisational factors that impact excellent CS. Thereafter the impact of diversity on CS interactions is discussed and a contextual understanding of CS in the South African economy is provided.

### **2.2 Description of the South African Casino Industry**

Prior to 1994, gaming was illegal in South Africa with casino developments emerging in the black homelands created by the National Party apartheid government. Rising industrialisation after the Second World War and the need for cheap labour in factories, culminated in mass migration of black people to the cities. In order to promote population control, the South African Apartheid Government introduced black self-governing states called Bantustans together with forced removal of thousands of Africans from urban areas (Evans, 2012).

In 1979, Sol Kerzner partnered with South African Breweries to launch Sun City which heralded the introduction of mega-resort casino development in South Africa. A large portion of the skilled workers were imported and not developed amongst the South African workforce. Worker salaries were low resulting in high staff turnover (Sallaz, 2003). In 1983 Sol Kerzner traded his shares in Southern Sun to form Sun International South Africa with a focus on establishing casino resorts (Van Lill, 2007). Thereafter, over ten years he secured ownership rights over all eighteen homeland casino licences through unofficial deals with Bantustan leaders. It is rumoured that Sol Kerzner reached agreement on high taxation of casino revenues and foresaw the prospect of controlling operations based on his associates' lack of auditing skills and capital (Sallaz 2003). In the early 1990's, horse-racing agencies began operating in the Bantustans and in South Africa these outlets were largely frequented by white gamblers (Sallaz 2003). Thereafter with the establishment of the mega-resort casinos Sun City and the

Lost City (a five-star resort located next to Sun City), these developments became key tourism nodes resulting in increased skills development in the casino industry and the employment of people in local communities. After the unveiling of Lost City, Sol Kerzner slowly retracted investments from his local assets and listed a new company Sun International Hotels on the New York Stock exchange, which has flourished into a global empire (Van Lill, 2007).

With the introduction of the National Gambling Act of 1994, gaming became legal in the country and casinos became a core channel for tourism (Van Lill, 2009). The instituting of regulations prompted the creation of a responsible gambling sector to level the playing field between more established organisations and new entrants to the market. This was facilitated through the promulgation of the National Gambling Act of 2004 which served to licence gambling activities and provide standards for regulation of casinos, horse-racing and gambling (DTI, 2017). The legislation set out requirements for matters concerning gambling, betting and wagering and created uniform standards across the industry (Van Lill, 2009). As a result, the industry developed from being dominated by two major resort casinos, to licences for 40 smaller casinos strewn across the country. Currently there are 38 licensed casino operations in South Africa. The Tsogo Sun Group, Sun International and Peermont Global Group are the largest casino organisations in South Africa and together operate 35 of the 38 licensed casinos across the country (Van Lill, 2009).

Rogerson (2004) points out that when looking back at casino tourism in South Africa, gambling is seen as a core driver of tourism growth. He further argues that the role of casinos as key growth points has been reduced in the new dispensation with transformational objectives being central to achieving gambling licences and casinos being viewed to a large extent as vehicles for Black Economic Empowerment deals in the tourism industry. However recent figures on gambling turnover provided below seem to refute this argument. In 2008, the gaming industry was described as being a key contributor to the health of the tourism industry, with the gaming industry having an economic multiplier effect of 3 (Van Lill, 2009).

According to a report by Price Waterhouse Coopers (PWC) in 2017, total gambling turnover is comprised of casino betting, online betting, bingo and limited pay-out machines (LPM's). Gambling turnover refers to the Rand value of money wagered, including 'recycling', which relates to amounts that are bet on more than one occasion (PWC, 2017). In 2015, gross gambling revenues for casinos, limited payout machines, bingo and betting amounted to R26 billion. This totalled an 11.2% increase on 2014 revenues (PWC, 2017). Casinos are viewed

as an important sector for economic growth through employment creation, capital investment and tax contributions to government.

As noted by Kale (2005), the casino industry is characterised by new theming, décor and architecture to attract customers, as the games offered by most casinos are often similar and thus commoditized. According to Bacon (2005), casinos as well as luxury hotels are designed to provide a customer experience, theming and an array of entertainment options in order to peek the customer's interest. Bacon (2005) maintained that Sun International focused on innovation and excellent CS to stay ahead of its competition. As the market matured and pushed towards service differentiation, there was more focus on high frontline service quality on a 24 hour schedule as new smartcard technologies (coinless operations) were replacing the older cash pay-out slots machines. This period also saw a surge in demand for Black administrative and support staff. In addition, in November, 2005, the gaming industry established a code of conduct with an emphasis on advertising norms, responsible gambling, policies on selling of alcohol, good corporate governance and an increase in social responsibility initiatives. The luring of experienced technical staff to other units was also a common feature in the industry (Van Lill, 2007).

In addition, training within the industry became more task focused and learner-centred as well as being linked to the National Qualifications Framework through Sectoral Education and Training Authority (SETA) accredited programmes, which are training institutions established within different sectors. Sun International developed a Gaming Management Development Programme (GMDP) which aimed to focus on implementing an organisational strategy based on service differentiation through the development of young managers with an orientation towards service excellence (Van Lill, 2009; Sun International, 2005). Service excellence can be defined as providing superior quality of service and surpassing client expectations by means of a management system, culminating in customer satisfaction, customer delight and consequently enhanced customer loyalty (Edvardsson & Enquist, 2011). Sun International's GMDP utilised an action learning process (discussed later) to highlight obstacles to effective casino management and transformation. The success of the GMDP was seen as being a result of a firm theoretical grounding of the programme content. This was achieved through competency modelling and an action learning process to identify barriers to effective casino management and transformation and foster practical solutions (Van Lill, 2009). It is evident from the above discussion that large casino operators such as Sun International, employ excellent CS as a differentiation strategy due to the provision of similar products across

organisations, resulting in the CS experience being the unique service offering of the establishment.

### **2.3 A Brief History of CS**

Prior to the advent of mass production, service, to a large degree was provided by human beings, primarily through the use of servants for the wealthy and middle classes (Grossberg, 2011). The diffusion of technology through industrialisation has transformed service interactions, with technology replacing face-to-face interactions with CS staff. In the United States in the 1950's, the post-war boom in mass production resulted in overproduction and consumers who felt worthy of high levels of service, creating the conditions for the advent of the services economy. This in conjunction with the provision of easy and cheap credit in America the middle of the twentieth century, fuelled the creation of a consumer economy and mass consumption (Grossberg, 2011). In addition, the provision of credit through instalment and mortgages resulted in the development of the financial services industry.

In American department stores, free gift-wrapping services were introduced to keep customers within the store area for longer periods of time and foster regular store visits (Whitaker, 2006). In terms of technology, the introduction of the telephone in the late 1800's was a major technological shift which allowed for instantaneous communication in comparison to the required face-to-face customer-employee interactions of the past. In addition, the introduction of the printing press, typewriter, escalator and elevator by the 1900's also changed organisation's capabilities to provide service to clients and in turn resulted in customers expecting more efficient service. Before the introduction of computers, the greatest tools for business efficiency in the 1950's were the telephone, calculator and the typewriter. Interactions with customers were focussed on closing sales rather than satisfying the customer (Friedman, 2004).

However it was AT&T's introduction of the toll-free number that invited consumers, at no cost, to communicate regarding their satisfaction with products (Grossberg, 2011). In turn, through the use of caller identification (caller ID), marketers could obtain the area codes of inbound customers thus providing data for future marketing efforts. This resulted in the growth of telephone traffic culminating in the development of back-office call centres in the 1960's. The advent of computer and cellular phone technologies later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century resulted in a more connected consumer, establishing a more entrenched context for the service-driven consumer

economy. More recently in the 1970's, the use of Interactive Voice Software, queuing systems and phone trees (automated phone information management systems allowing callers to route calls via a menu) at call centres has heralded the introduction of a new type of service geared to manage and retain consumers, however often resulting in long waiting times and poor service experiences. Due to cost-strategies in the 1980's, the call centre CS function began to be outsourced to countries like India.

Subsequently the introduction of email resulted in one-to-one interactions between customers and frontline service agents. The digital service revolution has seen the introduction of online shopping, smartphones, cloud computing and tablets, to name but a few technologies, all of which have altered the traditional CS model. The use of social media such as Facebook and Twitter as well as customer review websites such as Hellopeter has allowed customers to voice their complaints in a larger social (networked) context thus influencing company image and reputation. Mobile phone applications enable customers to access customer support information resources and access self-service tools in a user-friendly way. The use of data mining on the internet by marketing companies has resulted in consumers being stratified, often unknowingly, according to class, identity and personal taste, thus creating customer-centric marketing strategies that meet the specific needs of individual customers through analysis of online customer data.

It is evident from the above discussion, that the context of CS interactions have changed largely from face-to-face interactions to being conducted to a large degree through technology platforms such as telephones, cell-phones and computer networks. This change in the nature of CS interactions has resulted due to the increase in communication technologies as well as online consumption and door-to-door delivery services.

## **2.4 The Quality Movement and CS**

The quality movement, founded by the teachings of Deming, Juran and Ishikawa, initially focussed on quality improvement in the manufacturing industry (Douglas & Fredendall, 2004). With the growth of the services industry, quality in firms began to be extended from focussing only on the production process to being embedded in every level and process of the organisation. The Total Quality Management (TQM) philosophy developed by Juran shares three assumptions regarding quality, people and leadership (Kandampully, 2007). Firstly, the cost of poor quality is more than the cost of developing processes to improve quality. The

second assumption of TQM is based on the notion that employees will improve quality if they are provided with the necessary skills, tools and resources and thirdly, quality improvement is dependent on leadership's commitment to quality. Deming was famous for his management principles for improving quality, productivity and improving competitiveness. Deming's view on quality was based on statistical methods for quality control through the continuous collection of data and taking action to continuously improve quality. Deming viewed quality as being largely determined by effective leadership and a lack of variation (increased standardisation) in work processes. However, the foundational concepts and methods of the total quality movement were attributable to both products as well as services, and consequently quality principles and practices began to migrate into operations and processes of the service industry (Douglas & Fredendall, 2004).

The Malcolm Bridge Quality Awards (MBNQA) programme included seven categories that could be used to improve quality in any organisation, including manufacturing and services. These categories included leadership, information and analysis, strategic quality planning, human resource development, management of process quality, quality and operational results as well as customer focus and satisfaction. The various categories were scored as a means of evaluating quality and benchmarking so as to identify areas of improvement. Whereas the quality of a tangible product was more visible, service quality was more difficult to assess and indicators of quality service were more subjective (Gouthier, Giese & Bartl, 2012).

The European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) is the most renowned European business excellence model. The model is comprised of nine categories beginning with enablers of quality such as leadership, people, strategy, partnerships and resources as well as processes, products and services. The model also necessitates the achievement of excellent quality results concerning people, customers and the larger society. Employee involvement, continuous training, innovation, creativity and learning also play a major role in improving quality (Gouthier, Giese & Bartl, 2012).

Parasuraman, Zeithmal and Berry (1985) highlighted that using a definition of quality in the services industry based on a product may be problematic and consequently developed the concept of service quality (discussed later). Groonroos (1984) introduced the earliest service quality model highlighting that perceived service quality was a result of expected service and perceived service. Groonroos identified three constituents of service quality including technical quality (what the customer actually receives during service), functional quality (how a

customer received the service) and image which was a consequence of technical and functional quality as well as word of mouth, company values and marketing (Gronroos, 1984).

As noted above, the introduction of the quality movement within the manufacturing industry, began diffusing into the services industry to create determinants of quality in services resulting in the advent of CS literature. In light of this brief historical backdrop of CS as a consequence of technological change, and the discussion of quality awards and business excellence models, CS theory and concepts will now be discussed in more detail.

## **2.5 CS Theory and Concepts**

Service can be defined as actions, processes and performances provided or co-created by one entity for consumption by another entity or individual (Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremler, 2009). A broader definition of services relates to all economic activities where the outcome is not a physical product or creation (Zeithmal et al., 2009). The service is usually expended at the time it is produced and provides value in terms of convenience, entertainment, time efficiency, comfort or health, all of which are intangible outcomes for the consumer. Service industries refer to those industries where the organisation's core product is a service such as hospitality, transportation and financial services. Services can be viewed as products which represent a broad range of impalpable offerings which customer's value and pay for. These service products are sold by both service organisations and non-service organisations such as manufacturers and technology companies. For e.g. computer manufacturers may offer their clients information technology consulting services in addition to the production of their core products like computer hardware and software.

CS (CS) can be defined as the mixture of activities or strategies of a firm that aim to create a rewarding consumer experience to enhance service quality and to ensure customer satisfaction (Gothan & Erasmus, 2008). CS is also seen as the service provided to consumers that support an organisation's core product (Zeithmal et al., 2009). Peck, Payne, Christopher and Clark (1999) define CS as the combined encounters between an organisation and a client and is an outcome of the combined impact of all the points of contact between the two parties. Zikmund and D'Amico (2001) point out that CS is also represented by the activities of an organisation that are meant to enhance the value of a product or service and as a result improve customer satisfaction.

CS can occur through employee-customer interactions on-site, via telephone usually through call centres as well as through email and the Internet. CS is multi-faceted encompassing various elements including product, price, physical environment, personnel and processes, all of which together represent the central aspects of an organisations' marketing mix. These elements are purposefully manipulated in order to differentiate one organisations products and services from another. An organisation's marketing mix refers to the factors which a firm controls in order to satisfy customers or promote its product to clients. The marketing mix is comprised of the 4P's namely product, place, promotion and price. These four key variables are interrelated and are utilized in devising a firm's marketing strategy (Zeithmal et al., 2009). CS can be important for organisations as the process of interacting with customers allows firms the opportunity to identify customer needs and preferences and cultivate long term business relationships. In the context of globalisation, firms began competing on service quality in addition to product quality, so as to build relationships with customers and build their brands (Wu, 2014).

Customer satisfaction is defined as cumulative satisfaction that includes all of a customers' experiences with a product or service over time (Johnson & Farrel, 1991). Lin (2003) defines customer satisfaction as the outcome of a cognitive and affective appraisal where clients compare a standard with actual perceived performance of a service by an organisation. Various studies have highlighted the positive relationship between customer satisfaction and outcomes such as customer loyalty, usage behaviour and positive word of mouth referrals (Fornell, Mithas, Morgeson & Krishon, 2006; Wu, 2013). Customer referrals occur when existing satisfied customers recommend the organisation's products or service and is viewed as a powerful marketing method. Usage behaviour entails the ways in which customers use the firm's products and services as well as how often customers use them.

Customer loyalty is a consequence of customer satisfaction and refers to a strong commitment to re-purchase a specific product or service consistently in future. Customer loyalty results in repeat same brand consumption, regardless of situational influences and marketing attempts to cause switching behaviour, where customers move to purchasing a product or service from a competitor (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2010). After having built a relationship with customers, organisations seek to retain them by considering actions that will serve to keep customers satisfied and loyal to their products by meeting their specific needs. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) or database marketing involves the use of research in the generation of customer profiles indicating customer needs, behaviours and responses to marketing. CRM

allows organisations to determine the unique needs of specific consumers and is often manifested through the use of loyalty cards which are utilised for data collection (Zeithmal et al., 2009). According to Sturdy (2001), CRM involves obtaining, owning, satisfying and looking after a customer base better than a competitor. Customer loyalty is closely related to the concept of customer value which refers to the difference between the benefits obtained from using a product or service and the costs associated with acquiring and using the product or service. The larger the difference between the two, the more customer value increases and the more attractive a product or service is to a consumer (Horowitz, 2004).

It is evident from the above discussion that providing value to the customer is the main driver of CS theory, which views customer sovereignty as the central organising point for service interactions. The below discussion provides critical discourse on the traditional CS literature highlighting various issues inherent in contemporary CS theory.

### **2.5.1 Critical Perspectives on CS Literature**

When examining the above CS literature it becomes apparent that CS is based on the neo-liberal concept of the sovereign consumer and free markets (Sturdy, 2001). Consumer sovereignty refers to the power of the consumer to determine what products and services are produced by firms in line with customer needs (Consumer Sovereignty, 2016). The importance of the customer in organisational literature has been linked to the factors such as the eminence of the services sector, increased competition, changing expectations of the consumer and the dominant political ideology discourse of enterprise. Historically the customer was not awarded central importance in academic literature on organisations (Danet, 1981; Dean & Bowen, 1994 in Rosenthal et al., 2001). In contrast, the majority of texts in contemporary CS literature are written from the customer's standpoint, who is now seen as being a powerful agent in the value chain (Fuller & Smith, 1991; Heery, 1993; Hill & Wilkinson, 1995; Lengnick-Hall, 1996 and Hall, 1993 as cited in Rosenthal et al., 2001). Manufacturing processes and other internal organisational relationships such as TQM, Business Process Outsourcing, Human Resource Management and supply chain management have come to be defined as service-oriented. CS has extended to public and professional services as well as beyond Western markets in a form of neo-imperialism (Sturdy, 2001). The notion of service with a greeting and a smile has spread from the United States across the globe. There has been an increased interest in fortifying longer term relationships with customers as well as personalising interpersonal service

interaction through empowering service workers to create more traditional forms of interaction relating to increased contact. In addition, these CS interactions now occur through different mediums of technology including the Internet, telephone, radio and television.

Rosenthal et al.,(2001) views six different perspectives of the customer in organisational literature. These are the postmodern perspective, total quality management, the control perspective, the patriarchal perspective, the emotional labour perspective and the perspective of the customer in services management literature. In post-modern accounts of organisations, the customer does not occupy a natural position but is seen as being discursively produced. In the current capitalist ideology of enterprise and consumer culture, we experience ourselves as consumers in work and other parts of life (in comparison to workers, producers or citizens for example). This discourse of enterprise and consumerism exerts strong influence over our understanding of ourselves in relation to the world (Bowen & Schneider, 2014; Rosenthal et al., 2001).

The management literature on TQM and excellence views the customer as being the most important actor in the organisational context. The entire system is designed to identify the specific needs of the customer and to create products to fulfil those needs (Deming, 1986; Peters & Waterman, 1982). In the control perspective the customer is seen as an accomplice of management to identify problems in CS interactions. Here methods such as mystery shoppers are employed where consultants pose as customers in on-site visits to determine how well customers are being served (Lucas, 2005).

However in the services management literature, the customer takes on many roles including partial employee or co-producer of the service. For example, in a situation where a customer is making a deposit at a bank teller, the customer is required to fill out a deposit slip and is thus a co-producer of the service. Customers can also be seen as co-creators of value from a social constructionist perspective (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). Value co-creation is steeped in a social context of structure, roles, norms, and values. In this social context, the customer is seen as a co-creator of value in that customer are not just receivers of an experience from frontline service, but socially construct their own experience as well. Other roles that customers take on are that of free actor, resource, enemy and also to serve as an audience for performance (Bowen & Schneider, 1988; Gershuny & Rosengren, 1973; Rosenthal et al., 2001).

With the standardisation of service interactions, there has also been a loss of authenticity in CS experiences (Rosenthal et al., 2001). In addition, new forms of service labelled “Disneyisation & McDonaldisation” place emphasis on symbolism, theming, merchandising and deep emotional labour from service workers and customers to create a new ‘experience economy’ (discussed later). Through the required display of positive emotions during CS interactions, even when situations may induce negative emotion in the employee, emotional labour views the customer as reducing employee’s emotional resources (Rosenthal et al., 2001).

According to Bauman (1989), a crucial element in all organisations is their ability to create predictable behaviour and conformity amongst staff (as cited in Sturdy, 2001). This is achieved by quelling the most disruptive, unpredictable behaviours which often result from organisational demands that challenge individual moral standards. Organisations have devised various ways to reduce situations where individual morals contest organisational demands. Firstly, subjecting workers to instrumental and procedural criteria in evaluating their work rather than moral criteria assists in this endeavour. Distancing of the worker from the effects of his or her actions also makes moral appraisal more problematic (Sturdy, 2001). This is achieved through fragmenting work into separate, distinct parts that fail to combine into a task or action that would require moral evaluation. Organisational hierarchies that hold individuals in higher positions morally responsible can also reduce moral accountability of staff on lower levels (Sturdy, 2001).

With regards to staffing of frontline service jobs, there is notable preference by service organisations for hiring employees based on gender. This draws attention to the gendered discourse of CS which often resonates with traditionally feminine characteristics of caring and serving others (Wray-Bliss, 2001). Such discourse is skilfully used by male managers to manipulate and mobilise female workers gendered subjectivity. The notion of female staff being better suited to CS positions in terms of dealing with difficult customers was also noted in the study and will be further unpacked in the research findings chapter. In addition, the patriarchal perspective of CS theory views the client as a consumer of sexuality by conscious participation in sexualised exchanges during CS interactions (Rosenthal et al., 2001). Here employees may be hired on the basis of sexual beauty, charm and relational skills which may be used to influence customers.

In terms of recruitment of service staff, Sturdy (2001) also points out how management has emphasized appearance, moods and attitudes of service workers in comparison to white collar

jobs and how the producer of the service is the product in the CS interaction. This has resulted in the creation of a personality market where certain personalities are seen as being pre-disposed to displaying positive CS behaviours in service interactions (Rosenthal et al., 2001). Mills (1951) notes that in shifting from an economy based on manual skills to handling, selling to and servicing people, particular traits of staff are drawn into the area of exchange and become commercially important commodities in the labour market (Rosenthal et al., 2001). Consequentially companies have begun hiring for particular traits resulting in stereotyping according to personality, gender, sexuality, race, age, class and beauty in recruitment and advertising. This can result in segregation where manual skills are given less relevance, inequalities are perpetuated and segregation is maintained.

The preceding discussion has taken a critical stance on CS literature by analysing customer sovereignty and the management practices of service firms through standardisation and fragmentation of service work to achieve the provision of excellent CS. In addition, a patriarchal perspective on CS literature was provided as well as a discussion on the preferred recruitment practices of service organisations in fielding frontline service staff with specific traits and characteristics. The discussion now goes on to examine the business case for excellent CS.

### **2.5.2 The Business Case for Excellent CS**

The expansive growth of service-based economies globally has placed major emphasis on the importance of CS for organisations. In 2006, the services sector accounted for over 80% of total employment and gross domestic product (GDP) in the United States economy (Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremier, 2009). In the third quarter of 2015, the largest industries in the South African economy were finance, real estate and business services which contributed 20,7 per cent of GDP; general government services comprising 17,6 per cent; wholesale, retail and motor trade, catering and accommodation making up 14,6 per cent; and manufacturing comprising 13,3 per cent (Statistics South Africa, 2015). These statistics highlight the significance of service-based industries to the South African economy and the resultant need for CS skills in these sectors.

In an era of intensified competition for all businesses, CS is now recognised as a key driver of competitive advantage (Karmarkar, 2004; Wu, 2014). Cunningham, Young and Lee (2005) point out that the services sector emerged as business became more competitive and organisations sought to gain a competitive advantage. As a result, organisations began

differentiating themselves by supplementing their products with different types of services. Whereas competing service companies are often identical in terms of facilities, equipment and service menus, customers continue to distinguish differences in the quality of service they receive. Cost is used as the main criterion for product or service selection only when there is no clear quality gap between products or services (Ostrom, Parasuraman, Bowen, Patricio & Voss, 2015; Parasuraman, 1987). As a result, customers' personal interactions with frontline staff during the service encounter is often the differentiating factor between companies boasting similar service environments and equipment (Zeithmal, 2009).

Previous research (Boshoff, 2007; Eller, 2017; Hogleve, Isenke, Derfuss) indicates that the customer and employee interaction can have a substantial effect on customer satisfaction and sales performance, thereby highlighting the business imperative for excellent CS. Terblanche and Boshoff (2010) confirm an array of organisational benefits resulting from customer satisfaction which are based on research-based evidence. These include loyalty, usage behaviour and positive referral as well as complaints as feedback for continuous improvement of products and services. Other benefits of customer satisfaction include lower costs of future transactions and warranties and faulty products as a means for further increasing revenue.

Seminal management theorists have highlighted that business performance is dependent on customer satisfaction (Heskett, 1997; Peters & Waterman, 1982; Watson, 1963). Customers who are satisfied with their supplier have a stronger inclination to repurchase from that supplier, in comparison to dissatisfied consumers (Gelade & Young, 2005). However, it is also important to note that the link between intended versus actual repurchasing behaviour and customer satisfaction is not clearly substantiated through evidence-based research. Relationships between customer satisfaction and financial performance have been identified in the restaurant industry by Bernhardt, Donothu and Kenneth (2000) and in the retail industry by Rucci (1998), whilst in the banking sector, customer satisfaction led to increased cross-selling opportunities within the branch context.

The above research-based evidence indicates a strong link between customer satisfaction and financial performance which will be further explained in the discussion on the Service-Profit Chain model overleaf.

### **2.5.3 The Service Profit Chain Model**

The service-profit chain was developed from researching service firms with the goal of creating linkages between operational resources and human resources to marketing, operational and financial performance (Chi & Gursoy, 2009). Heskett, Jones, Loveman, Sasser and Schlesinger (2008) provide a comprehensive discussion on the service profit chain model. In this model, company profits are linked to customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, staff loyalty and employee productivity. More simply put, the model seeks to establish an association between employee satisfaction and customer satisfaction, which in turn has an impact on financial performance.

The model suggests that satisfied and motivated employees create customer satisfaction through providing high quality service. Subsequently employee satisfaction is determined by first-class support services and policies that allow employees to provide excellent service to customers. HR systems such as recruitment and selection, rewards and employee development also play an important role in enhancing employee satisfaction and internal service quality.

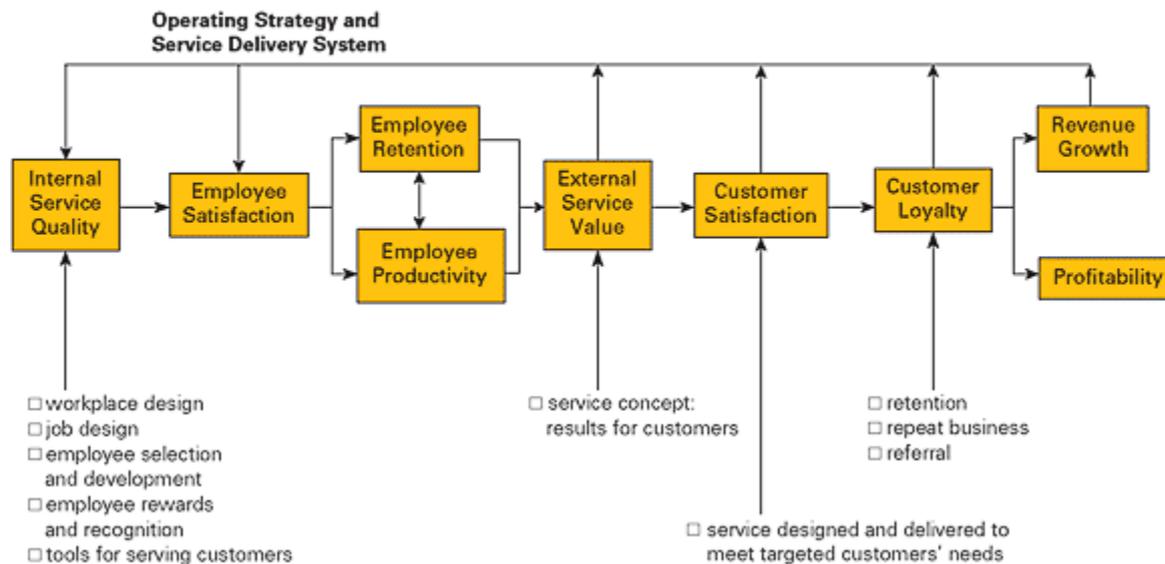
Customer satisfaction, to a great extent, is impacted by the perceived value of services that are provided to the customer. Value is generated by productive, loyal and satisfied staff members. Satisfied consumers tend to increase purchasing and become more loyal to the company in terms of their purchasing behaviours, thereby enhancing company profit and growth (Solnet, McLennan & Ford, 2018).

In the hospitality literature, the majority of researchers agree that employee turnover has an impact on the bottom line (Chi & Gusroy, 2009). The literature also suggests that employee retention and customer retention are closely linked. Staff who are satisfied with their work environment are more likely to be retained, which reduces the cost of recruiting and developing new staff. Research also suggests that satisfied staff are more likely to provide better services which result in satisfactory service experiences (Chi & Gusroy, 2009). Furthermore, these satisfactory service experiences can result in repeat business and retention of customers. Customer retention is expected to improve financial performance due to the costs of acquiring new customers versus servicing retained clientele.

The main conjecture of the service-profit chain is that customer satisfaction mediates either completely or to a certain degree, the relationship between staff experiences and business performance. The service profit chain has been punted by its authors as a framework for

creating a strategic vision for excellent service and that positive results can be obtained by interpreting and adapting the concepts to an organisation's context (Gelade & Young, 2005).

### The Links in the Service-Profit Chain



**Figure 1. The Service Profit Chain Model (Heskett et al., 2008:166)**

Due to the importance of customer satisfaction to organisations, many nation states have a national index that measures and tracks customer satisfaction at a national level. The American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) measure customer perceptions quarterly across 200 organisations representing the various economic sectors. The largest organisations within each industry are asked to participate and 250 interviews are conducted with current consumers. Each organisation receives a rating which is developed from customers' perceptions of quality, value, satisfaction, expectations, complaints and future loyalty (Solnet et al., 2018; Zeithmal et al., 2009). The ACSI measures three drivers of customer satisfaction namely customer expectations, perceived quality and perceived value. A customer satisfaction score is created which when correlated with customer complaints is used to gauge customer loyalty.

Using the ACSI data, researchers have successfully identified a clear relationship between ACSI scores and market value added, which gauges the company's success in creating wealth

for shareholders. Research has also illustrated how organisations that invest in service and have high levels of customer satisfaction offer higher returns to shareholders (Zeithmal et al., 2009). According to Heskett (1997), when customers are highly satisfied there is a particularly strong relationship between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Conversely, there is also a strong relationship between customer dissatisfaction and defection.

The South African Consumer Satisfaction Index (SAcsi) has been in operation since 2013 and is based on the ACSI. SAcsi is a national standard of quality of South African goods and services (Consulta, 2017) and is an independent index which allows South African organisations to be compared to global companies in terms of customer satisfaction. The index involves the use of customer surveys with the score being based on 270 customer interviews and 70 000 interviews occurring annually. Companies use SAcsi as a measure of customer satisfaction and like ACSI, can be used a metric for company investors to make investment decisions.

The above discussion on the business case for CS points out a significant contradiction in CS theory (Rosenthal et al., 2001). There is an inherent paradox between the rhetoric of providing excellent CS to customers and the concerns of management with regards to cost, profit and control and standardisation of labour. For e.g. a customer may want to engage in a lengthy discussion with a service employee following the purchase of a low margin product. This creates the situation where some customers (big buyers) are prioritised over the others (small buyers), resulting in unequal levels of service.

It is important to note that the prioritisation of high profit customers in terms of service quality was also identified in the study and will be further discussed in the research findings chapter. A discussion of the seminal CS theory of service quality follows.

#### **2.5.4 Service Quality and SERVQUAL**

In the late 1980's, three influential researchers in the services marketing field namely Parasuraman, Berry and Zeithmal set out to investigate the quality of services (Zeithmal, Parasurman & Berry, 1990). Twelve customer focus group discussions were held in four different service sectors namely retail banking, credit card, securities brokerage and product repair and maintenance. It was clear from the findings of these discussions that whether guests appraised a service interaction as being favourable or unfavourable depended on how

customers perceived the actual service behaviour in contrast to what they expected to happen. As a consequence, the researchers arrived at a definition of service quality as the difference between customer expectations of a service encounter and the customer's perception of how the service encounter occurred. The focus group interviews revealed four common themes regarding customer expectations. Firstly, word of mouth communications determined expectations of customers where the customer had been recommended by a friend or family member. Secondly customer expectations also seemed to depend on the individual characteristics or needs of the customer. For e.g. some customers preferred to obtain maximum credit limits from credit card companies while others hoped for the same companies to not offer them such high facilities. Thirdly, customer's past experiences with companies influenced their expectation levels and finally external communications such as advertising were key factors in impacting customer expectations from an organisation (Zeithmal et al., 1990).

The research revealed a set of key criteria that customers used to evaluate service encounters, namely assurance, empathy, tangibles, reliability and responsiveness. Tangibles refer to the physical representation of the service such as facilities, equipment and staff (Zeithmal et al., 2009). Using these five dimensions, an instrument called SERVQUAL was developed to measure customer perceptions of service quality. Research carried out on service quality has been dominated by the SERVQUAL instrument (Camgoz-Akdag, Tarim, Lonial & Yatkim, 2013).

SERVQUAL is based on the gap model which purports the existence of five gaps in delivering and marketing services (Prentice, 2016; Zeithmal et al., 2009). The customer gap addresses the difference between customer expectations of service and perceptions of actual service. Thereafter come four gaps from the service provider's perspective. The first gap is called the listening gap and is the difference between customer expectations and the firm's understanding of those expectations. It is expected that listening to customers' expectations can assist in reducing this chasm. The service design and standards gap refers to the construction of service processes and service standards that reflect customer expectations. The third gap concerns service performance and is the difference between customer-driven service standards and the actual service performance by staff. Finally, the service communication gap refers to the difference between service delivery and the firm's external communications. The gap model proposes that in order for companies to improve service quality, the provider gaps need to be closed (Zeithaml Bitner & Gremler, 2012).

The dimensions noted in the SERVQUAL instrument often vary according to the cultural context and industry that service providers operates in. In a South African quantitative study on service quality in the banking industry, Krishundutt and Parumasur (2007) found that communication, courtesy, competence and reliability were the four main dimensions identified by customers that impact service quality. In addition, the study found considerable differences in gender perceptions of service quality. Women appeared to be more difficult to satisfy and had greater expectations of service quality in relation to responsiveness, courtesy and accessibility than men.

### **2.5.5 The Link between Service Quality and Organisational Factors**

Schneider's (1991) early research on service quality and profits provided support for a link between employee and customer perceptions and attitudes towards service quality. The research found that when staff had a positive perceptions of the firm's HR practices (had positive work attitudes), customers evaluated service quality as being at a high level. In addition, customer's intentions to switch to competitors was related to staff perceptions on the level of service quality provided to customers. Furthermore, findings indicated a direct link between customers' perception of service quality and the likelihood of employees leaving the organisation. Tsaur and Linn (2004) identified the role of HRM practices in promoting service quality in Taiwanese tourist hotels. Zheng (2009) found significant connections between HRM practices, employee retention and organisational performance.

In his study of service quality in bank branches, Schneider (1991) classifies an organisation as having a service imperative when four requirements are met. Firstly, managers need to place emphasis on service through rewarding suggestions for service improvement as well as setting service goals and planning for service delivery. Secondly, the organisation must have the human resources to complete tasks, in terms of headcount as well as required skills. In addition, the organisation must have the required equipment and supplies to complete required tasks. Finally, the firm must place emphasis on the retention of customers in its daily activities.

A study by Koys (2001) revealed correlations between job satisfaction and customer satisfaction. Chand (2010) found that HRM practices have a positive impact on enhancing service quality as well as customer satisfaction and performance within a hotel context.

Schneider (1991) found that with increased tenure, there is a consistent increase in job satisfaction and perceived service competence.

When investigating the impact of HR practices on service provided, Chebal, Bahin and Kollia (2002) found that work fairness in relation to pay and recruitment procedures was a key determinant of frontline service behaviours. Wu and Parker (2011) highlight the link between organisational climate (discussed later) and staff members' proactive CS behaviours. Schneider (1991) notes that generic HR practices may also be inappropriate according to market segment. Some organisations may require a specific type of person to be hired in comparison to other market segments. In the same way training, compensation, career pathing and supervision can vary according to market segment. Focusing on service demands of customers can be achieved through recruiting and selecting suitable people for the market segment, who can deliver expected service to the market.

Schneider's (1991) views on aligning HR practices such as recruiting and training in line with the requirements of the market segment will be explored in more detail at a later stage in relation to the case. In addition, the findings of evidence-based research linking service quality with organisational factors such as leadership, employee engagement and organisational climate will also be investigated later in the review of the literature. The following discussion looks at the relationship between service quality, customer satisfaction and customer value.

### **2.5.6 Relationships between Service Quality, Satisfaction and Value**

In a study on customers' perceptions of service quality in the gaming areas of selected casinos in South Africa, Wannenburg (2009) found that service quality impacts customer satisfaction. The process oriented approach to customer satisfaction views consumption as an experience comprising collective perceptual, evaluative and psychological processes (Green & Boshoff, 2002). The difference between satisfaction and service quality lies in the understanding that service quality is based on perceptions while satisfaction is experienced based. Thus a five star resort may be perceived by people who haven't stayed there as having high quality service while satisfaction must be experienced to be evaluated.

Wu (2014) defines perceived value as the consumer's aggregate assessment of the usefulness of a product based on the perception of what is received and what is disbursed, thus involving from the exchange that occurs between consumers and providers. Perceived value is presumed

to be related to customer satisfaction and service quality. From a customer's viewpoint, Lamb, Hair and McDaniel (2005) provide an understanding of consumer value as the ratio between benefits accrued from a product or service and the costs involved in obtaining it. Influential theorists in the services marketing literature, Drew & Bolton (1987), state that perceptions of value are also determined by frame of reference of the purchaser in which he or she makes the buying decision, the availability of substitutes as well as buyer preferences.

Green and Boshoff (2002) found that technical components of the service delivery process have the largest impact on customer satisfaction in comparison to perceived value and service quality. The study found that technical components of service are often overlooked as firms are unable to differentiate themselves sustainably on technical aspects of service before being mimicked by the competition. Green and Boshoff (2002) maintain that the core component of a service must be managed meticulously as it is the major source of customer satisfaction. The experience-based aspects of service delivery such as friendliness of the frontline staff member has a greater impact on service quality perceptions. The study also did not find a relationship between extrinsic service quality and customer satisfaction. This could be due to the notion that if tangible aspects of service delivery are present, they may not affect consumer satisfaction however if they are absent they may hamper satisfaction. Another explanation may be that extrinsic service quality is more important within the context of a tourism service. For example, when going bungee-jumping, having an instructor who re-assures participants may enhance service quality perceptions.

The perceived value perspective aims to understand customer behaviour from a standpoint of perceived value (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2010). Value is often perceived as hedonic or utilitarian. Mackay (1999) mentions that merging the hedonic and utilitarian aspects through communicating the attractiveness of a product involves a mix of rational and emotional elements which can be of benefit to firms. Terblanche and Boshoff (2010) indicate that product value can be enhanced by marketing messages that stress the superior quality of a product.

Traditionally customer value has been seen to only be understood in relation to price and quality trade-off. Terblanche and Boshoff (2010) highlight eight novel types of customer value, including excellence, efficiency, status, esteem, play, aesthetics, ethics and spirituality. Schull (2012) discusses the value of escapism provided by video-based slots machines to customers. The self-contained process of playing slots machines is believed to create a trance-like mental state that takes individuals away from their own internal problems such as depression and

anxiety, as well as environmental issues, into a zone of repeated cyclical behaviours that creates a state of flow. This state has been described as a numbness which takes individuals away from worldly experiences, suspends the self creating a sense of emotional calm (Schull, 2012). Rather than the thrill of winning money, it is believed that maintenance of this mental state of escapism is one of the main reasons for explaining addiction, and should be recognised by casino operators as a major aspect of customer value provided to slots machine clients. This state of flow will be discussed further in the upcoming discussion of employee engagement. As mentioned earlier, Green and Boshoff (2002) highlighted the importance of technical components of the service delivery process. The discussion now shifts to look at how organisational factors can be determinants of excellent CS.

## **2.6 Determinants of Excellent CS: Organisational Factors**

It is generally accepted that an organisation should possess two major ingredients for service personnel to deliver excellent service, namely a concern for customers (customer-focused practices and policies) and a concern for employees i.e. the manner in which employees are treated and supported by management (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010). A concern for employees is part of organisational factors that influence excellent CS. Organisational factors which can impact CS include culture (Schneider, 1991), climate (Ostroff & Bowen, 2001), leadership (Schneider, 1991), job design and empowerment (Chebal et al., 2002) and management support and commitment (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2011) and feedback.

### **2.6.1 The Service Delivery System**

As noted by Sulek et al. (1995), there are various elements which impact the service delivery process and could enhance CS interactions, many of which employees have little control over. The service delivery system is comprised of the physical design of the service environment, technology, people, and systems for process control (Alireza & Faryabi, 2012). Heskett, Sasser and Schlesinger (1997) define a service delivery system as including information and non-information support systems, location, layout, customer management tools, décor and atmosphere and staff facilities. Heskett et al. (1997) highlights that features of a company's service delivery system are critical as they can improve or reduce the quality of work performed by employees, as well as control customer behaviour in different ways such as directing customer traffic flow. Efforts to redesign aspects of the service delivery system can have little

impact on customer satisfaction if improvements are made in areas not perceived as important by clientele. As a result, customer feedback mechanisms are integral to identifying service delivery challenges and for planning solutions to enhance CS.

The service-scape refers to the physical environment in which the service is provided and in which employees and the customer interact. Service-scapes include any tangible commodities that contribute to performance or communication of the service (Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremier, 2009). Service delivery systems should aim to involve customer's in the delivery of the service, provide sufficient room for frontline staff to adapt service to individual customer needs and provide security against CS failure at key points in the service delivery process.

Schull (2012) highlights that the design elements concerning the physical architecture of a casino are based around getting customers to move from the card issuing desk to the centre of the casino where they will be attracted to engaging in gambling activities to create profit for the casino. Slots machines areas are designed in a maze-like format to reduce spatial awareness so customers spend more time in the gaming area as well as to create confusion. The physical space is designed to capture customer's attention and guide them towards the slots machines. Considering that repeated studies have indicated that the highest income areas are small enclaves where customers can isolate themselves and delve into their own worlds through machine-playing, most casino are designed to reduce space to create these enclaves (Friedman, 2000). This is achieved through machine congestion, reduced line of sight on the casino floor and low roofing. Spatial cues such as blinking lights and curved entrances guide customers towards slots machines. The environment takes customers through a multitude of sensory experiences including disorientating sounds involving the constant ringing of machines and lights.

According to Friedman (2000), every aspect of the environment, including the patterns of carpet, lighting intensity, the width of aisles and sound reflection should be engineered to steer the attention of customers towards the machine. Once seated at a machine, the visual and auditory experiences of video-based slots machines as well as patterns of play, create an immersive, personal experience that allows for escapism from the problems of daily life. Schule (2012) notes that casino design is based within an "immersion paradigm" which places customers in a de-subjectified, uninterrupted state of motion so as to create an experiential affect, thus increasing customer value and profit. The impact of CS, when customers are removed from this immersive state can be critical point in providing positive customer

experiences. The discussion below looks at evidence-based research on CS within the casino environment.

### **2.6.2 Casino Slots Research**

According to Suh and Erdem (2009), due to competition, customers in the casino industry have an array of options to choose from and are often no longer content with playing tables (e.g. poker) or slots machines but are seeking a pleasurable gaming experience. Past studies in the service environment indicate that customers who experienced high service quality reported higher customer satisfaction and were more likely to provide repeat purchasing behaviours (Suh & Erdem, 2009). Considering that slots machines often make up the largest proportion of revenue for casinos, various studies have identified the need for more research into improving customers' slots gaming experiences (Johnson, 2000; Lucas 2003; Mayer et al. 1998).

Johnson (2002) highlighted the importance of staff interaction with casino customers as a key element to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. Steinhauer (1997) indicates that when newly themed casinos open in Las Vegas, older casinos often experience decreased occupancy thus highlighting the importance of the service-scape and customer perceptions of the physical environment of the casino. Wu (2014) found that in terms of the quality of the physical casino environment, significant dimensions identified were design, ambience, equipment and safety and security, ranked in order of significance. In a South African study, Wannenburg (2008) analysed customers' overall perceptions of casino gaming areas. In the study, physical factors such as the layout, accessibility, facility aesthetics, seating comfort and the cleanliness of the gaming area were analysed to get an indication of how gamers experienced the physical space. In addition, the service quality experience by gamers was assessed. Outcomes of the study highlighted customer satisfaction with physical factors of the gaming area as well as satisfaction with service quality of frontline CS staff such as cashiers, waitrons and slots technicians who, according to customer feedback provided prompt, efficient and friendly service. While CS is influenced by organisational factors, individual factors such as attitudes, communication skills and literacy levels seems to play a critical role in customer satisfaction.

A study by Suh and Erdem (2009) found that when management introduced a cashless ticket pay-out system to replace the coin operated slots machines, there was a reduced need for staff to provide change to customers in the slots areas. However this resulted in customers' perceiving a longer waiting time when asking for assistance. The study maintains that the

reduction in staff numbers on the floor could have changed customers' perceptions of waiting times for service. Suh and Erdem (2000) also found that more comfortable seating could increase the slots gaming experience and increase profits by having customers playing for longer. Furthermore, when assessing service quality, the study found deficiencies in the servicescape (physical environment) such as atmosphere, safety and cleanliness. Shortfalls in service behaviours were also found in promptness of drinks service, providing change, empathy from employees, employee response efficiency, slot-players club-performance and staff empowerment and willingness (Suh & Erdem, 2009). The deficiencies in employee interactional skills suggested poor staff supervision or inadequate staff selection and training.

A study by Johnson (2012) used a critical incident technique to identify service encounters that employees and customers' found either satisfactory or inadequate from the guests' perspective. With regards to service delivery failures, 57% of customers reported dissatisfactory interactions related to slot machine breakdowns, language barriers when dealing with frontline employees and lack of quick beverage service. Guests indicated that it was the staff member's unwillingness to remedy the problem, rather than the actual problem itself, that resulted in customer dissatisfaction with the service encounter. Employees noted that customer dissatisfaction occurred when customers were unaware of times when they could not obtain change from staff, such as shift handovers when counting the bank occurred, pointing to the need for customer education on company processes (Johnson, 2012). Guests were often pleasantly surprised when staff remembered their names and asked them about their personal interests. Getting to know customers' in a personal way was also seen as a fun part of the job by employees. Other behaviours that impressed customers included predicting their needs before having to request help, wishing guests good luck and commending winners (Johnson, 2012).

Employees identified dissatisfactory incidents with regards to servicing customers including, failing to greet customers, not providing service until a tipping situation presented itself and not responding to verbal or body language when customers were requesting provision of change (Johnson, 2012). The study highlighted the need for management to implement policies based on customer needs and to empower service staff to flexibly apply these policies to exceed customer expectations and achieve excellent CS. Service behaviours such as displaying empathy, courtesy, consideration and tact in dealing with customers as well as being perceptive to their needs, promotes positive perceptions of customer satisfaction and loyalty. It was also found that spur of the moment employee actions which had not been requested by customers,

accounted for the bulk of satisfactory encounters for both guests and employees (Johnson, 2012).

In addition to the physical casino environment and its impact on CS, the behaviour of frontline staff remains a key determinant of customers' service experiences. The next section looks at the effect of organisational culture and climate on organisational performance within the service environment.

### **2.6.3 Organisational Culture and Climate and Organisational Performance**

Organisational culture refers to the shared values, beliefs and implicit assumptions that steer employee's actions as well as traditions and patterns of behaviour within a company (Schein, 2010). Organisational culture is thought of as a long-term, stabilising factor in an organisation which is continuously changing. However changes in organisational culture as a result of organisational change are often a gradual process.

In contrast, organisational climate dominated the early research on organisational environments in the 1960's and 1970's, with the concept of organisational culture being more prevalent in the 1980's (Schneider, Eckhart & Macey, 2012). Organisational climate is concerned with employee perceptions of what the organisation is like in relation to policies, practices, procedures and incentives. In comparison to culture, climate is more immediate and can be sensed by individuals upon entering company premises through observing the physical environment and experiencing the attitudes of staff, as well as the handling of clients and new staff members (Ostroff et al., 2013). Climate is often perceived as being the operationalisation of culture (Chiou and Chang, 2009). Climate is concerned with the surface level experiences of the organisation through policies and practices. It is through these organisational practices and policies that staff perceptions of what the organisation is like, as well as consequent attitudes and behaviours are influenced. Overall staff attitudes and behaviours are impacted by climate which in turn influence organisational effectiveness, productivity and performance.

The importance of organisational culture and climate in relation to organisational performance cannot be understated. Organisational climate and culture shape both group and individual behaviours thereby influencing employee turnover, job satisfaction, citizenship, work performance and organisational effectiveness (Schneider, 2011; Gelade & Young, 2005),

safety (Schneider, 2002) as well as customer satisfaction, service quality and organisational effectiveness (Ostroff, Knickel & Muhammed, 2013).

In order for climate to emerge there must be a general consensus in perceptions of the nature of the organisation. The degree of variance in perceptions signifies the strength of the climate. Ostroff et al. (2013) distinguishes between weak and strong situations which can be found in relation to both organisational climate and culture. In simplistic terms, weak situations encompass a variation in perceptions and strong situations entail more homogeneity. If weak situations are created, individual perceptions of the organisation develop resulting in variability in perceptions of climate. Consequently, this effects variability in individual attitudes and behaviours, damaging the relationship with company performance. Weak situations are characterised by ambiguity, are not interpreted similarly across staff, do not create expectancies in relation to desired behaviours and lack adequate incentive for high performance (Schneider, Eckhart & Macey, 2012).

Strong situations entail more homogeneity which is achieved by leading all staff to interpret events in the same manner. In strong situations, uniform expectancies are established concerning appropriate response patterns, sufficient incentives are provided for performance within the particular response pattern and skills are taught for construction and execution. There are three forms of strength that characterise strong situations (Ostroff et al., 2013). Agreement-based strength occurs when staff construe and encode the situation in the same manner, which relates to their agreement on climate and culture. System-based strength involves the existence of a tight culture where non-conformity is not accepted. The culture or climate permeates every aspect of organisational life, places strong expectations on staff and tries to encourage uniform behaviours through strong socialisation and sanctions for incongruent conduct. Alignment-based strength relates to how key aspects of the organisation, such as strategy, goals, culture, practices and structure, need to be designed and arranged in ways that align and harmonize with each other. For example, practices must be designed such that they are in alignment with cultural values and assumptions.

In order for HR systems to create strong situations, HR practices must be delivered in a consistent manner, as well as being visible and significant. In addition, there must be consensus in relation to HR practices which must be clearly and consistently communicated within the organisation (Schneider, Eckhart & Macey, 2012). Such conditions help curb ambiguity and increase clarity of interpretation to assist in the development of similar cognitive maps or sense-

making processes across staff members. This gives rise to homogenous attributes amongst staff members, who are recruited in line with company-person value fit. Individuals whose values and beliefs do not fit those of the company, leave the organisation whilst those individuals whose values are aligned with organisational values are retained. This results in the retention of individuals with specific values and personality types that are suitable to the achievement of business goals (Ostroff *et al.*, 2013).

The emergence of organisational climate is influenced by various factors such as organisational hierarchy and practices, homogeneity, team processes and interpersonal interaction (Schneider, Eckhart & Macey, 2012). In terms of how organisational climate emerges through group social interaction, the theory of staff adopting the opinions of other employees to enrich their identities is discussed (Ostroff *et al.*, 2013). Social tuning explains the process through which social interactions can result in the adoption of attitudes of others. Creating a sense of a shared reality or shared beliefs is said to create and preserve social bonds with others (Ostroff *et al.*, 2013). Changing our beliefs and attitudes to suit that of others is a means of achieving a shared reality. When people attempt to get along with others or acquire knowledge they are more likely to adjust their attitudes and beliefs to others

Through interpersonal communication and shared views, meaning-making happens between team members. Moscovici's theory of social representation provides a theoretical underpinning for understanding how shared perceptions of the organisation (organisational climate) emerges through social interactions between staff. A social representation (SR) is a network of ideas, values and practices which produce collective thought systems and collective cognitions amongst a group of people (Hoijer, 2011). SR's are often comprised of social or cultural objects which allow for contextual location of an idea or concept for common-sense understanding between individuals in a group. SR's allow people to orientate themselves in the social world and communicate by using a code for social exchange. This allow for classification and naming of people, objects and behaviours within a shared identity matrix allowing for a collective frame of reference. SR's can be used to develop shared understanding of concepts between people in groups and can be used to organise the discourse. SR's can carry symbolic meaning as well as be anchored in themes, emotions and metaphors through visual objects. For example, the use of the polar bear by the media as an image symbolic of climate change for individuals. SR's can occur on different levels (individual, group and societal) and are embedded in communication practices such as group dialogue. Individuals and groups generate SR's through social interaction and can transform SR's or socially reinforce them through

communication in groups (Hoijer, 2011). In organisational teams, the shared mental assumptions of the way things are done are conveyed through social interactions. As a consequence, integral parts of the work process can be identified, understood and improved. Through continuous cycles of interaction and interpretation, team members create meaning out of organisational events, and it is these interactions that are likely to establish conformed behaviours and standards in the organisation (Ostroff et al., 2013).

Bowen and Schneider (2014) argue that multiple climates occur simultaneously within the organisational context. The idea is that organisations are comprised not of one climate only, but of various climates all of which are in constant interaction with one another. Climates can be simultaneously studied considering that they have similar antecedents such as leadership and HRM practices and different climates can often be in competition with one another. There are both content climates and process climates. For example, in terms of content climates, there could be both a service climate (where positive CS behaviours are rewarded and supported through leadership, work policies and practices) and a sales climate (encouraging positive selling behaviours). An example of a process climate would be the fairness and ethics climate in an organisation. A fairness and ethics climate can serve as a good foundation for a service climate to be constructed upon and can also have a positive impact on employee engagement (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). Walumbwa, Hartnell, and Oke (2010) identified that both procedural justice (fairness climate) and service climate moderated the relationship between servant leadership and organisational citizenship behaviours. In a study on the diversity climate and customer satisfaction relationship in retail organisations in the United States, McKay et al., (2011) found that diversity climate is positively and significantly linked to customer satisfaction, and that the correlation between diversity climate and customer satisfaction was highest when outlets were perceived to have positive service climates.

Whilst relating more to group culture, Edgar Schein defines culture as “a pattern of shared basic assumptions learned by a group as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, which has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein, 2010, p.18). Organisational culture can be defined as the way things are done by members of an organisation, within the organisation.

Culture is learned over time and is seen as a vicarious and experiential learning experience where individuals learn both by observing others and through their own work experiences

(Schein, 2010). This occurs through various interactions between leaders and staff resulting in sense-making. Individuals' backgrounds and traits inform their values and social cognitive processes, which impact psychological climate.

While climate is more related to experiencing the impact of HR practices and perceptions of what the organisation is like, culture can be perceived as an evolved context that is entrenched in organisational systems. Culture is more resistant than climate, is based on ideologies central to organisational success, has historical origins and is collectively held (Schein, 2010).

According to Schein (2010), there are three layers where organisational culture manifests namely observable artefacts, espoused values and fundamental, underlying assumptions. Cultural artefacts are surface level representations of underlying values such as symbols (physical setting), language and narratives. Espoused values tend to reflect the values that are promoted by management. Enacted values are those values that are implemented through staff behaviours and are consistent with espoused values. Deeply held assumptions begin as values and become so ingrained that they take on the character of assumptions. Schein (2010) maintains that deeply held assumptions represent the core manifestation of culture as they are rarely confronted, are very difficult to change and ignore the symbolic nature of culture.

Organisational culture is known to originate from three internal sources namely, the beliefs and values of founders of the organisation, the learning experiences of the group members as the organisation grows and the new beliefs, values and assumption that are brought in with new employees and managers (Schein, 2010). Evidence-based research suggests that founders of an organisation play a critical role in forming culture and leaders impact how the culture is preserved and evolves over time. According to the resource-based view, culture can be seen as being a valuable resource that cannot be imitated and as a result can serve as a source of competitive advantage.

Emergence of organisational culture is partially dependent on the recruitment of new members into the organisation who embody values that are consistent with organisational values and who in turn impact the organisational culture through their personal values, beliefs, attitudes and behaviours. However, the creation of a shared culture also requires the modelling of interactions into the sense-making process. Leaders are viewed as having a central role in the shaping and development of culture and climate (Schein, 2010) as well as facilitating alignment between culture, practices and climate.

The roles of the leader in the context of cultural emergence in an organisation is pivotal as leader-employee interactions generate consensus on the values, beliefs and assumptions in new work units over time. Hartnell and Kinicki (2011) maintain that cultural emergence is a learning process based on employees vicarious and experiential learning experiences. Cultural emergence emanates from leaders giving meaning to employee experiences through framing or sense-making. The sense-making process occurs through leader's regulatory behaviours such as planning, organising, monitoring, evaluating and correcting behaviour in pursuit of company goals, as well as employee's regulatory behaviours and leader-employee interactions. Vicarious norms relate to learned behavioural expectations which come about from listening to leaders and observing their regulatory actions (Ostroff et al., 2013). These regulatory processes are believed to result in experiential learning (through consequences of goal-directed behaviour) and shared mental models of functional and effective behaviour. Shared mental models facilitate shared interpretation, understanding and framing of important contextual aspects, and produce experiential norms as they generate consensus in terms of normative expectations concerning future behaviour. This allows for a shared culture to develop.

As discussed above, leadership is a key element of building culture in organisations. The literature on the impact of leadership on service quality is explored below.

#### **2.6.4 Leadership and Service Quality**

There are two main elements that impact service work performance positively, these are service climate and excellent supervisory-level leadership (Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng & Tse, 2007). Service climate refers to the shared employee perceptions of how service is encouraged in the organisation through policies, practices and procedures. Effective internal CS fosters empowered and happier staff members who are inclined to work more effectively. On the other hand, high service quality to external customers results in customer satisfaction and loyalty which can encourage profitability (Hui et al., 2007).

The literature on leadership, differentiates between three types of leadership behaviours, namely task-oriented behaviours (performance), people-oriented behaviours and ethical behaviours (Hui et al., 2007). In a service context, task-oriented actions include setting targets, empowering, inspiring and rewarding positive service behaviours and serving as role models. People-oriented behaviours including resolving staff conflicts, listening and respecting

employees' views and decision as well as being supportive. Ethical behaviours relate to the fairness of a leader's actions, lack of favouritism and abuse of power.

Directive leadership entails hierarchical goal-setting and role-clarification (Bass & Riggio, 2006). This form of leadership is autocratic and task-orientated in nature and involves providing clear expectations to employees. Directive leadership often results in employees not accepting managerial decisions due to a lack of involvement in decision-making and can result in frontline staff not advocating organisational values in service (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2009). Participative and empowering leadership styles have been found to increase service quality due to frontline employees being allowed to make decisions and thus be more flexible in response to customer requests. Participative leadership involves employees consulting their line manager before making decisions in responding to customer needs and entails consensus, delegation and participation. On the other hand, empowering leadership is different to participative leadership in that employees are allowed autonomy and authority so as to exert more control over decision-making in conducting their work duties. Due to being transformational in nature, empowering leadership can persuade frontline employees to adopt the organisations vision and values of service and respond creatively to customer needs.

The situational approach to leadership points to the importance of contextual factors such as employee characteristics, nature of work, organisational strategy and structure when considering leadership effectiveness (Mesu, Sanders & Van Riemsdijk, 2014). Transformational leadership involves leader behaviours which inspire and motivate team members to exceed performance expectations. Transactional leadership entails leader-member exchanges where high performance is traded for rewards and recognition.

Past research indicates that the leadership behaviours detailed above impact the quality of work of frontline service staff (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Pillai, Schriesheim & Williams, 1999). Lam and Schaubroek (2000) revealed that using credible and influential individuals as leaders improved the attitudes of bank tellers towards service interventions, resulting in improved customer satisfaction. In addition, the degree of servant leadership amongst supervisors has been found to have an effect on OCB of staff in 247 grocery store departments (Hui et al., 2007). As alluded to earlier, OCB refers to role behaviours that are outside the job description, which are not formally rewarded or necessitated by the Human Resources System, however which enhance organisational operations (Kwak & Kim, 2015).

With regard to the link between supervisory behaviours and service climate, a previous study has shown that employees who have a closer relationship with their supervisors tend to have a better appraisal of the organisational climate (Hui et al., 2007). Indeed, the service quality provided by staff is affected by various factors other than leadership behaviours such as task ambiguity, professionalism of staff, intrinsic job satisfaction and a sense of community amongst the team (Hui et al., 2007). However, in relation to supervisory behaviours, having shared values amongst staff or work norms can impact coercion to improve service performance.

Hui et al., (2007) examined how service climate and effective leadership actions can impact work performance of frontline service employees in China across the telecommunications, retail and hospitality industries as well as government. The study found that effective leadership behaviours impact service work performance only when the service climate is not favourable rather than when it is favourable. The authors suggest that under such conditions, managers need to clarify expectations and provide the required coaching and support to enhance service quality.

A study by Kwak and Kim (2015) in the Korean hotel industry, found that the servant leadership style of managers was positively related to customers' perception of the level of service quality. In addition, this positive relationship was mediated by both the staff members' individual-level and group-level OCB. From the previous discussion, it is evident that meeting internal customers' needs results in improved service quality to external clients. Servant leadership refers to a leadership style that focuses on the development of employees to realise their potential by building self-confidence, involves the leader being a positive role model who develops trusting relationships and provides support and resources to team members (Avolio & Gardner, 2005 & Greenleaf, 1977 as cited in Kwak & Kim, 2015). Liden et al., (2008) proposes various traits and skills required of servant leaders. Conceptual skills are needed which include work related knowledge that assists in supporting and coaching employees. Servant leaders empower staff by allowing them to problem solve and complete tasks as well as helping them grow through guiding their career development. Servant leaders put their team members' needs ahead of their own as well as having a strong moral character by being fair, open and honest in their dealings with staff. Servant leaders also promote emotional healing by showing sensitivity towards employees' personal problems and create value for others by contributing to the community (Kwak & Kim, 2015).

According to Walumba, Hartnell and Oke (2010), servant leadership fosters employee OCB towards other individuals and groups with the servant leader inducing employee behaviour through cognitive and emotional processes of social learning and social exchange. Social learning is seen as the mechanism through which servant leadership has an impact on subordinate behaviour (Dierendonck, 2011 as cited in Kwak & Kim, 2015). When a servant leader exhibits extra role behaviours, such behaviours may be observed, modelled and replicated by employees towards others. In terms of the leader-follower social exchange process, when an authentic leader supports a team member with conceptual skills as well as empowering, helping and putting the needs of the staff member first, the employee may appreciate the leader's efforts and willingly put in more effort into job tasks (Liden et al., 2008).

Liden et al. (2008) found that when supervisors were thought of by staff as being servant leaders, staff performed OCB for the community more frequently and carried out their job tasks in a more prosocial manner. In the same way, Wu et al., (2013) found that Chinese hospitality workers performed more OCB behaviours when supervisors were seen as being servant leaders. Previous research has indicated that client satisfaction with service quality was greater when they interacted with staff who displayed extra-role behaviours (Kwak & Kim, 2015). Morrison (1996) indicates that displaying OCB behaviours aligns well with staff behaviours required for better quality CS, which suggests a link between staff OCB and customer perception of service quality. Babakus, Yavas and Ashill (2010) found that servant leadership decreased frontline staff burnout and their ensuing turnover intentions, whilst Liden et al., (2008) found that servant leadership impacted organisational commitment positively. Seeing that staff experiencing burnout and low organisational commitment are known to provide low quality CS (Kwak & Kim, 2015), the suggestion that servant leadership enhances CS quality is maintained. The study by Van Lill (2007) which developed and evaluated a management development programme for service differentiation within the casino industry revealed that junior managers displayed a disagreement with the commanding managerial style of individuals from the older generation within the organisation. A young cohort of junior managers noted that leaders within Sun International managed through positional power and that the content being taught in leadership programmes was not being applied in the workplace setting. Whilst the obvious benefits of servant leadership for frontline staff is indicated above, the case study report in this research study will seek to explore the issue of inter-generational leadership style and culture change within the casino industry in more detail at a later stage.

Along with effective leadership styles, introducing a culture based on service excellence is integral in order to enhance CS behaviours of frontline staff. The discussion below examines the change management literature in relation to CRM.

### **2.6.5 Change Management in Casino Customer Relationship Management**

Change management involves a training aspect in order to influence attitudes and behaviours of staff in alignment with new business strategies. Within the case that was examined for this study, the CS workshop that was developed to improve service of frontline staff in the slots department over the December peak season was a once-off intervention that was not positioned within a larger change management strategy due to time and cost constraints.

A study by Kale (2005) looked at how change management interventions are employed to introduce and embed customer relationship management systems. CRM aims to enhance customer experience across an organisation by impacting business strategy, operations and processes so as to increase customer retention and loyalty. CRM can be seen as a business strategy by employing information technology within a business that has already maintained a culture of CS.

Kale (2005) sees change management as involving two different approaches, namely an engineering approach to enhancing performance and a psychologist's approach to influencing the people side of change interventions. An examination of the change management literature indicates that change management interventions are comprised of five areas including selling change internally, instituting a change management infrastructure, training, changing the organisational structure and performance management system as well as altering incentives (Goldstein, 1994; Handy, 1996 and Kotter, 1996). Seminal theorists on change management had differing approaches to developing their theory. Lewin's (1951) three step change model was based on action research within small groups, Senge (1999) learning organisation used management consulting experience and Kotter's (1996) eight step change model employed a large database of case studies to develop a conventional, practitioner approach to change management (Buchanan et al., 2005).

Selling change internally requires a well-resourced internal marketing programme. Senior leaders play a pivotal role in determining behavioural changes within an organisation and creating an environment that is welcoming of the change process. During change processes,

cultural issues are often responsible for derailing the intervention. Behavioural expectations of staff and the reasons for these behavioural changes in terms of the impact on the customer and the consequent contribution to business success, must be clearly communicated to employees to increase buy-in. Buy-in is largely facilitated through empowerment by inculcating a sense of energy, meaningfulness and effect across the organisational structure. Obtaining employee input on processes to enact the business strategy increases commitment whilst imposing changes can result in resistance (Kale, 2005). Employees must understand how their individual behaviours are a contributing factor to the success of the implementation of the business strategy. Internal marketing is enhanced through the assembly of a sponsor group from all levels who aims to brainstorm change implementation plans, provide feedback on implementation and arrange meetings to celebrate short term wins.

Change infrastructure relates to the people management aspect of the intervention and the various role-players in managing the process. The change agent must be a leader who is adaptable to personal change and holds the correct beliefs thereby possessing qualities such as optimism, self-confidence, creativity, having a sense of purpose and being able to work well with others (Kale, 2005; Kotter, 1996). The change leader must not only communicate strategy to staff but also place emphasis on the core values that appeal to staff and customers. The change leader must provide advice on the methodology of the change intervention and train decision-makers in implementation of the methodology. The steering team must oversee the change management process, fan up support from stakeholders and clear obstacles obstructing the change effort. Project managers need to ensure project activities are well-coordinated whilst team leaders must ensure that project activities are delegated and completed at this level. In addition, content experts should provide recommendations on work processes and procedures, relevant software and reward policy (Kale, 2005).

Training must involve changing employee mind-sets to make the organisation more customer focused and provide staff with the required skills to provide high levels of CS. Change in an individual's frame of mind can culminate in habitual customer-oriented behaviours. In a critical study on the management of call-centre workers, Wray-Bliss (2001) notes that that a focus on customer needs can be viewed as a way of getting workers to provide emotional labour to customers and be the human face of the organisation, whilst management focus remains on issuing targets and speed of task completion to keep up efficiencies and profitability without alienating customers.

In addition, in order to embed change interventions, Kale (2005) notes that incentive systems must be reconfigured to reward and emphasize the production of positive CS behaviours. These behaviours need to be directly linked to the performance management system, where employee performance is clearly measured against CS levels and the quality of customer experience. Incentive systems must also reward team-based behaviour that allow for the achievement of CRM goals as only incentivising individual can negatively impact teamwork. Kale (2005) notes that what is critical is to identify employee behaviours that have the most significant effect on CRM effectiveness and then link the performance criteria of these actions to incentives which are meaningful to staff. Incentives are often monetary however holidays and free time off work are also utilized.

The following discussion provides an understanding of Lewin's Change Management Model and how it can be implemented for developing an intervention seeking to enhance frontline CS.

### **2.6.6 Implementation of Lewin's Change Management Model**

As the intervention developed for Casino X aimed to change and improve CS behaviours of frontline staff in the run up to the peak December season, Lewin's Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze Change Management Model was utilised as anchor model for change management within the slots department. A description of the three steps in the Lewin Change Management model follows.

#### **Unfreeze**

The first stage called Unfreezing is based on the notion that human behaviour is stabilised through an equilibrium or status quo that is kept in place through driving and restraining forces. Lewin felt that the equilibrium needed to be unfrozen or disrupted before old behaviours could be rejected and new behaviours could be learnt.

Lewin discusses the unfreezing which occurs before prejudice can be discarded:

*"Allport . . . has described the 'catharsis' which seems necessary before prejudice can be removed. To break open the shell of complacency and self-righteousness it is sometimes necessary to bring about an emotional stir up"* (Lewin, 1947a, p. 229 as cited in Burnes, 2004)

Schein (1996) notes three conditions required for unfreezing namely the disconfirmation of the legitimacy of the status quo, the fostering of guilt or survival anxiety and the generation of an environment of psychological safety. Schein (1996) notes that if a psychologically safe environment is not fostered, then feelings of guilt and survival anxiety will not be experienced resulting in change not occurring.

The initial module of the intervention provided a definition of CS and revealed statistics from a customer satisfaction survey illustrating negative feedback from customers regarding CS. This information was purposely placed at the beginning of the workshop to unsettle staff, and initiate action amongst participants to change negative customer perceptions of CS. It was expected that this would translate into enhanced participation in learning activities and as a result create ownership of the intervention for participants. A safe climate was consistently sculpted by facilitators who sought to prime participants before difficult modules, such as receiving negative customer feedback regarding service, and encouraging a climate of continuous improvement and action-taking rather than defaulting to a blame culture. Further details regarding the intervention will be provided in the research methodology chapter.

### **Move**

The second stage called Moving, entails acting on disconfirming information (customer feedback) which creates a motivation to learn. This stage recognizes the complexity of forces at play in the change process and the need to identify them. Here the action research process comes into play where an iterative process of research, action and more research results in new behaviours that empowers a group to move from undesirable behaviours to more desirable behaviours. After receiving the statistics imparting negative customer feedback, participants were asked to flip-chart challenges they faced in providing excellent CS, as well as note down the impact of those challenges and provide a solution or action to address each of the challenges. Unfortunately, the cyclical process of action research could not be carried out due to only one intervention being conducted per group due to time and cost constraints. This was seen to be a major factor that impeded the sustainability of the intervention, as elaborated on by participants in the process evaluation interviews conducted after the intervention.

## **Refreeze**

The third stage called Refreezing, suggests that group norms and routines need to be changed as these have an impact on individual behaviours (Burnes, 2004). Refreezing notes the importance of reinforcement of new behaviours through changes in organisational culture, norms, policy and procedures. The final stage was not implemented due to management not requiring a comprehensive change management intervention. From the outset, the intervention was espoused by management as a once-off intervention geared towards motivating staff in light of the upcoming peak, holiday season. As a result, an impact on environmental factors such as organisational policy, procedure, organisational culture and group norms were not a target of the intervention, which in the context within which it was positioned, aimed to work on the individual and group level from a motivational standpoint.

Intervention design occurred between September and October 2014, and the intervention was conducted with staff between October and November 2014 over eight half-day sessions at the casino premises. The intervention was opened by the services manager, to show leadership commitment towards the intervention. The slots manager was also invited to open the sessions, however he was only able to attend one of the eight sessions indicating a lack of commitment to the intervention. Two facilitators ran each session, with each facilitator leading a module, allocated according to their areas of expertise and work experience. The first facilitator was the researcher who held a Master of Social Science degree and had previous experience in conducting leadership development interventions, diversity training and team building as well as having HR administration and talent management experience. The second facilitator, was a partner in consultancy X, and had extensive CS experience in the property and finance industry. Facilitators arrived an hour early prior to each session to prepare documents, flip-charts and equipment for learning activities. Further details of the intervention will be provided in Chapter 4.

The above discussion provides a contextual understanding of implementing change management interventions within the casino industry as well as the use of the Lewin Change Management Model in the design of the intervention to improve CS at Casino X. Earlier in the discussion, the impact of leadership on frontline service employees and their CS behaviours was also critically analysed. In addition, the, differentiation between organisational culture and climate as well as the impact on interpersonal processes and organisational performance was discussed. Furthermore, the role of leadership and group processes in creating climate and culture was explained. Some conclusions drawn from the discussion are that organisational structures and practices, as well as HR practices, must be aligned with organisational culture and climate in order to convey a consistent message to staff of expected CS behaviours, create a shared perception of the organisation and a shared understanding of culture in the organisation. All these aspects namely organisational culture, climate, organisational structures and processes need to be aligned to the organisational values which serve as a driver of organisational culture. Organisational culture and climate set the tone within the organisation and determine organisational structures, processes and procedures which interact dynamically to foster employee CS behaviours required for excellent CS.

The importance of organisational climate and culture to enhance firm performance through influencing employee behaviour cannot be understated. In light of the study occurring within a CS context, the topic of CS climate will now be discussed in relation to instituting change to promote CS behaviours by frontline staff.

### **2.6.7 CS Climate**

Service climate refers to staff members' shared sense and shared meaning construed from policies, practices and procedures focused on service quality that they experience, as well as the importance attributed to service quality they observe in work behaviours that are rewarded, supported, and expected in an organisation (Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998).

Service climate research concludes that these staff experiences are evident in customer evaluations of service quality (Bowen & Pugh, 2009), customer satisfaction (Dean 2009), customer loyalty (Liao & Chuang 2004), and inadvertently through customer satisfaction in a firm's market value, all of which can be related to profitability (Schneider, Macey, Lee & Young, 2009).

The origins of climate research can be traced back to studies by Kurt Lewin who purported that the holistic meaning that a person extracts from patterns of individual experiences and observed behaviours in social environments create the climate of that environment (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). As climate research developed, Schneider maintained that a climate should have a specific strategic purpose, for example a climate for safety or a climate for CS (Schneider, 1975).

According to CS climate literature (Bowen & Schneider, 2014), it is important to differentiate between service climate positiveness and service climate strength. The positiveness of climate in a work environment, also called the service climate level, is the mean of the service climate survey items (Schneider, White & Paul, 1998) measuring staff perceptions of organisational practices and rewards emphasizing service. The strength of the CS climate refers to employee consensus and lack of variation in an understanding on what the service climate is. Research illustrates that the positiveness of a CS climate correlates with customer experience (service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty). Furthermore, when climate is strong, there is a higher correlation between CS climate and customer experience.

Bowen and Schneider (2014) explain a framework for understanding CS climate. The framework purports that with an emphasis on service in HRM practices, leadership, and other systems such as operations, marketing and IT, as well as employee engagement in their job tasks, a robust service climate can be developed in firms. A strong CS climate subsequently results in positive CS behaviour that creates successful customer experiences and enhanced financial performance in the form of increased revenue and market value (Lovelock & Wirtz, 2004 as cited in Bowen & Schneider, 2014)). In addition, the framework highlights the occurrence of mediators and moderators of the link between CS climate and customer experiences. It is important to note that the service climate framework posed by Bowen and Schneider (2014) has not been evaluated through a modelling initiative. However specific elements of the framework have been studied and bivariate, and in certain studies, multivariate linkages have been substantiated. The discussion that follows provides a further explanation of the different elements of the Bowen & Schneider Service Climate Framework.

In the framework, antecedents of service climate include leadership, HR practices and systems support. The service climate literature maintains that leadership is a major factor in the development and rearing of a service climate and finds that leaders' committed attention to

everyday banal tasks may be as important to generating a service climate as their stated vision of service excellence and generic motivational inspiration (Bowen & Schneider, 2014).

As discussed earlier, leadership has a significant impact on the development of organisational climate and culture. Service climate research differentiates between three leadership styles namely, management of the “basics” versus transformational leadership, general versus service-based leadership and formal versus informal leadership. Research by Salvaggio et al. (2007) and Schneider et al. (2005) clearly show that consistent management of the basics through leaders showing a commitment to service excellence by setting elevated service standards, recognising positive CS behaviours, removing obstacles, modelling constructive behaviours and providing resources, tend to create a strong and positive service climate (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). From the preceding discussion it is clear that leadership’s role in setting a CS climate is to create the conditions for the establishment of suitable a service climate through engaging in the abovementioned actions.

Wieseke et al. (2011) illustrated how a leader’s own motivation affects staff motivation to improve CS. The role of inspirational motivation in service leadership to create a culture of service was illustrated by Berry (1999 as cited in Bowen & Schneider, 2014). A study by Oke (2010) of seven large conglomerates in Kenya revealed that servant leadership (comprised of both inspirational and moral elements) had a direct link to service climate. In addition, a study by Lam & Schaubroeck (2000) found that informal leaders also impact service climate where bank branch opinion leaders (as cited in comparison to randomly selected bank tellers) were trained in displaying an attitude of service quality, resulting in an increase in the effectiveness of all tellers when rated by both customers and teller staff.

The linkages between HRM practices and company performance are explained through two theoretical perspectives, namely the social context model and the competencies perspective. The social context model maintains that sets of HR practices as a whole create organisational climate. Rogg et al. (2001) in a study of franchise dealerships, illustrated that the relationship between HRM practices and customer experiences were mediated by service. The competencies perspective suggests that suitable personality and ability characteristics achieved through selection and training results in a staff complement who collectively may encompass the constituents of a positive service climate. According to Bowen and Schneider (2014), such results occur as service competencies are an integral aspect of a service climate. Frei and

McDaniel (1998) found that recruiting individuals with a service orientation results in improvements in service behaviour.

In line with the argument put forth by Schneider (1991) that positive staff perceptions of HR practices resulted in better customer evaluations of service quality, Tsaur and Lin (2004) found that positive employee perceptions of human resource practices, such as recruitment, compensation, performance appraisal, and training and career development, increase an employee's motivation to provide excellent service in the hotel sector.

In a study on the casino industry in Macao, staff identified three major barriers to providing excellent service namely, poor and unfair rewards and promotion systems (32%), differences in culture and language barriers between foreign supervisors and local staff (22%) and poor economic conditions resulting in fear of being made redundant (17%) (Wan, 2009). Suggestions from staff to improve the service environment were heavily focussed on 'rewards and promotion (34.8%), more transparency in compensation systems, more job recognition and setting of a clear promotion and career path for locals (Wan, 2009). The study by Wan (2009) highlights the impact of the HR systems such as rewards and career development on frontline service performance.

Systems support from other business functions such as Marketing, IT and operations also have a part to play in Bowen and Schneider's framework of service climate. Various studies have shown that internal service quality has an effect on service climate experienced by staff (Ehrhart et al., 2011).

Another aspect employee engagement, is based on the notion that only with engaged employees can a service climate exist. Engaged staff are more likely to carry out the job tasks required of them by a service climate. Employee engagement refers to the zest, commitment and absorption that individuals have for their work and the energetic behaviours they exhibit for the best interests of the organisation (Albrecht, 2010).

The fostering of employee engagement is dependent on the provision of resources that support employees' work (Schaufeli & Bakker 2004), work characterising high involvement and that is challenging (Coelho & Augusto 2010; Kahn 2010) and ethical work practices and the resulting trust that is built (Li & Cropanzano 2009). In service settings, Bowen, Gilliland, and Folger (1999) suggest that in service environments, when employees feel fairly treated, they are more emotionally committed to their company and will put in extra effort to work diligently

and unselfishly in the best interests of clientele. As a result, this culminates in customers feeling that they have been fairly treated.

In terms of service behaviours as mediators of service climate, research has shown that service climate itself, does not directly improve customer experiences. Rather it is frontline staff behaviours, specifically customer-focused OCB (Chuang & Liao 2010; Macey & Schneider, 2005) concerning actions promoting CS that improves customers experience. A study by Liao and Chuang (2004) revealed that store service climate is positively associated with individual employees' in-role service performance, such as finding out what customers need and explaining the characteristics and benefits of the product or service. In a study of hotel service units including front desk and restaurants, Salanova, Agut, and Peiro´ (2005) found that service climate forecasted both frontline service performance and then customer loyalty. In addition, service climate mediated the link between employee engagement and customer experiences.

In terms of moderators of the service climate-CS link, Mayer, Ehrhart, and Schneider (2009) found that under conditions where there are exceeding levels of client contact, service climate is increasingly related to customer experiences. With regard to interdependence of team members on the frontline, Gittell (2002) suggests that service climate can be a means to create the environment for coordination. The study found that high interdependence results in stronger associations between service climate and customer experiences.

The final stage in the Bowen and Schneider (2014) framework of service climate is customer experience, referring to service quality, customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. The majority of research-based evidence connecting customer experience and service climate emanates from linkage research which has established that service climate consistently links to customer experiences (Pugh, Dietz, Wiley & Brooks 2002; Wiley 1996). Various studies have suggested indirect links between service climate and service experienced by customers. Schneider and other scholars have highlighted that employee perceptions of climate are linked to customer satisfaction (Schneider & Bowen, 1985; Schneider & Bowen, 1992; Schneider, Parkington, & Buxton, 1980; Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998). A plethora of studies have provided evidence on the link between favourable organisational climates and employee satisfaction and commitment (e.g. Alvarez, 1998; Gunter & Furnham, 1996; Johnson & McIntye, 1998; Kline & Boyd, 1991; Muchinsky, 1977; Ostroff, Kinicki, & Clark, 2002; Welsch & LaVan, 1981). These results have been explained by emotional contagion theory which purports that during communication interactions the expressed emotion of a sender

impacts the emotion of a receiver. Emotion contagion maintains that employees who feel positive about their workplace, radiate positive emotion in their work duties which are perceived and absorbed by customers, thereby creating positive CS experiences (Gelade & Young, 2005).

Schneider and Bowen (1993) seek to explain why internal organisational climate has an impact on the service experienced by customers. They respond by pointing out that the internal climate has a spill-over effect onto external customers as a result of physical and psychological closeness between employees and customers during service interactions. Schneider et al. (1993) maintains that because services such as banking, retail and hospitality are intangible and involve an experience, it is the way, manner and style in which this service is delivered that influences the customer's impression of service quality. In comparison to purchasing a product, receiving service does not only entail consumption but also a personal and psychological element. As a result, service quality is often evaluated on peripheral cues that are experienced during service delivery. Thus Schneider et al. (1993) purports that understanding a customer's experience is key to enhancing service quality, and to enhance customer's experience of service quality, employee experiences within the organisation need to be managed, thereby making human resource management (HRM) a critical component of ensuring excellent service. Research at Sears stores illustrated this by showing that customer satisfaction negatively correlated with employee turnover rates (Bowen & Schneider, 1988).

Schneider et al. (1993) maintains that in order to ensure service excellence, an organisation's culture must emphasize service quality throughout the entire organisation rather than just at customer contact points. This piece of research illustrated that employees experience of the service climate and HRM practices within the organisation were reproduced in terms of how their customers perceived service interactions (Schneider et al, 1993). This research points to the need for service organisations to create two internal climates, a positive, internal service climate (involving systems support and logistical support) as well as a climate for employee well-being (involving supervision and socialisation), as both these efforts will result in positive CS interactions and experiences.

### **2.6.8 Links between Service Climate and Financial Performance**

Schneider et al. (2009) conducted a study in an attempt to link service climate to the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), which in turn has been linked to financial performance.

A sample of 44 service companies across finance, transportation, IT, airlines, hotels and retail were analysed. The findings revealed that service climate is significantly linked to the ACSI and that, in turn, the ACSI scores moderate the relationship between service climate and a measure of market value called Tobin's q (Bowen & Schneider, 2014). Data for the ACSI and Tobin's q were collected over a period of three years. Research outcomes suggested that service climate in the first year of data collection forecast customer satisfaction in the second and third year as well as predicting market value.

Furthermore, a study by Chuang and Liao (2010) assessing 133 stores in Taiwan (including hair and beauty salons, retail outlets, and restaurants and cafe), revealed that service climate was strongly correlated with unit-level employee service performance. In addition, the study found that a climate for employee concern was associated with employees helping each other in work tasks. Both employee service performance and altruistic employee behaviour positively impacted the outlet's market performance in relation to market share, sales growth, and profitability. Findings from the above studies indicate that service climate impacts customer satisfaction, which in turn impacts financial performance and encourages team-based behaviours.

### **2.6.9 The Relationship between HRM practices and Service Behaviours in SA organisations**

In the services industry, frontline staff members are seen as the face of the organisation and are crucial to success. From a customer's viewpoint, these employees are the service providers, who are thus responsible for projecting a positive organisational image and creating a positive service experience for the customer (Bettencourt & Brown, 1997; Bowen & Lawler, 1992; Redman & Mathews, 1998; Schneider & Bowen, 1995). In essence, the customer's experience is largely dependent on the frontline staff member's service behaviours. As a result, it is imperative that these staff members are competent and motivated to provide high quality service that will satisfy customers. To achieve service quality, meeting the needs of staff through effective human resource practices is crucial (Schneider & Bowen, 1993). These HR practices create the conditions for the provision of excellent CS, as staff members who feel valued and supported will be more driven to provide excellent CS to customers.

Service behaviour can be defined as the type and content of the interpersonal interaction between CS employees and customers (Zerbe, 1993). There have been various studies assessing the relationship between HRM practices and employee attitudes and the impact on service behaviours. In addition, these studies have identified specific HRM practices that are unique to particular service industries and result in positive service behaviours of CS staff. Zerbe (1993) found that employees in the airline industry who perceived their employer as providing opportunities for career development and having active support from management displayed positive service behaviours towards clients. For frontline bank staff, compensation and training have the strongest impact on service behaviours whilst in the tourism industry, the provision of innovative training, strategic recruitment and the creation of a team environment have a positive effect on CS behaviours (Jago & Deery, 2002).

Other studies have illustrated how specific HR practices have greater effect on improving service behaviours. Schmit and Allscheid (1995) found a clear relationship between staff members' intention to serve and the evaluation of policies and practices that support excellent CS. Schneider and Bowen (1995) as well as Browning (2006) maintain that workplace fairness in pay policy, supervision and recruitment and selection have a significant impact on service behaviours. Training and multi-skilling is known to increase a worker's sense of competence in dealing with consumer demands (Peccei & Rosenthal, 1997). In addition, the support of management in terms of distributing important information as well as providing resources and moral support, was also found to be associated with positive service behaviours (Schneider et al., 1998).

The above studies show the importance of HR practices and management behaviour in improving service behaviours. However, Schneider (1991) maintains that an exceedingly simplistic view of the relationship between HR practices, staff attitudes and profitability is untenable. Rather factors external to a firm can also influence whether HRM factors have an impact on service behaviours. Socio-political and economic situations can impact HR practices in this instance. For example, in the South African (SA) context, lack of educational and training opportunities affect the significance frontline staff place on specific HRM practices such as training. A history of discrimination may have an impact on the leadership style of management and national culture may also have an impact on HRM practices in service organisations (Browning, 2006). In relation to the humanistic approach to management which espouses the values of ubuntu relating to compassion, respect, human dignity and collective unity, the question remains as to whether frontline staff have expectations of leadership styles

focusing on building relationships and teamwork from managers, as a result of cultural values such as ubuntu, in contrast to traditional directive leadership styles characterising European bureaucracies.

Organisational commitment can be defined as the strength of an employee's identification with and involvement in a firm (Mowday, 1997). Zerebe (1993) maintains that contentment with HRM practices, results in job satisfaction which in turn impacts job performance. Within the realm of service work, high levels of commitment from frontline staff can result in increased motivation, lower attrition and absenteeism and a willingness to invest extra energy into service behaviours on behalf of the company, culminating in enhanced quality of service.

A study by Browning (2006), investigated the relationship between HRM practices and service behaviour in South African service organisations in the retail and hospitality industries. The study found that frontline staff perceptions of HRM practices have a direct impact on their service behaviours. Organisational commitment was identified as a mediator in the relationship between HRM practices and service behaviours. The results illustrated that as perceptions of HRM practices changed, so did the level of organisational commitment, which subsequently impacted CS behaviours. This finding supports the argument that implementation of HRM practices in organisations takes on an internal psychological significance for employees (Baron & Kenny, 1986). This suggests that staff members' perceptions of HRM practices affects their attitudes which in turn affects their performance. This indicates a possible link between employee perceptions of HRM practices and the impact on employee's emotional attachment and identification with the company (Browning, 2006).

The study by Browning (2006) found that the three HRM practices that largely affected CS behaviours within service organisations in the South African retail and hospitality industry, were fairness in selection, training and performance appraisal. The selection practice that was seen as most important in this regard was the opportunity for all staff to apply for vacancies and that the process of selection was non-discriminatory. This is an important finding and needs to be understood in the South African context where the black majority were historically barred from access to certain occupations due to racial group membership.

In Browning's (2006) study, the importance of training for improving competence in CS interactions and understanding what customers' require in regard to high quality service were identified by staff as being important. Training was also viewed as being a reward in itself by staff. In addition, multi-skilling was also acknowledged for providing employees with a broad

range of skills to deal with customer demands. Schneider and Bowen (1995) indicate that multi-skilling can foster a sense of empowerment from staff by reducing referrals to management.

In terms of performance appraisal, the activities that impacted CS behaviours to a large extent were feedback provided by managers that motivated staff as well as listening to staff input. These findings indicate that recognition of efforts from managers as well as line managers listening to staff, thereby showing respect and acknowledgement to employees, impacted CS behaviours positively. Similar to training, these performance appraisal activities were seen as rewards in themselves and were believed to impact frontline service behaviours positively. The study also found that staff identified the need for managers to provide emotional support for employees after dealing with a difficult customer as being very important, with many managers failing to assist staff in this manner. These findings also draw attention to the need for enhanced soft skills of managers which can impact frontline service performance (Browning, 2006). By management dealing with frontline service workers humanely and through applying HRM practices effectively, management can foster a sense of self-worth and dignity amongst staff that can increase service performance.

The study by Browning (2006) also found that neither pay nor rewards had any extensive impact on CS behaviours. Within the hospitality organisation researched, staff felt there was no adequate communication of the criteria for selecting employees for rewards creating a lack of awareness of the required criteria. It is also possible that employees did not see a clear link between providing excellent service and rewards. Browning (2006) notes that there is a need to link rewards to the intangibles such as empathising with a customer. However by linking rewards to customer feedback, staff can also feel a lack of control over such information that determines their rewards.

In relation to compensation, Dogru, McGinley, Line and Szende (2019) note that employees in the hospitality industry have the lowest earnings in the US economy. Browning (2006) also highlights that pay for frontline service workers in South Africa may be too low to have a motivational effect due to the low wage levels for service occupations in comparison to other industries. Schneider and Bowen (1995) note that the internal equity of compensation is linked to passion for service such that pay and rewards will only have an impact on service if staff believe they are well compensated. Zerbe et al., (1993) suggests that HRM practices impact service behaviour when staff work more to re-establish equity when they feel that they are being well treated.

Schneider and Bowen (1995) note that service companies do not utilise pay and reward systems adequately to reinforce positive CS behaviours. Other practices such as training and management behaviour seem to be more influential rewards in contrast to pay and rewards. This reflects the finding of Schneider and Bowen (1995) that leadership and supervisory style have an effect on perceived service quality and service behaviour. This finding was reflected in the study on the casino organisation where the introduction of a coaching leadership culture was introduced into the organisation to improve service and problem-solving on the frontline. The change of leadership style will be unpacked at a later stage in the research findings chapter.

Malhorta and Mukherjee (2004) found clear links between affective commitment and prosocial behaviour. Selection was the main HRM practice to affect CS behaviours in the hospitality organisation researched. However there was no relationship that was identified between selection and organisational commitment possibly indicating that selection does not have an impact on organisational commitment (Browning, 2006). The majority of hospitality staff who participated in the study by Browning (2006) were from rural areas and had limited choice in alternative employment due to low skills and high unemployment in the surrounding area. This could translate into continuance commitment which is concerned with the cost of leaving an organisation and relates to pay, recognition and the loss of these.

The preceding discussion has looked at the link between HR practices and service behaviours in South African service organisations. The discussion now shifts to addressing the individual factors that can determine the provision of excellent CS.

## **2.7 Determinants of Excellent CS: Individual Factors**

In addition to organisational factors, excellent CS is also influenced by individual factors. Studies in marketing and organisational psychology maintain that the individual factors affecting the performance of service personnel are staff attitudes of willingness in doing their job, and their ability, self-efficacy and skills to effectively perform tasks (Pimpakorn and Patterson, 2011). In addition, previous research shows a positive correlation between employee attitudes in service settings and service outcomes (Chow et al., 2006; Torvald, 2006; Wan, 2009). Whereas establishment of causal relationships remain inconclusive, preliminary evidence in individual studies suggest that aggregate employee attitudes have a positive relationship with customer satisfaction-loyalty and profit (Harter, Hayes & Schmidt, 2002).

### 2.7.1 Self-Efficacy

The concept of self-efficacy is founded in the agentic perspective of social cognitive theory (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy looks at how individual's beliefs in their capabilities to impact their environment effects their actions which in turn produces expected outcomes (Bandura, 2001; Al-Bhaddareen, Gaith & Akour, 2015). Social cognitive theory explains the three elements that influence human behaviour which are the person, the environment and the behaviour. The agentic perspective of social cognitive theory views individuals as being self-regulating, self-reflective, pro-active, self-organising as well as have the ability to influence their own actions to create beneficial results for themselves (Feist, 2009). Human agency refers to people's ability to exert influence over their own functioning and the course of events through their own actions. This view highlights the importance of individual action to produce effects and sees people as contributors to their life circumstances rather than products of them. Bandura (2008) succinctly states how individuals can self-regulate their behaviours:

*“Through cognitive self-guidance, humans can visualize futures that act on the present; construct, evaluate, and modify alternative courses of action to gain valued outcomes; and override environmental influences...To be an agent is to influence intentionally one's functioning and life circumstances”* (Bandura, 2008, p. 16).

Human agency is enacted through three different modes, namely personal, proxy and collective agency. Personal agency refers to the actions an individual can control to regulate their own behaviour. Proxy agency refers to how individuals manipulate others to achieve actions that are beneficial to the individual's themselves (Bandura, 2001). Collective agency recognises that most human achievements are a result of group efforts and involves a group of people with a common belief who act together to produce effects through collective action. Groups need to have shared intentions, knowledge and skills amongst members as well as collective self-efficacy, coordination and synergistic transactional dynamics.

Five human capabilities that precede self-influencing resulting in the display of particular behaviours include symbolizing, forethought, vicarious learning, self-regulation and self-reflection. Symbolizing involves people processing visual experiences into cognitive structures that direct future actions. This implies that people do not need to learn by only enacting behaviours and learning from the outcomes, but rather test possible actions cognitively first before deciding on one which reduces risk (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Forethought capability involves people controlling their own behaviour by forethought where they plan future actions,

evaluate the possible consequences and set personal objectives. As a result, by being represented by forethought in the present moment, cause and effect relationships are established currently in the future situation. Vicarious learning explains how people learn through observing others and the results of others behaviour. This capacity allows people to establish social laws for setting in motion different behavioural patterns without having to enact these behaviours in real life (Bandura, 2001). Self-help videos often depend on vicarious learning of the audience. The more risky the effects of the possible action the more suitable vicarious learning is for the situation. Self-regulatory capability involves people setting their own internal standards. Any mis-alignment between behaviours and standards results in self-evaluation which impacts future behaviour.

Self-reflection involves people analysing their own experiences and thought processes. A critical element of self-reflection is how individuals judge their own capabilities to deal effectively with different environmental situations. Bandura identifies four aspects of experience which are antecedents of beliefs of self-efficacy including enacting mastery experiences, vicarious learning, verbal persuasion and psychological and emotional arousal. It is key to point that it is the way information is evaluated by an individual (the way they process the information) that determines the person's feelings of self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Enacting mastery experience involves an individual achieving a difficult task and provides the most direct performance data to confirm and form reliable evaluations of efficacy. Changes in self-efficacy are determined by *how an individual processes the information* created by completion of a previous task. Research has shown that if an individual understands skill as being a given, fixed entity they are prone to viewing mistakes as indicators of low intellectual ability suggesting a lack of personal control. This can result in anxiety which impacts learning negatively. However when individuals view ability as being incremental in nature they spend longer analysing a task and are less susceptible to the negative effects of failure such as anxiety and stress and sustain higher self-efficacy (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998).

Vicarious learning involves observing a competent model perform a task which is then reinforced (Bandura, 2001). In terms of vicarious learning, a model's impact on the learner is greater when there is a great degree of similarity between the learner and model in relation to the personal characteristics required for performance success (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). Modelling can be used to enhance learner's self-efficacy through a systematized training course. Here leaders can create coping mechanisms for the thinking and behavioural competencies required for a job which are then communicated through the training. These

mechanisms would include understanding task expectancies, understanding the behaviours required, being able to identify sources of information cues for task performance and sequencing of required behaviours (Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998). The trainer initially explains and demonstrates the steps required to achieve task performance which is then replicated by learners in a systematic manner. Thereafter performance monitoring and feedback is provided by the model. Conveying faith in an individual (verbal persuasion) by a person who is trusted and seen as competent by the individual, in times when the individual is having performance difficulties and may be second guessing their belief in their competence, can be an effective strategy to improve the individual's self-efficacy. In addition, psychological and emotional arousal can impact self-efficacy as most people associate such states with vulnerability and poor performance. In a meta-analysis of 114 studies conducted by Stajkovic and Luthans (1998), a strong correlation was found between self-efficacy and work performance which was interpreted as a 28 percent performance increase. This research provides evidence that self-efficacy has major implications for enhancing staff performance.

Efficacy beliefs have a ripple effect on other determinants of task completion such as whether people think about their ability to perform specific tasks optimistically or pessimistically, whilst also influencing their ability to adapt and change as a result of believing in their skills and attempting a difficult task (Bandura, 2001). Efficacy beliefs impact how much effort people put into tasks, how long they persevere when facing obstacles and whether they view their failures as motivating or disheartening (Liao & Chuang, 2007). Having high degrees of coping efficacy can reduce stress and depression in difficult circumstances and bolster resiliency in the face of hardship. Efficacy beliefs can also determine the activities people are exposed to, the environments they enter through their own choices and one's personal development as a consequence of decisions based on self-efficacy. The environments that people gain access to as a result of self-efficacy are embedded with social influences that promote specific skills, values and interests over the long-term, thereby influencing personal development (Bandura, 2001).

Self-efficacy has been understood as a frame of mind that varies over a period of time as experience or information is obtained (Van Beuningen, De Ruyter & Wentzels, 2011). There is evidence indicating that beliefs about self-efficacy are influenced by feedback on task performance. Positive changes in self-efficacy reflect confidence while negative changes in self-efficacy suggest self-doubt. Van Beuningen et al. (2011) illustrates that positive or negative thoughts about oneself are a result of metacognitive reflection, which is concerned

with monitoring of one's thought processes. A study by Noor, Kasim, Scarlat and Muhamad (2012) found that individuals with high self-efficacy have a tendency to display higher levels of customer-oriented behaviours. In addition, the study found that individuals with higher self-efficacy attempt more difficult tasks, explore their work context more and are able to deal appropriately with high stress situations.

With this in mind, it is known that frontline service employees in the casino industry experience a difficult and high stress work environment with the prevalence of alcohol, addictive behaviour and emotionally distressed individuals. As a result, hiring of staff with high levels of self-efficacy should improve coping behaviour and enhance CS. In addition, training can increase self-efficacy of employees in exhibiting interpersonal skills in communication (Norgaard, Ammentorp, Kyvik & Kofoed, 2012). This will be explored further at a later stage through the evaluation of the CS intervention developed by the researcher for this study.

### **2.7.2 Engagement**

Hayes et al. (2002) defines engagement as the individual's involvement and satisfaction with work, as well as their enthusiasm for work. According to Leiter and Maslach (2004), engagement is concerned with a state of high energy, strong involvement and a state of high efficacy.

A meta-analysis conducted by Harter, Schmidt and Hayes (2002) reveals that employee engagement is positively associated with customer satisfaction, customer loyalty, productivity and profitability whilst being negatively associated with employee turnover. In addition, a global workforce study conducted by Towers Perrin (2008), found that firms that employed highly engaged employees enjoyed an increase of more than 5% in operating margin and 3% in net margin compared to companies that employed highly disengaged workers (as cited in Menguc, Hau, Fisher & Addad, 2013).

As staff become more engaged, work becomes more meaningful, self-fulfilling, and inspirational and as a result, employees become more dedicated, concentrated, and engrossed in their jobs (Menguc et al., 2013). Research has shown that engagement influences not only in-role behavior but also proactive behaviour (Sonnetag, 2003) and extra-role behavior such as OCB (Menguc et al., 2013). Extra-role CS refers to "discretionary behaviors of contact employees in serving customers that extend beyond formal role requirements" (Bettencourt &

Brown, 1997). Engaged employees have an expanded view of their job role and reach out to a broader set of activities in their jobs, suggesting that engagement will have a positive effect on how employees undertake their in-role duties, including providing excellent CS. Individuals in frontline service jobs are expected to deal with customer requests and problems in a responsive and courteous manner, because service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction depend to a large degree on frontline employees' service delivery behaviours (Bettencourt et al., 2005). A recent employee engagement study by Gallup Inc. (2013) found that engagement levels among frontline customer-contact service employees are among the lowest of any occupation included in the study, thereby indicating a need for service-based organisations to increase work engagement (as cited in Lee & Ok, 2015).

### **2.7.3 Psychological Capital**

Psychological capital is comprised of four indicators including self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience. Optimism refers to creating positive internal ascriptions to present and future success (Karatepe & Karadas, 2014). Resilience refers to adapting positively to difficult situations and excelling in challenging service interactions (Avey, 2008).

Karatepe (2014) showed that engagement mediated the impact of perceptions of company politics on organisational commitment, extra-role service behaviours and intent to leave the organisation. The study found that frontline staff with high psychological capital can manage difficulties originating from client issues in difficult service interactions and have confidence in their capabilities to do the job (Luthans, Youseff & Avolio, 2007). Staff with high psychological capital are energised, committed and engrossed in their work. Self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience substantially impact engagement as the existence of such personal resources are owned by the individual, which can be drawn upon when required, whilst also empowering individuals to be engaged in their work. When staff are self-confident they find alternative means to achieve their goals and have higher levels of optimism about their accomplishments in their current job, as well as being optimistic about future success in their role. Individuals who are engaged in their work feel energized, are highly involved and have greater levels of concentration in their work tasks.

Karatepe and Karadas (2014) recommend that the PsycCap questionnaire developed by Luthans (2007) to measure psychological capital, be used for recruiting frontline service staff. Selection criteria should include high levels of self-efficacy, hope, optimism and resilience, as

well as high work engagement. Together with the use of training, empowerment, reward and recognition and new career opportunities, companies can enhance the psychological capital and engagement of their frontline workforce to better prepare them for dealing with difficult customers on the frontline. In terms of recruitment, Karatepe and Karadas (2014) also suggest that online questionnaires be completed by employees to determine the knowledge and skills required to be successful in the job. Other recommendations include the use of case studies and experiential learning exercises to understand employees' methods for dealing with difficult service interactions. In addition, the study notes that employers should employ training programmes to enhance staff personal resources. Such programmes should allow staff to set challenging goals, use contingency planning to deal with problems and increase employees' psychological resources. The above recommendations by Karetepe and Karadas (2014) were used in developing the intervention for improving frontline CS behaviours at Casino X. Details of the intervention will be provided in the research methodology chapter. A discussion of the interpersonal factors that foster the provision of excellent CS follows.

## **2.8 Determinants of Excellent CS: Interpersonal Factors**

The following discussions addresses the interpersonal skills required by frontline CS staff in serving customers. Literature looking at the importance of interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence for frontline workers in the services industry is critically discussed.

### **2.8.1 Interpersonal Skills of Frontline Service Staff**

An important determinant of general service quality perceptions is the face-to-face interaction between customers and frontline service staff (Brown & Lam, 2008). The behaviours of frontline staff such as greeting, having courtesy, showing empathy, providing clear explanations, displaying effort and providing service recovery has a major influence on customer perceptions (Arndt, Arnold & Landry, 2006).

The interaction between frontline service staff and customers is seen as being imperative to a customer's appraisal of service quality (Babakus, Yavas & Ashill, 2009). Furthermore, frontline staff are often the first contact the customer has with a firm. This suggests that frontline employees have importance and temporal precedence in terms of interacting with

customers, indicating that they are likely to have an impact on customers' perceptions of other service aspects.

'Selective halo effect' refers to the propensity to evaluate an object based on the overall impression of the object as well as allowing the appraisal of one critical aspect to impact the appraisal of other aspects of the product or service, as a means of priming or making evaluative generalisations across aspects (Beckwith, Kassarian & Lehmann, 1978). A study by Dagger, Danaher, Sweeney and McColl-Kennedy (2013) found that enhancements in the interpersonal skills of frontline service staff led to customers having better perceptions of the skills and abilities of medical staff. In addition, the study also found that when clients rated CS more positively, they had better perceptions of management and saw the firm as being more dependable and credible. The study also revealed that enhancements in frontline employees' interpersonal skills spilled over and impacted customers' perceptions of unrelated service areas. However, this spill-over effect only occurred for select service areas rather than all areas (Dagger et al., 2013). For example, better interpersonal skills from service staff did not impact customers' views of whether a service was provided timeously. The study points to the underinvestment in interpersonal training for frontline staff which is often seen as peripheral in comparison to training of technical staff in core service areas. The study by Dagger et al. (2013) indicates how investments in interpersonal training is critical for organisations with high customer contact and how frontline staff should be seen as being "barometers" for the firm in terms of customer's impressions of service.

The psychology literature highlights how emotions are influenced by responding to environmental needs, conditions and events, and how these effect the individual's goals and desires (Hill & Tombs, 2011). Arnould and Price (1993) note that the emotional state of a customer can create the conditions for the experience of satisfaction. Factors impacting satisfaction include positive emotion (interest and joy), negative emotion (anger, disgust, contempt, shame, guilt, fear and sadness) as well as disconfirmation beliefs where expectations are left unfulfilled. Previous research suggests a positive relationship between customers' emotional states and their consumption experiences. Zeithmal et al. (1996) notes that customers in a good mood prior to a service interaction often evaluate service more positively due to being in a more optimistic frame of mind during the encounter. As a result, such customers have an inclination towards having a greater degree of tolerance and are more accepting of poor service.

Customers in a bad mood may have lower tolerance and any communication difficulties identified on the part of the CS agent may translate into a negative customer evaluation of service. Consequently, understanding and being able to interpret the emotional state of customers and the impact on the service interaction, can be useful for frontline staff and should be incorporated into the learning content for CS training programmes. Critical discourse on the importance of frontline staff having high levels of emotional intelligence is provided below.

### **2.8.2 Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence (EI) refers to the capability to perceive and influence emotional information without necessarily comprehending it, as well as to understand and manage emotions without necessarily perceiving feelings well and completely experiencing them (Salovey & Meyer, 1990). Prentice and King (2011) notes that there is a positive relationship between EI and staff performance in jobs that entail high emotional content, such as frontline CS jobs in the casino industry. The service encounter with high end gamblers involves various steps. Firstly, players look for emotional benefits concerning the emotional motives of gambling and casinos provide these emotional service through gaming. Thereafter clients have a highly emotional experience as a result of gambling (i.e. winning or losing) and subsequently customers respond emotionally towards the services provided by frontline staff as they are often the first contact that the customer has with the casino after their gambling experience. Emotions unavoidably affect interactions as suggested by emotional contagion theory (Prentice & King, 2011). According to Hatfield (1994), emotions are contagious irrespective of who conveys them. Emotional contagion also entails the mimicry of the behaviour, facial expression, voices, postures and movements of others. Emotions impact the social interaction with verbal and non-verbal cues of the sender effecting the emotional tone of the interaction and resulting in impression formation. Diffusion of emotions can induce particular moods thus influencing the other party unconsciously (Prentice & King, 2011). As discussed earlier, the emotional labour perspective of customers sees the client as a drain on employee's emotional resources which occurs through the required display of positive emotions during CS interactions, even when situations may evoke negative emotion in the employee (Rosenthal et al., 2001).

Gamblers seek a gaming-related entertainment experience which involves risk-taking and recreation. Gamblers motives are emotional and often symbolic in nature (Cotte, 1997; Prentice

& King, 2011). Symbolic motives involve gambling to achieve control over one's fate, especially in the case of older people who may feel loss of control of their lives and thus seek the psychological benefits of gambling. Gamblers may also seek to symbolically replace sexual desire or love with gambling as well as play out of loneliness stemming from an interpersonal relationship that may have been terminated during childhood. Cotte (1997) describes hedonic intentions as the pursuit of pleasure seeking through positive reinforcement and improving self-esteem (Prentice & King, 2011). Other players called the action-seekers tend to play out of boredom which has been linked to depression. Cotte (1997) describes eight gambling motives in terms of leisure namely gambling as learning and evaluating, excitement (positive and negative emotion), self-definition, risk-taking, cognitive self-classification, emotional self-classification, competition and interpersonal interaction (Prentice & King, 2011).

The main intention of gambling is winning which is a positive emotion, but often and after playing long enough, most gamblers experience financial loss which creates negative emotion resulting in frustration and distress, that often translates into difficult behaviour. Staff are required to treat customers as if they are right, even in situations where they are not (Bitner, 1990). This can create emotional dissonance which refers to the conflict between emotions experienced and emotions expressed in alignment with organisational rules. This emotion work often results in employees on the frontline experiencing burnout when customer demands cannot be met by themselves or the organisation (Singh & Goolsby, 1994). In addition, staff especially who deal with high-end customers or high rollers who account for a large majority of casino profits, often have to face the conflict between current policies and demands of the customer. Often when indicating to the customer that the request will need to be referred to management, these high-end customers often display abusive behaviour towards frontline service staff, particularly when the player has been losing (Prentice & King, 2011). Such situations require that staff are well resourced with emotional management skills to diffuse such situations.

As a result, frontline staff require the skills to manage customers' as well as their own emotions. The use of emotional management skills can manage the emotional level of the encounter and influence customer emotion and behaviour. This in turn can impact employee performance during service interactions, and influence customers' perceptions of service quality as well as improve customer retention.

### **2.8.3 The Impact of Diversity on CS Interactions**

The following discussion addresses the influence of diversity on CS interactions. At first, literature looking at the importance of diversity climate in relation to customer satisfaction is examined. Thereafter the cultural differences across customers in the casino industry is looked at followed by a discussion of cross-cultural differences in CS. Subsequently the impact of cross-cultural sensitivity on the performance of frontline service staff is looked at, as well as the impact of race on customer perceptions of service. Finally a discussion of CS in the South African context is provided, followed by discourse on cultural intelligence and the impact of language barriers and non-verbal communication in service interactions.

#### **Diversity Climate and Customer Satisfaction**

The business case for diversity maintains that effective management of diversity can enhance business profits through having access to diverse markets, increased innovation and problem-solving, decreased conflict between groups and improved organisational image as well as staff retention (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011). Diversity climate refers to staff members' shared perceptions of the degree to which the organisation values diversity through the implementation of fair practices and encourages social integration (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011). As discussed earlier, the concept of a diversity climate is one of the multitude of climates existing in an organisation concurrently, and is related to the concept of a service climate. Cox's (1994) interactional model of diversity suggests that diversity climate translates to increased firm performance through improved employee-level work performance and affective outcomes such as work attitudes. Diversity climate also impacts attendance, staff turnover and work quality. Bowen et al. (1999) indicates that frontline service workers tend to mirror the organisational treatment they receive internally in the service interaction with external customers, thus indicating a possible link between diversity climate and service climate in relating to customer satisfaction.

Mckay *et al.* (2011) notes that the proportion of disenfranchised groups within a work environment should determine the degree of importance ascribed to diversity climate, as these groups report higher levels of discrimination experiences and are more responsive to positive diversity climates. Pro-diversity climates provide all staff with equal opportunities to be successful despite group membership, thus making employees feel that the organisation supports their best interests, allowing them to identify more strongly with the organisation, see

the organisations objectives as their own and motivate them to exert more effort. Such responses to pro-diversity climates can serve as catalysts to a social contagion process where positive emotional states of staff “spill-over” to customers during service interactions culminating in enhanced service quality (Bowen, Gilliland & Folger, 1999). In addition, as discussed earlier, service linkage research indicates that frontline service behaviours directly impact customer satisfaction (Heskett et al., 1997; Schneider et al., 2005).

A pro-service climate communicates a strong focus on service quality and impacts customer satisfaction through the effect on staff behaviours such as suggestive selling (making recommendations for additional purchases), approaching customers swiftly and explaining the benefits of a product to improve sales thereby improving customer satisfaction. Pro-service climates create employee perceptions that excellent service is expected and rewarded thus creating a high level of motivation to maintain service quality (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011). As more than one climate can exist in an organisation, diversity climates can have an interactive effect on service climates as staff within a pro-diversity climate tend to identify more with an organisation and will thus exert more effort within a positive service climate as well.

Social identity theory maintains that people are more likely to advance the interests of their membership groups (as cited in-groups) as this has an impact on self-esteem. In addition, people have a tendency to seek contexts that uphold their in-groups. As a result, issues of diversity are often linked to cultural orientations and it is expected that pro-diversity climates should have positive effects on individuals from disenfranchised groups. In support of this claim, evidence has shown higher correlations for non-whites between individual diversity climate perceptions and organisational commitment, absenteeism and turnover (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011). In addition, pro-diversity climates show an increase in sales for Black and Hispanic sales staff (McKay et al., 2008).

The results of the study by McKay et al. (2011) illustrate the positive effects of pro-diversity climates on customer satisfaction. In particular, certain condition such as having a high pro-service climate and having a large number of staff from marginalized groups, provided the strongest relationship between diversity climate and customer satisfaction. This indicates that the existence of a pro-diversity climate together with a pro-service climate can be motivational for frontline service staff, especially if they are largely from marginalized groups. Considering the development of an intervention addressing diversity interactions and improvement of

frontline CS in this study, it is clear that the intervention aimed to improve the diversity interaction skills of frontline staff in the casino in order to improve the CS, whilst contributing positively to the diversity climate in the organisation.

The study by McKay et al. (2011) also revealed that a one unit change in the measurement of diversity climate resulted in 3% increase in customer satisfaction. The increase in satisfaction rose to 5% for branches with high representation of marginalized groups and a pro-service climate whilst decreasing to 1% for branches with less representation of marginalized groups and low service quality (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011). Liao & Subramony (2008) indicate that a 1% increase in the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) score for medium-sized organisations results in 11.4% increase on return on investment, \$654 million increase in equity market value and \$55 million increase in net cash flow (Anderson and Fornell, 2000). This indicates very clearly the business benefits of the determining factors of enhanced customer satisfaction.

Kravitz (2008) notes that in order to create pro-diversity work climates, organisations can outlaw all forms of harassment, provide diversity appreciation training and provide staff with skills to allow them to perform their job tasks properly. In addition, companies can provide mentoring and developmental opportunities for disenfranchised groups and provide social and career support to marginalized groups. Whilst pro-diversity climates can have an impact on customer satisfaction, diverse customers can also have different expectations of CS in alignment with their cultural values. The following discussion looks at cultural difference of customer groups in the casino industry and the implications for CS.

### **Cultural Difference of Customers in the Casino Industry**

A study by Wan, Kim and Elliot (2013) based on staff observations differentiated between behaviours of customers from Hong Kong, China and Taiwan. Hong Kong customers were expected to complain more often, voiced their concerns when not satisfied with service and were most likely not to follow instructions from dealers during table games. Taiwanese gamblers were more likely to gamble alone, play a table for an extended period of time and have preference for soft drinks rather than alcohol (Wan et al., 2013). The Chinese customers often requested explanations of the rules of a game indicating an inclination to avoid uncertainty. Chinese customers also had a tendency to move around the casino in groups which could be a result of the value placed on conformity and collectivism in Chinese culture (Wan

et al., 2013). In addition, Chinese customers were also more likely to view gambling as a form of business networking. The benefits of such a study allows businesses to understand and predict their customer's behaviour, create effective marketing initiatives and meet the needs of customers from different cultural groups.

The results of the study highlight the perils of overgeneralizing cultures (Kwek & Lee, 2007) and avoiding sophisticated stereotyping (Wan et al., 2013). This refers to how whilst cultures may have common values and behaviours, there are a wide variety of different behaviours that can be found within a culture displayed by different individuals. The researcher was not able to identify any research on cultural difference of customers within the South African casino industry suggesting a gap in the literature.

### **Cross-cultural Differences in CS**

Understanding CS in a global context is a research priority in contemporary times (Ostrom, Bowen, Parasuraman, Patricio & Voss, 2015). Hostede's conducted one of the most in-depth studies assessing how workplace values are impacted by culture (Dragus, 2007). Hofstede's cultural dimensions include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism and masculinity-femininity. Power distance relates to the acceptance of inequality in wealth, prestige and social standing. Cultures with high ratings on power distance view power inequality as the natural order and advocate obedience as a fundamental value. Cultures ranking high in uncertainty avoidance experience uneasiness when placed in situations lacking structure and clarity and have a preference for rules and direction which are established in past practice and tradition. Cultures low in uncertainty avoidance flourish in ambiguity and situations requiring improvisation.

In individualistic cultures, a self-centred view of the world is taken where individual ambitions are of utmost importance. In collectivist culture, one's family, society and nation are viewed in order of importance with individual goals being ranked lower in comparison to communal goals. Masculinity-femininity refers to the emotional roles ascribed to the genders. In masculine cultures males are perceived as focusing on performance and being strong headed whilst females are ascribed caring and nurturing roles. In female cultures the gender roles tend to coincide (Hofstede, 1983).

Hofstede's cultural dimensions have been used to determine which aspects of service quality would vary across different cultural orientations. For e.g. Asian countries have high power distance where status difference is accepted. Western cultures can be seen to be more oriented towards individualism in comparison to Eastern cultures which emphasize collectivism (Zeithmal et al., 2009). As a result, these cultural differences can affect the importance consumers in these different cultures ascribe to the different service quality dimensions. Customers from individualistic cultures have a preference for objective facets of service quality during service interactions such as reliability, responsiveness and tangibles whilst customers from collectivist cultures favour subjective criteria such as empathy and assurance (Sharma, Wu & Su, 2016).

The importance of culture within the service climate context is illustrated by Chan, Yim, and Lam (2010) who researched financial service companies. The study found that the effects of customer participation on value creation was dependent upon the cultural values of individualism-collectivism and power distance of both employees and customers, in Hong Kong in relation to the United States. In an analysis of cross-cultural expansion, Hallowell, Bowen, and Knoop (2002) conducted a study in business expansion into new cultures, assessing the opening of the George V Hotel in Paris. The study found that the higher power-distance in France required adjustments to the employee empowerment culture of the hotel. Schumann, Wangenheim, Zhilin, Yang, Jimenez, Blasevich, Shannon, Shainesh and Komor (2010) revealed cross cultural differences in the ways clients learn to trust their service provider. Mai and Hoffman (2011) illustrate how regional dialect differences can have an impact on customer satisfaction. These studies highlight the need for business to adapt to the values, norms and expectations of the culture they are operating in.

In an extension of Hofstede's cultural dimensions, Zeithmal et al. (2009) discusses five cultural typologies. Followers are seen as having large power distance, high collectivism and masculinity, average uncertainty avoidance and short-term orientation. Balance-seekers have little power distance, high collectivism, average masculinity, medium term orientation and high uncertainty avoidance. Self-confidents have small power distance, high individualism, average masculinity, long term orientation and little uncertainty avoidance. Sensory seekers have high power distance, average individualism, high masculinity, short-term orientation and low uncertainty avoidance. Functional analysers have small power distance, average individualism, increased femininity, long term orientation and high uncertainty avoidance (Zeithmal et al., 2009).

Small power distance cultures with long term orientation and high individualism (self-confidants and functional analysers) tend to rate reliability and responsiveness as most crucial. In contrast, cultures with high power distance and high masculinity (like followers and sensory seekers) tend to ascribe less importance to these dimensions. To serve a follower cultural typology, frontline staff should be trained to have expert knowledge and be trustworthy to gain the trust of these customers together with empathy and tangibles to express service quality. Providing service to self-confidants should entail empowering staff to provide reliable and responsive service.

A study by Brewster and Rusche (2012) found discrimination by waiters in relation to African American tipping and dining behaviours suggesting that frontline service staff preferred serving Caucasian customers in restaurants due to these customers having a tendency to tip higher (which can largely be attributed to better economic circumstances). This is an interesting finding which may be reproduced in the South African hospitality industry considering historical inequality, however no further research based evidence was identified by the researcher in this context.

Zourrig, Chebat and Toffoli (2014) investigated the impact of cultural value orientation on conflict in intercultural service encounters. Customers cope with interpersonal conflict in different ways such as revenge, avoidance and forgiveness. Service failures can result in the creation of negative emotions such as anger and rage. Various studies indicate that customers actively engaged in stereotyping of service staff during service interactions with restaurant service employees (Chebat et al., 2010), call centre staff (Das, 2008), hospitality staff as well as travel agents (Kozak & Tasci 2005). Racial stereotyping affects the customer's interaction with the frontline service worker and can affect the ability to create relationships with service staff from other cultures. In contrast, customers from target groups may perceive lower service levels from service staff who are from agent groups as discriminatory behaviour. As a result it is imperative to understand how clients frame service delivery failures and deal with interpersonal conflict during such cross-cultural interactions.

Customers can change their conflict style in line with their cultural value orientation as well as whether the service employee is from an in-group or out-group. Cross-cultural theory views cultures, as being collectivist and individualistic in nature (Parumasur, 2012; Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). The terms allocentrism and idiocentrism were coined to refer to individual level

behaviours oriented towards individualism or collectivism. Allocentrism refers to person-level collectivism, which is often associated with East Asian cultures and idiocentrism refers to person-level individualism which is a common feature of Western cultures (Zourrig et al., 2014). Allocentric customers who are involved in conflict with in-group employees are more likely to co-operate as these individuals are driven by collectivist values. The same allocentric customer may deal more harshly with an employee from an out-group and be more confrontational (Zourrig et al., 2014). On the other hand, an idiocentric consumer who values competition and dominance is more likely to behave in a confrontational manner no matter whether the service employee is from the in-group or out-group. As a result, the study found that how customers deal with conflict during intercultural service encounters is often dependent on the employee's group membership. Such research on customers' cultural responses to service behaviours is important to consider within the context of frontline service within the South African gaming industry. Educating frontline service staff on acceptable behaviour in different cultures can assist staff in dealing with customers from different cultures through forecasting the expected behaviours from customers of different cultures.

Diversity interactions on the frontline can be fraught with misunderstandings, discrimination and conflict. The following discussion begins by examining the reactions of frontline staff to customer mistreatment and goes on to look at the impact of cross-cultural sensitivity on CS behaviours.

### **Reactions to Customer Mistreatment in Frontline Service**

Shao and Skarlicki (2014) highlight that organisations need to recognize that mistreatment of staff by customers can result in staff behaviours that diminish service quality. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory holds that staff bring an array of resources with them to the workplace including personal characteristic resources such as self-esteem, pride in their work as well as energy resources such as energy, time, skills and knowledge (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Work stress results in resource depletion. For example, job insecurity can result in reduced self-worth. COR theory maintains that the loss of such resources is threatening to workers and that they respond by attempting to replace (resource replacement) or reduce the potential loss of such resources (resource protection).

Customer mistreatment refers to behaviour such as screaming at staff, irrational criticism and destructive comments which can result in reduced self-esteem and self-worth. Employees can

respond in two ways to mistreatment. Firstly they can sabotage the customer to enhance self-worth and self-esteem by giving the offender what they deserve through punishing them (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Alternatively the service employee can hold back organisational citizenship behaviours to avoid future resource loss. Due to a lack of research on racism experienced by frontline staff at the hands of customers in the South African casino industry, it is expected that similar responses from staff can be expected in such instances of discrimination.

Customer sabotage as a result of employees being mistreated refers to dysfunctional behaviours with the motive to harm the customer through creating delay in service processes, rescinding the employee-customer relationship and reducing service quality through counteractive behaviours, such as hanging up the telephone on customers (Saho & Skarlicki, 2014).

Findings from the study by Shao and Skarlicki (2014) indicate that the association between mistreatment by customers and sabotage of the service interaction was substantially stronger amongst Canadian frontline staff than Chinese staff. The research found that difference in individualism and collectivism orientation among Chinese and Canadian staff accounted for the higher levels of sabotage amongst Canadian staff. Individualists have an inclination towards using direct coping strategies in dealing with work stress such as confronting another individual or speaking up even when one's opinions is in disagreement with others (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). Collectivists are more likely to use passive coping strategies to avoid conflict as they place value on interpersonal harmony and the prioritization of communal needs over individual needs. On the whole, across both Chinese and Canadian staff, the study found that there was a positive relationship between customer mistreatment and staff sabotage and a negative relationship between customer mistreatment and display of OCB. The study also found that staff from collectivist cultures have a tendency to generalise their target or source of mistreatment resulting in the grouping of customers.

Research also indicates that highly emotional events can spark behaviours that are driven by a person's cultural norms (Van Den Bos et al., 2005). Consequently, when faced with customer mistreatment, a person from a culture high in individualism may display higher individualistic behaviours which can result in more direct and active reactions to enhance self-esteem (Shao & Skarlicki, 2014). In relation to frontline CS, it is evident that individualistic or collectivist cultural orientation can determine and predict how individuals from a specific culture will react to mistreatment from customers. From the above discussion it is apparent that service staff from cultures emphasizing collectivism will respond to mistreatment from customers in more

palatable ways than employees from cultures emphasizing individualism, whose behavioural response may be interpreted as aggressive behaviour or poor CS. Such cultural behaviours may hold a competitive advantage for service staff from collectivist cultures, allowing for firms housing these staff to provide better service quality, especially in situations where there has been poor behaviour towards employees from customers.

Cultural values assist people in evaluating their surroundings and guide their actions (Pikkemaat & Weiermair, 2001). Values serve as a collection of rules guiding human action in terms of what is deemed right and wrong in terms of interpersonal relations. Usually these rules are commonly understood between people of the same culture, however individuals from different cultures who may utilise different sets of rules of conduct may have difficulty in interacting with each other. Values are often shared across world cultures, however it is often how values are ranked that serve as the foundation for the culture's value system (Pikkemaat & Weiermair, 2001). The question of how cultural values such as ubuntu, which refers to the human virtues of compassion, humanity and brotherhood, can be used as a means of competitive advantage in frontline service interactions in the South African tourism and hospitality sector to achieve international service differentiation and competitiveness, will be revisited in Chapter 3.

### **The Impact of Cross-Cultural Sensitivity on Frontline Service Staff Behaviours**

Research has indicated that service interactions between customers and employees from different cultures result in misunderstandings and conflict due to differing cultural values and norms. This culminates in a displeased consumer, a discouraged staff member and reduction in profit for the organisation (Sizoo, Plank, Iskat, & Serrie, 2005).

According to Sizoo et al. (2005), culture causes role conflict as what is deemed appropriate behaviour in one culture is seen as inappropriate in another. Winsted (1999) found that Japanese consumers evaluated CS interactions in the USA by criteria that were different to those used by Americans. Mattila (2000) found that customer ratings of service and frontline employee performance was affected by culture. A study by Katriel (1996) found that foreign tourists often expect frontline service staff to familiarize themselves with their values by showing a degree of cross-cultural competence.

Sizoo et al. (2005) found that staff who are inter-culturally sensitive provide better CS to foreign customers in the hotel industry and better work performance. Findings of the study indicate that such staff will use suggestive selling to a greater degree thus creating more profit, will be able to identify customer needs more readily and will work longer at the organisation. In addition, employees with intercultural sensitivity will have good interpersonal skills for cross-cultural interactions, will be happy to interact with foreign customers and have high levels of job satisfaction (Sizoo et al., 2005). As a result the benefits of investing in intercultural sensitivity training for firms with service environments involving a high degree of cross-cultural interaction, include more satisfied staff and customers, customer referrals, repeat business and increased profit.

### **Race and Customer Perceptions**

Malhorta, Ulgado, Agarwal, Shainesh and Wu (2005) note that culture is often a key factor that influences customer's expectation and perceptions of service quality. (as cited in Bick et al., 2010). Research in the United States, indicate that race has an impact on customer decision-making. Studies have shown Black Americans frequent fast food branches more than any other race. Findings from the study by Terblanche and Boshoff (2010) which looked at the patrons of fast food chains across race groups in South Africa, indicate that there were considerable differences amongst the loyalty levels of Indian, Coloured, White and Black consumers. Coloured customers were the most loyal group of consumers followed by Blacks. In addition, Coloured customers rated perceived quality and perceived value of the fast food outlet the highest from all race groups. In relation to the perception of satisfaction with the fast food chain, there were no considerable differences amongst the racial groups. The four racial groups varied to a large degree in terms of how they perceived the quality and value provided by the fast food outlet. In addition, there was high loyalty amongst all racial groups as most scores ranged from 8.47 to 9.1 out of 10 (Terblanche & Boshoff, 2010). Such finding indicates that different marketing programmes be developed for different race groups considering the different levels of loyalty, perceived quality, perceived value and satisfaction.

## **CS in the South African context**

Gotham and Erasmus (2008) investigated customer's evaluation of the CS in appliance stores in South Africa. The study argues that South African consumers tend to come from diverse backgrounds. Some, particularly previously disadvantaged individuals, having little experience in making purchasing decisions, whilst others previously advantaged groups tend to have more experience. Prior research based evidence indicates that customers with little product related consumer socialisation have a tendency to be more reliant on heuristics such as the image of a store, brand image and perception of salespeople to evaluate product quality. Here, peripheral cues and tangibles such as product variety are used as a basis to make judgements of a product. In contrast, more experienced consumers obtain product information in relation to different ways the product can be used to allow for more informed buying decisions (Erasmus, Makgope & Kachale, 2005; John, 1999). Gotham and Erasmus (2008) suggest that consumers from First World countries construe service reliability as relating to consistency, dependability and accuracy. In contrast, consumers in developing countries tend to interpret service reliability in relation to perception of salespeople, have lower expectations of quality and are generally more tolerant of poor service.

Findings of the study revealed that South African (SA) consumers evaluated the tangible aspects of CS with there being emphasis on the importance of sales staff, product presentation as well as processes and value for money. The study also indicated that the majority of SA consumers rarely frequent high-end, speciality appliance stores and tend to purchase appliances from department stores more often. As a result, CS expectations from such consumers can be viewed as being low due to little exposure to high end shopping experiences. Findings indicated that SA consumers, despite their previous consumption experiences, rarely make responsible and knowledgeable purchasing decisions. Results also confirmed the view by Malhorta et al. (1994) that customers in emerging countries are more accepting of poor service, have lower expectations and are often satisfied if the core benefits of the product or service is adequate. Finding also confirmed that consumers were impressed with sales staff as well as their appearance, behaviour and physical presence in the outlet, as well as the processes and value for money deals offered at the stores (Gotham & Erasmus, 2008). In addition, the study found that appliance retail firms should seek to improve product presentation by enhancing displays which provide useful product information to stimulate questions around performance of the product. In the study, subjects who mentioned that the buying decision was very easy were

considerably more satisfied with product presentation, indicating that such displays can possibly reduce anxiety during the decision-making process.

Parallels can be drawn between the appliance retail environment and the casino environment considering that in both contexts the consumer is purchasing either a product or experience, where prior exposure to the product or service may be limited in terms of prior consumer exposure. As a result, findings concerning low expectations and tolerance of poor service may be similar across both contexts. Appearance of CS staff as well as training of these staff to provide product or service related information in terms of how to play casino games as well as the perils of irresponsible gambling can also be relevant for the frontline customer care in the casino industry.

In relation to CS expectations on the African continent, a study by Bick, Abratt and Moller (2010) investigated the CS expectations of customers in the retail banking environment across ten African countries.

Service expectations can be created by a multitude of irrepressible factors ranging from the customer's experiences to the psychological state of the consumer during the service interaction. Espinoza (1999) suggests that some aspects of service delivery encounters are impacted by cultural influence which must be identified by firms to adapt their service processes whilst other aspects are stable across cultures (Bick et al., 2010). Malhorta et al. (2005) found there were differences in service quality across different developed and developing countries which could be forecast by assessing economic, cultural and social factors (Bick et al., 2010). Due to the interaction element, services are largely people-oriented and are thus highly sensitive to culture. As mentioned earlier, people from different cultures may have different perceptions of service quality as a result of cultural differences. In addition, Stauss and Mang (1999) indicate that consumers from different cultures may have different expectations of the service interaction and may therefore perceive such interactions differently (Bick et al., 2010).

Various studies have also highlighted the different ranking of SERVQUAL dimensions across different cultures, indicating different expectations of service across different cultures (Benkenstein, 2007; Arasli, Katircioglu & Mehtap-Smadi, 2005). Some studies have also found strong congruence on specific elements of SERVQUAL between customers from different cultures indicating little need to create customisable scales to measure service quality (Benkenstein, 2007). Results from the study by Bick et al. (2010), indicate that responsiveness

was the main determining factor that impacted customer's perception of service quality in African retail banks. Ranked in order of importance, other factors were reliability of service, tangible, assurance and empathy. When looking at individual attribute, staff efficiency trumped other aspects followed by shorter queues, service reliability and convenient locations.

The results indicate that cross-country differences in CS expectations are evident across African countries. As a result, this necessitates the creation of customisable marketing strategies addressing the unique CS expectations of the particular country's national culture. The findings indicated that interactional aspects such as assurance and empathy are not as important in the African context, whilst core aspects such as responsiveness and reliability are seen as being more crucial by customers. Results indicate that within the African retail banking environment, efforts to increase efficiency of dealing with customers and processing information can have a positive impact on customer satisfaction, and should be addressed through frequent employee training to enhance service quality. Furthermore, in a CS study within the Taiwanese context, Imrie, Cadogan & McNaughton (2002) found that sincerity, generosity and politeness were key determining factors of service quality. The above literature highlights the importance of understanding cultural difference for enhancing service experiences for customers from different cultures. A discussion on the importance of cultural intelligence for frontline CS follows.

### **Cultural Intelligence**

According to Earley and Ang (2003), cultural intelligence (CQ) can be defined as a person's ability to grasp cultural norms, behave in culturally appropriate ways and manage others effectively in culturally diverse situations. The globalised workplace and resultant multicultural workforce make CQ a central factor in terms of personal effectiveness in the workplace.

Having CQ allows people to deal with diversity, adapt to culturally diverse settings, gather cultural knowledge and understand the main tenets of intercultural interactions. Cultural intelligence is composed of four aspects namely Meta-cognitive CQ, Cognitive CQ, Motivational CQ and Behavioural CQ. Meta-cognitive CQ refers to one's cultural awareness, ability to question cultural assumptions, and adjust one's knowledge about intercultural experiences when interacting with others from other cultures. Meta-cognitive CQ entails planning and adapting one's mental models of cultural norms for different cultural contexts

thus serving as an important capability for managing others in different cultural environments. Cognitive CQ relates to the knowledge a person has obtained regarding the values, norms and traditions of other cultures. Motivational CQ refers to a person's level of self-efficacy and intrinsic motivation to adapt to other cultural contexts (Kanten, 2014). Behavioural CQ refers to a person's capability and flexibility to identify and reproduce appropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour when interacting with others from different cultures. These include culturally appropriate facial expressions, words and gestures that allow one to make a positive impression on others.

Chen and Kwang (2015) found that CQ had a positive impact on in-role service performance for frontline workers in the casino industry in Macau. A study by Chen (2012) found that cultural sales in real estate (between estate agents and customers who were from different cultural groups) illustrated that a person's motivational CQ had a positive relationship with cultural sales. In addition, the study found that this positive relationship is enhanced by the organisation's motivational CQ and positive diversity climate that values cultural diversity. Improving CQ of frontline service staff can result in workers with greater cross-cultural knowledge and who are better able to adjust to cross-cultural encounters, thereby creating better perceptions of CS from diverse customers (Kanten, 2014). As suggested by the above studies, though findings may not be generalizable, CQ may have a positive impact on frontline CS in the SA casino industry considering the culturally diverse customer base of such operations. As such, further research is required to understand the effect of CQ on frontline CS in the SA casino industry. Being able to interpret the body language of customers can allow frontline CS staff to identify customers' hidden needs and enhance CS. The following discussion looks at the effect of language barriers and non-verbal communication on frontline CS.

### **Language Barriers and Non-verbal Communication in Service Interactions**

Kang (2012) maintains that communication skills play a crucial role in inducing positive interaction between customers and employees. Maseko and Kaschula (2009) maintain that the South African education system produces professionals who are largely incompetent in the languages of the clients they serve, and as a result this impacts service encounters which are less informed by client needs. In a survey of empirical studies linking diversity with business performance, McMahon (2011) states that the impact of diversity is more striking in service

industries due to the greater extent of interpersonal interactions wherein personalized CS is likely to affect performance. A lack of intercultural awareness and intercultural communication skills can contribute to poor CS interactions when dealing with diverse customers. Differences in non-verbal behaviour between different cultural groups can create misunderstandings leading to poor CS interactions (Hoobler & Smallwood, 2002).

In their study analyzing nonverbal concomitants of perceived and intended persuasiveness of communicators, Mehrabian and Williams (1969) maintained that over 93% of communication was nonverbal and Barnum and Wolniansky (1989) noted that more than 70% of communication between people was possible through nonverbal methods. Jung & Yoon (2010) maintain that an employee's use of proper nonverbal communication methods during a transaction significantly impacts his or her relationship with the customer by reducing conflicts occurring in the service delivery process and positively affects customer satisfaction. When a situation occurs in which limitations in language expression makes it difficult for people to deliver emotions sufficiently, they often have to decipher others' emotions or deliver their message through nonverbal clues (Jung & Yoon, 2010).

Linguistic barriers in many intercultural transactions are compounded by differences in nonverbal behaviour (Hoobler & Smallwood, 2002). While some nonverbal behaviours may be acceptable in some cultures, in other cultures they may transmit negative messages. For example, in traditional African communities, the following behaviours are frowned upon e.g. beckoning to someone, pointing at someone with one finger, looking someone straight in the eye, passing things, especially food, with the left hand, which may be seen as the norm in other cultures (Ntuli, 2012).

Although alluded to earlier, a brief definition of culture shall be provided at this point to provide a clear point of departure for the discourse on culture. Culture can be defined as a “complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (Tylor, 1924). According to Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, culture creates dispositions emanating from beliefs, values and habits which are widely shared in a society. Dispositions impact practice which influence behaviours in daily life. According to Bourdieu's theory, it is likely that people from different cultural backgrounds judge the same experience from vastly different perspectives. When applying this theory to the service industry, certain customer judgment and interpretations may be universal and others could be more culture-specific in nature. Studies by Crotts and Erdmann (2000),

Tsaur et al. (2005), Parasuraman et al. (1988), Weiermair (2000) and Laroche et al. (2004) all highlight the role of culture in shaping the perceptions of service quality and customer satisfaction (cited in Torres, Fu & Lehto, 2014).

According to Ntuli (2012), human beings convey messages to one another through language, constituted by verbal and nonverbal cues with many of our gestures being based on our cultural values and backgrounds. Naidoo (2011) maintains that during interactions, miscommunication is likely to happen, especially when there are significant cultural differences between communicators. Wan (2009) found that the diversified workforce in Macua (through influx of expatriates managers) created many challenges for casino management, with conflicts and misunderstandings often arising due to communication challenges linked to cultural differences and language barriers.

Excellent communication is key to the outcome of a CS interaction. When frontline service staff and customers do not share a common native language, communication can be hampered severely resulting in misunderstandings and poor customer perceptions of service quality (Jacobs, Chen, Karliner, Agger-Gupta & Mutha, 2006). A study by Holmqvist and Van Vaerenbergh (2013) revealed that in high involvement services (e.g. medical and banking services), bilingual customers have strong preference for being served in their resident language whilst in general, all customers prefer to be served in their native language. In low-involvement services (e.g. grocery shopping), elderly customers were less eager to change language in comparison to younger consumers (Holmqvist & Van Vaerenbergh, 2013). These findings indicate that casino customers may prefer to be served in their native language, whilst frontline staff may need to attempt to engage older players in their native language in comparison to younger players.

Previous research has indicated that accent affects sales performance of sales staff as well as the decision-making in job interviews (Tombs, 2011). Cargile (2006) indicates that even when there is little differentiation, people are able to distinguish between different accents. Language is a central aspect of identity and is frequently used for social classification. Accents can influence emotions and service appraisal through the occurrence of stereotyping. Stereotypes are standardized mental pictures of a group, resulting in unconscious pre-judgement in interpreting the behaviour of people from such groups (Human, 2005). Accents can be used to determine perceptions of individual characteristics and can initiate perceptions regarding status, race, class and nationality. In the USA, French accents are seen as being chic whilst

Asian accents are associated with high economic and educational achievements. As a result these prejudiced attitudes developed from distinguishing between different accents can influence the client's perspective of the frontline service employee (Tombs, 2011).

In a study on customer perceptions of the accents of call centre staff, it was found that customers were already in a negative mood before contacting the organisation due to having a poor experience with the firm's product or service (Tombs, 2011). Dealing with an agent with a foreign accent worsened the customers' mood, increasing frustration, irritation and antagonism. Cultural congruency theory maintains that dealing with a service employee of the same cultural origin as the customer, increases confidence and reduces expected risk in the service interaction. A study by Tombs (2011) found the existence of ethnic stereotyping in the service encounter within the call centre environment. Foreign accents were seen as being difficult to deal with by customers and were seen as being a signifier of poor communication, low competence and untrustworthiness.

As accents are a part of the cues used to trigger racial prejudice, they often initiate discriminatory responses. In addition, the accent of frontline employees may bias customers' judgement of service quality, especially in situations where visual cues are absent for e.g. call centres. A common finding in the literature is the inclination to evaluate a person's service performance more severely as a result of their accent (Casper et al., 2010). Tombs (2011) notes that frontline service staff need to provide excellent service to customers to neutralize stereotypes that customers may have of specific groups.

#### **2.8.4 Body Language Training to Improve CS of Frontline Service Staff**

Human communication involves a cyclical process with a sender of a message and a receiver who interprets the message and then sends a response. Body Language or non-verbal communication refers to the messages without words that people send to each other during interactions (Petersen, 2005). This can include aspects such as physical distance, eye contact, posture, hand movements, facial expressions, hand-shake styles and leg placement (Ali, Rizvi & Baba, 2015).

Body language can be displayed to impact interactions and send messages to receivers to evaluate the sender positively. Alternatively, body language cues of receivers can be decoded as information to reveal the mental and emotional state of the receiver, which can be utilized to pro-actively improve CS interactions.

Customers evaluate service based on three aspects, namely outcomes of the service interaction in terms of benefits to the customer, organizational procedures governing the service encounter and interaction. Service failures result in apprehension for guests and as a result, customers pay more attention to body language in attempting to determine the service employee's intentions in terms of assisting them. The display of inappropriate body language during such situations can result in more negative emotion being experienced by customers which can result in reduced re-purchase behaviours. When there is no alignment between verbal communication and NVB resulting in an inconsistent message, receivers are more likely to rely on non-verbal messages for interpreting the message.

Dress, appearance and NVB determine whether service staff are deemed credible, capable, considerate and dependable (Chaney & Green, 2006). Yuksel (2008) highlights that open body posture together with appropriate levels of eye contact by frontline service staff contributes to positive service evaluations of customers. Eye contact is seen as being a very important aspect of NVB for frontline staff (Yuksel, 2008).

Yuksel (2008) notes that non-verbal behaviours (NVB) have a major impact on service-recovery and can impact customer emotion. In line with emotion contagion, during service interactions, customer's emotions can be transferred to service staff and vice versa. Emotional contagion process involves customers or employees imitating the facial expressions and body language of the other person. This then results in that person experiencing the relevant emotion. The more intense the emotion shown by the sender results in greater emotion being experienced by the receiver (Barsade, 2002).

The customer's evaluation of a frontline service employee's emotional state affects the customer's emotional state which in turn impacts customer satisfaction (Soderland & Rosengard, 2004). As a result of a negative impact on the consumption experience, failures in service can be foster negative affective states for consumers such as frustration, anger, remorse and embarrassment (Bigne & Andreu, 2004).

Yuksel (2008) notes that studies assessing the impact of frontline service body language on customer emotions have indicated strong relationships between positive service staff NVB's and customers' likelihood to repurchase. Yuksel (2008) claims that with all things being equal, customers in positive affective states rate service quality more highly thereby creating a case for the display of positive body language by frontline staff to influence positive customer experiences. Considering that people are visually dominant and receive the largest amount of

stimuli through vision (57% of interpersonal messages are transmitted through vision), they are most likely to use this sense over others in decision-making (Petersen, 2005).

Non-verbal and verbal communication are believed to occur in a coordinated and synchronized manner. In addition, body language is believed to be culturally specific, with different cues having different meanings in different cultures. Petersen (2005) notes that empathy has been associated with the success of sales representatives. Boone and Buck (2003) highlight that in personal interactions, emotional expression contributed to ratings of high attractiveness as an independent factor with similar equivalence to the contributions of physical attraction (Boone & Buck, 2003). Emotional expression was also seen to be a marker for trustworthiness and harmonious interactions with an individual. In addition, another research study indicated that dominant body language resulted in more liking of the individual receiving the communication than submissive body language (Tiedens & Fragale, 2003). Gabbot and Hogg (2001) point out that empathy and power can be successfully communicated through non-verbal behaviour, thus indicating the use of body language as a channel communicating empathy to customers. Van Swol (2003) found that emulating the body language of the person that one is communicating with, can increase persuasiveness of the sender of the message.

Body language training for service staff has been used in organisations to improve service interactions and customer perceptions. Hotel managers have utilized body language training for upskilling front desk staff in NVB to improve customer perceptions of the organisation (Petersen, 2005). In addition, Yuksel (2008) notes how providing frontline service employees with skills to read body language of customers can assist in service recovery.

De-escalation refers to using both verbal communication and body language strategically to calm down a person or increase their self-control (Spielfogel & McMullen, 2017). De-escalation can be employed to diminish the impact of very high negative affective experiences in a CS situation so as to ensure customer loyalty. Communication, body language, listening and validation are deemed to be key components for de-escalating a situation across various professions. In a CS scenario, a frontline service employee may continually provide reassurances to clients in order to preserve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

The above discussion has provided an understanding of body language and a review of the academic studies completed on the use of body language to improve CS and sales interactions. The use of body language training to improve customer perceptions and de-escalate negative situations was also discussed. The study sought to develop an intervention to improve CS

challenges. The participatory intervention aimed to provide frontline staff with skills to identify body language of customers suggesting a need for assistance so as provide pro-active service behaviours, improve employee skill in dealing with diverse customers and enhance staff motivation prior to the peak season. The following discussion provides an overview of the conceptual framework used in the study.

## **2.9 Conceptual Framework**

This chapter sets out the conceptual framework of the study through the integration of three models: the socio ecological model (adapted from CDC, 2014); the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000) as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes (Liao & Chuang, 2007). These three models were combined in order to develop the multi-level systems model of CS (MSMCS) which served as a comprehensive framework for organizing concepts related to the study. The following discussion will provide a brief explanation of each of the three models, culminating in a description of the integrated MSMCS which serves as the conceptual framework for the study.

### **2.9.1 The Socio-Ecological Model**

The multi-level nested socio ecological model seeks to explain behaviour change through the interaction of the individual (personal factors) with different sub-systems of the environment (environmental factors). The model is comprised of four sub-systems, including individual, interpersonal, organisational and the community.



**Figure 2. The Social Ecological Model**

(Adapted from CDC, 2014)

The social ecological model was developed in order to inculcate behaviour change in line with health promotion interventions in communities. The model will be adapted in a different context in the study in order to determine challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS within an organisation, through understanding the impact of the different sub-systems on CS interactions. This will allow for a comprehensive systemic view of the multitude of factors impacting CS interactions in the frontline casino context.

The individual sub-system looks at personal dimensions that impact behaviour change such as race, age, gender, self-efficacy, attitude and skills (UNICEF, 2013). This sub-system will be amended by adding psychological capital and engagement in line with literature linking psychological capital and engagement to excellent CS (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2011).

The interpersonal sub-system looks at formal and informal social networks that impact behaviour such as family, friends and working relationships. In this study, the researcher will adapt the model to the context of the study and therefore the interpersonal aspect will also relate to interactions with customers on the frontline. In line with the literature on interpersonal aspects impacting CS, other concepts have been added to the interpersonal dimension such as group norms, trust, social support, team work, communication, emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, body language, diversity skills and problem-solving.

In the socio-ecological model, the organizational sub-system refers to the organizational rules, procedures and policies for work operations. In line with the literature on organisational aspects impacting CS, concepts including strategy, physical environment, technology, CS (CS) processes and HR systems have been added to the organisational dimension of the model (Snow & Yanovitch, 2010).

In the original model, the community aspect refers to relationships between organisations, institutions, leaders and informational networks within a distinct context. However, for the purpose of the study and in alignment with CS literature (Snow and Yanovitch, 2010), this sub-system has been renamed the external environment and includes economic, political, cultural, technology and social aspects.

The adaptation of the multi-level social ecological model into the multi-level systems model of CS will serve as a guide for the design and implementation of the study. By looking at the research site and data generated through this lens, the researcher will be able to better understand how factors across the various embedded systems impact CS interactions on the frontline, thus allowing for a holistic understanding of the interconnected factors affecting frontline service in the organisation (Schacter, Ingram, Jacobs, De Zapien, Hafter & Carvajal, 2014).

## **2.9.2 Multi-level Model Linking HR Systems and Firm Performance**

A Human Resource (HR) system can be defined as a complex set of practices designed to shape staff attributes such as skills, behaviours, motivations, satisfaction and commitment (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). These attributes are believed to be the linking mechanism between HR practices and organisational performance. Some of the HR practices making up the HR system include recruitment, selection, training, appraisal and rewards. These HR practices are seen as being the means by which staff perceptions, attitudes and behaviours are moulded to enact organisational goals. Staff who are satisfied, committed and well-adjusted will be more inclined to work towards organisational goals (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). In line with the strategic focus perspective, all HR systems must be aligned with strategic goals in order to create a strategic climate.

Ostroff & Bowen (2000) provide a multi-level model illustrating the impact of HR systems on individual and organisational performance outcomes. This model assists as a framework for

understanding the impact of HR systems on individual and firm performance with regard to CS. The model depicts performance as occurring on two levels namely the organisational level and individual level. The model clearly illustrates the impact of the HR system on performance within these two levels (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Between the organisational and individual levels there is an underlying cross-level and multi-level, which explains the interactions of individual attitudes and behaviours and their collective influence on organisational performance.

In line with general organisational theory and according to the multi-level model, the structure of the organisation, which also impacts strategy, should fit the demands of the environment and technology. Contextual social factors and the HR system lie at the centre of the causal chain of performance. A fair and consistent HR system transmits clear signals to staff on expectations, provides a clear conception of what the organisation is like and a positive shared organisational climate.

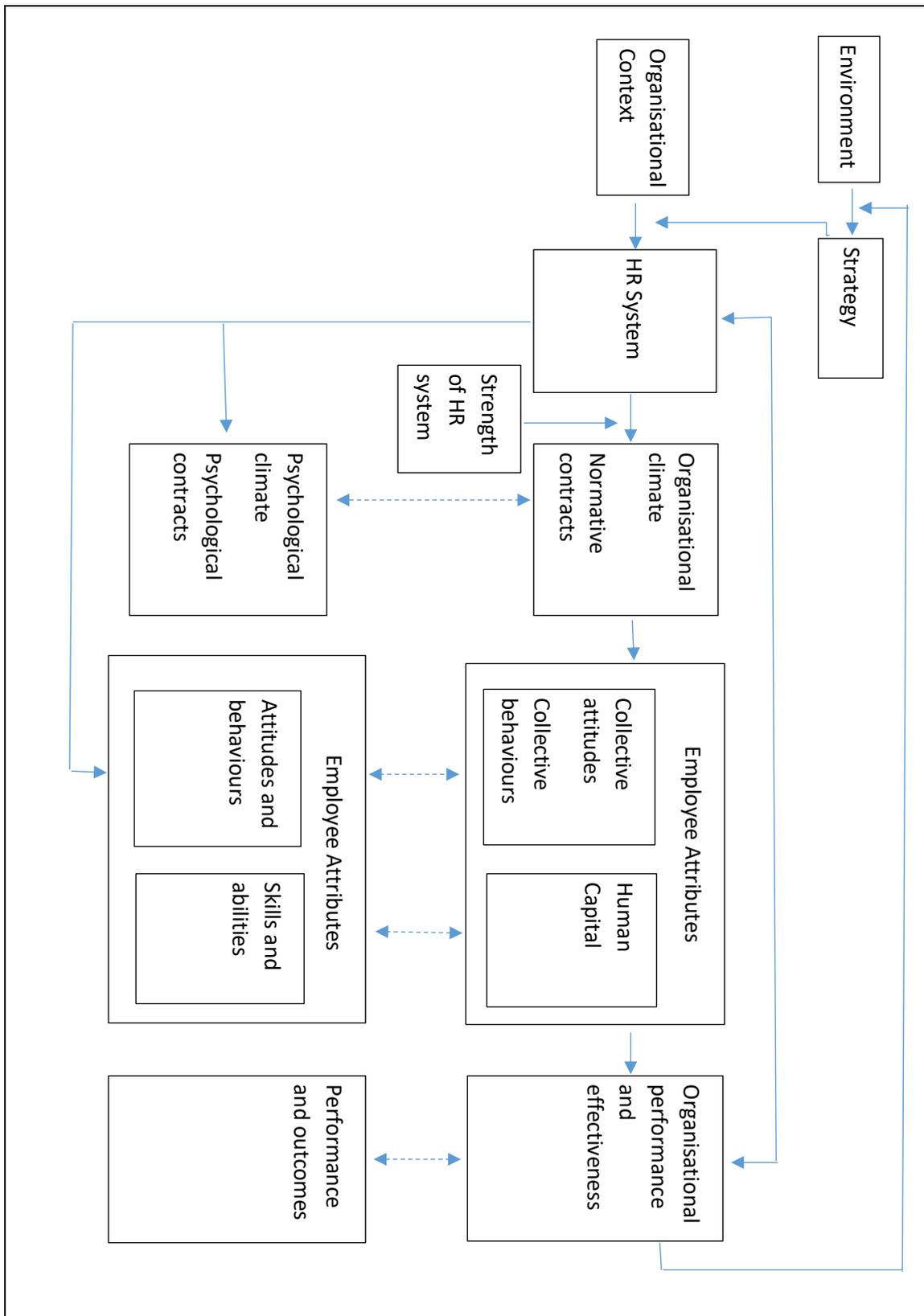
Organisational climate places an emphasis on the situation and its impact on staff perceptions, feelings and behaviours (Ostroff, Kinickl & Muhammed, 2013). Climate impacts employee attributes (or collective attitudes) like commitment, motivation and identification with the company and creates behavioural expectations, thereby shaping behaviours in favour of achieving company objectives. Organisational climate provides orientations and gives direction to staff as to where they should focus their skills, attitudes and behaviours (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Positive attitudes result in staff retention, high performance in terms of in-role work tasks, high citizenship behaviours and productivity. Evidence-based research for such relationships has been reported by Simon and Robertson (2003).

On an individual level, the psychological climate relates to individual perceptions on the nature of the firm. HR practices create the organisational climate by fostering social environments. Psychological contracts refer to agreements of exchange between the organisation and staff members and relate to the beliefs individuals have about promises made by the organisation, and that have been accepted by the individual (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). The HR system shapes individual expectations (psychological contract) of the exchange agreements between the employer and individual (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Once again, when these expectations are shared, normative contracts emerge.

Elements of the Multilevel Model Linking HR Systems and Firm Performance (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000) have been adapted and included in the Multi-level Systems Model of CS to

provide a conceptual framework for understanding the influence of CS theory and concepts on the case in question.

**Figure 3. Multi-level Model Linking HR Systems and Firm Performance**



(Ostroff & Bowen, 2000)

### **2.9.3 The Integrated Multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes**

The Integrated Multi-level model of transformational leadership (TL), employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes explains through linkage research the impact of TL on service climate, the resultant effect on employee service performance culminating in positive customer relationship outcomes such as long-term customer relationships (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

Transformational leaders (TL) display four behavioural traits that empower their staff to surmount self-interest and exceed expectations. Transformational leaders lead with charisma, displaying behaviours that result in building of trust and admiration by team members who identify with the leader. Through inspirational motivation, transformational leaders create an inspiring vision of the future. Through intellectual stimulation, such leaders encourage their followers to challenge assumptions, think critically and take risks. Transformational leaders also practice individual consideration by dealing with each team member individually and appealing to their specific needs (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

In the service environment, the transformational leader can influence team members by conveying the importance of providing excellent CS, improve their enthusiasm for serving clientele and build up their confidence in their ability to provide exceptional service. Transformational leaders can create the conditions for creativity to mushroom by delegating tasks, removing barriers to service and recognizing individual performances. Individual-level TL impacts employees on an individual level and is transmitted to staff differentially (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Work-unit TL refers to the pattern of leadership behaviors experienced by teams which is seen as shared among team members and is responsible for setting an internal team atmosphere (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

TFL leaders enhance intrinsic motivation of followers by linking goals to the aspects of their follower's self-concepts, which team members view as being important. TL leaders communicate verbally and symbolically with their team to increase employee's self-efficacy and identification with their department, enhance internalization of the team's values and increase enjoyment with work tasks.

TFL develops three types of attitudes amongst team members that are key to service. These attitudes are self-efficacy, affective commitment and job satisfaction.

The positive attitude towards overcoming challenges and persistent effort is a key competency required by CS staff and has been found to increase work performance amongst service workers (Hartline and Ferrel, 1996). Affective commitment refers to a worker's identification with and emotional connection to the organisation. TFL leaders foster affective commitment amongst staff by allowing staff to identify with the organization's values and internalize company values (Liao & Chuang, 2007). Staff with high degrees of affective commitment promote the organizational values of excellent service and identify with company objectives of customer satisfaction and loyalty. This commitment results in team members staying with the organisation over the long-term and being more attentive to the company's long-term service goals whilst providing friendly and customized service to clients.

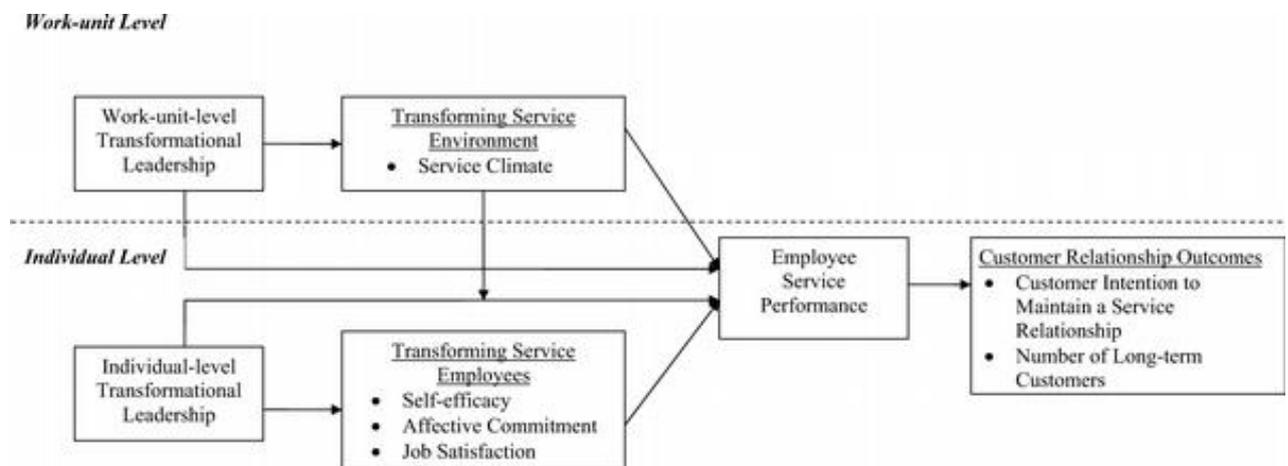
An important aspect of service work is the ability to form an emotional connection with the customer through developing rapport by displaying friendly behaviours. Such emotional displays of service behaviours are critical for developing long-term relationships with clients which fosters customer satisfaction and loyalty. Staff who have high levels of job satisfaction may display more authentic positive emotions during service encounters thus encouraging repeat purchasing behaviours.

As mentioned earlier, service climate refers to staff member's shared perceptions of the policies, practices and procedures in terms of CS and amounts to the tone and atmosphere that team members work within (Schneider, 2012). Considering that climate is often shaped by the immediate organizational context, the leadership of the immediate manager serves to filter team members' interpretations of service within the organisation, thereby providing the building blocks of team member perceptions of climate. Through inspiring staff, encouraging optimism and setting a vision, transformational leadership is an effective leadership style for shaping a positive service climate within a work unit through setting high service expectations and rewards for superior frontline service (Liao & Chuang, 2007).

Liao and Chuang (2007) found in their study that perceived and experienced transformational leadership styles were positively associated with service performance of staff. In addition, employees with high levels of self-efficacy were found to provide better service. Furthermore, results of the study suggested that transformational leadership styles may assist in enhancing staff self-efficacy in the service context.

The integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes is used to explain the impact of key aspects

of the CS context namely, transformational leadership and its impact on service climate on a collective level. Consequently, the effect of transformational leadership on individual self-efficacy, affective commitment and job satisfaction is mapped out, all of which positively influence service performance behaviours (Liao and Chuang, 2007). This explanatory linkage model is adapted to explain the above relationships (key concepts in the CS literature) within an embedded Multi-level Systems Model of Customer Service (MSMCS), where additional concepts were added in alignment with the literature review, the researcher's experiential knowledge, exploratory research and thought experiments (Maxwell, 2013).



**Figure 4. The Integrated Multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes (Liao & Chuang, 2007).**

#### **2.9.4 The Multi-level Systems Model of CS**

The multi-level systems model of CS (MSMCS) adapts the three preceding models to understand CS from a multi-level systems perspective on an individual, interpersonal, organisational and external environment level.

The individual level takes into account the impact of concepts from the literature such as self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001), engagement (Bowen & Schneider, 2014) and psychological capital (Karatepe & Karadas, 2014) on CS. The interpersonal level takes into account the effect of conceptual concepts such as interpersonal relations (Dagger et al, 2013), emotional intelligence (Prentice & King, 2011), diversity (Mckay, Avery, Liao & Morris, 2011; Wan et al., 2013), language barriers (Kang, 2012), body language (Yuksel, 2008) and trust (Li and Cropanzano 2009) on CS.

The integrated model also takes into account the Multi-level Model linking HR Systems and Firm Performance. On an organisational level, the impact of HR systems on fostering organisational climate and normative contracts is considered. In turn, the effect of organisational climate on collective attitudes and behaviours, human capital and the resultant impact of organisational performance is taken into account. On an individual level, the influence of the HR system on psychological climate and psychological contracts is considered. In turn, the impact of psychological climate on individual attitudes, behaviours and skills and the resultant effect on individual performance is taken into account.

The organisational level looks at the impact of transformational leadership (Liao & Chuang, 2007) on creating a service climate (Bowen & Schneider, 2014), which in turn has an effect on service performance and customer relationship outcomes. In this way the adapted MSMCS model, superimposes the explanatory linkage model of Liao and Chuang (2007) explaining the link between transformational leadership (TL) on affective commitment, self-efficacy and job satisfaction on an individual level as well as the impact of TL on service climate and service performance on an organisational level.

Finally, the adapted model takes into account the impact of organisational factors such as strategy, technology, physical environment and service processes on CS (Snow & Yanovitch, 2010). The effect of external environmental factors such as economy, political, cultural and technology are also considered. The use of this adapted multi-level model creates a contextual canvas for depicting concepts emerging from a review of the literature such that they can be easily identified and critically discussed in the case.

**EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

Economic, Political, Cultural, Technology, Social

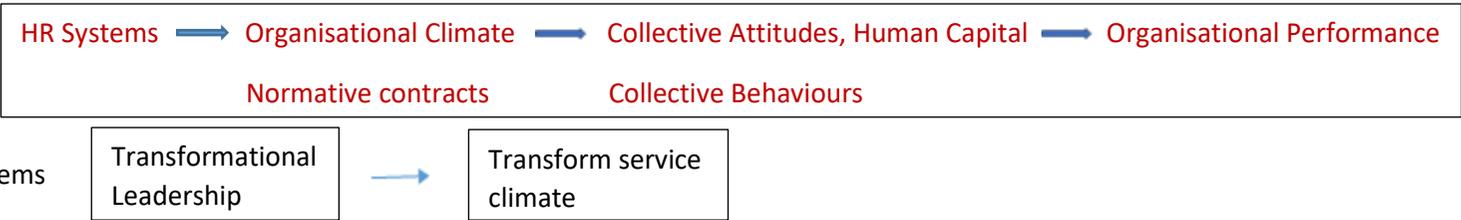
**Figure 5: The Multi-Level Systems Model of CS**

Adapted from CDC (2014), Ostroff & Bowen (2000) & Liao & Chuang (2007)

**ORGANISATIONAL**

Strategy, Physical Environment

Technology, CS Processes, HR Systems



**INTERPERSONAL**

Relations with colleagues & management

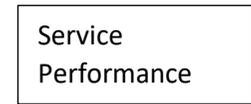
Group norms, trust, social support

Team work, communication

Emotional intelligence

Conflict Resolution, body language

Diversity skills, problem-solving



**INDIVIDUAL**

Self-efficacy, engagement

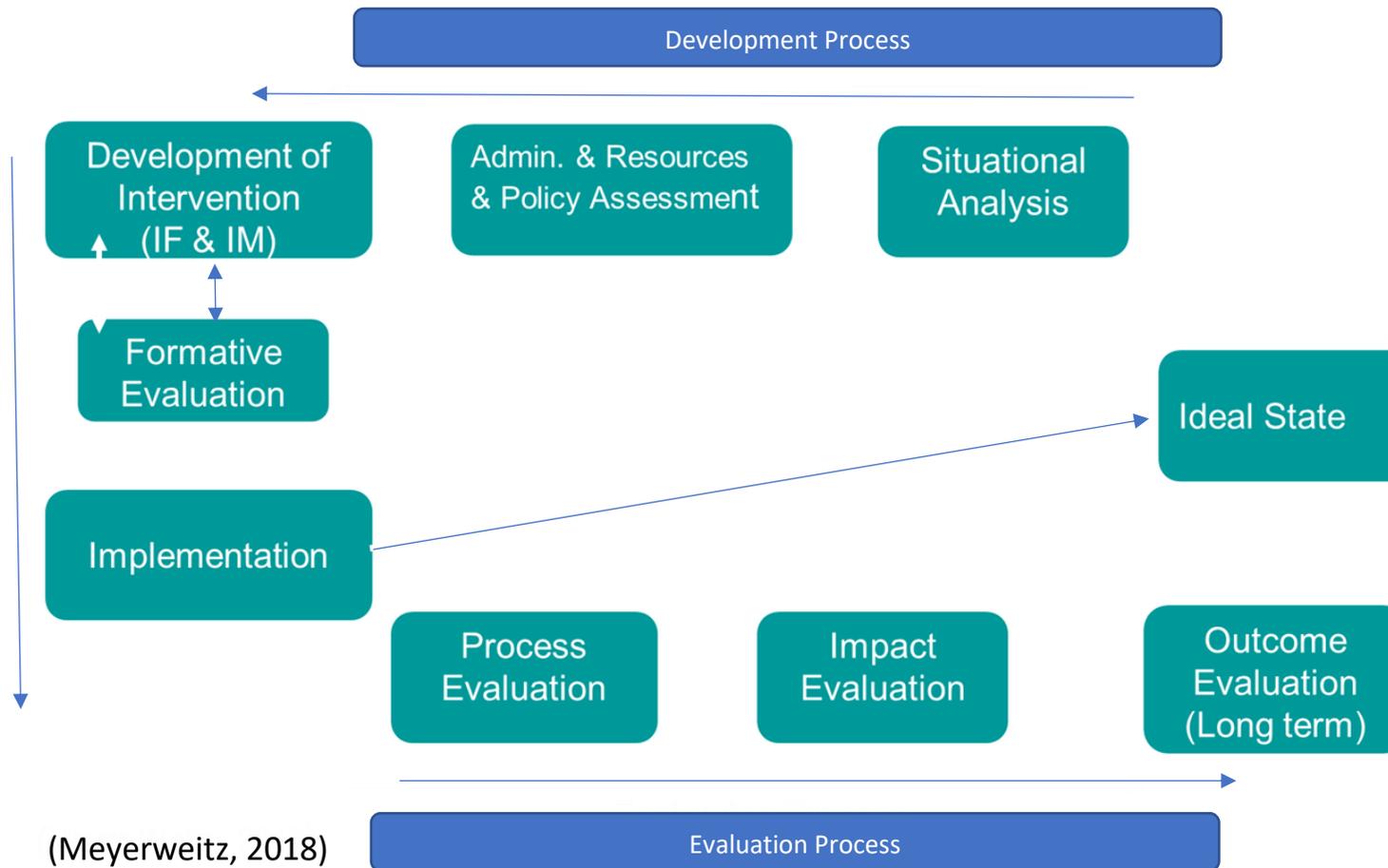
Psychological capital, attitudes



The preceding discussion adapted three conceptual models including the socio ecological model, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes. These three models were combined to develop a new conceptual framework, the MSMCS model, which served as a holistic organising framework for representing the situated context and relationships between relevant concepts and theories within the study.

The planning model for workplace interventions (Meyerweitz, 2018) was used to develop a conceptual planning framework which informed the design of the study.

# Planning Model for Workplace Interventions



**Figure 6: Conceptual Planning Framework for the Intervention**

The conceptual planning framework for the intervention begins with the situation analysis phase which used a focus group, interviews and observations with management and frontline staff to determine CS challenges in the casino environment. Thereafter administrative and policy assessment was completed to align and plan the intervention within organisational regulations and parameters. Findings from the situation analysis were used together with CS procedure and policy assessment for intervention planning, mapping and development. Thereafter a formative evaluation was conducted of the intervention prior to implementation.

The next phase entailed the facilitation of the participatory intervention where staff perceptions on CS challenges were heard to develop solutions and new information was provided on how to improve CS through communication, understanding cultural difference and observational training in body language. This process allowed to staff to learn new behaviours and share solutions and new ways of thinking about CS, to move participants in terms of reframing their views on CS, taking ownership and changing their CS behaviours. Immediately after the intervention a quantitative training evaluation was used to determine immediate outcomes of the intervention. Finally in the evaluation phase ten months after the intervention, a post-intervention focus group, interviews and observations were conducted to evaluate the process and long-term outcomes of the intervention.

## **2.10 Chapter Summary**

This chapter set out by providing a description of the South African casino industry. Thereafter a critical discussion of CS literature was provided. Subsequently organisational, individual and interpersonal factors influencing CS interactions in the casino context were identified and critically discussed. A discussion was provided on the impact of culture on CS interactions as well as the influence of language barriers and non-verbal communication. In concluding, a conceptual framework was developed for the study by adapting the social-ecology model, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes. To inform the development of the CS intervention at Casino X, the following chapter provides a systematic review of the literature on CS interventions.

## **Chapter 3:**

# **The Effectiveness of Customer Service Training Interventions – A Systematic Review of the Literature**

### **3.1 Introduction**

In the quest for competitive advantage, and with the recognition of CS as its key driver, organisations are investing significant amounts of resources in CS interventions. This study aimed to understand the nature of these CS interventions as well as their effectiveness to guide future initiatives by assessing the literature on CS interventions that have been conducted within organisations.

In an era of intensified competition for all businesses, Customer Service (CS) is now recognised as a key driver of competitive advantage (Kandampully and Duddy, 2001; Karmarkar, 2004; Kumar & Pansari, 2016). Whereas competing service companies are often identical in terms of facilities, equipment and service menus, customers continue to distinguish differences in the quality of service they receive. As a result, customers' personal interactions with frontline staff during the service encounter is often the differentiating factor between companies boasting similar service environments and equipment (Zeithmal, 1990 and Weitzel et al., 1989 as cited in Sulek, Lind & Maruchek, 1995). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berr (1985) define service quality as the degree to which the customer's perception of the service encounter matches or surpasses their expectations for service. Within the interpersonal exchange between staff and customer, customer satisfaction is determined by the employee's willingness to serve the customer and by the employee's competence in performing the required job tasks (Schneider and Schechter, 1991; Hogan et al., 1984; Chase & Tansik, 1983; Tansik 1980 as cited in Sulek, Lind and Maruchek, 1995). Preceding research (Chase & Bowen, 1991; Bitner, 1990, Berry et al., 1988, Cronin and Taylor, 1992 as cited in Sulek et al., 1995) indicates that the customer and employee interaction can have a substantial effect on customer satisfaction and sales performance, thereby highlighting the business imperative for CS interventions.

As noted by Chase and Bowen (1991 as cited in Sulek et al., 1995), there are various elements which impact the service delivery process and could enhance CS interactions, many of which employees have little control over. The service delivery system is comprised of the physical design of the service environment, technology, people, and systems for process control. Efforts

to redesign aspects of the service delivery system can have little impact on customer satisfaction if improvements are made in areas not perceived as important by clientele. As a result, customer feedback mechanisms are integral to identifying service delivery challenges and to planning solutions to enhance CS.

It is generally accepted that to deliver excellent CS, an organisation should address both customer and employee needs. Organisational factors that influence excellent CS include culture, climate, leadership, job design, empowerment and management support and commitment (Pimpakorn and Patterson, 2011). In addition to organisational factors, excellent CS is also influenced by individual factors such as staff attitudes of willingness in doing their job, their ability, self-efficacy and skills to effectively perform tasks. Furthermore Babakus, Yavas and Ashill (2009) highlight that the interaction between frontline service staff and customers is seen as being imperative to a customer's evaluation of service quality. Dagger et al. (2013) notes how investments in interpersonal training is critical for organisations with high customer contact on the frontline. This study sought to conduct a systematic review of the literature on the effectiveness of CS interventions to inform the development of a participatory CS intervention addressing CS challenges at Casino X. A discussion on the methodology used for conducting the systematic review follows below.

## **3.2 Method**

A search of electronic databases was conducted in October 2015 to assess evidence-based research on CS interventions in organisations using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta- Analysis (PRISMA) Guidelines (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman & PRISMA Group, 2009).

### **3.2.1 Design**

Peer-reviewed studies were identified using a comprehensive search strategy in four electronic databases namely Ebscohost, Jstor, Sciencedirect and GoogleScholar. One single coder was used for scoring and assessment, and results were assessed by the team to reduce selection bias. No period was implemented during the search due to lack of results in the initial searches. A wide array of search terms were used to ensure all relevant articles were captured. Search terms included: 'CS, casino industry, casino, service industry, CS programme, CS intervention, CS training, service industry, hospitality industry' (See Appendix 1 for more information). Search

terms included ‘casino industry’ and ‘casino’ as the study initially aimed to analyse CS interventions within the casino industry, however, due to lack of results, no limitation was placed on industry type.

### **3.2.2 Targeted Body of Literature**

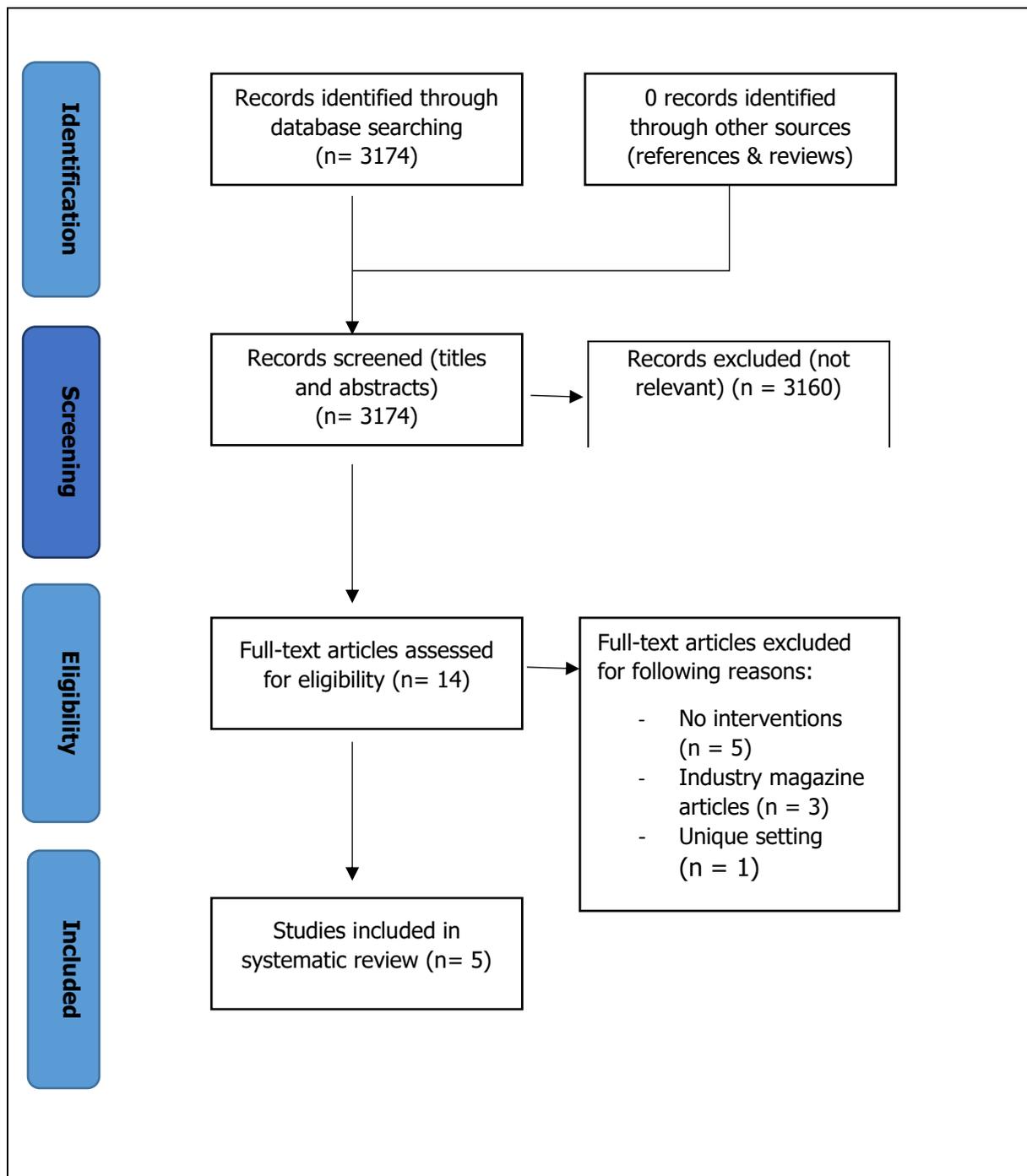
Study selection was based primarily on whether the study included an evaluation of a CS intervention. Initially studies that were carried out in South Africa were searched for, however, due to a lack of studies being produced in search results, geographic location was not used as a factor for omission. In addition, CS studies in the casino industry were initially searched for, however, due to low results, this factor was omitted as a criterion for study selection. The studies needed to include qualitative or quantitative evidence-based research on the topic. Studies that did not include a CS intervention were omitted and duplicates removed.

### **3.2.3 Gathering of Data**

In attempting to gather all existing evidence, all empirical studies irrespective of methodology, response rate and bias were included. One study which met the inclusion criteria was initially selected, however after analysing the unique setting of the study and the body of literature available on the topic, the study was excluded from the review. All studies that met the inclusion criteria in terms of entailing an evaluation of a CS intervention were captured. The database search identified 3174 studies. After a systematic screening process (see Figure 1), five studies were included in the review.

### **3.2.4 Analysis and Presentation**

Thematic analysis was used to identify common themes that emerged from the data. Studies were presented in relation to the research site, aims of the study, study design, study population and sample size. Studies were also graphically presented in terms of their findings as well as the types of interventions they entailed.



**Figure 7: Flow Chart Showing Sample Selection**

**Table 1: Study Characteristics of Five Peer-Reviewed Studies To Assess Evidence-Based Research in Organisations**

<b>First author, publication date</b>	<b>Research Site</b>	<b>Aims of the Study</b>	<b>Study Design</b>	<b>Study Population</b>	<b>Sample size</b>
Peccei (2000)	Supermarket chain (UK)	To assess how frontline staff respond to customer orientation programmes	Quantitative, cross sectional survey, self-report questionnaire	Employees	667
Sturdy (2000)	Call centre (UK), Bank (Malaysia)	To understand the interactive process of CS training delivery - employee responses and trainer counter responses	Qualitative, observational research, participant observation & interviews	Employees	4 CS programmes
Pattni (2007)	Banking (location Undisclosed)	To assess the impact of a short self-management skills intervention on frontline bank staff	Qualitative & Quantitative, Quasi experimental field study, FG, Self-completion questionnaire, performance evaluation	Employees, supervisors, HR & experience CS staff	164
Sulek (1995)	Supermarket chain (US)	To investigate the impact of a CS intervention and store design on store performance	Qualitative & Quantitative, quasi experimental field research, longitudinal study, survey	Employees, customers	1537
Rice (2009)	Supermarket (US)	To assess an intervention to improve employee CS behaviours (i.e. correct closing and greeting) using manager delivered task clarification & social praise	Qualitative, multiple baseline, natural observation	Employees	17

### 3.3 Findings

The study by Pattni (2007), used a self-management intervention based on a behaviour modification model with an emphasis on identifying undesired events and dealing with these events. The culture change programme used in Peccei & Rosenthal's (2000) study was comprised of an intervention and involved a more participative and supportive style of management. The programme also included active role modelling of positive service behaviours by management and job redesign to increase autonomy for frontline staff. Consequently, the theoretical underpinning of the intervention, though not explicitly identified by the authors, was comprised of a combination of the behavioural change perspective and social cognitive approach. Similarly, the study by Rice, Austin and Gravina (2009), also

employed a behavioural change perspective in developing a function-based, manager-implemented intervention. The four CS interventions in the study by Sturdy (2000) all aimed to effect behavioural and attitudinal change in participants and inculcate a commitment to CS. The intervention assessed by Sulek, Lind and Maruchek (1995) involved the implementation of new CS standards with a complaint follow-up programme. This intervention was also designed using a behavioural change approach, however, this was not overtly stated by the authors. It was evident that the majority of studies assessed, with the exception of Peccei and Rosenthal (2000), used a behavioural change approach in the design of the intervention in order to achieve the main objective of influencing frontline CS behaviours to enhance the service to customers.

Of the five studies that were reviewed, four collected data at employee level, one collected data at both client and employee level and one obtained data only from customers. All interventions assessed within the studies sought to impact staff behaviours and attitudes in order to promote customer satisfaction. The study by Sulek et al. (1995) was designed using customer satisfaction survey data, whereas the study by Rice (2009) involved a functional assessment of the unit to determine causes of poor CS, the results of which were then used to develop the intervention. Three of the studies did not mention how the interventions had been designed (Peccei, 2000; Pattni, 2007; Sturdy, 2000).

In the study by Sturdy (2000), one of the public CS interventions as well as one of the in-house CS programmes assessed, involved the use of training material that had been developed in the United States (US) and purchased from a US consultancy. One intervention (Peccei, 2000) was termed a culture change programme including training, participative management, role modelling and job redesign as core elements. Pattni (2007) investigated the impact of a short course on self-management on frontline bank staff. The intervention by Rice (2009) included manager training and coaching to improve task clarification and social praise and assess the impact on greeting and closing behaviours. The CS initiative investigated by Sulek et al. (1995) was a two-phase intervention including an Employee Awareness Programme as well as the implementation of a customer feedback mechanism. Thus three of the interventions involved short-term training programmes without changes to the physical environment. One of the programmes involved both a training course as well as process redesign (improvements to the service delivery process) and technology redesign involving the adoption of new technology to improve the service delivery system (Sulek et al., 1995). The CS intervention by Sulek et al.

(1995) involved a process and technology redesign initiative based on customer feedback data. Two studies used qualitative research (Rice, 2009; Sturdy, 2009), one used quantitative research (Peccei, 2000) and the remaining two used a mixed methods approach (Pattni, 2007; Sulek, 1995). An overview of the study characteristics is provided (Table 1) while the types and training interventions conducted and the findings of each study are also highlighted (Table 2). A short description of each of the studies follows below.

Peccei and Rosenthal (2000) conducted a post intervention evaluation of a service excellence change initiative conducted within a large supermarket chain in the UK. A general typology of employee responses to customer care programmes was developed analysing their level of internalisation of CS values in comparison to their display of customer oriented (CO) behaviour. CO behaviour refers to the degree to which staff engage in continuous improvement and exert effort on the job on behalf of clients. These typologies included Committed (displayed positive CO behaviours and attitudes), Rejecters (displayed low CO behaviours and attitudes), Lip Service (high internalisation of CS values but low CO behaviours) and Behavioural Compliers (low internalisation of CS values but high CO behaviours).

The classification of employee responses into four main categories disregarded the diverse nature of staff attitudes and behaviours in response to the culture change intervention. Instead, results of this study suggested that the employees' responses to customer orientation change interventions are a lot more complex than indicated by the literature. There was substantial support concerning the positive impact of a strong CS climate on individual attitudinal and behavioural commitment to CS. The study revealed that in comparison to demographic variables such as age, gender, job level, tenure, customer contact and work status (part-time or full-time), other non-demographic factors also have a substantial impact on individual responses to customer orientation initiatives. Non-demographic individual factors include self-efficacy (perceived job competence), job characteristics (autonomy), perceptions of management (upward hierarchical trust) as well as individual traits and attitudes such as organisational commitment, affective orientation (intrinsic satisfaction created by CS interactions) and normative orientation (employee's sense of duty towards customers). Non-demographic situational factors include CS climate and the approach of management. CS climate refers to the extent to which employees perceive CS to be an area of importance in the organisation. For instance, how organisational HR systems such as rewards, training, and appraisal prioritize positive CS, as well as employee's perceptions of the degree to which

management prioritize and model positive CS behaviours. The study found that the perceived strength and supportive nature of the CS climate is expected to have an impact on how staff respond to CS interventions, both in terms of attitude and behaviour.

The results of the post intervention evaluation by Peccei and Rosenthal (2000) indicated that a strong and supportive CS climate is not constant and is moderated by various factors. Specifically, high levels of organisational commitment tend to enhance the impact of a strong and supportive CS climate while high levels of affective and normative CS orientation (mentioned above) tend to weaken the climate. In addition, the results suggested that demographic factors such as gender and age play a far weaker role in accounting for staff's responses to customer orientation interventions. Instead, and more importantly, it is the individual and situational-level factors linked to employee attitudes, affective orientation to CS and nature of employee experiences in the workplace that support positive CS behaviours.

Sturdy (2000) conducted qualitative, observational research of four CS interventions, that included both public courses and in-house training courses in Malaysia and the United Kingdom within the banking, call centre and hotel industry. Participant observation of interventions as well as interviews with trainers and management were conducted. Traditionally within the realm of CS interventions, the training delivery process is seen as diffusion rather than interaction. The training delivery process of diffusion implies that the message (course content) is transmitted by the facilitator, then adopted, translated, dissipated or rejected by employees. The study however illustrated the manner in which these processes occur interactively during the intervention, and how trainers forecast and counter respond to immediate, and often unpredictable reactions of participants to course content during delivery. The study found that these counter responses by trainers influenced both the message and subsequent responses of employees in terms of reinforcement, transformation, dilution or undermining of the initial message. Staff perceptions, on the use of CS initiatives by the organisation to pursue profit on the pretext of providing excellent service to customers, resulted in the display of cynicism by delegates in the training environment (Sturdy, 2000). Employee scepticism was evident in relation to the inauthenticity of the prescribed customer language used in the training material as well as psychological approaches and customer first philosophy used in the delivery of training. Sturdy (2000) noted that employees who hold a strong orientation to service, prior to a CS initiative, were more likely to internalize the values and messages inherent in the intervention (Rosenthal et al., 1997 as cited in Sturdy, 2000).

Sturdy (2000) highlighted content, methods and characteristics of trainers that were evident across the four CS programmes. In terms of content of the programmes, all four programmes had similar objectives to encourage and empower participants to provide excellent and individualised service consistently (Sturdy, 2000). Various self-management techniques were covered which were put forward to allow staff to manage customers' emotions, moods and actions to enhance sales. These self-management methods also empowered staff to manage themselves in terms of their own attitudes, moods and appearance.

With regards to the methods used, the third intervention, which was concerned with telephone sales (see Table 2), involved the replacement of a fixed script with a more flexible structure allowing employees a choice of words and phrases to create a softer sell approach (Sturdy, 2000). This, perhaps, points to the evolution of CS or sales interventions towards more flexible, personalised service thus allowing for the needs of customers to emerge through conversation and match their needs through service. Developing rapport through using names, eye contact, matching speed rates and body posture were covered. Techniques for recovery were outlined as well as active listening and the use of voice, tone and relating back a customer's story. All CS programmes were similar in terms of techniques used such as group discussions, individual exercises, role-playing, various media and presentation formats such as workbooks and acronyms to assist with memory recall. Emotional labour was portrayed as displaying a positive mental attitude (PMA) in difficult situations, with self-talk and surface acting techniques being taught to participants to enable them to deal with such situations. Positive mental attitude was supported by having lunch with people who had a positive outlook, having a buddy system where people paired up to guide each other in supporting positive CS behaviours as well as displaying motivational visuals around the work environment (Sturdy, 2000).

In terms of trainers' characteristics, Sturdy (2000) noted that trainers who ran public CS courses used more positive performances and put more emphasis on changing the mind-set of participants. Trainers' management of criticism of the authenticity of CS content was achieved through the use of humour and having neutralizing responses prepared that created reassurance.

The study also pointed out how interventions may be custom designed, evaluated and integrated into employee reward and development systems or solely entail the buying of a package where select staff attend high profile corporate events or are sent to a one day off-site or in-house course. Sturdy (2000) also highlighted the shift from training, to character

formation, where there is a variation in the degree to which programmes seek to focus on service techniques or create personal transformation. According to Mezirow (1997), transformative education refers to the process of changing one's frame of reference. A new personal perspective is arrived at through critically reflecting on the assumptions, biases and beliefs that structure the old perspective or frame of reference. Mezirow (1997) defines a frame of reference as 'the structure of assumptions and expectations through which we filter sense impressions...it provides the context for making meaning' (Merriam & Ntseane, 2008, p. 184). During transformative learning processes, it is these frames of reference that are transformed as individuals critically reflect on their underlying assumptions and taken-for-granted beliefs. In the context of CS interventions, further research is required to determine the extent to which CS interventions are transformative, and to what degree they meet these criteria in terms of on the job behavioural changes.

Rice, Austin and Gravina (2009) evaluated an intervention to improve staff CS behaviours concerning correct greeting and closing behaviours in a grocery store. In the study, greeting behaviours referred to staff members engaging in eye contact, smiling and greeting customers e.g. 'Good morning, how are you today?' Unlike closing behaviours in sales interaction which seek to take the customer into the final step of the sales process, in this study closing behaviours referred to the staff member making eye contact, smiling, thanking the customer and verbally closing the interaction e.g. 'Goodbye' or 'Have a nice day' (Rice et al., 2009). A training intervention was conducted with the manager on task clarification to communicate expected behaviours to staff and provide social praise subsequent to correct greetings and closing when interacting with customers. The study found that the intervention resulted in increased correct greetings and closing behaviours suggesting that task clarification and social praise is an effective way to improve CS behaviours. Positive effects were sustained after a 48 week follow-up, with five new employees also being observed. Interestingly the study found that new staff engaged in higher levels of correct greeting and closing behaviours than the original staff during baseline, suggesting that new staff may have observed colleagues engaging in these behaviours and assumed that they were to interact similarly with customers (Rice *et al.*, 2009).

Pattni, Soutar and Klobas (2007) assessed the impact of a short self-management skills training course on frontline banking staff learning to employ self-management techniques to overcome obstacles to the initiation of banking product sales, perceived self-efficacy in initiating the sale of a product and performance in CS interactions. The study found that the skills training course

had a positive impact on learning and self-efficacy. The study showed how a short self-management course can have similar results to a longer multiple stage training intervention. The study revealed an increase in CS performance scores of both staff from the control and experimental group, suggesting a possible spill over effect from participants to other staff and a sharing of knowledge. In a transactive memory system, the team itself is viewed as a centre for information storage and identifying the diverse knowledge bases of individuals is important for team members to learn from each other. The study noted that the notion that group performance can be enhanced through improved transactive memory systems requires additional research. In addition, the impact of transactive memory systems following self-management interventions requires further research. The study also noted, that the existence of transactive memory systems can have implications in self-management training contexts as not all staff need to be trained. As a result, training becomes more efficient due to spill over effects. However, such methods would have ethical concerns considering that all staff would not be provided with the same opportunity to attend training.

Sulek et al. (1995) investigated the impact of a CS intervention and the facility design of a supermarket chain on firm performance. A two-phase CS intervention programme was developed. The first phase of the programme included the development and implementation of service standards which were embodied in an employee awareness programme and were implemented in all 46 stores. Mystery shoppers were used to assess the implementation of standards in each unit. The second phase involved a customer feedback mechanism where all service quality surveys were screened by management and a complaint follow-up programme was initiated where customers were contacted to resolve problems and make suggestions for improving service. There were three types of store designs ranging from “store of the future” format to “traditional,” each catering to customer needs in terms of product variety, technology, price, store-size and the amount of prepared or convenience food on sale. A theoretical model linking the intervention, variations in store design, and customer satisfaction to sales performance, was created. Using operational performance data and 1537 customer satisfaction surveys, a Linear Structural Relationships (LISREL) model was used to test the predictive fit of the model. Results suggested that the intervention and store design had a positive impact on customer satisfaction which in turn impacted sales performance. The study also found that the CS intervention had a direct effect on sales performance. The study concluded that a low technology intervention through continuous attention to customer concerns, customer feedback mechanisms and CS standards can substantially increase customer satisfaction and sales

performance. Emphasis was placed on the importance of communicating standards, policies and to explain the reasoning behind these systems to employees. This communication helped influence the customer's perception of their experience, and allowed the company to narrow the gap in the quality of service by listening to customers and using information to draw the customer's expectation closer to the actual design of the service delivery process.

**Table 2: Types of Interventions and Findings**

<b>First author, publication date</b>	<b>Intervention Type</b>	<b>Findings</b>	<b>Theme</b>
Peccei (2000)	Culture Change Programme with 4 elements: 1) CS Training 2) Participative Management Style 3) Role Modelling 4) Job redesign to increase autonomy	Positive impact of strong CS climate on individual and attitudinal and behavioural commitment to CS.  Individual and situational factors have a significant impact on staff responses to CS training  Rejection of the discourse that CS interventions have a homogenizing effect on employee attitudes and behaviour	Impact of CS Climate
Sturdy (2000)	Assessed 4 Training Programmes: 1) Personal Empowerment (1 day public) 2) Personal Empowerment (1 day public) 3) Telephone Sales (3 days in-house) 4) CS Induction (1 day in-house)	Provided detail on the process of training delivery and how employee responses e.g. cynicism to CS training messages can be shaped by trainer's immediate responses  Various techniques prescribed for employees to manage their appearance, attitudes and moods as well as customers moods to enhance sales	Impact of Training Process  Employee Empowerment  Self-management CS Climate
Pattni (2007)	Self-management Training	Positive impact on self-efficacy and gaining knowledge about ways to use self-management to address obstacles at work  A short self-management course can have similar results to a longer multiple stage training intervention  Increases in CS performance scores of both control group and experimental group suggesting a possible spill over effect from participants to other staff and sharing of knowledge	Employee Empowerment  Self-management  CS Behaviour Modelling
Sulek (1995)	2 phase intervention: 1) Employee Awareness Programme 2) Customer Feedback Mechanism	The intervention and store design both had a positive impact on customer satisfaction which in turn impacted sales performance  CS intervention had a direct effect on sales performance  Compliant follow-up programme allowed customers to identify problems and suggest solutions to management, reshaped customers perception of the shopping experience and used customer communication to shape the service delivery process in order to meet customer expectations	Business Imperative of CS  Impact of Customer Feedback Mechanism
Rice (2009)	Manager Implemented Intervention - task clarification and social praise	Increase in correct greetings and closing behaviours Effectiveness of task clarification and social praise to improve CS behaviours  New staff who did not attend training, engaged in higher greeting and closing behaviours suggesting they may have observed and mirrored their colleague's behaviours	CS Behaviour Modelling

### **3.4 Discussion**

This review aimed to critically study the nature and effectiveness of CS interventions by assessing the literature on CS interventions that have been conducted within organisations. A conceptual understanding of the reviewed articles points to three levels that CS interventions impact. These are the individual level, the situational level and the organisational level. Individual level factors which have an effect on how employees respond to CS interventions include intrinsic motivation, capability, self-efficacy, organisational commitment, affective and normative orientation, autonomy and hierarchical trust. Situational level factors include how employees respond during the customer-employee interaction. Here aspects such as self-management and responding to and dealing with customer's, as well as one's own emotions and moods, are brought into light. Communication skills such as language, greeting, body language and the ability to improvise and apply learnt communication skills are included in the situational level. Organisational level factors include management commitment to CS, CS climate, alignment of HR systems and organisational processes with CS strategy as well as customer expectations generated through feedback mechanisms.

Some of the key issues impacting CS interventions that were identified in the review include the inauthentic nature of training content and trainer's responses to employee cynicism. The interactive process of employee-trainer responses to training content was critically analysed (Sturdy, 2000). The different types of training content, methods and trainer's characteristics addressed in the articles were discussed. Different types of CS interventions were highlighted (see Table 2). The importance of a robust CS climate, a strong intervention, and reinforcement of CS values and norms to enhance the likelihood of employee internalisation of CS values and behaviours, was heavily emphasised by Peccei et al. (2000). In addition, employee responses to CS interventions were classified into four different typologies by Peccei et al. (2000) for a more generalised understanding of staff reactions. The use of self-management techniques to improve CS behaviours was advocated by both Sturdy (2000) and Pattni et al. (2007). Sulek et al. (1995) highlighted the positive impact of a CS intervention on sales performance as well as the impact of store design and the CS intervention on customer satisfaction.

Three of the studies reviewed were conducted in supermarkets, indicating a possible need for CS interventions in this industry. In addition, three of the major studies identified in this paper including Peccei (2000), Sturdy (2000) and Sulek et al. (1995) were all conducted between the years 1995 and 2000, indicating a lack of significant CS intervention research over the past 15

years. There were three overarching themes identified across studies. Both the interventions by Sturdy (2000) and Pattni (2007) entailed interventions that sought to foster employee empowerment. This also speaks to the shift from training to character formation or personal transformation as mentioned by Sturdy (2000). Other themes that were identified were Behaviour Modelling of CS behaviours by staff who had not attended the interventions as well as the use of self-management techniques in CS interventions.

The study by Rice (2009) illustrated the positive impact of managerial task clarification and social praise on frontline CS behaviours, thus pointing to the importance of supervisory feedback in reinforcing appropriate CS behaviours. In addition, both studies by Pattni (2007) and Rice (2009) entailed a degree of behaviour modelling where new employees who did not attend the training were mirroring CS behaviours of participants. In particular, Pattni (2007) saw increases in CS performance scores of both the experimental group and the control group who had not attended self-management training. In the study by Rice (2009), the CS behaviours of the group exposed to the treatment increased, whilst paradoxically, new employees who had not been exposed to the treatment exhibited higher levels of correct greeting and closing behaviours than original staff. This is a significant learning event considering the impact it may have on training efficiency and budgeting, however, this also comes with practical and ethical precautions as mentioned earlier.

The findings, of improved performance in untrained staff, are congruent with Bandura's social cognitive theory which forms the theoretical foundations of behaviour modelling training (BMT). Robertson (1990) notes that BMT perceives individual behaviour as a function of both internal characteristics such as cognition, attitudes, and personality, and external, situational variables. Social cognitive theorists disagree with the notion that only direct and personal experiences influence behaviour but instead have proven empirically that people will learn and change their behaviour after observing the behaviours of others; people can learn vicariously (Robertson, 1990; Taylor, Chan and Russ-Eft, 2005). As a result, in BMT, role modelling is viewed as a powerful way in which new behaviours are learned (Taylor et al., 2005). The main processes in BMT are attention to a model, retention and mental organisation of the main characteristics of a model's behaviour, motor reproduction of a model's behaviour (putting to use information that your brain has received), and motivation processes such as rewarding consequences that serve to reinforce the modelled behaviour.

As mentioned above, the Pattni et al. (2007) study showed an increase in CS performance scores of staff from both the control and experimental groups. This increase in CS performance scores suggested a possible spill over effect from participants in the control group to other staff and thus a sharing of knowledge between employees who had attended training and those who had not attended the intervention. Due, however, to a lack of rigorous evaluation of the workplace studies, as a result of challenges in research designs of intervention studies (Weihs and Meyer-Weitz, 2015), this claim is not empirically supported and more rigorous research is required in this area.

Sturdy (2000) also highlighted how CS initiatives are perceived as an imported practice due to the use of American language and phrases in course content as well as the use of training companies, trainers and materials from the United States. As a result, CS initiatives which use American course material, trainers and training organisations have a tendency to overlook an understanding of local culture and thus lack practical application in the local context. This draws attention to the nature of South African CS interventions in the workplace and the need for a uniquely South African (SA) perspective towards CS interventions. A locally designed CS intervention would be particularly beneficial for the South African gaming and tourism sector by mobilising local cultural values to enhance service interactions. This is viewed as an important area for further research considering that these cultural values are already present and can be viewed as an untapped resource to improve CS from a cultural and business perspective.

### **3.5 Limitations and Recommendations**

Limitations of the study included the exclusion of grey literature from the review. The inclusion of grey literature may have created bias in the results due to lack of peer review. In addition, grey literature can be difficult to systematically search due to poor cataloguing in research databases. Furthermore, the lack of literature available on the topic was also a considerable limitation.

As identified by Sturdy (2000), in-house customer service initiatives did include evaluation of the impact of the interventions on CS, with public courses having a tendency to lack evaluation capability. The other studies by Peccei et al. (2000), Sulek et al. (1995), Pattni et al. (2007) and Rice et al. (2009) all entailed an evaluation of the impact of the intervention on CS. It is important to take into account that these interventions were assessed from an academic perspective thereby providing a need for evaluation data. In cases where no such need exists

for e.g. in-house interventions that are not researched from an academic standpoint, it is uncertain whether such impact evaluations of interventions occur. As a result, in-house CS initiatives may not necessarily provide the best evidence-based research illustrating the impact of the interventions on CS, thereby reducing the likelihood that best practices are recorded and shared within the industry. It is vital that organisations are made aware of the importance of evaluation of CS interventions in order to foster improvements in such initiatives and contribute to the body of knowledge on best practices in CS interventions.

This systematic review found no evidence on CS training interventions conducted in the SA context, indicating a significant gap in the literature to provide guidance to SA organisations in the services industry in terms of CS interventions. This dearth of research on CS interventions remains a concern considering the poor service standards apparent in the South African services industry (Blem, 2005). As a result, it is recommended that further research is conducted in South African service orientated industries such as gaming, retail, hospitality and tourism, to develop locally designed CS training interventions that, as identified in the five reviewed papers, adopt approaches which have been successful in improving CS in organisations in Europe and the US. These locally designed interventions should place emphasis on personal transformation, employee empowerment and self-management techniques, and seek to exploit the benefits of behaviour modelling whilst allowing for evaluation of the impact of the initiatives to promote learning and best practice. More importantly, this study calls for further research to identify how cultural values can be mobilised to enhance service interactions in the South African services sector in order to gain a competitive advantage over international gaming and tourism markets.

### **3.6 Chapter Summary**

This systematic review identified three overarching themes in the assessed literature on CS training interventions. These were the shift from training to personal transformation or employee empowerment, behaviour modelling of CS behaviours by employees who had not attended the interventions, and the use of self-management techniques. In addition, various trends and techniques used in CS interventions were identified and discussed. Findings of the study can assist practitioners in the field of customer service interventions and be used in the design of CS interventions for South African and overseas service-based organisations.

## **Chapter 4: Research Methodology**

This chapter will provide an overview of the research design utilized in the study including a discussion of the mixed methods approach, the case study approach as well as the use of intervention research as the main research framework for the study. A blueprint for the intervention will be provided together with a discussion of how the intervention was designed through the use of the Participatory Intervention Model. In addition, the development of the intervention by using Lewin's Change Management Model as an underlying theoretical framework will be discussed. Thereafter a framework identifying CS challenges that emerged from the interviews and focus group conducted in the situation analysis phase will be provided. A description of the research setting will be presented as well as a discussion regarding the sample, data collection and data analysis of the different phases in intervention research, namely the situation analysis phase, the design and implementation of the intervention phase and the process evaluation phase, which will be discussed separately.

### **4.1 Philosophy of Research**

In discussing the philosophy of research it is important to distinguish between ontology, epistemology and methodology. According to Creswell (2007), ontology refers to the nature of reality and what can be understood about it (as cited in Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). Epistemology originates from the Greek word "episteme" which means knowledge and "logia" which denotes study. Thus epistemology is concerned with the study of knowledge and more specifically with the relationship between the researcher and that which is being researched. Methodology refers to how researchers identify new knowledge and relates to the laws of inquiry.

Considering that a mixed method approach was implemented in this study, I will discuss two paradigms beginning with positivism and then going on to discuss interpretivism in more detail, considering that the study was more qualitatively focussed.

### 4.1.1 Positivism

Neuman (2006) describes a paradigm as a system of thinking about theory and research encompassing key assumptions, specific requirements for quality research and preferred methods of inquiry. Positivism maintains that true knowledge can only be attained by gathering objective, observable empirical evidence through a scientific method in order to predict and control the social world (Cilliers, De Villers & Bezuidenhout, 2014).

Neuman (2006, pg. 82) defines positive social science as “an organised method for combining deductive logic with precise empirical observations of individual behaviour in order to discover and confirm a set of probabilistic causal laws that can be used to predict general patterns of human activity.”

From the above quotation it is evident that positivism begins from the premise that universal laws govern human behaviour which can be understood through the investigation of data collected from measuring key variables of interest. Perhaps one of the key criticisms of positivism is its simplistic view of human behaviour, which it sees as measurable enough to determine cause and effect relationships. However the sheer amount of variables, forces and effects apparent in social situations ranging from internal to environmental factors, and the difficulty in replicating these conditions in controlled situations, makes the likelihood of identifying particular cause and effect relationships in human social systems problematic.

Positivism takes a mechanical view of human nature seeing people as rational and logical who are self-interested and hedonistic. This mechanical model of man maintains that identifying individual's external behaviours, which allows researcher's to learn about individuals, and taking note of external forces impacting these individuals, provides adequate data for explaining human thinking and behaviour (Neumann, 2006). One of the criticisms of positivism and its deterministic view, which sees human agency as largely being a result of external forces, is its lack of emphasis on internal human aspects such as mental processes, emotions, values and beliefs which also have a major impact on external behaviours and decision-making. It is these internal aspects, which are more difficult to understand and predict, often resulting in irrational behaviour or decisions.

Within the context of research, perhaps positivism can best be described through an example of the research process. When taking a positivist approach, a researcher sets out to disprove a cause-effect relationship between two variables that is logically drawn from a conceivable causal law (Neumann, 2006). Data is collected in order to link the abstractions to real world

measurements. The researcher's role is one where he or she remains objective, detached and value-free from the data that is collected. The researcher analyses the evidence and aims to have his or her findings replicated through the research of other researchers. The research process culminates in an empirical test that aims to confirm the casual law apparent in social life.

The difficulties with the application of the above positivist research process to study everyday human interaction, is its scientific and mechanistic structure which is in direct contrast to everyday human interaction, which can be both logical and emotional. As a result, and in line with the approach taken by the study, it can be suggested that the study of human behaviour can benefit from a more mixed approach to research methods where both objective and subjective strategies of inquiry are employed to allow for the benefits of both methods to be put to use.

#### **4.1.2 Interpretivism**

Interpretivism begins from the premise that there is a distinction between the laws of science (natural reality) and social reality and each requires different methods (Gray, 2009). Interpretive social science can be defined as “the systematic analysis of socially meaningful action through the direct detailed observation of people in natural settings in order to arrive at understandings and interpretations of how people create and maintain their social worlds” (Neumann, 2006, pg 88).

The central emphasis of interpretivism is on understanding people in relation to their own view of reality, with the notion that individuals experience and assign meaning to the same situations differently due to their own, subjective interpretation of events (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). In interpretivism, there exists a relativist ontology or multiple constructed realities and the researcher and the phenomenon both shape one another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). In comparison to positivism, interpretivism aims to understand rather than explain phenomena through the identification of causal relationships brought about by universal laws. Due to the importance ascribed to subjective understanding, interpretivism rejects the positivist notion of distance between the researcher and the researched, as well as the need for control of the research context. Rather interpretivism places value on getting close to the respondent in order to obtain an insider's view. Interpretivism maintains that empirical evidence should not be reserved for observable behaviour but should also attempt to describe people's hidden

intentions, meanings, reasons and values that explain human behaviour. Interpretivism has been more associated with the qualitative approach to research and interpretive approaches have a predisposition to value naturalistic methods of research such as unstructured observation, interviewing and qualitative data analysis in order to obtain a subjective understanding of the research problem from the research subject's perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

This study took an interpretive approach with regards to the qualitative data that was obtained from interviews, focus groups and participant observations in order to understand the subjective experiences of respondents in relation to CS challenges and the impact of diversity and body language on CS interactions.

#### **4.1.3 Participatory Paradigm**

Denzin and Lincoln (2011) discuss a new paradigm called the participatory paradigm, which is a new addition to the conventional set of paradigms such as positivism and interpretivism, thus reflecting contemporary thinking in research. The participatory paradigm views the nature of reality as being co-created by the subjective mind and the world rather than existing separately as in positivism. This paradigm views knowledge as being created within communities of practice and subjects are viewed as co-researchers who learn through becoming agents in the research process. Subjects engage in democratic dialogue resulting in collaborative forms of inquiry.

In terms of epistemology, the participatory paradigm proposes that there are four ways of knowing, namely experiential, presentational, propositional and practical (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Experiential knowing is seen to occur from direct learning experiences, where new knowledge develops from the application of the knowledge. Knowledge accumulation is believed to stem from the mind's conceptual understanding of the world which is thought to be a result of real-life experiences. Experiential knowing entails an understanding of symbolic frameworks of conceptual and propositional knowing. Presentational knowing arises from experiential knowing, and involves aesthetic creation within art-forms such as music, as well as visual and verbal art, representing metaphors emerging from experiential knowing (Heron & Reason, 1997). Propositional knowing refers to conceptual understanding through description of knowledge and theories emerging from real-life experiences. Practical knowing refers to being able to demonstrate a skill or ability. In qualitative research, researcher bring

with them their propositional knowing, but the research findings are meant to reflect the experiential knowing of research subjects who have knowledge of the context, which is captured through conversation with the researcher or observation of the subject.

The participatory worldview was seen as being relevant to the phases in the research project concerning the intervention that was developed as a result of collaboration and co-creation with management and frontline service staff. A democratic learning environment was created promoting equality and open communication and experiential learning was employed as a source of knowledge and group intelligence that was accessed through course activities (discussed later) and that was shared amongst respondents to improve CS.

#### **4.1.4 Action Research**

The Action Research (AR) approach, developed by Kurt Lewin, is a form of social inquiry using research to institute actions in social systems in order to address issues within the system. The AR approach originated from Lewin's work in intergroup relations and stereotyping. AR places emphasis on democratic decision-making processes within groups to question power constellations, processes, habits, structures and individual roles to address problems facing the group. AR views the small group as a social context for initiating change in organisations and views the way a group makes decisions as being key to instituting change. Research in AR is less objective and places more emphasis on the skill of making observations regarding social interactions among group members (Glassman, Erdem & Bartholomew, 2012).

Action Research's (AR) mandate is to use research to transform problem situations in organisations, and sees action as the best means of testing newly created knowledge (Greenwood & Levin, 2007). Action Research is solution-focussed and is a collaborative process where researchers and stakeholders generate relevant knowledge together, learn how to conduct basic social research, take informed actions and learn from the impact of their actions. AR aims to create social change and is based on democratic values. This is evident through the pooling of knowledge between the researcher and stakeholders.

The AR process begins with a problem facing the group. Research is undertaken to understand the problem and an action is formulated and implemented. Thereafter research is undertaken once more to evaluate the impact of the action and reformulate a subsequent action, thus highlighting the iterative nature of the process. When the action results in resistance from the

field of interaction in the social system, unanticipated forces in the system surface which can then be further analysed. This process allows groups to understand barriers to resolving their dilemma such as existing structures. In line with his AR theory, Lewin also suggested a continuous fact finding cycle to resolve problems comprising three steps namely planning, action and analysis.

The second line of action research was developed by William Whyte called participatory action research (PAR). As in AR, PAR refers to an approach to inquiry that is grounded in participation, action and experience, and that entails critical reflection to create new insights on an issue which are tested through an iterative research process in order to improve practice. PAR aims to solve problems within a context, by researchers engaging with individuals involved in that environment to collect data to identify problems, identify appropriate intervention solutions and implement and evaluate those interventions (Knight, Paterson, Dawson & Brown, 2017). The main difference between PAR and action research is that PAR is more concerned with the organisational structure in context and how group members' interactions with each other are shaped by their occupational identities. PAR proposes that group members can change the directions of their actions by questioning their roles in the organisation and adjusting their interaction patterns (Glassman et al., 2012).

PAR begins from the premise that knowledge creation is a collaborative process where participant's competencies, experiences and local knowledge are key to the research outcomes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). PAR integrates theory and practice where a community's problem is addressed through an iterative process of action and reflection on that action designed to foster change, whilst providing participants with a broader understanding of economic, social and political forces that impact the situation. In originating from a social justice prerogative, PAR aims to include people in the research process who have been previously excluded from knowledge creation. The salient objective of PAR is the improvement of a situation of injustice or oppression in a community by working towards achieving a vision of an ideal state characterized by equality and democracy. Some PAR projects addressing critical race theory utilise narrative or stories strategically to examine power relations, disrupt the status quo and deconstruct complacency (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). PAR's focus on several ways of knowing encourages experimentation with the use of arts-based methodologies which provide mediums for individuals to challenge situations indirectly, express themselves and create change. Arts-based methodologies include theatre, storytelling, visual art, photography and various other indigenous art-forms. Due to its collaborative nature and respect for local knowledge, PAR is

viewed as a culturally sensitive form of research, and due to it being a type of research evaluated by participant-driven criteria it is viewed as decolonizing research method (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). One of the benefits of PAR is its creation of relevant and useful findings for communities that aim to solve real-life problems through group work. PAR also entails inviting participants to contribute in the learning environment thus resulting in researchers renouncing control which encourages participants to lead discussions, share knowledge and take ownership of the process.

Whilst this study was not designed to address a social justice prerogative, the process of how the research was conducted in the situation analysis, intervention design and implementation phase and process evaluation phase, all had traces of PAR. While the action research process of continuous research, action and reflection were not followed due to time and cost constraints, reflection formed a major part of how the participants were encouraged to share their personal wisdoms in terms of how they addressed CS challenges on a daily basis. Group work characterized the majority of learning activities during the intervention e.g. flip-charting where participants became co-researchers by identifying challenges to providing excellent CS from their work experiences and coming up with solutions to those challenges. An arts-based methodology was a central feature of the intervention where theatre was used to apply learnt communication techniques. In addition, participants were asked to write narratives of times where diversity had had an impact on CS interactions that they had been involved in.

The participatory intervention model (PIM), rooted in participatory action research, is a cyclical process that entails the social creation of interventions through research and is characterised by the involvement and empowerment of key stakeholders. PIM seeks to apply theory and conduct research in creating interventions for particular contexts. PIM attempts to create ownership of interventions by key stakeholders through this process to ensure sustainability of the intervention (Nastasi, Varjas, Schensul, Tudor Silva, Schensul & Ratnayake, 2000). The participatory learning model stresses that “learners are active participants or co-producers rather than passive consumers of content, and ... learning is a participatory, social process supporting personal life goals and needs” (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007, p. 664).

In addition, participatory learning is associated with assimilating learner creativity into the learning process. Learning activities that seek to foster creativity allow students to take active roles in their learning process according to their interest, curiosity and choice of learning

activities (Smucny, Baker & Tripathy, 2016). Navarrete (2013) found that while involved in understanding learning content holistically and conceptually, learners can obtain a deep level understanding of the subject matter.

Lieu, Cheng and Huang (2011) found that learner engagement and motivation can improve when learners bring their imagination into the learning process. Student engagement entails active participation in the learning process to result in deeper and meaningful learning. Engagement is known to be comprised of various aspects including motivation, challenge, sensory appeal, attention, feedback, curiosity, and interest (O'Brien & Toms, 2008). Engagement has known to be a reliable forecaster of long-term learner performance and engaged students have been known to pay more attention, have more persistence and show more interest (Klem & Connell, 2004).

PAR entails active group participation resulting in employee involvement in decision-making which is believed to increase individuals' views of job control, thereby reducing stress and burnout. A study by Nielsen and Randall (2012) found that allowing staff to actively participate in a change process was important to increase commitment to the intervention. The study viewed changes in work procedures emanating from participation in problem-solving activities as being related to perceived involvement in decision-making, perceived social support and well-being.

A participatory intervention was designed in this study in order to address CS challenges facing frontline staff in the casino. Participatory action research was employed to collect data to analyse the CS problems facing the organisation through interviews, focus groups and observations with frontline service staff. Using this data, a participatory intervention model was implemented to develop an intervention using group activities such as flip-charting to collect information to frame CS problems and get frontline staff to suggest solutions to these problems. In this way, only two stages of the fact-finding cycle proposed by Lewin were implemented. Analysis of CS problems and planning of solutions were utilised to record these solutions to provide recommendations to management. A continuous process of PAR was not utilised due to time and cost constraints of the organisation. Rather only two stages of the process were completed in one round of research conducted through group activities during the intervention. PAR methods were employed in order to get frontline staff to take ownership for the intervention through increased participation and involvement.

Learning activities were open-ended in nature to allow for creative problem-solving of identified CS challenges facing frontline staff. Learning mediums such as role-play, applied theatre and video analysis were employed to create interest and engagement in learning activities. Reflection on activities were utilized in order to encourage critical thinking, knowledge-sharing and deep learning of content through analyzing the application of theoretical content in work roles through group discussion. A discussion on quantitative research follows.

#### **4.1.5 Quantitative Research**

According to Neumann (2006), quantitative research takes a deductive approach with a focus on systematic research. Quantitative research is nomothetic in nature aiming to establish causal relationships between variables and confirmation of universal laws that exist regardless of time or locations (Gray, 2009). Quantitative research stresses the importance of accurate measurement of variables and hypothesis testing which are connected to causal laws. In comparison to qualitative research which follows a logic of practice involving an iterative research process with less formal procedures and a predisposition towards practical accomplishment of a research tasks, quantitative researchers follow reconstructed logic involving highly formalised and standardised research procedures. Quantitative research emphasizes the collection of numerical data and places importance on the statistical analysis of this data with the end goal of predicting causal relationships between variables. One of the criticisms of quantitative research are the reduction of complex social phenomena into a small number of variables resulting in a fragmented understanding of the phenomena with little insight into the research context.

#### **4.1.6 Qualitative Research**

Qualitative research is ideographic in nature, is located in specific time periods and contexts, and has a focus on depth and intensity of findings rather than generalizability (Gray, 2009). According to Terblanche et al. (2007), qualitative researchers employ research designs that are more open and flexible due to the emergent nature of the research. In qualitative research studies, the research focus and research questions may change as a result of the analysis of initial observations, resulting in an unfolding of the research design which may be more

naturalistic and practical in comparison to more restrictive quantitative research designs. Often, qualitative research designs are employed in exploratory research, as the inductive nature of such research serves well to identify emerging areas of interest. Interpretivist researchers maintain that qualitative studies can also be utilised for explanatory purposes and to provide rich, detailed descriptions of phenomena. Qualitative research often involves the collection of written or textual data through methods such as observation, interviews and focus groups. Typically, qualitative data is analysed through the identification and categorization of data into inductively generated themes. One of the major strengths of qualitative research designs are their ability to provide a holistic understanding of a complex systems and interdependent relationships, in contrast to quantitative research designs which attempt to reduce complex relationships to a few variables and linear cause and effect relationships (Terblanche et al., 2007). In order to benefit from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research, this study chose to use a mixed methods research design.

The study gave priority to qualitative research due to the inductive and emergent nature of the research, allowing for the identification of CS challenges from staff and sharing of their work experiences. This allowed the researcher to understand the context in rich detail as well as gain a complete understanding of work processes and procedures that staff were exposed to so as to assist in the development of the intervention. The qualitative, participatory intervention focused on staff identifying solutions to CS challenges and post-intervention focus groups and interviews examined the impact of the intervention, allowing the researcher to dig for deeper meaning and understand complex issues with confounding variables through qualitative research instruments. The qualitative interviews and focus groups allowed the researcher to capture respondent's experiences of CS interactions as well as their experiences of the intervention. The below table indicates key differences between quantitative and qualitative research in terms of epistemology, relationship between the researcher and the subject as well as the nature of data and scope of findings.

**Table 3. A Summary of Differences between Quantitative and Qualitative Research**

	<b>Quantitative Research</b>	<b>Qualitative Research</b>
<b>Epistemological positions</b>	Objectivist	Interpretivist/Constructivist
<b>Relationship between researcher and subject</b>	Distant outsider	Close insider
<b>Research focus</b>	Facts	Meanings
<b>Relationship between theory / concepts and research</b>	Deduction / confirmation	Induction / emergent
<b>Scope of findings</b>	Nomothetic	Ideographic
<b>The nature of data</b>	Data based upon numbers	Data based upon text

(Adapted from Gray, 2009)

#### **4.1.7 Mixed Methods**

Mixed methods research is defined as “the type of research in which a researcher...combines elements of qualitative and quantitative research approaches (e.g. the use of qualitative and quantitative viewpoints, data collection, analysis, inference techniques) for the purposes of generalizability and depth of understanding and corroboration” (Creswell as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This study sought to utilise a mixed methods research design to allow the researcher to enjoy the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative research (Gray, 2009).

Mixed methods draws on pragmatism as a research philosophy, placing value on the use of research methods that are suitable to answering the research questions. Rather than being restricted to research methods that are determined by research paradigms, pragmatism advocates for the use of research methods that are practical and which have the greatest chance of creating useful and achievable answers.

Benefits of mixed methods include triangulation where the use of multiple methods converge and substantiate one another, thereby increasing the validity of research outcomes (Gray, 2009). Mixed methods can also complement one another where methods such as questionnaires can measure different elements of a phenomenon in comparison to qualitative interviews, thereby expanding the findings of the study. In addition, the results of one method e.g. interviews with managers and staff, can result in the development of the subsequent method e.g. a participatory learning intervention.

One of the difficulties associated with mixed methods research is synthesis and integration of findings across qualitative and quantitative methods, where research findings within each

method may not be easily comparable. For example, qualitative open-ended questions may not be easily compared with numerical data sourced from questionnaires which may elicit different responses from participants. Within this study, qualitative interviews and focus groups were used to identify CS challenges of frontline service staff and these findings were used to develop an intervention to address these challenges. The quantitative aspect of the study served in a secondary role, primarily to determine the effectiveness of the intervention in terms of meeting learning objectives, identify effective learning methods and evaluate facilitation. Outcomes of the questionnaire were corroborated to a small degree in the focus group and interviews conducted during the process evaluation phase, however on the whole the quantitative and qualitative datasets were analysed separately.

A multi-phase mixed method design (Creswell, 2012) was used in the study, beginning with pre-test qualitative interviews, a focus group and participant observation of frontline staff on the casino floor. This was followed by the use of the findings in the development and delivery of a CS intervention, ending with a process evaluation of the intervention via a quantitative questionnaire. Ten months after the intervention had been implemented, post-test qualitative focus groups, interviews and participant observation were conducted. As a result, the study is situated within a time-series, pre and post-test qualitative design without a control group. A flow diagram illustrating steps in the research process is provided later in the chapter to provide a visual understanding of the process. An embedded strategy of mixed method was used where a primary method was used to guide the project followed by secondary methods that serve in a supportive capacity (Creswell, 2009). The primary method in the study were the interviews and focus groups conducted whilst secondary methods included the training evaluation questionnaire as well as naturalistic and participant observation.

#### **4.1.8 Case Study Research**

A case study is an empirical investigation regarding a current phenomenon in a real-world environment, particularly where the boundary between the context and phenomenon is not apparent (Yin, 2009). The above description of a case study suggests that understanding the context and conditions of the case are important to understanding the case. As a result of understanding the context and conditions of a case, case studies go over and above understanding causal relationships between isolated variables (Yin, 2012). Case studies designs are particularly useful for understanding complex social phenomena and allows the researcher

to preserve comprehensive and meaningful features of real occurrences such as small group behaviour, managerial style and company processes (Yin, 2009). In addition, case studies can be utilised to understand why a decision or series of decisions were taken, how they were applied and what the outcome was. According to Yin (2012), case studies are particularly relevant when answering descriptive research questions such as “What is happening?” or explanatory questions such as “How or why did something happen?” A case is a bounded entity and can refer to a person, an organisation, condition, event or other social phenomenon (Yin, 2012).

The in-depth examination of the case, allows the researcher to analytically study the case in detail, understand the context and how the different parts of the context are organised. Case studies allow researcher to link the individual actions of people to larger social structures and processes (Vaughan as cited in Creswell, 2006). Whilst case studies may not allow for statistical generalizations as made in quantitative research designs, analytical generalizations can be claimed by case studies. According to Yin (2012), analytical generalizations involve using a study’s theoretical framework to develop a logic that may be relevant in similar situations. The first step in making a generalization from a case is to make a conceptual claim indicating how the study’s findings explain relationships between specific concepts or constructs. The next step involves applying the same theoretical propositions to similar situations where comparable concepts, constructs or sequences may be in place. Thus analytical generalizations generalize to similar situations rather than to larger populations.

In this study, an embedded, single case study of a Durban-based casino was carried out. A descriptive case study research design was employed. The case study was embedded considering the slots department of the casino served as the unit of analysis within the larger case and context. The qualitative aspect of the case study yielded rich and detailed data allowing the researcher to construct representations based on in-depth information about the case which was gathered over the period of eleven months.

A case study protocol containing the research instruments, research questions and the procedures to be followed in the field was utilised when undertaking data collection (See Appendix E). The purpose of the case study protocol was to provide consistent guidelines for the researcher in collecting data and increase the reliability of the case study research undertaken (Yin, 2003). In addition, a case study database was built through the creation of a folder on the researcher’s computer during the course of the study, where documents,

observations, interviews and focus group data, research instruments and narratives were stored. This database will be stored for a period of five years together with other research data collected during the course of the study. In addition, a chain of evidence was maintained through data collection phases in order to be able to trace conclusions from the case study, back to the collected evidence and initial research questions thus increasing the reliability of the study (Yin, 2003). Multiple sources of evidence from different perspectives were utilised in the case study including interviews (management perspective), focus groups (frontline service staff perspective), training evaluation questionnaire and participant observation. This allowed for convergence of evidence and data triangulation.

#### **4.1.9 Intervention Research**

Intervention research is characterised by the identification of a problem and the subsequent, research, design and development of an intervention to address the problem. The last step involves a process evaluation of the intervention. Each of these steps is part of a change strategy seeking to create behaviour change. Intervention research stems from the evaluation of social work and health interventions. These interventions sought to identify changeable risk and protective factors, and link these factors through a logic model and theories of change to programme content of adequate strength to create a positive impact on participants (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010).

Designing of an intervention requires amalgamating research, theory and best practices in a specific field to create intervention principles and action strategies. Action strategies can include constructive feedback and support to participants, as well as group discussion between participants and engaging participants in structured activities such as role-plays and opportunities to practice new skills. Role-plays, video debrief, theatre, group discussion and flip-charting were utilised as action strategies during the intervention. Intervention research requires the development of learning activities that are adaptable to cultural contexts and specific situations.

With the casino frontline service culture of customer engagement and extroversion in mind, the programme content and learning activities were developed to engage and motivate frontline staff through the use of fun and interactive learning mediums such as theatre, role-play and interactive group activities. Programme content often involves continuous pilot testing and refinement to enhance effectiveness (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010). Within the case of this study,

considering that one month was provided for content development of the programme by the client organisation, time constraints did not allow for rigorous pilot testing and refinement.

In the early phases of intervention research, single group case studies with qualitative research may be more effective than experimental, quantitative research due to the exploratory nature of the research at this early stage (Fraser & Galinsky, 2010). Development of intervention content requires contextual knowledge of the norms of the organisation and it is beneficial to partner with key informants within the research context in order to tap this knowledge. During the study, programme content was developed as a result of interviews with stakeholders from management as well as conducting focus groups with frontline service staff in order to allow programme developers to understand the context and determine CS challenges.

Rothman and Thomas' (1994) research in social work interventions resulted in the development of the Intervention Research Model characterised by six stages: Problem Analysis and Project Planning; Information Gathering and Synthesis; Design of the Intervention; Early Development and Pilot Testing and Experimental Evaluation and Dissemination. The last phase, Experimental Evaluation and Dissemination was conducted as a process evaluation.

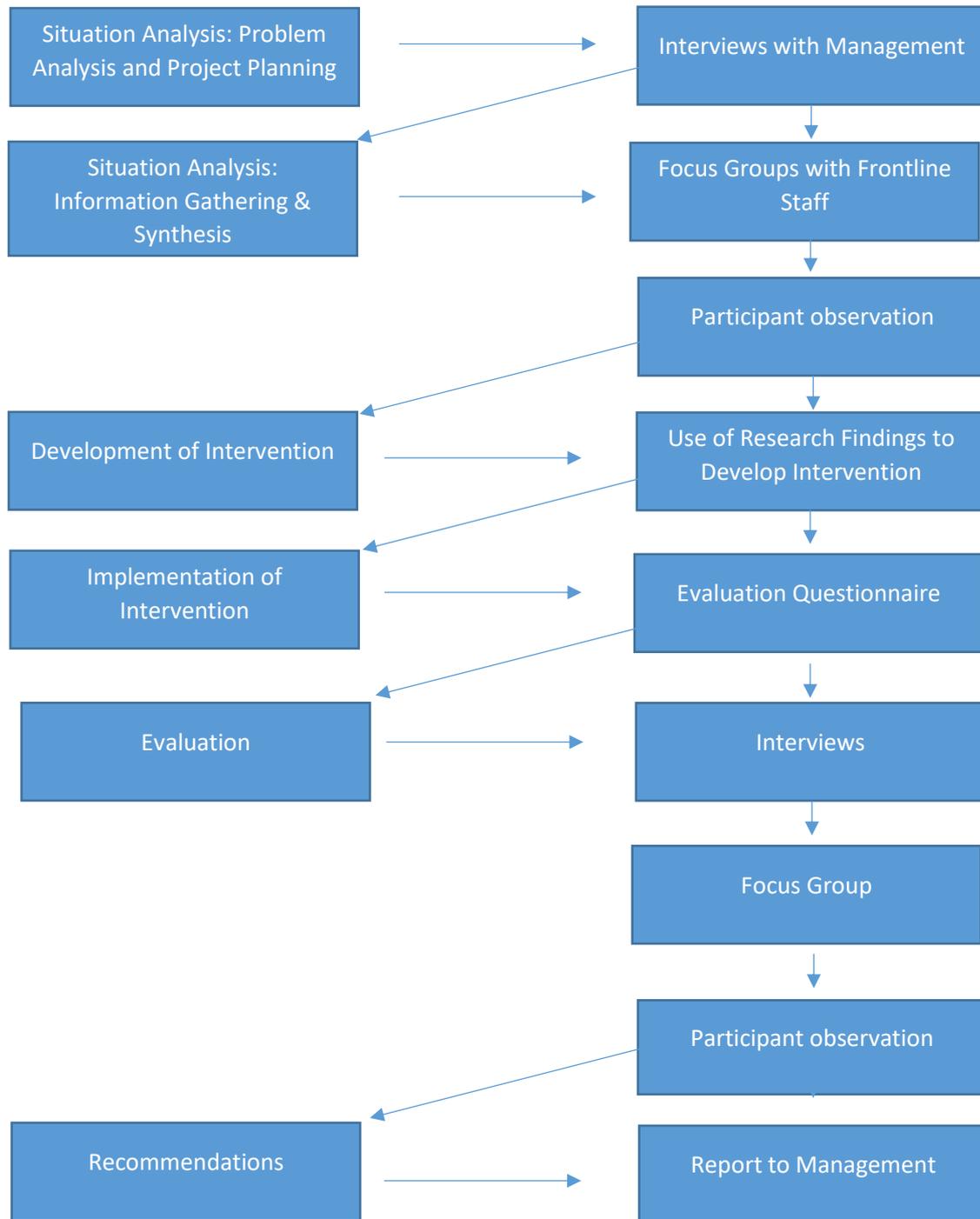
Process evaluation addresses whether programme activities have been implemented as envisioned and if key outputs have been achieved by an intervention (CDC, 2016). A process evaluation is conducted during the life cycle of the intervention and assesses whether the activities and output components of the logic model have been achieved. Process evaluation allows organisations to track programme activities, the impact of the intervention and provide recommendations for improving the programme. In addition, process evaluation identifies targets of the intervention, intervention objectives, outputs of the intervention as well as barriers to implementation of the intervention. The process evaluation phase of the study utilised focus groups, interviews, observations as well as a training evaluation questionnaire to evaluate the intervention on the above-mentioned areas.

Biron and Karanicka-Murray (2013) note that direct observation is often used to obtain an understanding of work conditions during intervention research as was completed in this study. Biron and Karanicka-Murray (2013) discuss evaluation frameworks for intervention research concerning Organisational Stress and Well-being Interventions. Nielsen & Randall's (2012) evaluation framework for intervention research occurs in three phases namely, intervention context, intervention design and implementation and participant's mental models. In this sense, intervention context refers to the situational opportunities and restrictions that impact the

occurrence and meaning of organisational behaviour as well as the relationship between variables. The second phase refers to intervention design and implementation concerning what the motives and goals of the intervention were, what workplace challenges the intervention addressed and what the role of stakeholders were. The third phase, participant's mental models looks at individual's evaluation of the intervention. Nielsen & Randall (2012) point out that stakeholders may have differing opinions of the intervention, with managers' often having dissimilar views to those of employees.

A study by Dahl-Jorgensen and Satvick (2005) found that line managers have a determining effect on the implementation of interventions and noted that managers often resisted change by limiting the amount of time staff spent on completing intervention activities (as cited in Nielsen & Randall, 2012). Resistance of line managers was noted when conducting this intervention in the form of shift managers displaying resistance to course content as well as some managers conveying that facilitators lacked the relevant work experience to understand service challenges in the casino environment. In addition, a few shift managers had a tendency to dominate group discussions by taking on a teacher role rather than a participant role during the workshop. One of the respondents noted in an interview after the intervention that groups where managers resisted the intervention took a lot less out of the intervention than group's where managers showed their support. In addition, Nielsen & Randall (2012) point out that a mixed method approach is suitable for intervention research to capitalize on the benefits of both qualitative and quantitative research.

The following flow diagram illustrates the steps in the Intervention Research Process.



**Figure 8: Flow Diagram Illustrating Steps in the Intervention Research Process**

**Situation Analysis: Problem Analysis and Intervention Planning**

A problem analysis was conducted through an initial briefing meeting with the department manager to determine the client's needs and program objectives for a CS intervention. The researcher attempted to conduct secondary analysis of an existing customer satisfaction survey based on the SERVQUAL approach which was used to determine customer perceptions of CS and as an indicator for customer satisfaction. SERVQUAL is a 22 item scale measuring service quality on five dimensions: reliability, responsiveness, assurance, empathy and tangibles (Parasuraman, Zeithmal & Berry, 1994). Unfortunately the researcher was informed that he was not permitted to utilize this data during the course of the research and the data was thus omitted from the study.

### **Situation Analysis: Information-Gathering & Synthesis**

A heavily focused qualitative study was employed at this stage as it allowed the researcher to “discover the meanings that participants attach to their behaviour, how they interpret situations, and what their perspectives are on particular issues” (Woods, 2006:2). Qualitative methods including semi-structured interviews with management, a focus group with staff and participant observation of CS interactions were utilized in this stage to assess the organization climate and obtain an understanding of work processes, identify CS challenges and determine the impact of diversity on client interactions. Participants were recruited for interviews and focus groups through key informants from management and the Human Resources department who identified informative candidates and arranged for their participation. Focus groups members were selected on the basis of purposive sampling to increase their chances of availability. Three interviews with management, and one focus group discussions with employees were conducted. The interviews and focus group discussions lasted approximately 1 hour. During the situation analysis phase, the sample size of the focus group was five and semi-structured interviews had a sample size of three (details provided later). It is important to note that the research subjects came from different organization levels, thereby encouraging a holistic understanding of the research topic.

## **Development of Intervention (training programme) and Implementation**

The training programme was designed in line with a participatory action research approach where a framework for the intervention was developed through pre-intervention interviews and a focus group with frontline staff and management to identify CS challenges (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). As mentioned in the literature review, Lewin's Change Management Model of Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze was used as an underlying theoretical framework for developing the intervention. In addition, the Participatory Intervention Model which seeks to apply theory and conduct research in creating interventions for particular contexts was used in the intervention design. Learning objectives were also co-developed with the participation of the frontline staff through data collected within a participatory intervention research process that identified their own CS challenges and likely solutions as well as related skills development needs. Participation in group activities were used to access the group intelligence in terms of what strategies worked for frontline staff members when dealing with customers under specific circumstances. Group discussion that emerged during reflection on learning activities during the intervention informed the content of the workshops. A major focus of the intervention was also to foster greater engagement in the organization as part of the different strategies to improve client service.

In line with action research methodology, the intervention took an organic, learner-centred approach by allowing participants to shape group discussions as well as identify challenges in providing excellent CS, discuss the impact of cultural difference on CS interactions as well as determine the methods they use to communicate across language barriers (Slabbert, de Kock & Hattingh, 2009). Within the participatory intervention research approach used to shape the intervention, interactive and participatory strategies of learning and problem solving as well as personal development objectives were incorporated into the programme. For example through group activities, participants were asked to flipchart solutions to identified CS challenges. The researcher formed part of the facilitation team. Participant observation was used during the intervention to record key discussions and levels of participation. Experiential learning methods such as role plays and video debrief were used in the intervention to allow participants to act out typical scenarios they faced on a daily basis in terms of dealing with customers and to role play the preferred way of responding. Small group-work was employed to allow staff to actively engage mentally, emotionally and physically, whilst increasing opportunities for self-discovery and learning from peer interactions (Holden & Zimmerman, 2009). These scenarios were generated from the climate survey data and focus group discussions. In addition,

participants were asked to apply learnings from the intervention to solve customer problems in relevant role-play scenarios to help them build practical skills and gain insight from their interactions with peers. A detailed discussion of the participatory intervention will be provided in Chapter 6. 160 participants were expected to attend the intervention with only 105 attending due to staff rostering and scheduled leave.

## **Evaluation**

An evaluation was conducted with one focus group and three interviews in the situation analysis phase and one focus group and twelve interviews in the process evaluation phase (Rubin & Babbie, 2005) to determine the impact of the intervention pertaining to CS. Only three interviews were conducted with management in the pre-intervention stage due to time constraints in developing the intervention and availability of respondents.

A training evaluation questionnaire was constructed through the development of three indices measuring learnings gained as a result of the intervention, the perceptions of learnings activities as well as evaluation of facilitation. In addition, the questionnaire evaluated the strengths and areas of improvement of the intervention as perceived by respondents, the usefulness of the learning content for on-the-job application as well as investigating cultural barriers to providing excellent CS.

The qualitative data of the focus group discussions was analysed through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a useful method for use within the participatory research approach where participants are seen as collaborators (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The questionnaire in combination with the open-ended qualitative information were used to generate a feedback report for management regarding the impact of the intervention in improving CS delivery (see Appendix J).



**Figure 9. Map of South Africa showing the Location of the Study Area in Durban**

#### **4.2 Research Setting**

The research setting for the study was a casino based in Durban, KwaZulu-Natal. The casino is known to have the highest footfall (number of customers on the floor) per square meter compared to all casinos nationally. The casino floor covers over 7,000m<sup>2</sup> and houses 1,600 state of the art coinless slot machines and 67 tables such as black jack, poker and roulette. The casino had been a client of the researcher’s for two years prior to the study. The researcher was contacted by a Human Resources Consultant together with the slots manager who requested a customer intervention to be carried out in October 2014, in order to motivate frontline slots staff prior to the peak, December holiday season.

The unit of analysis was the slots department in the casino which housed the slot machines which were, according to respondents, responsible for eighty percent of the casino’s income, thus indicating the importance of the department to the business operations. The physical

structure of the organisation consists of the casino floor comprising slots machines and tables including Black Jack, Poker and Roulette. Below the casino floor, are the administrative offices, cafeteria and staff break room. Unfortunately a diagram cannot be presented at this point to illustrate the floor plan of the casino as this was prohibited by management. The casino floor is manned by slots host (wearing green and black attire) whose main role is to respond to customer enquiries, complaints, pay jackpots and deal with machine faults. Slots technicians are responsible for fixing mechanical faults on slots machines and are radioed by slots host for assistance. Supervisors are responsible for predefined areas, with a group of slots host reporting to one supervisor. Supervisors report to the shift manager, who in turn reports to the services manager and slots manager. Also apparent on the floor are security to assist with theft or fraudsters (and who are assisted by security camera control room), cashiers responsible for distributing slots cards and loading credits onto cards as well as waiters and cleaners.

### 4.3 Data Collection: Phase 1 - Situation Analysis

During the situation analysis, interviews were conducted with management and a focus group was carried out with frontline staff to understand CS challenges from a frontline service perspective. Participant observation was conducted by the researcher who gambled on the slots machines on two occasions in order to gain a better understanding of work procedures and conditions. The following semi-structured interviews were conducted during situation analysis and were approximately one hour in duration:

**Table 4: Semi-structured Interviews Conducted During Situation Analysis**

	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Work Experience</b>
9/09/2014	Manager	Male	Indian	44-52	11-15
10/09/2014	Manager	Male	White	44-52	16>
	Supervisor	Male	Indian		10
9/09/2014	HR Consultant	Male	Indian	33	13

A focus group was conducted in a training room on the casino premises. A mix of slots hosts (frontline service staff) and slots technicians (responsible for fixing machine faults) were

suggested by management in order to obtain a holistic understanding of CS challenges on the frontline.

**Table 5: Focus Group Conducted During Situation Analysis**

	<b>Job Title</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Work Experience</b>
<b>11/09/2014</b>	Slots Technician	Female	Black	26-34	0-2
	Slots Technician	Male	Black	26-34	0-2
	Slots Host	Female	Black	26-34	6-10
	Slots Host	Female	Indian	17-25	3-5
	Slots Host	Male	Coloured	26-34	3-5

#### **4.4 Data Analysis During Situation Analysis**

The qualitative focus groups and interviews in the situation analysis phase were conducted in September 2014. The steps in thematic analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed in analysing qualitative data emerging from interviews and focus groups. Interviews and focus groups were tape recorded and transcribed verbatim with the help of research assistants. The transcriptions were read through by the researcher over seven times in order to obtain a general sense of the material. Thereafter the data was uploaded into Atlas Ti (Version 7.5.15) and the data was coded by the researcher. Open coding was used where segments of text were assigned a code label (Creswell, 2012). These codes were then re-assessed by the researcher who then developed themes from the initial codes. Themes generated from the focus groups and interviews were reported on and discussed in relation to the job title of participants due to the differences in opinion expected from individuals on different organisational levels.

Focused observations were used by the researcher in order to distinguish relevant from irrelevant behaviours by subjects in relation to the research objectives of the study (Angrosino & Rosenberg as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Permission was obtained from the Slots Manager to conduct participant observation in the slots area of the casino floor. The process of observing as set out by Creswell (2012) was followed during observations. Field notes were not taken during the observation so as to not reveal the identity of the researcher who participated in gambling on the slots machines during the observation. As recommended by Creswell (2012), descriptive and reflective field notes were recorded within 24 hours of

conducting the observations to ensure sufficient memory recall due to freshness of the observation. Field notes from participant observation were written up in a structured narrative where the subjective experience of the researcher and the impact of his identity (race, class, gender, occupation) on the research environment was acknowledged through the use of the first person. A narrative approach was taken in writing up the research results from the interviews, focus group and observations in the case study report.

#### **4.5 Data Collection: Phase 2 - Development and Implementation of the Intervention**

Feedback received from the interviews and focus group conducted in the situation analysis phase were used to design and develop the intervention. In particular, feedback from staff regarding challenges they faced in providing excellent CS were considered during the design of the intervention. Objectives identified by management also guided the aims of the intervention. A participatory approach was taken when designing the intervention to allow staff to have an impact on the structure of the intervention as well as take ownership. The participatory approach attempted to gain high involvement from staff in learning activities as well as to ensure access to group intelligence through group learning tasks, in order to identify best practices in dealing with CS challenges.

After attending a meeting with management, five major objectives of the intervention were set out:

- Equip delegates with tools to pre-empt and identify body language that leads to customer complaints
- Equip delegates with communication models to deal with customer problems effectively
- Use role-plays to re-enact typical scenarios of how to deal with difficult customers
- Identify cultural differences and language barriers when dealing with customers and provide ways of dealing with them
- Motivate staff to provide excellent CS ahead of the peak December season

A literature search was conducted in order to identify relevant theory to be addressed in the intervention. After identifying relevant literature covering CS (Snow & Yantovich, 2010), communicating with customers (Grant and Borchers, 2003, Emerald, 2015), body language (Brislin & Yoshida, 1994) cultural difference (Human, 2005; Cox, 1994; Albert, 1995), and in line with the findings from the pre-intervention interviews, focus group and observation, the following modules were developed and facilitated through a half-day participatory intervention conducted on the client's premises:

**Table 6. Intervention Framework**

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**Item**

- Introduction to CS
- Feedback from Customer Survey
- Team Activity: Challenges in Providing Excellent CS
- Body Language
- Dealing with Different Cultures
- Play: Challenges in Providing Excellent CS
- Motivational Talk

\* A detailed description of the intervention agenda and learning activities is provided in Chapter 7

At this point, it is important to note that the intervention was designed specifically for slots hosts and content was pitched at a level deemed suitable for this cohort. A detailed description of the socio-demographic data of participants in the intervention will be provided in Chapter 6.

In terms of qualitative data analysis, during the implementation of the intervention phase, thematic analysis was utilised to analyse data collected from participant observation. Narrative practice relates to how people experience their daily lives and locate themselves within their own story by constructing their own interpretation of events subjectively. Narratives illustrate how individuals give meaning to their life experiences (Neumann, 2006). Thematic narrative analysis involves the generation of codes and themes to illustrate similarities and differences across individual narratives (Harding, 2013). According to Harding (2013), narrative analysis does not aspire to understand objective truth but rather aims to gain a subjective understanding of people's own lived experiences. Narratives may emerge from stories told to the researcher or stories that are co-created by participants and the researcher. During the participatory intervention research, a framework for the workshop was developed from the interview, focus

group and observation findings from the situation analysis as well as interpretations of the literature and theoretical framework. As in the case of action research, during the intervention participants were viewed as co-creators of content (developed through group activities such as flip-charting and group discussion). Content concerning CS (CS) challenges and solutions emerged through dialogue between the respondents and the researcher, where respondents were encouraged to share knowledge on resolving CS challenges. Feedback from group discussion was used by the facilitator to open up new discussions and explore issues that emerged from the dialogue. Creswell (2013) notes that narratives can be collected through observations, interviews or other forms of qualitative data. The researcher will use thematic narrative analysis to provide a storyline of the researcher's experience when conducting participant observations of the interventions and analyse participant's perspectives on CS issues related to improving service at Casino X.

In addition, narrative thematic analysis will also be used to relate stories by frontline staff collected during the intervention with regards to dealing with difficult customers as well as dealing with customers from different cultural groups. It is important to note that this form of narrative analysis used for analysing the stories documented by participants during the intervention, will be in shortened format due to the short stories that were hand-written by slots hosts and technicians during the intervention itself.

#### **4.6 Sampling**

For the situation analysis phase, purposive sampling was used where participants were identified for the focus group as recommended by the HR consultant in relation to the information they were able to provide. A split of three slots host and two technicians were identified as a good mix to gain an understanding of CS challenges from a slots host and slots technician's perspective. The HR consultant was interviewed together with the slots manager who commissioned the intervention in order to determine the aims of the intervention as well as their expectations. Purposive sampling was also used to identify two hour periods where the researcher was permitted to observe interactions in the slots area of the casino floor. The researcher was encouraged by the HR consultant to observe busy periods from 7pm onwards on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and weekends. As discussed in detail below, purposive sampling was also utilised in the interviews, focus group and observations conducted during the process evaluation phase.

In the intervention design and implementation phase, a 100% sample was obtained where participant observation was conducted in all eight workshops by the researcher. 105 participants comprising slots hosts, slots technicians, supervisors and managers attended the intervention. A full sample was also obtained in administering of the training evaluation questionnaire where 105 participants responded.

#### **4.7 Data Collection: Phase 3 - Evaluation**

With regards to the evaluation, a training evaluation questionnaire completed directly after the intervention, was utilised to evaluate the intervention in terms of whether learning objectives had been met, which learning methods were most effective and the quality of facilitation. In addition, after the intervention had been carried out, semi-structured interviews and a focus group were conducted to evaluate the intervention. Furthermore, participant observation was carried out on two occasions by the researcher on the casino floor, after the intervention had been conducted, in order to identify if there were any changes in behaviour from service staff after the intervention.

The qualitative focus groups and interviews in the situation analysis phase were conducted in September 2015. As in phase 1, thematic analysis was conducted to generate themes that were analysed separately according to participant's job title as it was expected that different levels of staff would have different perspectives of the intervention. Similar to the process followed in Phase 1, field notes from participant observation conducted on the casino floor after the intervention, were written up as a narrative to provide a description of how CS was perceived by the researcher after the intervention. Themes generated from the observations were discussed and compared to findings from the other methods of data collection. A detailed description of the case was provided in order to enhance external validity of the study with the intention that researchers working with similar cases may have a comprehensive understanding of the case for comparison.

For the evaluation phase, the interviews were conducted with the same respondents in the situation analysis phase. However, one focus group was conducted with only two respondents. The remaining participants from the initial focus group conducted in the situation analysis phase were interviewed individually due to unavailability for the focus group. Furthermore, four additional interviews were conducted with three managers and the Managing Director, who were not available for interviews during the situation analysis phase, in order to gain an

understanding of their view of the intervention as well as CS challenges at the casino. Like the situation analysis phase, purposive sampling was used during the process evaluation phase to identify two hour periods where the researcher was permitted to observe interactions in the slots area of the casino floor.

As part of the evaluation, a training evaluation questionnaire was used in the study to measure the CS intervention across three areas namely, whether learning objectives had been met, the effectiveness of learning methods used and quality of facilitation. Likert scale type responses were used across 12 items. There were four open-ended questions at the end of the questionnaire which addressed the strengths of the workshop, recommendations for improvement, what was useful for participants' work roles as well as whether staff faced any cultural barriers in providing excellent CS.

#### **4.8 Development of the Instrument**

A post-intervention training evaluation questionnaire was implemented as a data collection instrument (Kalisch, Lee & Salas, 2010). Items for the instrument were developed based on face validity and theoretical grounds. The Kirkpatrick Model of Training Evaluation (Reio, Rocco, Smith & Chang, 2017) and Blooms' taxonomy of educational objectives (McNeil, 2011) were consulted for this purpose. Kirkpatrick's model of evaluation is the most widely used model for evaluating training programs due to its simplicity and practicality. Due to the scope of the study as well as time and cost constraints, only the first two levels of evaluation (reaction and learning) were assessed in the questionnaire due to it being administered directly after the intervention. The third level (behaviour) was assessed through the observations on the casino floor conducted by the researcher during the situation analysis and process evaluation phase. Phillip's five levels of evaluation model, which is an extension of Kirkpatrick's model and takes into account return on investment (ROI) in training, was not used due to the measurement of ROI not being an objective of the intervention.

Bloom's taxonomy of educational objectives differentiates six hierarchical levels of educational attainment beginning with knowledge (the ability to recall information), comprehension (the ability to explain concepts), application (the ability to use new information in new situations), analysis (the ability to draw connections across ideas), synthesis (the ability to draw conclusions) and evaluation (the ability to compare, discriminate and make judgements based on evidence). The questionnaire aimed to evaluate learnt knowledge and skills as a result

of the intervention based on the first three level of Bloom's taxonomy (Klobas, Renzi & Negrelli, 2007).

After pre-intervention interviews with management and a focus group with a mixed group of frontline staff, learning objectives and outcomes as well as learning methods were developed and selected for inclusion in the study. The learning content as well as the training evaluation questionnaire were circulated to management and experts for review and approval. Unclear and irrelevant items were discarded (Kalisch et al., 2010). Three versions of the questionnaire were developed as a result of suggestions and editing (Walford, Tucker & Viswanathan, 2010).

Socio-demographic information was collected in the initial aspects of the questionnaire. Items were developed in line with the due Model of Evaluation in three content areas namely learning objectives, learning methods and facilitation. Particular care was taken in the development of the questionnaire to reflect the intended theoretical constructs to be assessed in the study. A main aim of the questionnaire was to determine that the learning objectives of the intervention had been achieved, understand which learning methods had been most effective as well as evaluate the facilitation of trainers.

Bandura (2006:307) defines perceived self-efficacy as relating to "people's beliefs in their capabilities to produce given attainments." Self-efficacy theory predicts that students with high self-efficacy will decide to engage in learning activities more often, will exert more energy and effort on difficult educational tasks and have greater degrees of persistence when facing difficulties (Bandura, 1986; Schunk, 1991; Berry & West, 1993; Zimmerman & Martinez-Pons, 1990 as cited in Sewell et al., 2000). In addition, self-efficacy is a strong forecaster of academic attainment and motivation to learn (Schunk, 1991 as cited in Sewell et al., 2000). Bandura's self-efficacy scale is a time-consuming instrument and is not designed for use outside of the schooling system. As a result, the self-efficacy scale would not have been suitable for this study considering the time constraints facing participants in returning to work after the intervention (Klobas, Renzi & Negrelli, 2007). Considering the positive impact of self-efficacy in the educational context, and bearing in mind the use of a participatory method in the intervention, the researcher decided to include five items in the evaluation questionnaire measuring learners' skills efficacy. The questionnaire did not seek to identify a relationship between the employment of a participatory method and self-efficacy, but rather served as a means of exploratory investigation into this area. As a result, the first dimension of the index sought to determine learners' skills efficacy in terms of assessing whether learners believed

they were better equipped after the intervention to deal with a variety of customer scenarios. The other two dimensions of the index assessed learning methods used in the intervention and facilitation.

#### **4.8.1 Index Construction**

An index was constructed in line with the suggestions by Babbie & Mouton (2002). A scale can be described as a measure that evaluates the intensity, direction and level of a changeable construct (Neuman, 2009). Indexes are measures that combine several items of a construct into a cumulative mean score. The composite score is utilized for content and convergent validity (Neuman, 2009). Each aspect of a construct should be measured by at least one indicator, whilst several indicators are encouraged. Indexes do not require inter-correlations between items and entail the gathering of concepts from indicators occurring in the real world.

Items for the indices were selected based on face validity with the item having to appear to represent the construct on the surface level (Babbie and Mouton, 2002). Items for inclusion were designed to allow for variance thereby ensuring that respondents' opinions were represented and catered for in the items provided to foster proportional representation (Babbie & Mouton, 2002).

Various indicators were selected to create relevant items which were combined to form three indices (see Appendix F). Three indexes were developed based on face validity including learnings gained, perceptions of learning and evaluation of facilitation. A five-point Likert Scale was used to measure participants perceptions on the above aspects ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree.

It is important to point out that the main purpose of the questionnaire was to serve as a simplistic research instrument to assess the workshop immediately afterwards from a learner's perspective. The questionnaire also allowed participants to describe their experiences of the workshop with a view to inform possible ways to improve the delivery.

#### 4.8.2 Development of Indices for the Training Evaluation Questionnaire

The questionnaire items were aggregated into three simple composite indices, namely learnings gained, perceptions of learning and evaluation of facilitation. These three indices allowed the creation of a single rating score for the items making up each index, thus allowing for easier comparison across indices. As there were no predetermined constructs, a factor analysis was not completed. Item analysis was conducted to examine the degree to which individual item scores were related to the composite index scores (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). Items were grouped according to correlation of frequency counts and descriptive means (Neumann, 2006). Initially items were selected for inclusion in the three indexes based on face validity, as discussed in Chapter 3 (Babbie & Mouton, 2014). Thereafter inter-item correlations were generated and items that correlated positively were grouped into indices (Pallant, 2007).

**Table 7: Descriptive Statistics of Indices**

	<b>Index</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>	<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>
1.	Learnings Gained	101	27.03	2.79	-.85	.177	.89
2.	Perceptions of Learning Activities	102	13.18	1.70	-.86	.296	.73
3.	Evaluation of Facilitation	100	13.76	1.27	-.32	-1.61	.92

Negative skewness across all three indices indicates a clumping of scores on the high end of the graph. The fairly low standard deviation indicates a similarity of scores across indices. In addition, a positive kurtosis suggests a peaked distribution of scores for Index 1 and Index 2. A negative kurtosis for Index 3 indicates a relatively flat distribution.

Inter-item reliability analysis was carried out across items. After achieving acceptable Cronbachs Alpha reliability coefficients for each index (greater than 0.80 suggesting reliability), indices were developed by summing the relevant items. The normality of the indices were analysed utilising the Explore function of SPSS. Outliers were removed from the data set where required to improve normality. A Cronbach's Alpha value of .089 was obtained for Index 1. As a result items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9 were consolidated into the index Learnings Gained. In addition, a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.73 was obtained for Index 2 and consequently items 5, 6 and 7 were grouped together into the index Perceptions of Learning Activities. In addition, a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.92 was obtained for Index 3 resulting in items 10, 11 and 12 being combined into the index Evaluation of Facilitation.

The results of the inter-item correlation that was conducted to determine whether a relationship existed between the items that were combined into indices, is provided below.

The inter-item correlation of the indices revealed that all items correlated positively with one another (all above .466) and the item-total statistics revealed that all items correlated with each of their indices (all above .583).

**Table 8: Inter-item Correlation Matrix: Index Learnings Gained**

<b>Item</b>	1. Identify Body Language leads to CS complaints	2. Deal with Customer Problems	3. Deal with Difficult Customers	4. Deal with Different Cultures 4.	8. Can apply learnings in my daily job	9. Motivated me to provide better CS
1. Identify Body Language leads to CS complaints	1.000	.739	.736	.484	.580	.626
2. Deal with Customer Problems	.739	1.000	.702	.513	.634	.649
3. Deal with Difficult Customers	.736	.702	1.000	.466	.559	.586
4. Deal with Different Cultures	.484	.513	.466	1.000	.563	.499
8. Can apply learnings in my daily job	.580	.634	.559	.563	1.000	.817
9. Motivated me to provide better CS	.626	.649	.586	.499	.817	1.000

**Table 9: Item-Total Statistics: Index Learnings Gained**

<b>Item</b>	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1. Identify Body Language leads to CS complaints	21.88	12.648	.771	.656	.875
2. Deal with Customer Problems	22.08	10.975	.785	.651	.873
3. Deal with Difficult Customers	22.13	12.405	.735	.606	.879
4. Deal with Different Cultures	22.24	12.452	.590	.369	.904
8. Can apply learnings in my daily job	21.94	12.535	.762	.708	.876
9. Motivated me to provide better CS	21.83	12.547	.765	.709	.876

**Table 10: Inter-item Correlation Matrix: Index Perceptions of Learning Activities**

<b>Item</b>	5. Videos helped identify body language	6. Play helped apply learnt tools	7. Flipchart helped identify CS Challenges
5. Videos helped identify body language	1.000	.534	.545
6. Play helped apply learnt tools	.534	1.000	.502
7. Flipchart helped identify CS Challenges	.545	.502	1.000

**Table 11: Item-Total Statistics: Index Perceptions of Learning Activities**

<b>Item</b>	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
5. Videos helped identify body language	8.53	2.636	.617	.388	.626
6. Play helped apply learnt tools	8.82	1.40	.587	.349	.700
7. Flipchart helped identify CS Challenges	8.59	2.417	.583	.359	.620

**Table 12: Inter-item Correlation Matrix: Index Evaluation of Facilitation**

<b>Item</b>	10. Facilitators were knowledgeable	11. Facilitators explained concepts clearly	12. Facilitators encouraged participation
7. Facilitators were knowledgeable	1.000	.828	.743
8. Facilitators explained concepts clearly	.828	1.000	.827
9. Facilitators encouraged participation	.743	13.76	1.000

**Table 13: Item-Total Statistics: Index Evaluation of Facilitation**

<b>Item</b>	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Squared Multiple Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
10. Facilitators were knowledgeable	8.90	2.80	.823	.696	.904
11. Facilitators explained concepts clearly	8.86	2.47	.886	.786	.853
12. Facilitators encouraged participation	8.86	2.79	.823	.695	.904

The scores on items within each index were summed to achieve cumulative aggregate scores (discussed below). In relation to the index Learnings Gained, a Likert scale rating continuum ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree) was used and a maximum cumulative score for the five items was set at 30. A medium score of 15 was established and a low score was set ranging from 0 - 10. The researcher decided to weight items equally as each item represented different parts of the overall construct e.g. perceptions of learning activities (Babbie & Mouton, 2002). This form of scoring allowed for an adequate range of variation with three index categories and sufficient cases for analysis in each category.

In terms of the index Perceptions of Learning Activities, a high cumulative score of 15, medium cumulative score of 10 and low cumulative score of 5 were set.

For the index Evaluation of Facilitation, a cumulative score for the three items was set with 15 being a high score, 10 being a medium score and 5 being a low score.

Due to there being a normal distribution of the data, parametric tests were used to compare groups with t-tests being used to compare gender and race groups (across two groups) and One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) tests used to compare across three groups concerning age and job title. Results will be discussed in Chapter 7 Process Evaluation.

#### **4.9 T - Tests**

T-tests are parametric tests used to test mean differences between two independent groups on a continuous variable and are used when a normal distribution is achieved (Pallant, 2007). Considering that the data set had a normal distribution, T-tests were appropriate for comparing means of indices across race and gender groups in the study. Due to the small number of cases in the white and coloured race groups, race was recoded to only include Black and Indian participants. The results for the T-tests are provided in Chapter 7.

#### **4.10 One-Way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) Tests**

According to Pallant (2007), One-way ANOVA tests are used to compare the mean scores of more than two groups. One-way ANOVA involves an independent variable comprised of various levels. In the study, the continuous variable Age was recoded into four categories. In addition, job title was collapsed from fourteen groups into three groups namely service level, supervisory level and manager level. This allowed for the creation of fewer categories with more cases available within each category for analysis. The One-way ANOVA test was run to determine whether there was a significant difference between the different age groups and occupational categories across the indices. The results of these One-way ANOVA tests follow in the subsequent chapter.

#### **4.11 Data Processing and Statistical Evaluation**

In terms of quantitative analysis of data generated from the training evaluation questionnaire, descriptive statistics were generated from Statistical Package for The Social Sciences (SPSS) version 25. In order to ensure accuracy and quality control of data by cleaning duplicates, removing errors and missing values in the dataset, minimum and maximum scores were created

for each item to ensure that all scores were within the range of the rating scale for the relevant item (Pallant, 2007). No missing values were identified.

Parametric tests were used in the further analysis due to the relative normal distribution of the measures. The required skewness and kurtosis values were achieved for the use of t-tests and analysis of variance (Fidell & Tabachnick, 2007). As a result, t-tests were utilized to assess differences across racial and gender groups. Furthermore, One-way ANOVA tests were used to assess differences across age group and occupational group title where more than three categories existed.

When analyzing the data obtained from the training evaluation questionnaire, due to the small number of cases in the White and Coloured race groups, these groups were excluded. Race was recoded to only include Black and Indian participants i.e. 1 = Black and 2 = Indian. This allowed the researcher to compare Black and Indian race groups across indices.

#### **4.12 Validity, Reliability and Rigour**

In terms of reliability from a quantitative perspective, due to the training evaluation questionnaire not including multiple items measuring a variable, a factor analysis could not be completed. However acceptable Cronbach's Alpha values (mentioned earlier) were achieved for the three indices. Inter-item correlations across indices generated acceptable values.

Due to the instrument being newly developed, there was no available data on the validity of the instrument. Considering that items were developed as a result of a literature survey and briefing with management regarding the aims of the intervention, and that great care was taken to ensure that items represented relevant constructs to be measured, it can be safely assumed that instrument achieved face and content validity. In addition, the instrument cannot be deemed to have external validity due to being designed specifically for evaluating the intervention within the case in question.

As only a single case was studied and due to the small scale of the research, findings may not be generalizable beyond the immediate organization. Due to the use of purposive sampling for focus groups and interviews, the degree of randomness and generalizability were limited. However, for the qualitative component of the evaluation study, validity and reliability as conceptualized in qualitative studies were used. In this regard, attention was paid to conducting thematic analysis in a structured and consistent manner as prescribed by Braun & Clark (2006).

The theory and method were applied rigorously by devising a systematic method where assumptions are congruent with the way the subject matter is conceptualized (Reicher & Taylor, 2005 *in* Braun & Clark, 2006). Data were transcribed to a suitable level of detail and each data item was given equal consideration. The coding process was thorough, conclusive and exhaustive and themes were verified against each other and were internally coherent, consistent and distinctive. Data was made sense of in the analysis rather than paraphrased and the researcher was identified as taking an active role and shaping the research process rather than the data being viewed as emerging in an unassisted manner (Braun & Clark, 2006).

In addition, using multiple methods helped increase the validity of findings. Triangulation across three data collection methods including interviews, focus groups and observations enhanced the internal validity of findings. Adherence to a case study protocol during data collection served to enhance reliability (Yin, 2003). Ecological validity relates to the findings of empirical research being applicable to people's daily lives within their natural social setting. In this instance, the study has high ecological validity considering the practical learning outcomes generated from the participatory approach adopted in the design and implementation of the intervention, as well as the research findings from the participant observations conducted in the situation analysis and process evaluation phase within the natural casino work environment.

Guba and Lincoln (1994) identify alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research, namely trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is comprised of four criteria including credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. The research conducted at Casino X can be viewed as being credible and internally valid due to the use of a case study protocol in conducting research as well as the submission of the research findings to management for verification and accuracy. Transferability refers to whether the research findings can be relevant in other contexts. Transferability was ensured by preparing a thick, rich description of the data in the case study report, which provides readers with a database for making decisions on the transferability of findings to similar cases. Dependability is concerned with the trustworthiness of research. This was established by taking an auditing approach during data collection to ensure that complete records of all three phases of the research process were kept securely in storage (as mentioned below). Confirmability recognizes that complete objectivity in qualitative research is unachievable and as such the researcher validates that he did not explicitly allow his personal value system to impact the research findings. In terms of authenticity, catalytic authenticity of the study was achieved with the intervention acting as a

catalyst for frontline staff to take action to change their current situation in terms of challenges faced in providing excellent service to customers and the co-creation of solutions to these challenges. In addition, the researcher acknowledges that the research findings provide a fair representation of the differing perspectives of respondents on the research topic through adherence to ethical principles in the research process which are discussed below.

#### **4.13 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical principles were adhered to as informed consent was obtained for participation in the study after the aims and objectives of the study had been outlined. Participants were informed of the voluntary nature of participation, confidentiality and anonymity of data collected and the use of data for research purposes. These ethical procedures were followed during the pre-intervention focus groups and interviews, the implementation of the intervention as well as the post-intervention focus groups and interviews. Confidentiality was maintained by not publishing the names of the organization or respondents in the thesis or related presentations or publications. Ethical clearance for the research study was granted by the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal. A letter of permission was obtained from the Human Resources Manager to conduct the research and to use the data for PhD research. Data were stored in secure storage and will be destroyed after five years. A copy of the dissertation was made available to management and participants to provide feedback to respondents after completion of the study.

#### **4.14 Chapter Summary**

This chapter has sought to provide an overview of the research design utilized in the study. An introduction to the mixed methods approach was provided, followed by a discussion of the case study approach as well the use of intervention research as the main research framework for the study. An introduction to the case was provided, as well as a holistic overview of how the situation analysis phase, the design and implementation of the intervention phase and the process evaluation phase were carried out. An outline of the intervention and its development through the use of the Participatory Intervention Model and Lewin's Change Management Model was discussed. Subsequently, a framework was developed identifying CS challenges that emerged from the interviews and focus group conducted in the situation analysis phase. The chapter concluded by providing a socio-demographic background of the sample

population, provision of descriptive statistics and a discussion of the development of an instrument for evaluating the intervention. In addition, a discussion of data processing and statistical evaluation, validity and reliability of the research instruments as well as ethical considerations taken into account during the course of administering the study were discussed.

## **Chapter 5: Situation Analysis**

### **5.1 Introduction**

The main aim of the study was to determine the challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent frontline CS at Casino X. Further objectives of the study were to understand the impact of diverse customer interactions on CS as well as educate staff on how to identify body language of guests indicating a need for assistance so as to pre-empt customer requests. The situation analysis served to inform the development of an intervention addressing identified CS challenges in the organisation. The findings of the pre-intervention focus group discussion with frontline service staff, interviews with management as well as the participant observation of service interactions conducted prior to the intervention shall be sequentially discussed in this chapter.

The focus group discussion was conducted with five frontline service staff including three slot machine technicians (responsible for machine faults) and two slots hosts who provided general service assistance to customers. Individual interviews were conducted with management including the slots manager and HR consultant in order to understand expectations of the intervention. In addition, individual interviews were conducted with the services manager and one supervisor in order to gain a deeper understanding of frontline CS challenges.

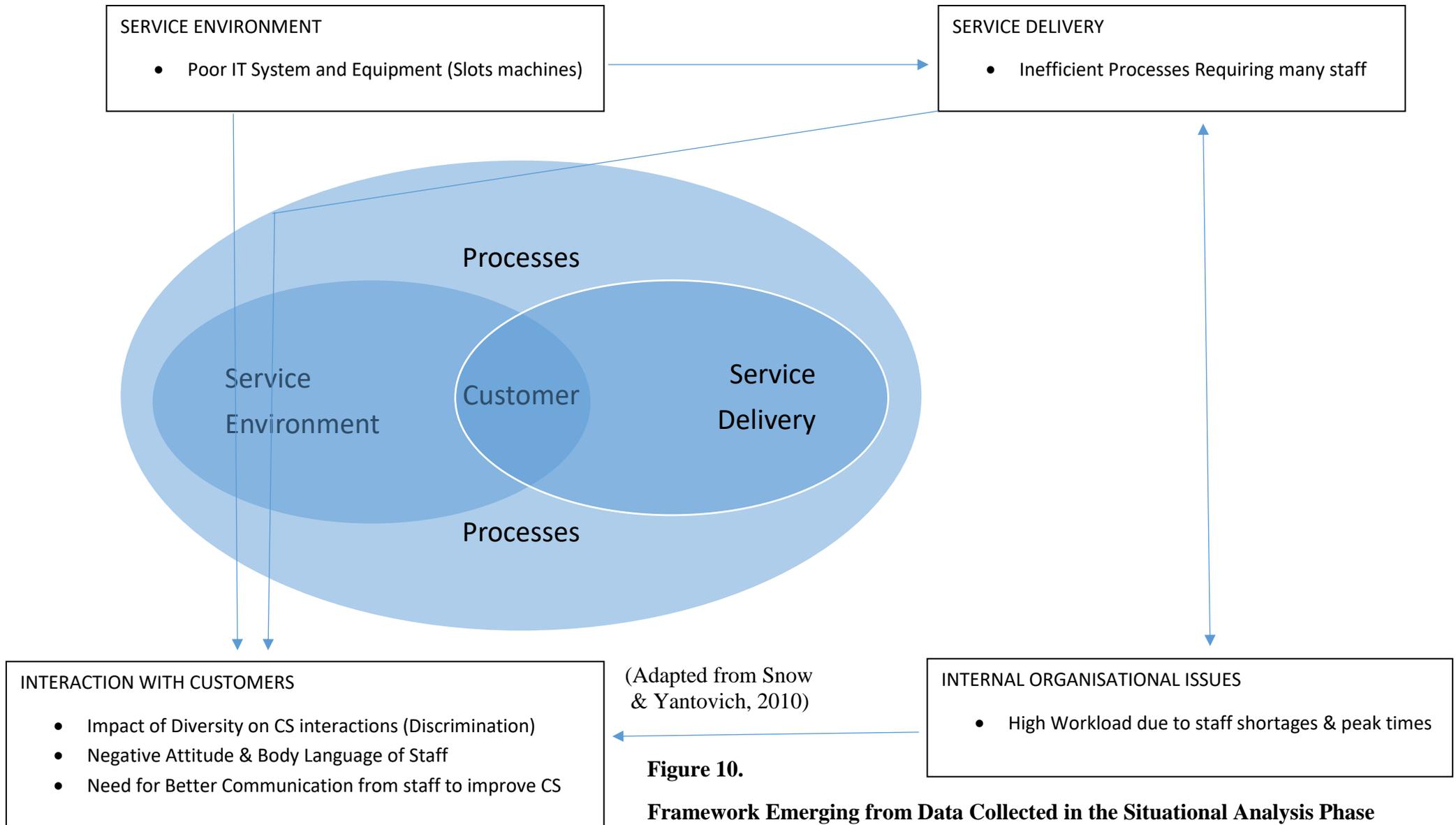
A preliminary model of CS issues emerging from the data collection in the situation analysis phase was developed as a frame of reference for illustrating CS challenges facing the organisation. The framework provided below seeks to provide a conceptual understanding of the CS issues at play within the case and informs the key focus areas in conceptualising the participatory intervention.

## **5.2 A Framework of CS Issues Identified in the Situation Analysis**

According to Booth, Papaioannou and Sutton (2012), once patterns, themes or relationships in the primary data become apparent through comparing data, a conceptual map can be developed to illustrate the relationship between variables. A conceptual framework explains visually or narratively the main variables, factors or constructs to be studied and their relationships (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Relationships between variables can indicate whether there is tension between variables (antagonistic) or a linear relationship (pathway effect where one occurs before the other). As a more comprehensive description of the relationship between variables or themes develops, one can begin to analyze existing theories or develop hypotheses driving an emerging theory. However, the new hypotheses or theory must be grounded in the data (Booth et al, 2012).

According to Miles & Huberman (1994), when developing a conceptual framework it is integral to set out the orienting frame, which all researchers approach a research site with prior to data collection, and map out the variables and relationships identified from the literature search, so as to identify similarities, conflicting views and refinements. Miles & Huberman (1994) note that social anthropologists consider social processes too complex to be studied with a deductive conceptual frames and prefer a more loosely organized, emergent, inductively grounded approach to data collection.

The following framework illustrates the various factors that have an impact on CS delivery on the casino floor of Company X. The factors include the environment, CS processes and service delivery. From the three interviews with management, focus group discussion with frontline service staff and two participant observations done in the situation analysis phase, various elements were labelled and identified as constituting these factors.



The above framework was developed inductively by identifying repeated themes and patterns in the data from interviews and focus groups conducted in the early situation analysis phase of intervention research. The themes provided were in response to staff members' views on challenges faced in providing excellent service in the casino. Conceptual maps allow for a clear and simple overview of the issues emerging from research through a visual representation that serves as a frame of reference for guiding the research study (Grbich, 2013).

The figure clearly illustrates that CS is impacted by three elements namely the service environment (which can include the physical design of the service environment, technology, and processes), service delivery (including people and processes) as well as processes which are pervasive and which impact the previous two elements. The above framework serves to contextualise the factors affecting CS at Casino X which emerged from the data collected during the pre-intervention interviews and focus group discussion.

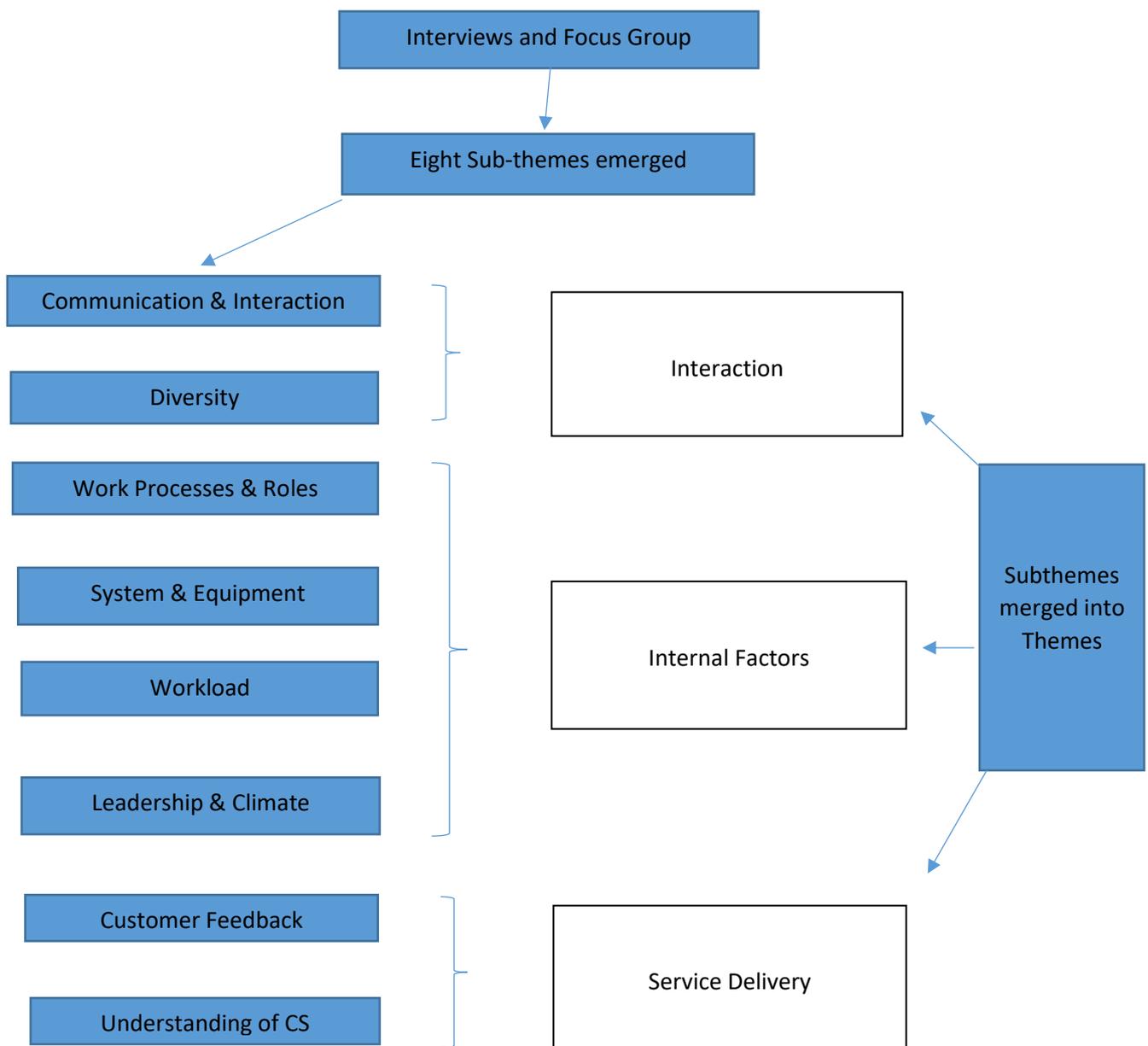
The framework, which was developed from pre-intervention research findings, provides a simplistic illustration of the factors impacting CS in the slots machine area of Casino X. The figure illustrates that the service environment (poor information technology system and slots machines) impacts service delivery by resulting in more machine malfunctions. This requires various staff (e.g. slots technicians, supervisors and the host) having to meet at the slot machine in question to resolve technical faults. Other service processes that hosts are required to assist with such as paying out jackpots to winners on the machines also require various role players to meet at a central point. Bringing various role players together via the radio communication system to resolve the issue results in delays and hence inefficient CS processes. These delays experienced by customers result in slots hosts needing to communicate effectively with customers to explain the processes to be implemented to resolve their issue. If processes are not clearly explained and customers experience long delays, this can result in customers becoming frustrated. In some cases angry customers can verbally abuse and use discriminatory language towards hosts. The discriminatory behaviour from angry customers towards hosts can result in hosts' displaying negative attitudes and body language towards customers as a defense mechanism in response to past discrimination. In addition, internal organizational issues such as high workloads for slots hosts result in poor service delivery to customers and negatively impact service interactions with guests. The findings of the pre-intervention research will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter. The following section provides a discussion of how this data was analysed through the use of thematic analysis (discussed in detail in the research methodology chapter).

### **5.3 Pre-Intervention Findings**

The following narrative account briefly outlines the major findings in the form of emergent themes by presenting meaningful textual quotations from the data depicting these themes (a detailed discussion of how themes were constructed is provided in Chapter 4).

Considering that the main research question of the study sought to investigate the CS challenges facing the organisation, the data is represented firstly by identifying CS challenges that surfaced as a result of the interviews and focus group. Thereafter the data generated from these data collection methods are represented according to the main themes of interaction, service delivery and internal factors and their relevant sub-themes, in order to represent patterns found within the data.

In addition to the interviews conducted with management, a focus group was utilized due to convenience and management preference for having slots hosts and technicians off the casino floor during their lunch break. Considering the focus group generated data is different from interview generated data in that group interaction needs to be taken into account, the analysis of the focus group data will be reported separately to interview data, but within the relevant theme that was identified across both data collection methods (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008).



**Figure 11: Breakdown of Findings from Situation Analysis**

As noted in the above figure, eight sub-themes were developed from the code list. Thereafter these sub-themes were combined into three larger, overarching themes namely interaction, internal factors and service delivery. The following discussion of findings presents data from the interviews and focus groups, initially according to CS challenges identified through both methods of data collection, and later findings are reported in line with the above themes.

### 5.3.1 Theme 1: Internal Factors

#### Definition of CS – Slots Hosts and Technicians

The views expressed by participants' in terms of their understanding of CS seemed to focus primarily on ensuring guest satisfaction as mentioned by one host. Hosts also highlighted the importance of self-regulation and professional conduct in dealing with customers.

*"...And how you carry yourself, in a professional manner, the way you have to handle a situation, you always conduct yourself in a professional way and handle the situation in a professional way..."*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

In addition, the host mentioned that CS was about having the ability to maintain a calm demeanor when dealing with difficult guests.

*"...and if you know the guest is like not seeing your point of you, I think it's better if you calm yourself first instead of getting angry with the guest and if you can't handle it, I think you should call somebody higher, maybe a supervisor who can handle the guest."*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

Being able to manage one's emotions when dealing with difficult customers and refer the issue to a supervisor or manager was seen as being an important tacit skill that was key to providing good service in the casino environment.

From these descriptions, it is evident that customers did not view service processes, equipment and the environment as important factors in CS. Rather respondents explained their understanding of CS as a behavioural concept in terms of satisfying guests' needs, maintaining professionalism in dealing with customers and referring unhappy customers to management when the customer requests a manager to deal with their issue.

## **Job Description of Slots Host and Technicians and Work Processes**

The job descriptions of slot hosts, technicians and the related work processes were explored from the slots hosts and technicians' perspectives during the focus group discussions and are outlined below.

One of the main functions of slots hosts was described by one host as paying jackpots to customers and provided basic training to customers on how to gamble.

*“Ok, the role of the slot host, firstly, the main one is paying the jackpot, teaching the guest how to play our slot machine, giving them information about the gaming floor, assisting them when they want to buy cards (upon which credits are loaded) or help fix the machines.”*

(Respondent 3, Slots Host)

Furthermore, hosts needed to explain the promotions and the lucky draws happening on the gaming floor and the benefits of being a card holder and how a guest can move from one card level, like silver card to gold card and finally to the highest level on the black card. Each level has exclusive benefits and moving between levels is dependent on how much guests spend gambling. Some of the benefits of going from a silver card member to gold is that the guest obtains complimentary meals, free parking and movie tickets. When guests play in the casino they get benefits such as bottled water as well as complimentary stays at the casino's hotel resort.

If a guest's card was locked in the machine and could not be removed, hosts needed to explain to guests why the card was locked and use a pin code to unlock it. When guests insert their card into the slots machines the credits on the card are loaded onto the machine when they begin playing, as well as loaded back to their card when they have finished playing. Transfer failures occur when money is not loaded back onto guest's cards after playing the machine. Resolving these transfer failures by resetting the machine was identified as another important task of slots hosts who would then need to inform technicians if a more serious fault was identified. What happens in the event of transfer failures were explained by one slots host:

*“...the guests have to put in a pin number, you have to press 44 ok and there are many transfer failures that are coming in and these cause the delays on the floor.”*

(Respondent 3, Slots Host)

Slots technicians also described the main role of technicians in the slots area of the casino.

*“Our task is to keep the machine in a good condition, the DB is the most important part of the machine because its where you accept the notes (money)...and we also assist the guest when cards are stuck in the machine. So if the host gets stuck, they call us to assist them.”*

(Respondent 4, Technician)

As mentioned above, one of the key job function of slots technicians was to keep the machines in a good technical condition and provide technical support to slots hosts when more serious technical faults occurred e.g. where the DB needs to be replaced. Card reader problems are also dealt with by technicians when guests’ cards are not identified by the machine or become stuck in the machines. Slots technicians were requested through radio to assist slots hosts when they are unable to resolve such machine problems. This extract can be linked to the quotation provided by the slots host earlier who highlighted that one of the functions of slots host was also to help fix machines.

Thus a large part of a slot’s host role was to pay customers when they won jackpots on slots machines, provide information to guest’s regarding gambling rules and benefits from loyalty cards as well as assist with minor technical faults on the slots machines. In contrast, technicians’ main function was to provide technical support to hosts by fixing more serious technical faults such as replacing card readers and DB’s. These descriptions of work roles highlight the need for good communication and team work when slots hosts cannot fix more serious machine faults and need to request assistance from technician via the radio system. All hosts and technicians are provided with walkie talkies (or radios) to enable communication between hosts and technicians when serious technical faults occur.

*“As long as you are stuck, you call a technician (on the radio), sometimes the guests notes will be stuck in the canister, we are not allowed to pull the note from the canister, you have to call a technician that will only deal with the canisters, who only have the right to sign the bb tech, so you have to call the person to assist with that.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

The radio communication process will be discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

### **CS Challenge: Processes – Slots Hosts**

The focus group indicated how a majority of slots host's activities are governed by strict processes and procedure. In certain situations, for e.g. where a jackpot over R10 000 has been won, various role players need to be present such as the supervisor to verify the jackpot as well as security to escort the guest. One host mentioned:

*“...there is a procedure on everything that you do on the floor. There is no way to make it fast, you have to follow the procedure even if it's a minor thing but sometimes you can't just do it as a favour to the guest cause at the end of the day you will be the one in trouble.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

In these cases, the processes and procedures whilst ensuring secure transactions and transparency, also impact CS in a negative way, primarily due to long waiting times experienced as a result of requiring various role players at one location point in order to resolve a situation. Such instances can occur when a guest leaves credits on a slot machine, removes his or her card and begins playing another machine:

*“The problem is, let's say the guest leaves money on the machine and went to another machine. When the guest comes back to the machine, you can't just put the card in the machine, you have to call a supervisor first to confirm if it's the same guest who was playing there first and maybe the supervisor is busy somewhere ...and there is no way that you can do it cause if you will try to do it on your own and if something happens to that machine, maybe a double up (doubling of winnings on a machine) or whatever and you can't jump that procedure.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

It is evident that the procedural requirements to have various individuals at a central point to deal with common occurrences such as a guest leaving credits loaded on a machine and returning to continue playing or where a jackpot over R10 000 has been won, can result in long waiting times and as a result poor CS.

Delays in processes were also identified specifically as being reasons for poor CS. In relation to customer waiting times as a result of the long process involved in getting a technician to fix a problematic slots machine one respondent mentioned:

*“It's not easy to tell the customer that they will be waiting for 30 minutes.”*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

This excerpt indicates the difficulty explaining to customers that there will be a long waiting time times before a technician arrives, which often result in customer complaints and frustration. As mentioned earlier, the process of requesting the technician via radio involves the first technician who becomes available to assist with the query. Further problems with the process were outlined by two slots hosts:

*“And we don’t even know how many calls that technician got already. “*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

*“The problem is we can’t know exactly where is the technician and what they are doing there.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

This lack of information in the process creates uninformed customers resulting in more complaints.

*“Ok, when the machine goes off while the customer is playing, so we have to do a fault finding so the customer gets irritated to wait for a while, so they want to call the manager...you have to explain to them...it has to take time to reboot...then only to find out that they are impatient and want to carry on playing, just call your manager or supervisor.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

The above quote describe a situation where a machine goes off while being played and has to be rebooted. The term used by slots host to describe this process is “events are loading.” The above respondent mentioned that customers firstly get irritated and impatient as a result of the long waiting period, as their card is still stuck in the machine and need to wait for the reboot to finish before obtaining their card. Hosts try to identify and deal with the fault on the machine and explain the process to customers, but customers immediately demand to speak to the supervisor as a result of frustration with the process. Other respondents also concurred that customers often hear the same explanation of the process by supervisors or managers, however when hosts provide the same explanation initially, they do not understand and want to speak to someone higher up the chain of authority. This seems to indicate that customers feel a need to hold someone responsible and complain about a process to a higher authority figure, and seems to be a default reaction to a perception of poor CS as a result of long waiting times related to inefficient service processes.



**Figure 12. Illustration of CS Interaction in the Slots Machine Area**

### **CS Challenge – Information Technology and Equipment – Slots Hosts**

There were many faults and problems identified with the Information Technology (IT) system (commonly referred to as the “system”) by frontline staff at Casino X. In interviews and focus groups, the term system came to refer to the IT (Information Technology) software running the slots machines. The process of playing a slots machine included inserting one’s casino card into the machine (in which cash is stored much like an ATM card), playing and winning on the machine to collect your payout (or losing). In certain situations guests would experience a problem with a machine and need to get a slots host to assist. In the focus group, one host spoke about the service button on the slots machine which are meant to summon a staff member to assist the guest if the button is pressed.

*“There is a service button on the machine but sometimes it doesn’t work, some people think they work but it doesn’t work so they are expecting you to come but no one is coming.”*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

As mentioned in the above extract, the respondent indicated that these service buttons on slots machines didn’t work resulting in guests’ presuming that a slots host is on the way to assist them, however the expectancy is not met.

Two hosts also spoke about the use of new card readers on the slots machines which were causing CS problems due to preventing cards from being removed when there is a problem with the card:

*“...they bring a different card reader which blocks the card from being removed which also causes problems cause it locks the machine whether there is money or no money on the machine, the guests can't take his card and he has to call an attendant just to come and press the code to release the card, a simple thing, just to release the card and that person is angry...I understand why they put the new thing but it's causing too much hassles.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

This response from a slots host indicates a direct way to improve CS by discontinuing usage of new, problematic card readers either through reverting to older or newer technologies.

One host indicated that the system was the major cause of most CS problems and indicated that if an accurate system was implemented, such problems would not exist. The host compared the system at Company X with the system used at a local competitor, where she had worked prior to joining Company X. According to the host, the local competitor's system had less errors, was more accurate and therefore resulted in fewer guests looking for attendants on the floor as they could do things on their own as a result of the system.

*“If the system can be accurate, everything will be fine on the floor.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

In relation to the equipment used in the slots area, slots hosts mentioned the importance of the tower lights on the slots machines which serve as a secondary notification of machines with problems or jackpots. When jackpots occur the blue tower light flashes (see Appendix L for diagram of slots machine). Plasma screens at host stations illustrating a queuing system to deal with machine problems or jackpots on the floor were the primary means of identifying machines or customers that require assistance.

### **CS Challenge – Workload**

When discussing workload challenges they faced in providing an excellent CS, one slot host mentioned:

*“Everything goes to the guys on the floor...I am not complaining about it but everything is us. I must be checking your card, I must be assisting someone, I must be selling cards.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

It is evident from this quote, that the slot host saw an unequal amount of job tasks being allocated to slots hosts in comparison to other staff such as those at the cash-desk or in marketing. The excerpt indicates that slots hosts were perceived as being jack of all trades who were called upon for any guest requirement, even for tasks that lay outside their scope of work e.g. calling waitrons.

*“...cause sometimes you will be standing by one machine and there is like five guests around you. One will be asking you to do something else, the other will ask you for change or cards.”*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

The above excerpt indicates how due to the high workload, slots hosts are sometimes surrounded by over five guests who are all requesting the host’s assistance simultaneously, creating a high pressure situation for the host. This situation was also identified during the observation and was utilized as a scenario that was role-played by hosts in the CS intervention. At this point during the focus group, from an interviewer’s perspective it seemed as if the hosts and technicians were using the focus group as a means of complaining about high workloads at the casino. This eventually resulted in the interviewer clarifying whether they did in fact have busier times and quieter times or were busy all the time (as suggested during the focus group), to which respondents replied that high workloads only occurred during peak times.

*“Like when we come in the morning, when we are on day shift, there is only a few guests on the floor. That’s when you are able to attend to every guest and see what they need and if they are satisfied with the game and check around if there is something to clean or whatever.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

One slots host also mentioned that during the busy periods, the high number of technical requests that technicians service during these times results in long waiting times for guests.

*“...technicians are also busy, sometimes with other machines so they expect as soon as you call, its going to get fixed. Sometimes if there is someone available they will come and assist but sometimes they are stuck on another machine so it will take some time.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

The following sub-theme looks at the impact of teamwork and leadership on CS challenges at Casino X.

## **CS Challenge: Teamwork and Leadership**

When asked about how slots hosts coordinate with technicians when they are faced with a technical problem on the slot machine that they cannot resolve, both slots hosts and technicians noted that everyone (slots hosts and technicians) worked together as a team when dealing with such situations. The radio system (all frontline staff are equipped with two-way radios) is used to request the services of technicians on the floor who must respond, and whichever technician is available at the time accepts the request to provide technical assistance. If no technician is available at the time, slots hosts must wait until a technician becomes available. Hosts also mentioned that during busy times they have to follow the queuing system (mentioned earlier) which picks up faults on slots machines and visually depicts an ordered list of customers to assist on a plasma screen in the slots area. A host mentioned that during busy times when she is on the way to assist customers identified on the queuing system, she is often summoned by other guests.

*“Imagine if you had 200 machines and then there is always a guest looking for help, maybe 5 guests in 1 minute and then that’s where you have to follow the queueing system..you expect me to help you now while there is someone already waiting for 10 minutes on the other side.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

The guests see hosts going past them to assist other guests and feel the host is ignoring them. The host mentioned that if she had to help all the people she met on the way, the guest who was identified on the queuing system initially would be waiting for a long time to be served:

*“...and the supervisor or manager, if they saw the queueing system and saw that 25 minutes on the board, they are going to come straight to you and lash you cause why is the guest waiting 25 minutes on the floor cause they can tell you, first come first served.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

The above excerpt suggests the use of an autocratic leadership style by supervisors and managers in the event of CS failures. This will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 6.

### **CS Challenge: Recognition**

One respondent explained how the previous coin system was used where guests would win payouts in coins (in comparison to the current card system where credits are loaded on a card). Staff who were recognized by guests for excellent CS were rewarded with R50 vouchers. In addition under the old coin system, the slots host completed transactions and had to make cash payments to the guest. The number of transactions that a slots host had completed over the month, was tracked through a receipt system and used as a means of measuring work rate and rewarding staff.

*“Before you would get a voucher, you know if someone recognised you on the floor you get this R50 voucher and then you know when you do something and you see that you are recognised, it gives you more energy to just carry on doing your job in the certain way so it was nice cause like if we got a coin system, we were able to count how many transactions we did each day.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

As mentioned in the focus group, the old system of counting transactions completed by slots hosts was cancelled due to favouritism and corruption between supervisors and staff, where supervisors were believed to allocate particular hosts to higher paying machines therefore resulting in these hosts being rewarded.

Staff did identify during the focus group that guests could acknowledge excellent service behaviours by staff through the use of a suggestion box but that often customers would verbally credit good service or write a note and put a smiley face on their payout slips. An employee of the month award had been in operation in the past but staff were unsure whether this reward was still being used. As mentioned by one host in the above excerpt, being rewarded through the old system where transactions per host were counted and used as a way of measuring and rewarding performance, “gave one extra energy to do one’s work”, thus suggesting that the motivational impact of the old reward system was missing in the current card transactional system.

In addition, slots hosts mentioned that management had recently introduced a Short Messaging System (SMS) system for staff members to recognize one another in real time, with regards to exhibiting behaviours that were in line with the company’s values e.g. teamwork. The system serves as a means for employees to engage with the brand and serves to align behaviours with

the company's brand promise. Staff get to nominate each other by sending an SMS with the person's name and a reason for recognizing them. Staff have to register their cellphone numbers and cannot vote for themselves. Staff who were recognized stand to win monthly rewards such as cash prizes, movie tickets, restaurant vouchers, duvet days (days off work) and a coffee date with the Managing Director.

Staff seemed to indicate that employee recognition was better facilitated through the previous coin system where individual transactions completed by staff could be tracked and top performers rewarded.

*“So that they count on the system and at the end of the month they know you are the person who did the most transactions than others then maybe you get a R100 voucher so it was nice.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

In addition, all staff indicated that the provision of a substantial financial incentive would change the way they interacted with customers in terms of providing excellent CS. This seems to indicate that staff in the slots department were highly motivated by monetary incentives.

### **5.3.2 Theme 2: Interaction**

The second theme interaction looks at the impact of communication, negative attitudes and body language of slots host towards customers as well as the effect of diversity on service interactions.

#### **CS Challenges: Communication – Slots Hosts**

*“Even if you are tied up, you still have to respond to your calls. It doesn't matter how long it's going to take you, you still have to respond. If I know I am an attendant in Alpha, I know I have to respond even if there are 20 calls coming in, I have to respond and it's up to me where I start and where I finish”.*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

In the focus group, the communication system between hosts and technicians was discussed where a radio system is used. There are a specific number of technicians on the floor at a time (usually four, depending if it is peak time). As mentioned previously, each host and technician has a radio which is meant to be turned on at all times. Technicians are requested by hosts via

radio and are asked to arrive at a specific position on the casino floor which is provided through the machines identification number (e.g. Alpha 101). As discussed earlier, technicians are not explicitly assigned to specific hosts who have requested technical assistance for machine faults, however whichever technician becomes available first must provide assistance to the said host.

*“The problem is we can’t know exactly where is the technician and what they are doing there... And we don’t even know how many calls that technician got already... I can hear everyone’s call...So if the one technician is busy, then the other one who is available will come and assist.”*

(Respondent 4, Slots Host)

This system does not allow hosts to provide customers with an expected time of arrival of the technician, as the host does not know what task he or she is doing or how many tasks they have left to complete. This lack of information to the customer negatively impacts the CS process by creating an uninformed customer who is constantly asking the host about the time of arrival of the technician.

### **CS Challenges: Communication – Leaders’ Views**

In the interview, the manager described how when a customer wins a jackpot over R10 000, various people are involved in the process such as the supervisor and a security escort. However once the process is in motion, often hosts do not explain the process and what is happening:

*“It is all because the staff member didn’t take the opportunity to explain the situation and what happens thereafter. At least I could be better sitting here and understanding the situation. Here is the thing, we have to empower the guest. Just say this is the situation. Even if the person is frustrated at least let them know that you are doing something.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager then discussed how by talking with the guest, errors can be minimized as unconsciously one is checking for the customer’s understanding of the situation:

*“The truth is if it can just be brought across the more you talk, the less you can make mistakes, because now you are checking for understanding with the guest and you are checking for understanding with yourself...The truth is, if I haven’t followed the procedure which is ‘good day, what is your name, well done, congratulations, you won the jackpot, so much. Then sees*

*the machine and resets it. That error can't happen but that error has happened because of communication breakdown. So it is a simple thing of talking."*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager then discussed the importance of closing the loop for customers by providing information on casino processes. If this information is not provided, the host usually comes back to a frustrated customer:

*"That little thing has just closed a loop for you as a guest. First of all you not looking for more information. You understand why you are being delayed and you know even if you are being delayed you are still knowledgeable of what is going on. You are informed. Don't inform me and you come back and I'm going to drop on you so (verbally abuse you)... Very often they are the masters of their own situation... You should be sure that the customer should be in the same frame of mind as when you left. Don't give the information, don't keep them in the loop and when you come back, you come back to an irate case. And it is not the guests fault – it is YOUR fault!"*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

In the above excerpt, the manager clearly illustrates the importance of providing information to customers on casino processes. The manager emphasized that providing information to customers and closing the loop needed to be stressed in the CS intervention as it was often overlooked by hosts when dealing with customers.

### **CS Challenge Negative Attitudes and Body Language – Leaders' Views**

In terms of the body language displayed by slots hosts, the manager noted that the online complaints process where customers complain through electronic terminals on the premises or via email, had identified that many guests perceived the hosts as having a negative attitude towards guests and were seen as being lazy, unfriendly and having a tendency to talk amongst themselves. In the interview, the manager remarked:

*"...these are the things that are lacking... eye contact, positive body language and I reiterate positive body language, interaction with the guest, acknowledgement of the guest. Understanding, listening to understand and not listening to answer. Describing their actions*

*and describing what is following that and when they get back and also confirming if there is anything else.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Positive body language along with eye contact, communicating information and processes to the guests were seen as being neglected in service interactions. The manager went on to comment on interactions he had witnessed where there was an absence of communication and positive body language by slots hosts:

*“I watch transactions where they don’t make eye contact, nor talk. they just listen and they make a call and walk away and the guest is left guessing.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Some hosts were also seen to gather in groups on the casino floor to socialize during quiet times, which was believed to create customer perceptions of the staff lacking interest in their work:

*“A lot of them have a problem with understanding that when it is quiet they think that not much is going on and they talk to each other. The problem is if I’m sitting at a machine and see two staff talking...the perception is that they’re not interested.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager noted that staff were not allowed to group on the floor and were only allowed a maximum of two minutes interaction time. Staff interactions were meant to occur in the breakrooms during breaks. He also pointed out the impression created of the host by the guest as a result of not responding promptly to customer requests on the floor:

*“The problem is, the movement across the floor. If I drag my feet when I see a guest then I’m already telling that I’m not interested in your problem. Even if I turn around and ask ‘hello, how is it going’. I’m gonna know that it is false.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The above excerpt illustrates how the impact of negative body language can foster a negative customer approach and how this communicates a message non-verbally to the customer that the host is not interested in assisting them. Even if the host initiates verbal communication in a positive way after portraying negative body language, the customer will not see them as being genuinely interested in providing good CS to them.

*“It seems like if I don’t care ‘why the %\$#\* do you ask’. Because you see some of them the way they drag their feet.”*

(Respondent 7, Supervisor)

During the interview the supervisor was making some strong statements in relation to the poor CS provided by slots hosts. The above statement by the supervisor, indicates the body language portrayed by some of the hosts (but not all of them, as indicated in the interviews), speaks volumes in terms of conveying to the customer that they don’t care about providing good service. This makes the customer feel as though they are being done a favour when they request assistance, when in fact such tasks are part of the slots hosts job descriptions.

After discussing the various shortfalls of the slots staff, the manager went on to defend and praise staff as being good rather than great in terms of their provision of CS:

*“It is not about our staff being useless. Not by any means, our staff are very good. The problem is they aren’t excellent. This is about to go from good to excellent and the reality is that it is the small things that make a difference.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The supervisor agreed with the manager on the above point but mentioned the problem of slots staff not prioritizing their tasks. In addition, staff were perceived as not understanding the importance of timeframes when serving customers.

In the focus group, two hosts mentioned that quiet times on the casino floor in terms of service interactions were often in the mornings, and therefore the shift one was allocated to, often determined whether a host would experience quiet times. Hosts’ mentioned that these quiet times were opportunities to provide better CS to guests by attending to every guest and serving their needs. It was also seen as a chance to clean one’s area before being asked to by a supervisor.

In the interview, a manager mentioned the “busy mentality” where hosts perceive themselves as not having sufficient time to complete work tasks. The busy mentality relates to the idea that societal values of idleness aversion result in individuals feeling a sense of being productive when being busy, whilst not prioritizing work activities and engaging in unnecessary tasks. He mentioned that the guest’s situational awareness is there and thus understands why a host may not be completely overbearing and friendly. However, he pointed out that the same busy

mentality is transferred into quiet times when guests are expecting better interactions but receive the same service provided during busy times. He goes on to explain that the majority of complaints arise from quiet times:

*“The problem is that the same mentality has been put to a quiet time in order to give themselves more time between transactions. What you are doing with the time you have given yourselves causes an issue. If I’m a client sitting there and I’m telling you the situation but you are not taking the time to greet me in order to finish the transaction off quicker to go back to your friend to talk to him. I’m going to ask why didn’t you take more time with me?”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Ironically, the above excerpt illustrates how complaints arise during quieter times in the slots area. It is evident that hosts do not take up opportunities to exceed service expectations of guests during quieter times and instead prefer to provide the same service that is experienced during busier times.

### **The Impact of Diversity on CS Interactions – Leaders’ Views**

The interview with the manager, revealed various racial issues that impact the CS interaction within the multi-cultural context of the slots machine area in Casino X. A particular racial issue was identified in the interactions between Indian customers and Black hosts:

*“Unfortunately the things that have to be addressed are cultural issues. Ahhm... the black with the Indian and the Indian with Black. Okay - actually there are less issues with an Indian on a Black customer there are more issues with a Black (host) on an Indian customer.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager then went on to mention how Indian guests speak very fast, speak better English than Black hosts and are more inclined to swear when unhappy with service:

*“If you normally come to an Indian guest. They speak quicker and fluently, using a higher English and the propensity to swear will be greater as well versus a Black person coming to you as a host. That will be automatically you know oh hang on you get into my personal space type of thing. The truth is what they actually have to learn... interruption... you might find that some of the blacks are not as good in their English...”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The sense of hosts feeling racially intimidated by some Indian guests who had experienced delays in service was noted by the manager:

*“The host is feeling racially intimidated or something, because a lot of them are getting along fine with a lot of Indian, White guests. I think that just because you get some problem Indian guests who feel that I paid for this here and this is not up to standard and take it off over you. If he has a jack pot over R 10 000...This can take anything from 5 to 10 minutes...By the time we get to him, it can be over 10 minutes and he is already waiting 20 minutes, because he is upset he is going to call him something.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The above excerpt indicates how process delays can result in guests getting angry with hosts and using abusive language. In addition, customers were depicted by the manager as not being concerned about what racial group slots hosts belonged to. Customers’ reactions to service failures were seen as being racially insensitive and as having a negative impact on the host, resulting in disengagement:

*“...if I’m the guest I don’t care what you think and what your culture is. It is my situation and I don’t like what I’m experiencing and I express it as I want and the problem with that is that you have the host who is now put off by the approach, by the language and the first reaction you get from him is dead silence.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager then noted that the impact of negative reactions from customers during service interactions between Indian customers and Black hosts can be racialized by Black hosts and result in demoralizing the host:

*“Because the host has said before that ‘we get to you, we sort your machine’, when he comes back then the client is saying ‘what the %\$#\*, we are waiting so %\$#!& long’ and so forth. The tension on him has a negative effect on the host basically demoralises him in that one sentence one phrase. They take it personally because he is working hard and he is trying his best. But sometimes our guests are not that friendly and they kinda cross the line.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Due to delays in the service process and customers becoming abusive as a result, the creation of negative emotional states in the host as a result of experiencing verbal abuse in cross-cultural interactions can culminate in disengagement by slots hosts, which can thereafter be interpreted as poor attitudes towards service by customers.

*“But you must understand there is such a fine line between swearing and the situation or swearing because of the situation between the host if I automatically take myself as being you know as ...cultural different I will take whatever profanity you use and internalise it.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The manager here refers to how customers may be swearing due to their discontent with the CS processes or situation, whilst the Black host now interprets and experiences the verbal abuse as racial discrimination and internalizes the abuse.

*“Even if you use the word shit or idiot. He is going to take it as swearing.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Here the manager suggests that Black hosts may be over-sensitive to such language and personalize it resulting in such interactions impacting their future performance. He seems to suggest that the casino environment is a harsh environment and staff need to be able to deal with such situations. The researcher understands that these are the manager’s opinions on this topic, which may conceal the actual events and intentions of such interactions. Such situations may have been differently understood from a host’s perspective, who actually interacted in the said situation.

*“They distance themselves. So now they are aware of the situation and what they have to fix. They might not engage. And now we have a situation when they then take the person to the manager. You can’t say the guest is wrong but it is how we deal with the guest that is critical here.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The way Black hosts seem to react to such situations is to disengage, not communicate and call the manager, which can reduce customer’s perception of service even further. The manager, in the above quote, suggests that guests are not wrong but the guest needs to be dealt with very carefully at this point. In the above statement, the manager can be seen to be defending the guest in the case of such situations, in contrast to protecting the dignity of frontline staff.

*“But the host has seen it the opposite way and (their) defensive wall cuts off their way of communication.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The above excerpt indicates that Black slots hosts are automatically defensive when they interpret verbal abuse by customers as racial discrimination, resulting in the host withdrawing from the service interaction by holding back further communication with the customer. The discussion section later in the chapter will expand further on this finding.

### **The Product is the Experience – Leaders’ Views**

The importance of the experience of gambling as well as interacting with the casino environment and people in that environment, was discussed by the manager.

*“So you must understand the reality of most of the customers who are coming here. They are looking for an excuse not to come back. They already pushed themselves, the whole environment lends itself to a person not losing control but getting absorbed by the whole situation we put, the machines, everything.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The above statement depicts the environment created in casinos in order to draw customers into the situation and promote a gambling experience.

*“Now, I have lost control, I’m a guest. Most of the time a staff member is coming to a person after their session is finished. Which is a good chance probably that I might have already lost money. So you fell right down, down low... and (as a result) most of the interaction with the person is in a negative frame of mind. This is now the core time to interact positively, so that they can distance themselves from the machine and re-associate with the experience. So their interaction is critical.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Evidence from the interviews suggest that the majority of situations where hosts deal with guests, are when the guest is in a negative frame of mind as they have lost money (other than jackpots). He mentioned that this is the key time to interact positively with guests so they can distance themselves with the machine and reconnect with the experience. In realistic terms, this would prove to be a very difficult task if a person has suffered a considerable financial loss. The manager further explained:

*“Now I’m looking for an excuse not to come back. It is very hard for me to say that the machine is my reason for not coming back because it is only a machine. It is easier for me to blame a person than a machine.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Interview findings elucidated how people have a tendency to humanize a problem, such as losing money on a slot machine. It is difficult to be angry at a machine, whilst transferring that anger onto a person who you interact with directly after the loss allows individuals to put a face to the problem that they face.

The manager continued to describe how violence on the casino floor plays out:

*“When a guest comes in with R10 000 he is buying hope that he is going to turn this R 10 000 to R 100 000...If he is losing his R 10 000 his whole frame of mind is %&\*\$#! up. If you don’t treat them well... what do you think is going to happen? ...they are primed to get out of order or to even klap (hit) you.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

Here, the manager and supervisor spoke about instances where staff had been assaulted (klap is an Afrikaans word for hit) by angry customers. Such situations can be seen as being very dangerous for slots hosts whose interaction with a customer at the point of financial loss can be critical in order to pick up the guest’s mood and prevent a negative reaction from guests who may seek to transfer blame for losing onto a person.

In the interview, the manager proceeded to discuss how the product sold at the casino is the experience rather than the machine:

*“We think or the perception is that the product is the machine. The product is the experience and regardless of what the machines are doing, nothing has a larger effect than personal interaction. The reason why we have got guests coming into the casino is because they don’t want to play on-line. They want human interaction. You better make the interaction positive.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The importance of positive, personal interactions to create an experience for the guest was identified by the manager in the above quote, as being the reason why guests visit the casino

rather than playing online. The supervisor noted the importance of personal interaction for guests:

*“What I realise, like with me, a lot of guests ask for me personally to come and visit them when I come on shift. Two minutes to chat and they don’t care if they are losing the money, the fact that they saw me and things like that, they are happy. These are people, not that you should get personal with the guest. Know where they stay or whatever the case may be, but you need to make them feel welcome. So every time they come here you must ask ‘hey Bonga, are you married or what?’”*

(Respondent 7, Supervisor)

The importance of personal interaction to guests in making them feel welcome and being recognized by slots staff was highlighted here indicating the significance of basic human needs such as social interaction in the CS context.

### **5.3.3 Theme 3: Service Delivery**

The theme service delivery addresses outcomes of the interviews and focus group concerning customer complaints, guest reactions to service failures, staff self-ratings of CS and recommendations for improving service at the casino.

#### **CS Challenges – Complaints**

Complaints from customers regarding CS at the organisation have been previously alluded to under communication as a CS challenge, as well as the impact of negative attitudes and body language by staff on service interactions. Customer complaints from a frontline staff and management perspective at Casino X are provided in more detail below.

In the focus group, one host mentioned that customers complain very often, and often these complaints are a result of long waiting times or machine problems:

*“There is always a complaint, every day, and every 5 or 10 minutes you hear a complaint from a customer about how long he has been waiting, the malfunction of the machine.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

Hosts mentioned that complaints also arise due to waitrons or cleaners not turning up when requested by guests. As hosts are often visible they are the first person that guests approach when a waiter or cleaner has not arrived. On the other hand, managers viewed customer complaints as a result of slots hosts being difficult to find on the casino floor, as well as them having poor attitudes towards their jobs.

*“It’s like they don’t want to do their job.”*

(Respondent 7, Supervisor)

Literature in relation to staff having negative attitudes towards their jobs and avoiding service interactions will be considered in the discussion section later on.

### **CS Challenge – Guest Reaction to Service Failure**

In the interview, the manager revealed that guests are not concerned with problems that the casino faces in terms of staffing or inefficient processes. After waiting for long periods as a result of poor processes, the default response of customers is often to use vulgar and offensive language. Customers view themselves as owning the situation and if their needs are not met they feel they have the right to complain and express their displeasure. This seems to be an individualistic and self-centred point of departure that customers adopt in dealing with service failures.

During the focus group, respondents were asked whether their reaction to their first client for the day versus their reaction to client fifty was the same, and whether their behaviour towards customers changed through the course of the day. The respondent indicated that a negative interaction with a guest impacted how they served customers thereafter, with hosts being deflated and not being as enthusiastic in their approach to the guests.

*“Sometimes somebody can put you in a bad mood, you come in happy and they just put you in a bad mood, you will be a bit sad, you won’t have that bubbly feeling when greeting the guest, you will just be like hello and do the thing and finish.”*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

Another respondent indicated that the mood of slots hosts fluctuated throughout the day in accordance with negative and positive customer responses. However a positive customer interaction during the course of the day was seen to possibly change a host’s moods from a negative state to a positive state:

*“Maybe until you find someone that puts you in the good mood again, cause the guests are not the same. Some of them are very nice and some are very difficult.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

In addition, during the focus group two slots hosts mentioned how guests, after being informed by hosts of the gambling rules concerning slots machines, then proceeded to repeat the same behaviour. These repeat behaviours seemed to trigger a feeling of frustration by slot host towards the guest.

*“The same person will go to the next machine and do the same thing that what we just explained to them not to do.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

This seems to indicate a low level of transfer of learning into a similar situation immediately following a CS interaction with the guest, who had just been assisted by a host in terms of how to play the slots machines. As a result of some guests having to be continually taught how to gamble. One host identified how he often had to spend time teaching customers how to use the slots machines which would often prevent him from doing other tasks. As a result, in order to improve CS at the organisation, the slots host recommended the development of a training area with a few slots machines that would allow guests to teach themselves how to gamble. In addition, a reduction in workload during peak times resulting in service delays for guests, was also put forth as a recommendation to improve CS at the casino.

### **Self-Ratings of CS and Recommendations for Improving Service**

In the focus group, slots technicians and hosts were asked to rate themselves on a scale of one to five in terms of their provision of excellent service to customers whilst on the job. Subjective responses were noted from participants as indicated in the below quote:

*“Every day I smile, I do my job. When I am on the floor, I know I am on the floor. I give it my best. I know not everyone can be satisfied, don’t forget there is 1500 machines so I can’t please every person on that floor cause everyone wants your attention.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

Of the five staff in the focus group, three individually rated themselves a three out of five for the quality of service provided to customers. All staff identified the high workload as impacting

negatively on their ability to provide quality CS. Two slots hosts rated themselves four out of five in terms of providing excellent CS on a daily basis.

#### **5.4 Summary of Pre-intervention Findings from Interviews and Focus Group**

It was evident from the interviews and focus group discussion that there were an array of factors impacting the provision of excellent service at the casino. During the focus group discussion as well as interviews, various internal factors were identified such as poor work processes, unclear work roles, problems with the communication system as well as technology issues such as technical faults and poor software running the slots machines. High workloads during peak times were identified by staff as a major factor impacting service. Autocratic leadership styles and a lack of praise and recognition from supervisors was also viewed as a factor impacting the service behaviours provided by frontline staff. There were also various diversity issues that arose in the multicultural context of service interactions on the casino floor. Perceived racism from customers resulting in demotivation, disengagement and defensive behaviours from slots hosts were identified as negatively impacting CS. The need for informal human exchanges (such as chit-chat) between hosts and customers during service interactions was seen as a factor that resulted in guests coming into the physical casino environment and consuming the services provided by the casino rather than gambling online. In addition, when customers had lost money on the slots machines or had experienced technical problems, the need to identify a human being as being accountable rather than blaming a machine was an interesting research finding. The impact of a negative service interaction with a customer on a slots host's state of mind, and thereafter the manner in which the initial service interaction negatively impacted the host's subsequent service behaviours to customers, was also an important finding. The negative attitude displayed towards guests and avoidance of customers by slots hosts, were also identified as elements affecting poor service at the casino. The negative impact of the stressful and difficult casino environment on frontline staff was also identified as having a negative influence on CS behaviours.

Observation was also used as a pre-intervention data collection tool to learn about work processes and context, identify typical service interactions and possible areas of improvement in terms of interpersonal skills of frontline staff when dealing with customers. The following discussion provides a narrative account of the observations conducted by the researcher in the slots section of Casino X.

### **5.5.1 Pre-Intervention Observations**

The main aims guiding the pre-intervention observations were to identify challenges facing slots staff in providing excellent CS. Gamblers were observed by the researcher in the slots machine area of the casino, and the researcher did not interact with customers unless a conversation was initiated by the guest. The pre-intervention observations also sought to examine customers' behaviours when requesting service from frontline staff and interacting with slots hosts and technicians. The observations also sought to assess the body language and attitude of hosts when dealing with customers. Furthermore, the observations sought to provide the researcher with an understanding of CS processes in the slots department as well as assess service interactions within a multicultural context.

The first participant observation was conducted on 21 October 2014 at 8pm on the casino main floor. It was a Tuesday night and the casino was moderately busy. I conducted the observation primarily with the objective of observing and understanding CS processes that slots hosts had to complete on the casino floor as part of their job. I had informed management of my presence on the floor, however slots hosts had not been made aware. It is understood that I was seen as being a regular customer by slots staff from the outset. However once I began chatting to two staff (one slots host and a slots technician), I did reveal my identity prior to asking them questions on the CS processes, in order to prevent suspicion. I obtained a card for playing the slots machines from the cash desk.

The staff member at the cash desk did not greet me upon arrival. She seemed to be new to the job and was being trained. She was reprimanded by her supervisor for following the incorrect procedure when issuing a card to the researcher, and eventually got the process right. After walking around the main floor for a few minutes I settled in at a slot machine and began playing.

#### **Key Talking Points:**

After playing slots for roughly fifteen minutes the slots machine next to where I was playing had a technical fault and a technician was requested by a slots host via radio. An Indian male technician (tech) arrived to fix the machine. He had been working at the casino for six years and mentioned that usually the slots hosts fixed minor faults on the machines and techs were usually called in for more serious problems. He mentioned that techs communicated via

speaker and were called to the position of malfunctioning machines on the casino floor through the radio. The casino was on a 24 hour shift with there being a day, night and graveyard shift, and staff were allocated to shifts using a roster.

After the technician had completed his job, I left my machine and noticed a young, black male slots host who was assisting a customer at a machine, whilst also having two customers behind him waiting for him to finish with the first customer. After dealing with the first customer, he proceeded to help the second and then the third. When asked about how the process for a jackpot worked, the host mentioned that at first two lights on the machine tower (on top of machine) go on and the machine was reflected on the queuing system as having had a jackpot. In addition, the tower lights signal to slots host that a jackpot was won on that specific machine. The queuing system is depicted on a plasma screen and informs hosts of which machines have won jackpots so hosts can do pay-outs as well as communicate to hosts which machines have malfunctioned. If the machine is in the slots host section, he or she goes to the machine, types in a code and transfers the jackpot onto a slots host card. He then goes back to the queuing system, scans the card and prints two receipts. One receipt is put into the ATM, he draws cash if the pay-out is under R3000, pays the guest who signs the receipt and puts the signed receipt in a collection box. He also mentioned that the queuing system usually has two to four jobs listed at a time. He mentioned that complaints from customers often occurred during quiet times and that some supervisors don't stay in their sections and take a while to arrive at a specific location when they are requested to assist with a jackpot or query.

### **Reflective Notes:**

The situation where the slots host had three customers to deal with at one time, seemed to be a high pressure situation for the host who did well to communicate with all customers, indicating that he would help them once he had finished assisting the first customer. This observation suggested that staff operate on a first come first serve basis when dealing with multiple customers simultaneously. This observation session allowed the researcher to observe technicians and hosts in action when dealing with customers as well as allowing the researcher to ask staff about the details of CS processes to enhance his understanding which assisted in the design of the intervention.

The second pre-intervention observation was conducted on 23 October 2014 at 7pm on the main floor of the casino within the smoking area. It was a Thursday night and the casino was

busy. After going to the cash desk to load more money onto my card after losing the money I had loaded onto the card two nights earlier, I was met with uncertainty at the cash desk. Once again the staff member (a different lady) did not greet me and when I asked if I could load R50 on the card she said that I could only put a minimum amount of R100 onto the card. At this point I mentioned that I had put R50 on the same card yesterday, however she then said that you could only put R50 onto a new card. I then mentioned that I only wanted to load R50 after which she replied that you could only load a minimum of R50 cash on a card and R100 minimum via debit card.

In terms of reflecting on the above interaction, this entire situation left me feeling foolish, defensive and angry, changed my mood and could have been avoided if the staff member had simply said in the first place that you could only load a minimum of R50 cash and R100 minimum from one's debit card onto the casino playing card. The staff member did not provide complete information regarding the ruling on minimum amounts that could be loaded onto the card. This lack of clear explanation of the rules in terms of loading credits resulted in the guest (myself) getting frustrated. The attendant should have apologised during the interaction for being uncertain and reassured me of what the minimum amount was that I could load onto the card. She could also have used chit-chat and humour to deal with the discomfort created for myself (the guest) as a result of incomplete information being provided. However this did not occur and I was left having to reprimand the attendant for not providing me with correct information in the first instance.

### **Key Talking Points:**

After playing for 30 minutes, I walked around the smoking floor and noticed a host dealing with a customer. The machine had a malfunction and had to be rebooted. According to the host, this was called "events loading" when the machine reboots and can take up to fifteen minutes while the guest has to wait. A technician was called to the location via radio. While the system was rebooting, when 240 events had been reached, the host tried to transfer the guest's money (credits) back from the machine onto the guest's card, as the guest wanted to play on another machine. This did not work on the first occasion but was successful the second time around at which point the customer proceeded to play on another machine.

One guest, an old White male had his card stuck in the machine's card reader and informed the host (a young, Black male) who was busy with another customer. After waiting for five minutes

the man was visibly frustrated with both his hands on his hips and said, “This is bullshit. You taking so %\$#&\*%\$ long!” The guest’s verbal abuse seemed to have a negative impact on the slots host who immediately disengaged and was visibly dejected. In observing guests who were waiting for slots hosts to attend to them, the researcher noticed a middle-aged, White male who had his arms folded on the top of his head staring at the host, while sitting on the stool in front of his machine. This body language seemed to indicate frustration at waiting too long to be assisted by the host. Another guest, a middle-aged Indian woman was seen pacing up and down while trying to make contact with a host, who was busy serving another customer. This woman also had her hands on her hips and seemed to be frustrated in having to wait. At the same time, an older white woman was seen smiling after receiving good service from a host who helped her retrieve her card, which had been stuck in the machine’s card reader.

### **Reflective Notes:**

The above scenarios indicate that customer frustration often results from long waiting periods to receive assistance. Although the researcher had been primed to look for body language after his initial meeting with slots manager, so as to develop a CS intervention addressing body language and cultural difference, the researcher realised first hand that assessing the body language of customers could be used to identify frustrated or angry customers. The researcher also noticed that some customers were unreasonably impatient when they could see that hosts were busy assisting other guests. The impact of verbal abuse on hosts was seen to cause disengagement and demotivation, especially in the observed cross-cultural interaction between an older, White male customer and a young Black host. There was also a possibility that the social power carried by racial identity had an impact on the interaction with the guest being an older White male and the host being a young, Black male. It is never admissible for a guest to be abusive towards a host and the profanity used by the guest seemed to be a gross over-reaction to the situation, considering the guest had only been waiting for five minutes while the host dealt with another customer. To the researcher’s eyes, the experience was viewed as abusive language used by the customer as a result of impatience. The approach of the customer was one of expectancy to be served immediately, involved the use of dominant body language (hands on hips) and from an observer’s standpoint, the subsequent abuse was experienced as aggressive behaviour by the customer towards the host. From the researcher’s biased perspective (Indian male), this situation was experienced as racial discrimination towards the

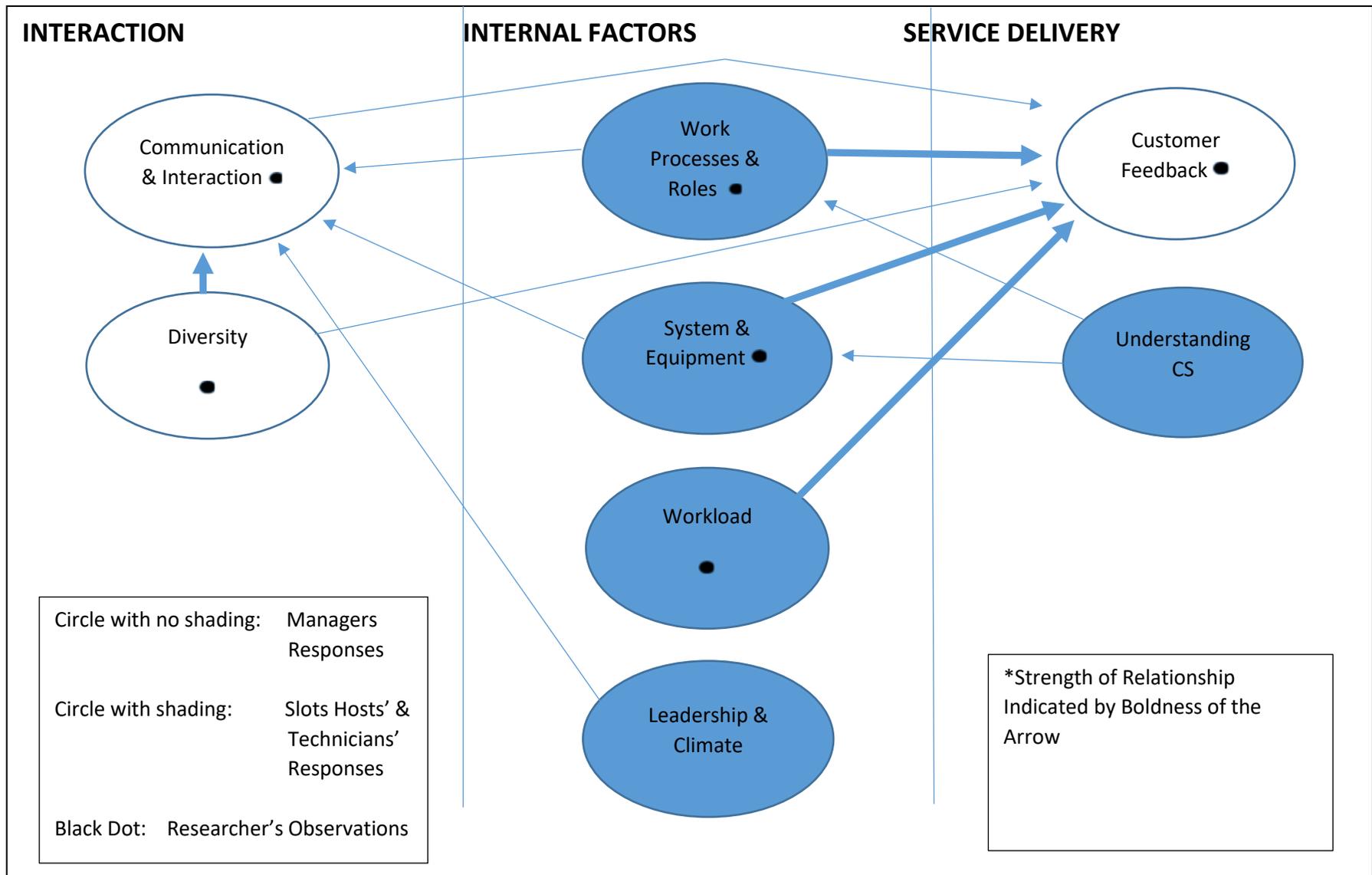
host, however from the guest's perspective this could have been viewed as a reaction to slow service.

## **5.6 Summary of Findings from the Pre-Intervention Focus Group with Slots Hosts, Interviews with Management and Observations**

One of the key findings from the pre-intervention interviews was that the mood of frontline staff was impacted by their interactions with customers. Thus if hosts came across a negative customer early in their shift, they would be in a negative state of mind when dealing with guests that followed. This negative mood would continue until the host had a positive interaction with another customer that would change their mood to a positive state. It was also evident from the interviews and focus groups that the IT software system running the slot machines as well as aspects of the slot machines such as the card reader were not effective and negatively impacted service delivery. Long, inefficient work processes and procedures requiring many staff to coordinate and converge at one place, were also seen to cause long delays and result in poor service perceptions by customers.

Perceived racial discrimination from guests towards slots hosts was also identified resulting in disengagement and demotivation from hosts. Hosts would often react defensively to discrimination from guests which was then interpreted by the customer as poor CS. The need for hosts to depersonalize such incidents was also highlighted by one manager. The manager also stressed the importance of hosts' communicating what was going to happen next in order to resolve the customer's dispute and provide information to the guest on the service process, so as to close the loop and reduce uncertainty. Management also noted that customers who are in a negative frame of mind after having lost money on the slots machine, often have their first human interaction thereafter with a slots host, and therefore transfer blame onto slots hosts, resulting in disengagement.

The above findings will be integrated with relevant literature in the discussion later in the chapter. The thematic map overleaf illustrates the relationships identified between sub-themes that emerged from the pre-intervention interviews, focus group discussion and observations on factors preventing excellent CS at Casino X.



**Figure 13: Thematic Map Illustrating Relationships between Sub-Themes from Pre-Intervention Findings on CS Challenges**

The thematic map was developed by analyzing the sub-themes and themes that emerged from the data analysis of interviews and focus group discussion (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An abstract framework was created serving to map the relationships between sub-themes that were identified in data collection. As recommended by Maxwell's (2013) guidelines for developing a thematic illustration, the arrows in the map illustrate the relationships between concepts, with bolder arrows indicating strong relationships between concepts that were evident in the focus group discussion and interviews. Circles with shading represent sub-themes that were identified more explicitly by slots hosts and technicians' whilst clear circles represent sub-themes identified more strongly by managers'. Circles with black dots reflect sub-themes that were identified during the researcher's observations. Sub-themes are grouped vertically into the larger over-arching themes of interaction, internal factors and service delivery.

The thematic map shows that slots hosts and technicians highlighted that poor work processes and roles (including CS challenges experienced as a result of processes as well as participants' understandings of their job descriptions), were seen to impact customer feedback that was evident through customer complaints, as well as the impact of negative interactions of customers on staff. In turn, these work processes and job roles also impacted the communication and interaction between staff and customers. Frontline staff also viewed the organisation's technological system and equipment (slots machines and their software applications), which were seen as being very poor and unreliable, as strongly affecting customer feedback and to a lesser degree also impacting communication and interaction between staff and customers. High workloads, especially during peak times, were identified largely by frontline staff as also strongly affecting customer feedback. This finding was also corroborated by the researcher's observations on the casino floor. Leadership and climate, referring to teamwork and autocratic leadership styles, were also seen to affect communication and interaction between staff which indirectly impacted customer feedback. When questioned during the focus group on their understanding of the CS, hosts and technicians referred to behavioural competencies and guest satisfaction whilst also alluding to the role of work processes and technology to provide good CS.

From a manager's perspective, abusive language used by guests from other race groups to that of the slots host, as well as direct racism from guests in particular, was seen as a major factor inhibiting CS. Abusive language from a frustrated White guest, who had experienced service delays, towards a Black host had been witnessed by the researcher during an observation. In response to the abuse, the researcher observed the staff member becoming subdued as a result

of the language used. However the host did not disengage and become defensive, and rather continued to assist the guest in a subdued manner. The interview with the manager highlighted that such behaviour from guests often resulted in having a negative impact on frontline staff who would become defensive and disengage from service interactions. These findings from the interview were not wholly substantiated by the researcher's observation.

Diversity was also seen by managers to strongly impact communication and inhibit interaction between staff and guests, as a result of past and current discrimination experienced by staff members. This defensiveness and lack of interaction apparent from frontline staff was interpreted as having a negative attitudes towards guests, creating a cycle of discrimination from guests and defensive responses from staff, which are then assumed to be interpreted as confirmation of initial stereotypes held by guests. This finding will be further supported by literature later in the discussion.

It is evident from the thematic map, that managers' largely identified themes such as interaction (communication and interaction as well as diversity) and service delivery (in terms of customer feedback) as affecting poor CS in the organisation. In stark contrast, frontline staff largely identified internal organizational factors such as work processes and roles, sub-standard technology and equipment, high workloads and a lack of teamwork and autocratic leadership as being causes of poor CS. This notion was identified in the focus group discussion where the interviewer noticed that slots hosts and technicians continuously complained about high workloads, mechanical and software problems with slots machines and poor internal processes as major causes of poor service. More specifically, hosts seemed to suggest that they were busy during every part of their day, and only admitted to having quiet times in the morning only when explicitly asked by the researcher. When taking into account the purpose of the situation analysis phase, which was to understand challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS, it must be pointed out that the researchers worked within the parameters set by management. As a result, changes to work processes, workloads and technology could not be addressed through the intervention and as such, the intervention focused on developing behavioural competencies such as communication, identifying body language as indicators of customer states and building cultural awareness.

## **5.7 Discussion**

The following discussion integrates literature into the findings that emerged from the interviews, focus group discussion and observations conducted during the situation analysis phase. Considering that similar findings concerning intercultural challenges and autocratic leadership styles and their effect on CS were identified both in the situation analysis and process evaluation, a holistic discussion of the literature concerning these findings will be provided during the discussion section of the process evaluation so as to prevent repetition.

### **5.7.1 Internal Factors**

As mentioned in the thematic map, findings illustrate that slots hosts and technicians largely attributed internal factors such as poor CS processes, high workloads, an ineffective IT system and machines, as well as poor team work, inadequate leadership styles by supervisors and an ineffective recognition system, as challenges that result in poor CS provided to customers.

During the pre-intervention interview, the manager discussed service interactions with customers and stressed the importance of hosts' communicating the process of what was going to happen next in order to resolve their dispute. He mentioned that often due to a lack of communication from the hosts, guests were left unsure as to whether anyone was dealing with their query and when to expect a response. By not closing the information loop, the host would return to a frustrated customer.

Liu and Wan (2011) found slow service and slot machine malfunctions to be key sources of customer dissatisfaction. A study by Snoj and Mumel (2002) that assessed service quality within a wellness spa context, highlighted that customers should not feel unattended or left to wait too long in efforts to ensure high levels of service quality. In addition, a study by Wannenburg, Drotsky and De Jager (2009) on service quality in two South African casinos found that customers were satisfied with service quality of frontline CS staff such as cashiers, waitrons and slots technicians who provided prompt, efficient and friendly service. These findings corroborate research outcomes from the interviews, focus group discussion and observations conducted at Casino X which found that inefficient CS processes resulting in delays had a negative impact on service quality. Similarly within the hospitality environment, Lo, Wu and Tsai (2015) found that standardized service procedures, optimally designed service processes and training can result in service quality and positive customer emotions which

enable better customer experiences. Lucas (2003) noted that speed of service within the slots machine area of casinos was key to customers having a positive overarching experience. The above literature findings relate to the need for Casino X to improve the design of service processes to minimize delays and ensure standardized procedures to create positive customer emotions and experiences.

The findings also highlighted how service buttons on slots machines that were meant to summon slots hosts to assist customers, were in fact not operational resulting in customer expectations not being met. As suggested in the literature review, in the SERVQUAL model the customer gap addresses the difference between customer expectations of service and perceptions of actual service (Zeithmal, Parsuraman & Berry, 2009). Such instances, can produce situations where customer expectations are not met by the guest's perceptions of the actual service as a result of non-functioning CS instruments (e.g. service buttons on slots machines).

Wan (2009) highlights the difficult environment that frontline casino staff operate in. Casino work is characterized by late shifts, weekend work, standing for long hours as well as high levels of work stress. The casino environment exposes staff to enclosed environments with second hand smoke as well as situations involving intoxicated and unruly customers who are prone to both verbally and physically abusing frontline staff. In service situations, customer are not always right, however under the current CS rhetoric of customer sovereignty, frontline staff are often expected to deal with customers as if they are always correct, thereby creating employee stress (Wan, 2009). The stresses involved in frontline casino work as well as the difficult work environment, may suggest possible explanations for frontline staff displaying unfriendly attitudes towards customers at Casino X.

Slots hosts and technicians also highlighted high workloads as being a major source of poor CS provided on the frontline. Managers noted that most complaints tended to arise during off-peak times as customers were situationally aware that hosts were less accessible during peak times and had higher service expectations during quieter times. However, managers noted that the same service standards were transferred into quiet times, with hosts preferring to use their spare time to socialize amongst themselves, resulting in guest dissatisfaction. Han, Han & Kim (2017) note that job burnout (defined below) involves withdrawal of work behaviours to prevent exposure to risk whilst on the job, which can reduce work output. In addition, Bakker, Demerouti & Verbeke (2004) note that various job demands such as high workloads, emotional

demands and work conflict can result in staff having a negative perception of work roles, resulting in employees reducing work behaviours. It may be possible that some frontline staff reduced work behaviours during off-peak times due to experiencing high job demands and job burnout, resulting in a negative perception of work roles and a withdrawal of pro-service behaviours.

Findings from the study suggest that staff at Casino X may have preferred to interact with their colleagues in order to access social support as a coping mechanism for dealing with high workloads. A study on work stress in casinos in Macau revealed that increased workload due to poor economic times was the second most commonly identified source of stress for staff (Wan, 2013). As a result, it can be expected that increased workloads during peak times can result in high levels of stress for frontline staff who may resort to personal coping strategies such as trying to enjoy oneself, accessing social support, working harder and trying to overcome challenges. Depersonalization is described as occurring after emotional exhaustion, where service staff reduce emotional and cognitive participation in interactions through detachment and taking an impersonal view of the interaction (Bakker et al., 2004; Maslach & Jackson, 1981). These authors thereby provide a negative definition of detachment which is seen as being detrimental to service provision. In contrast, managers and frontline staff at Casino X, mentioned the importance of slots hosts being able to depersonalize negative interactions with customers, particularly where guests had mistreated them. Thus depersonalisation was seen as being a competency required to minimize negative emotions transmitted by customers and a positive coping strategy required within the difficult casino service environment.

Findings from the pre-intervention interviews and focus group suggest that management initiatives are necessary to equip frontline staff to deal with the high stress, working environment at the casino during peak times. Depersonalisation as well as using alcohol and drugs are also common strategies for dealing with work stress. Depersonalisation, was possibly identified in interviews with management where staff were said to display negative attitudes and body language in dealing with customers. In support of the findings from the pre-intervention research at Casino X, Wan (2013) suggests that management strategies for assisting frontline staff in coping with stress are needed. Burnout refers to emotional exhaustion relating to interpersonal stressors occurring during work interactions. The three elements of burnout include emotional exhaustion (the analogy of a “flat battery is often used to describe such staff), depersonalization where customers are dealt with like objects and reduced personal

accomplishment reflecting demotivation, low self-esteem and efficacy. Soderland (2017) notes that employee burnout can entail the leakage of cues through body language, facial expressions and tone of voice that can display a staff member's emotional state and which can have a negative impact on customer satisfaction through emotion contagion (discussed earlier). Considering that some of the above mentioned symptoms were identified by managers in describing frontline staff such as "demotivated, negative attitudes towards customers and poor body language," it is possible that some frontline staff at Casino X were experiencing burnout.

Findings from the focus group revealed that frontline staff believed that a more lucrative reward system that could clearly attribute positive service behaviours to specific employees could assist in motivating staff to provide excellent CS. This research points to the need for Casino X to provide more specific and discernable rewards such as cash payments or luxury products to encourage the required service behaviours by frontline staff.

Within the context of the current card system of slot machine play in use at Casino X, recognition of staff and positive reinforcement of effective service behaviours was seen as not being sufficient and frontline staff highlighted the importance of recognition from senior leaders in the organisation. The old coin operated system was seen as being more motivational for hosts as the number of transactions was tracked by the system resulting in the top performing host receiving a voucher, thereby incentivizing the achievement of high numbers of service transactions. Recognition and rewards has been shown to impact organisational commitment within the service environment (Browning, 2006). In addition, recognition has been identified as a powerful source of reward in the absence of appropriate pay.

### **5.7.2 Interaction**

With regard to interactions between staff, the communication system used at the casino involved a radio system allowing hosts, technicians, supervisors, managers and security to communicate with one another to implement service processes. This system was seen as being deficient as when machines malfunctioned, the expected time of arrival of a technician was unknown to the host. This was due to there only being two or three technicians on duty at a time. Technicians were not allocated to specific machines and only when a technician became available would they respond to a machine malfunction request. Zeithmal, Bitner and Gremier (2009) propose that service delivery systems should aim to provide security against CS failure at key areas in the service delivery process. In line with the literature findings, it is suggested

that Casino X improve their communication systems between frontline staff to improve CS experiences.

It is evident from the pre-intervention findings that during quieter times, guests' service expectations were higher, resulting in a large gap between service expectations and guest perceptions of actual service at these times. Individuals in frontline service jobs are expected to deal with customer requests and problems in a responsive and courteous manner, because service quality perceptions and customer satisfaction depend to a large degree on frontline employees' service delivery behaviours (Bettencourt et al., 2005). Research indicates that engaged employees bring positive attitudes to their roles, have vigour and achieve better work outcomes (Bakker, 2009; Schaufeli & Salanova, 2011; Sonnentag, 2011). An employee engagement study by Gallup Inc. (2013) found that engagement levels among frontline customer-contact service employees are among the lowest of any occupation included in the study, thereby indicating a need for service-based organisations to increase work engagement (Lee & Ok, 2015). Whilst customers may expect more immediate, personalized service interactions during quieter times on the casino floor such as the mornings, disengaged employees may be less committed to ensuring excellent customer experiences during these off-peak times, resulting in customers' expectancies of service not being fulfilled (Zeithmal et al., 1990).

As mentioned earlier, an important finding from the pre-intervention phase was the suggestion that the interaction between a host and a guest (who was in a bad mood), resulted in the host being put into a bad mood, and transferring this negative frame of mind into their next interaction with a guest. Subsequently, a positive interaction with another guest then resulted in an improvement in the host's mood. This finding is in alignment with emotion contagion theory which proposes that people can take on the moods and attitudes of others they interact with (Gelade & Young, 2005).

Wan (2010) points out that frontline staff in casinos can experience extreme emotions from customers who have either won or lost as well as having to engage in emotional labour (discussed in literature review) to smooth service interactions, which can result in high levels of work stress. Casinos provide emotional services and players seek emotional benefits associated with gambling i.e. winning. When customer lose, which occurs after playing for long enough on a consistent basis, they are often angry and distressed. Frontline staff are often the first contact that guests have with the organisation, and these negative emotions spill over

into service interactions as suggested by emotion contagion theory (discussed earlier). Here verbal and non-verbal cues result in forming impressions, arousal and setting the tone of the interaction, which occurs bi-directionally. Emotion contagion, concerned with taking on the emotions of others, involves mimicking the facial expression, postures and movements of the other person. Expression by one individual can set a particular mood, resulting in individuals being influenced unconsciously (Prentice & King, 2011).

The above literature supports findings from the study at Casino X which indicate that the mood of employees in frontline service positions in the casino industry can fluctuate during service interactions over the course of a working day. This study has identified that it is the interaction between service staff and customers that serves to change the mood of the employee both positively and negatively, depending on whether the interaction is a positive or negative one. Most importantly, the above statement indicates that the mood of employees impacted how they approached customers, thus suggesting that the mood of service employees impacts CS experiences. In turn, employee mood can be positively or negatively changed by either positive or negative interactions with customers.

Furthermore, negative customer emotions can translate into negative behaviours and in having to deal with the customer “as if they are always right.” This can create emotional dissonance amongst frontline staff who have to display positive emotions in their role whilst experiencing conflicting negative emotions. This can culminate in poor service behaviours from frontline staff resulting in customer complaints. Prentice and King (2012) recommend that for this reason, frontline casino staff should be equipped with emotional management skills to perceive, understand and regulating their emotions during encounters, thus improving performance in service encounters thereby enhancing customer perceptions of service quality.

During a pre-intervention interview, one manager spoke about the environment created in casinos in order to draw customers into the situation and promote a gambling experience. This includes the machines, the sensory experience of the casino floor including lights and constant ringing of machines as well as the themed environment which lends itself to escapism by allowing customers to escape the reality of their daily lives. Petrillose and Brewer (2000) argue that customers often revisit casinos in Las Vegas that provide the best comprehensive consumer experience, thereby suggesting the importance of the gambling experience for customer retention. Liu and Wan (2011) point out that the attractiveness of the physical casino

environment as well as aspects of the servicescape such as ambience, décor and cleanliness have a considerable impact on customer satisfaction.

The manager also highlighted the importance of human interaction in the service experience, and how customers could play slots online but preferred to come in to the casino due to the human element. In addition, the importance of informal conversation and personal interaction between customers and hosts was highlighted in the findings from the interviews as an important aspect of service behaviours. Such behaviours by slots hosts which serve to make customers feel welcome and known, can assist in encouraging customers to return to the casino and be retained by the business. These findings were substantiated by Liu & Wan (2011) who found that slots players in Macau were impressed by frontline staff who remembered their names, spoke to them about their personal lives rather than just gambling, taught them how to play slots machines, wished them good luck and congratulated them when they had won.

Management also highlighted that even when there was a technical problem with a slots machine, there was a tendency of customers to blame a person (who can be held accountable) rather than a machine. Such scape-goating practices allow individuals to blame a person who can be held accountable for their problem rather than a non-living entity such as a slot machine. Brown (1997) states that customers prefer a real, human being to accept responsibility for a technology failure and provide an apology, thus suggesting that service failures involving technology should be followed up by human service recovery. In addition, human service recovery offers the benefit of empathizing with the customer which contributes to perceptions of fairness and interactional justice.

Negative attitudes towards customers and in particular, the lack of positive body language by hosts was seen by managers as a major area of improvement for frontline staff. The perceptions created by negative body language, lack of eye contact when interacting with customers and social grouping by hosts on the floor when customers required assistance, were seen to create a negative impression of service in the slots area. In relation to customer perceptions of negative body language of staff and an apparent lack of enthusiasm, Breytenbach (2001) notes that within the service environment bodily appearance is the first indicator of a person's character and behaviour in social settings. Body posture can also be seen in the service context as being either too stiff which is perceived as being uptight, or too loose which seen as being a sign of slacking. This research suggests that frontline staff at Casino X should display more positive

body language in order to appear professional to customers thereby creating positive perceptions of service at the casino as well as good expectations of service behaviours.

Wan (2013) points out that due to being trained in providing excellent service, frontline service staff often engage in surface acting by displaying inauthentic facial expressions and body language to convey positive emotion. It was evident from the findings that emerged from observations that assessing customer body language could be utilised by slots hosts to identify frustrated and angry customers. Wang, Luo and Tai (2017) support this finding by suggesting that frontline service staff in the Taiwanese hotel industry should be trained in observational skills to identify body language cues and facial expressions indicating a customer's emotional state, so as to predict their hidden needs and thereby provide excellent service experiences.

During the focus group discussion, hosts mentioned how after informing customers of how to play the slots machines, customers' would repeat the same behaviours and ask hosts the same questions regarding the rules of playing the machines. It is expected that the language barrier between hosts and guests in a multicultural context could have played a part in this repeat behaviour. Similarly Wan (2009) found that the diversified workforce in Macau created many challenges for casino management, with conflicts and misunderstandings often arising due to communication challenges linked to cultural differences and language barriers. In addition, Liu & Wan (2011) found language barriers between customers and staff to be a cause of customer dissatisfaction.

Due to the prevalence of low cost alcohol at casinos, high levels of alcohol consumption amongst patrons are commonplace (Mathes, 2014). Wu and Chen (2013) note that casino gambling correlates with social problems such as alcohol abuse, drug addiction, domestic violence, bankruptcy, divorce and unlawful sexual activities. Steele & Joseph (1990) points out that alcohol negatively impacts people's ability to process information from their surroundings and limits their attention to only the most noticeable internal and external environmental cues. Alcohol consumption is linked with poor decision-making, increased risk taking, a lack of understanding of gambling rules, a propensity to bet higher amounts, overstated confidence in one's ability to win and a distorted evaluation of the benefits and costs of gambling (French, Maclean & Etner, 2008). This can reduce a gambler's ability to play slots machines in the correct manner and may be a possible explanation for customers repeatedly asking hosts to explain how to play the machines.

Another key finding was the impact of intercultural encounters during service failures, which often involved long service delays for the customer. In such situations, abusive language from an Indian or White guest towards a black host would demoralize the host who would then disengage from the service interaction. Excerpts from the interview with the manager suggest that such situations were racialized by Black hosts who were often over-sensitive. Under such circumstances, abusive language from Indian and White guests was often interpreted as racism, resulting in disengagement, which was evident through body language and feelings of intimidation from the hosts' perspective. When triangulating interview findings with the focus group discussion and observations, it was evident that racism towards hosts did occur on the casino floor from a host and researcher's perspective of events.

According to the manager, the defensive reaction by hosts to abusive language from customers would be interpreted by the customer as poor CS. This would create a self-fulfilling cycle beginning with the host's interpretation of racist behaviour from the customer (whether the customer's interaction was discriminatory or not), resulting in defensive behaviour from the slots host which often involved withdrawal or slowing down of service behaviours. The reactive defensive behaviour from the host was then interpreted as even poorer service behaviour by the customer, thereby justifying the customer's (supposed) initial discriminatory behaviour and resulting in a complaint to the supervisor.

The findings from the situation analysis will now be discussed in relation to the implications for planning the CS participatory intervention.

## **5.8 Implications for Intervention Planning**

Findings from the pre-intervention research interviews, focus group and observations identified the need to equip frontline staff with observational skills to identify body language indicating a customer's need for assistance. The interviews also revealed a need to increase the cultural awareness of frontline staff to deal with diverse customers effectively as well as improve communication skills for dealing with service interactions. In addition, the focus group, interviews and observations also highlighted the need to further investigate and understand factors that negatively impacted CS by frontline staff. A participatory style intervention was selected by the researcher as a suitable mechanism for encouraging involvement by slots host to identify CS challenges as well as take ownership and encourage buy-in from frontline staff to improve CS (Waterman, 2001).

Findings from both the slots hosts' focus group and managers' interviews were utilised to develop objectives for the intervention. Some of these findings included the impact of negative service interactions on the mood of frontline staff thereby affecting subsequent service interactions, as well as responses to perceived racism from customers resulting in disengagement of slots hosts.

Deficient slots machines with ineffective card readers and problematic IT software as well as inefficient service processes and high workloads of slots staff were also identified as challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent service. Further investigation of these factors occurred through the flip-charting group activity planned to be used during the intervention (discussed later). Researchers provided recommendations to management regarding the identification of these internal organisational factors affecting CS at Casino X, through a management report. As a result of the findings of the pre-intervention interviews, focus group and observation the objectives of the intervention were:

1. To provide an opportunity for slots staff to explore challenges in providing excellent CS and generate solutions to these challenges
2. To equip frontline staff with observational skills to identify body language indicating a customer's need for assistance
3. To improve the cultural knowledge of slots hosts to enhance their ability to deal with diverse customers
4. To improve slots hosts ability to communicate effectively with guests regarding CS processes

Considering that one of the main aims of the intervention was to understand challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent customers service, the intervention used group discussion and flip-charting to get hosts, technicians, supervisors and managers to identify service challenges facing frontline staff, as well as to develop their own solutions to these challenges.

In relation to the findings regarding defensive behaviour from Black hosts towards Indian and White guests, as a result of past discrimination, a model for dealing with offensive customers during cross-cultural interactions was adapted by the researcher as a result of the pre-intervention interviews and focus groups with hosts and technicians (Human, 2005). The model aimed to train hosts to focus on gathering the facts of a service situation where they felt they

were being stereotyped by a customer, make a decision to resolve the issues, take the necessary action and seek feedback to determine if customer needs had been met. The model for interacting with diverse customers took the approach of seeing a situation where a host is being negatively stereotyped by a customer as an opportunity to falsify that stereotype by exceeding service expectations, so as to result in empowerment of the host and reduce the perpetuation of negative stereotypes by customers (see Appendix G).

Feedback from customer surveys (conducted by the organisation) regarding unfriendly attitudes towards customers by frontline staff were communicated to frontline staff during the intervention to make staff aware of how guests were experiencing service at the casino, so as to provide disconfirming information regarding service standards. The importance of body language displayed by hosts in the casino environment was also discussed within groups and applied theatre was utilised to get participants to view and interpret the meaning and messages evoked through one's body position and posture. Hosts were also encouraged to share their strategies for dealing with diverse customers, managing their moods on the job and dealing with difficult customers.

The participatory CS intervention also used reflection on video footage to train staff on how to identify body language cues indicating a need for assistance, frustration and anger on the part of customers. Furthermore, role play situations developed from service situations identified in the observations and described in the interviews and focus groups, were used to allow hosts and technicians to use the communication models and body language techniques to resolve typical customer queries. For example, a situation where a host was being summoned by more than one customer at a time was used to allow hosts to apply their learnings as well as develop and share their solutions with each other. Wang *et al.*, (2017) highlights that effective training methods for CS programmes identified by both frontline staff and managers in the Taiwanese hotel industry included a peer knowledge sharing method, where frontline staff shared their experiences of successfully dealing with customers, as well as a coaching method involving a junior staff member learning through observing a senior interacting with a customer. Consequently, the participatory nature of the intervention developed for frontline staff was comprised of a knowledge-sharing aspect, however details regarding the structure of the intervention will be provided in the following chapter.

## **5.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter sought to describe the situation analysis phase of the intervention. Findings from the pre-intervention focus groups and interviews with frontline staff and management were discussed. In addition, participant observation notes were analysed. These findings were utilised together with the briefing from management for the development of the CS intervention to address CS challenges at Casino X. A participatory intervention using interactive methods was adopted in order to address the challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent service. The following chapter discusses the delivery of the intervention and includes reflective notes taken by the researcher during participant observation to provide a descriptive narrative of how the intervention was conducted.

## **Chapter 6: Framework Development and Implementation of the Intervention**

### **6.1 Introduction**

This chapter will seek to provide a descriptive account of the implementation and delivery of the intervention to address CS challenges at Casino X. A discussion of the planning of the programme content through a participatory action research process will be provided resulting in a development of a framework for the intervention. Thereafter a background to the framework that was developed for the workshop will be presented using information from the situation analysis and the researcher's observation experiences. This will be followed by a discussion of the data emerging from flipchart activities conducted during the series of workshops where groups were tasked to identify challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS, as well as the impact of those challenges and possible solutions to them. Stories collected by the researcher during the intervention, that were documented by frontline staff regarding their work experiences in dealing with difficult customers as well as guests from different cultural groups, will also be critically discussed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the intervention, areas of improvement and future directions for participatory interventions addressing CS within Casino X.

### **6.2 Programme Content Planning and Activities**

The design of the intervention and programme content planning took a participatory approach through the use of pre-intervention interviews and focus groups to identify customer challenges facing frontline staff as outlined in the literature on participatory action research (Nastasi et al., 2000; Reason & Bradbury, 2009; Roskam, 2009). At the outset, information gathering and synthesis was used to retrieve and organise information that would assist in intervention design. As proposed by the intervention research model of Rothman and Thomas (1994), a comprehensive review of the literature was conducted to promote a clear understanding of the problem and determine the feasibility of possible interventions (Bailey-Dempsey & Reid, 1996). As discussed in detail in Chapter 2, a literature search was conducted in order to identify relevant theory to be addressed in the intervention including CS (Johnston & Clark, 2008; Snow & Yantovich, 2010), communicating with customers (Grant and Borchers, 2003; Emerald,

2015), body language (Bowden, 2010; Brislin & Yoshida, 1994) and cultural difference (Albert, 1995; Cox, 1994; Govender, 2010; Hofstede, 2001; Human, 2005).

Thereafter findings from the pre-intervention interviews and focus group with frontline service staff and managers' were utilised as the primary source of data for obtaining a deeper understanding of frontline CS issues at the casino. Managers and staff were thus viewed as collaborators in identifying CS challenges and suggesting possible solutions that could be incorporated into the intervention. Management objectives were also taken into account in the design of the intervention, however the researcher took care to balance research interests with management objectives for the intervention and prioritized research findings when designing the intervention. Learnings from the pre-intervention interviews and focus group discussions in combination with the literature and theoretical approaches discussed in chapter two, were used to plan a framework for the workshop and content areas, with particular reference to effective frontline CS behaviours, effective communication, problem-solving, body language and cultural difference. Foundational understandings of the concept of CS were provided for staff illustrating the importance of CS processes, service delivery and the CS environment. This was followed by feedback from an online customer satisfaction survey that was provided by management for use in the intervention. The researcher was not permitted by management to share data from the customer satisfaction survey which was thus omitted from the write up of the thesis.

As referred to above, the insights gained by the researcher through the literature review and situation analysis created a lens through which the researcher developed the content areas for the workshop, as well as viewed the findings that emerged from the participatory activities during the workshop. The workshop was thus grounded in participants' learning from their own work experiences and sharing these best practices with others to improve service as suggested by Gallos (2006). Due to being grounded in the context, participants were viewed as being aware of the subtle characteristics of the environment that may impact the implementation of a plan to improve CS.

As a result of the participatory approach undertaken, the facilitators of the intervention were informed of the relevant CS literature, theoretical underpinnings of the CS issues facing frontline staff at the organisation and CS best practices. In line with PAR methodology, the intervention took an organic, learner-centred approach by allowing participants to shape the group discussions as well as identify challenges in providing excellent CS, discuss the impact

of cultural difference on CS interactions as well as determine the methods they use to communicate across language barriers (Slabbert, de Kock & Hattingh, 2009).

Due to the intervention taking a participatory approach, group feedback that emerged during the intervention also determined the topics of group discussion and content of the workshop. At such times, the facilitator took a flexible approach to the agenda when important issues concerning CS challenges surfaced during workshops so as to allow the group time to critically analyse such issues and identify possible solutions.

In relation to learning methods employed during the intervention, video analysis of CS situations was used to train staff on how to identify positive and negative body language cues of customers, in order to identify frustrated or angry customers in need of assistance, thus allowing them to pre-empt requests for assistance (Ekman, 2003). Critical analysis of video material through group discussion contributed to the participatory approach to learning where participants were encouraged to share their work experiences in dealing with angry customers and identify similarities across body language cues in relation to the video material. Role play and theatre was seen as being an important medium to allow participants to re-enact real-life CS scenarios they faced on the casino floor and learn from each other in terms of how to respond successfully (Stuart & Tax, 2004). Ice-breaker activities using warm-up theatre exercises were utilised at the beginning of the intervention and before the skit, to allow staff to shed inhibitions and express themselves through their bodies as well as pick up the energy in the room (Boal, 2002). Small group-work including flipchart activities documenting CS challenges which were then reflected through a skit and critically discussed, were employed to allow staff to actively engage mentally, emotionally and physically, whilst increasing opportunities for self-discovery and learning from peer interactions (Holden & Zimmerman, 2009). In addition, when developing the skit, participants were asked to apply learnings from the intervention to solve the customer's problems in relevant scenarios to help learners to practice skills learned and use insight gained from interactions with peers.

The intervention was given the name "CS Superheroes" with the idea coming from viewing the frontline staff as superheroes, due to having to exhibit resilience and grit in responding to customers in a negative frame of mind, as a consequence of financial loss on slot machines. This name for the course was selected by the researcher due to staff being able to identify with the name, the majority of whom were between the ages of 21 – 30 years. The training booklet containing models for addressing CS challenges (identified from pre-intervention findings) as

well as the PowerPoint presentation used during the intervention were adorned with images of superheroes from Marvel Comics such as Spiderman and the Incredible Hulk. This theme was chosen to engage participants as it was seen as a theme that would resonate with this demographic.

The programme framework developed for the intervention is provided in table 4 below.

**Table 14. Framework for the Intervention - Half Day**

<b>Module</b>	<b>Activity</b>	<b>Planning</b>
1. Introduction to CS	Group Discussion	CS Theory used to present definitions and provide a structure for understanding the CS environment and CS delivery (Snow & Yantovich, 2010 Zeithmal <i>et al.</i> , 2009). Group discussion used to gain participants' understanding of CS in their roles
2. Feedback from Customer Survey	Group Feedback	Feedback from customer satisfaction survey provided to staff. Customer feedback suggesting need for CS improvement was presented so as to create dissatisfaction with the status quo (Lewin, 1948) and a need for change in service provision
3. Challenges in Providing Excellent CS	Flipchart Activity & Feedback	Interactive activity allowing for recording of challenges participants faced in providing excellent CS & solutions to challenges (Senge, 1994). Views of CS challenges from the perceptions of frontline staff, informed group discussions & were used in the skit to create practical learning outcomes.
4. Body Language	Video Analysis & Group Discussion	Youtube video of a frontline desk airline employee dealing with customers who had experienced a delay. Examples of the body language of angry & frustrated customers requiring attention was provided. After video analysis of customer body language, staff were asked to relate this to body language cues they observed from customers on the casino floor (Ekman, 2003). Reflective practice was used to gather group intelligence and share this experiential knowledge to encourage proactive service behaviours.
5. Communicating Effectively with Customers	Role Play	Facilitators took participants through the Model of Effective Communication for Problem-Solving in Service Interactions, which was developed from the pre-intervention findings. To provide guidelines for staff when dealing with difficult customers, a Conflict Resolution Model was presented. Scenarios developed from pre-intervention findings were role played allowing staff to apply the above models & follow specific procedures in typical service interactions.
<b>BREAK</b>		
5. Dealing with Different Cultures	Sharing Diverse CS Experiences	Frontline staff asked to write down scenarios at work where they experienced challenges in serving a customer from a different culture. Participants who felt comfortable shared experiences & best practices of how to deal with customers from different cultures effectively (Hofstede, 2001). Participants taken through the Intercultural Encounter Model for Dealing with Offensive Customers (Human, 2005) adapted by the researcher from the pre-intervention findings. Frontline staff also asked to document scenarios where they had to deal with difficult customers at work.

		Group discussion used to share group knowledge of how to respond effectively.
6. Skit: Challenges in Providing Play and Feedback Excellent CS		In groups, staff asked to re-enact a scenario displaying a CS challenge (identified in the earlier flipchart activity). Props such as hats and masks as well as a real slot machine were available to encourage realism and allow participants to immerse themselves in the role. Staff were encouraged to use tools they had learnt in the workshop to resolve the CS issue presented (Boal, 1992)
Motivational Talk	Presentation	Positive feedback from the customer satisfaction survey was provided to motivate staff and illustrate their impact on customers.

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The role-plays were used as a learning method to allow staff opportunities to practice and apply models for communicating effectively with customers and resolve conflict during typical service interactions they faced on a daily basis in the work environment. After the role plays, participants were asked to reflect on their experience and receive peer feedback, a process that was mentioned by Fertleman et al. (2005). Role plays allow for increasing skills through practice thus contributing to skills efficacy (Berkhof, 2011; Bandura, 1997). Video analysis allows for observational learning to occur where the participant could analyse the situation from an observer's viewpoint rather than from within the situation, allowing for new learnings to emerge (Walker & Dotger, 2012).

In the session on how to deal with customers from different cultures, staff were asked to record their experiences of challenges in dealing with customers from different cultural groups. Thereafter staff were informed of typical values, customs, attitudes and behaviours of individuals from African, European and Asian cultures so as increase understanding and staff knowledge of what types of behaviour to expect from such customers (Hofstede, 2001). Staff were asked to identify perceived positive characteristics they had observed in dealing with customers from specific cultural groups. Group reflection then promoted knowledge sharing and sharing of best practices in dealing with customers from different cultures. Subsequently the Model for Dealing with Offensive Customers during Cross-cultural Interactions (Human, 2005), adapted by the researcher from the pre-intervention findings, was delivered to staff as a means of providing staff with guidelines on how to deal with discrimination during CS interactions, which was a finding from the pre-intervention research (see Appendix G for more information).

During the flipchart activity in the workshop which sought to identify CS challenges from a frontline perspective, staff were involved in identifying and analysing challenges impacting CS as well as developing solutions to these challenges. The flipchart notes were used to develop a script to a skit presenting a CS problem, that the actors solved through identifying their own solutions or using techniques learnt during the workshop. Reflection on the solution presented to resolving the problem within the enacted scenario, also created opportunities to critique the solutions provided and suggest additional best practices used by other team members under such circumstances. This process of flip-charting CS challenges and identifying solutions, was a skill that was learned by participants and which could be used after the intervention for continuous learning and taking solution-focussed action towards new challenges. This activity served to increase engagement as well as allow application of the new knowledge and skills attained during the intervention.

### **6.2.1 The Participatory Activities**

Participatory Action Research (PAR) is a social process which recognises that learning is a shared process that occurs within a connected social system (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). PAR aims to challenge and change social practices which are established in social interactions between people, thus recognising that changing social practices is a social process.

Experiential learning (learning through reflecting on experiences) forms a foundational learning theory in PAR where experience is seen as resulting from continuous interaction between individuals and the environment (Kolb, 2002)). Reflective practice is implemented through a cyclical process of critical action and reflection to analyse, experiment with and develop new social practices, which was considered in the activities selected for the workshop. Here opportunities are used to encourage open and honest communication to develop practical and collaborative learnings for improving social practices. The researcher/facilitator attempted to critically engage participants by asking them to analyse their current work practices and thus to reflect on what they were currently doing. Participants were then asked to identify the preferred practices, through engaging in a process of learning by sharing and doing with others. The PAR intervention was aimed at co-generating solutions to challenges that the frontline experience through group activities and reflections. These group activities allowed the group intelligence to be harnessed through staff developing their own strategies for dealing with customers under specific circumstances.

It should be noted that when taking a participatory action research approach, both the consultant and participants are viewed as co-learners in the change process (Cummings & Worley, 2009). There is no expert authority that is assigned to the researcher. Team members are seen as having deep contextual knowledge about the organisation and how it functions whilst consultants have the ability to provide diagnostic instruments and design interventions for learning about the organisation.

Action research is seen as being fully participatory when organisational members are involved in designing and conducting the research (Gallos, 2006). Action research views involvement in the research process as leading to psychological ownership of the problem facing the organisation and co-creation of goals or actions that are meaningful to all participants. Involving staff in the design phase allowed for buy-in, ensured the intervention met employee needs and drew on staff experience and skills (Bailey-Dempsey & Reid, 1996).

### **6.2.2 Facilitation process**

The eight workshops were facilitated by the researcher and a co-facilitator (discussed in detail below). Reason and Bradbury (2009) note that various skills are required at different times by action research facilitators during a workshop. At times facilitators may need to provide structure and time boundaries by following an agenda whilst at other times facilitators may need to be present in the moment so as to be alert to important issues that surface during group discussion. At such points, facilitators may need to display flexibility to dig deeper into these issues which may result in the development of solutions and increased group engagement. More directive facilitation is required at certain points in a workshop and sometimes facilitators will need to challenge, inquire and question in order to achieve learning outcomes. Listening at the appropriate times as well as nurturing and supporting participants are also competencies required by action research facilitators. In addition, the ability to work with energy flows in a group is important from a facilitation standpoint to enhance engagement and participation. Being tuned in to the group's energy by noticing body language and atmosphere in the room, as well as being aware of one's own intrinsic energy as a facilitator and how one impacts the facilitation space, are important skills required by facilitators in action research interventions. The above-mentioned facilitation guidelines developed by Reason & Bradbury (2009) were followed in delivering the participatory workshops to improve interaction and involvement,

while the learner-centred way in which facilitation was done ensured practical learning outcomes.

A participatory approach was taken in the facilitation of the intervention where the facilitators' role was presented to participants largely as a conduit to facilitate a knowledge-sharing environment through group discussion. A narrative of the participant observations conducted shall be provided to make the workshop experiences evident.

### **6.3 Programme delivery**

The programme was disseminated to 105 frontline staff at casino X to address CS challenges facing the organisation. Staff included a mix of frontline service staff, supervisors and managers at Casino X as depicted in table 13.

### 6.3.1 Socio-demographic Background of Participants

**Table 15: Socio-demographic Breakdown of Participants in the Intervention**

<b>Socio-Demographic Characteristics</b>	<b>n</b>	<b>N (%)</b>
<b>Gender</b>	89	
Male		50 (56.2%)
Female		39 (43.8%)
<b>Age</b>	105	
18 – 25		17 (16.1%)
26 – 35		66 (62.9%)
36 - 45		22 (21%)
<b>Race</b>	95	
Black		58 (61.1%)
White		6 (6.3%)
Indian		28 (29.5%)
Coloured		3 (3.2%)
<b>Job Title</b>	104	
Service Level		62 (60%)
Supervisor Level		34 (32.7%)
Manager Level		8 (7.3%)
Other		0 (0%)
<b>Work Experience</b>	98	
0 – 2 years		15 (14.3%)
3 – 5 years		14 (13.3%)
6 – 10 years		46 (43.8%)
11 – 20 years		19 (18.1%)
20+ years		4 (3.8%)

Socio-demographic data were collected to gain an understanding of the characteristics of the participants. 62.9% of workshop participants were between the ages of 26 – 35 years old. Of the 84.8 % of participants who reported their gender, 56.2 % were male and 43.8% were female. In terms of racial breakdown, a large majority of 61.1% of participants were Black, 29.5% were Indian, 6.3% were White and 3.2% were Coloured. With regards to work experience, the majority of workshop participants (43.8%) had between 6 – 10 years’ work experience.

In terms of job title, 60% of respondents were in service level occupations whose jobs entailed serving customers on the frontline. On service level there were 59 slots hosts (56.2%), 12 technicians (11.4%), one stores controller (1%), one trainee technician (1%) and one gaming technical assistant (1%). A third of respondents (32.7%) worked on supervisor level, and of this staff cohort there were nineteen slots supervisors (18.1%), twelve slots technicians (11.4%) and three slots lead technicians (2.9%). On manager level there were four Shift managers (3.8%) and one Gaming Technical manager, Recruitment manager, Employee Services manager and Human Resources manager.

### **6.3.2 Detailed account of the workshops**

The role of the researcher was one of designer of the learning framework and lead facilitator. The participatory intervention was conducted with groups of approximately twenty staff at the HR training room on the client's premises. There were two different sessions per day from 8am -12pm and 1pm – 5pm, of which participants only attended one session. The researcher presented the first three modules of the intervention: Introduction to CS, Customer Satisfaction Survey Results, Flipchart activity on CS Challenges as well as the module on Dealing with Different Cultures. The co-facilitator presented the module on body language whilst both facilitators assisted in leading reflective debriefs of group activities in relation to applying the theoretical content.

When the researcher was not facilitating, he sat at the back of the training room and conducted observations and took notes while the co-facilitator guided the group discussion. Directly after the workshops, the researcher also took reflective notes of his experiences as a facilitator.

In being cognisant of the possible power dynamics and influencing factors, efforts were made to create an environment of open and honest communication through a fun ice-breaker using body percussion (discussed in detail below). In addition, a warm-up theatre exercise called “Moving through a Space” was used where participants moved in a circular fashion around the facilitator who was situated in the centre of the circle. The facilitator called out words and adjectives such as strong, tired, bubbles and Rocky Balboa and participants had to express the word through their body movements. The aim of these activities were to get participants to shed their inhibitions and allowed them to become more open to alternative experiences resulting in new learnings. This served to loosen up participants and allow them to begin expressing themselves through their body and build their improvisation skills, in preparation

for the upcoming skit and role play (Boal, 2002).. Reason and Bradbury (2009) note that creative and non-verbal approaches harness greater energy and commitment, allow people to integrate their intuitive and rational minds as well as access experiential knowing and collective wisdom which can lead to critical insights into challenges facing the group.

The researcher's reflective notes of the workshops are provided below.

**Workshop 1:** 28 October 2014

**Time:** 8:00 – 12. 00 (morning session)

**Location:** Training room, Human Resources Department

**Researcher's role:** Facilitator and Participant Observer

### **Atmosphere**

There was low interaction and energy in the morning session with a late start to the workshop. By 8.15 am everyone had arrived. An ice-breaker called African Rain was implemented using body percussion where individuals use their bodies to create rhythmic sounds including thigh-slapping, clicking of fingers and rubbing of hands together. There was positive feedback from the ice-breaker, however another ice-breaker was needed and an applied theatre warm-up exercises involving participants moving in a circle around the facilitator and displaying behaviour to express adjectives spoken by the facilitator (Moving through a Space), was implemented to pick up the energy in the room.

### **Reflective Notes**

Research statistics were provided to staff from the CS feedback that had been generated through online emails sent to customers requesting feedback, as well as via CS rating terminals situated on the casino floor. These statistics were prepared in advance by the facilitator and presented to delegates, including selective qualitative statements from customers concerning complaints of poor service at the casino. This seemed to have taken some participants by surprise and created a sense of shock and visible despondency which may have slightly demotivated some candidates. However, after being asked to approach the comments from

customers from a constructive perspective, participants began looking at ways to find solutions to problems. This was achieved by using an activity where groups were tasked to flip-chart challenges that participants' faced in providing excellent CS. Delegates were asked to identify three challenges they faced on a daily basis that prevented them from providing excellent CS and to note the impact of these challenges. Thereafter delegates were asked to identify possible solutions to each of the challenges. Flipcharts were used to allow groups to record their feedback and present back to the class. Process issues were mentioned by various slots hosts and technicians as justification for poor CS. At this point, the researcher highlighted the use of problem-solving techniques such as the Toyota 5 Why's method (Liker & Franz, 2011) to identify root causes of customer complaints. From looking at common themes that emerged across the various groups in the plenary discussion, the challenges identified by participants pointed largely to equipment and process issues as being the source of CS problems. In addition, staff shortages and communication problems were also highlighted as common factors influencing CS.

The flipchart notes detailing challenges in providing excellent CS, as well as the impact of these challenges and possible solutions, served to inform the next activity by being used to develop a story line for the group's upcoming skit. One group's play showed an Indian woman removing a Black male customer's card from a machine. The customer had left his card on a machine that he was not playing. In this situation, the casino rules create a grey area as gamblers are not allowed to reserve machines by leaving their cards inserted while they are not playing the machine, however players are also not allowed to remove another guest's cards. This scenario depicted by the group pointed to typical problems that are faced by slots hosts which are then racialized by guests. The discussion thereafter indicated that hosts should use process and policy as the point of departure in dealing with these issues. In addition, hosts mentioned that they would try to get both individuals to recognize their collective identity i.e. "we are all gamblers" rather than viewing themselves as individuals from different race groups.

The session on body language began with facilitators putting the lights off in the training room, playing a house music video called "Body Language" by a South African DJ Gino Brown. This was a freestyle dance session with the other facilitator playing a djembe drum to the music. This freestyle dance session introduced increased engagement and motivated staff after the previous one and a half hours of group activities and information dissemination. Staff were very responsive to the music and they had to be toned down due to the levels of noise created.

After the lively introduction to the session, the co-facilitator presented different body language cues to identify different types of customers on the casino floor in order for hosts to pre-empt customers requiring attention and pro-actively dealing with them before complaints arise. Considering the common complaint by slots hosts of being short-staffed on the floor, engaging in pro-active behaviours would appear to only be relevant during quieter times. The facilitator explained that typical behaviours to look out for in guests who may require assistance were pacing on the floor, looking around, playing with hands or fingers, hand gestures away from body and rapid head movements. The body language of frustrated guests included behaviours such as biting one's lip, shaking one's head to signify "No!", having a sour look on the face, keeping a fixed gaze on the person who caused the problem (indicating aggression), making fast and sharp movements with one's hands as well as throwing one's hands in the air. The facilitator pointed out behaviours to look out for in angry guests which included eyebrows tilted downwards towards the centre of the face, glare of the eyes, deep and excessive breathing, standing straight up with a puffed up chest, making fist with hands, hands trembling and a narrowing of the lips (Ekman, 2003).

Participants were also taken through different steps of getting another person to identify you as a friend, by them (the other person) interpreting your body language as friendly. Hosts were taught to smile and raise their eyebrows when meeting someone (signifying that you recognise them as someone you know). When approaching guests, hosts were encouraged to display empty hands with palms at their sides facing forward (indicating lack of weapons to the primordial brain thus suggesting the person is a friend). In addition, hosts were encouraged to approach customers with no arms covering the belly area, signifying trust by exposing a vulnerable area (Bowden, 2010).

Body Language was by far the best session of the day. It was very well presented, with an engaging and energetic performance from the co-facilitator. The group was enjoying the interaction. What could be improved was the facilitators use of the term "fake it till you make it" to describe how to react positively to customers even when you are in a bad mood yourself (stemming from a previous negative interaction with a customer). The researcher who observed this session did not agree with this statement and spoke to the facilitator after the session to rather appeal to values of human service than asking staff to fake their behaviours. In hindsight, this statement was hypocritical considering that teaching staff how to display positive body language cues is in fact a manipulation of the customer's senses. In addition, research suggests

that even when a person is not happy, a smile can improve positive feelings by increasing air flow through the nose and cooling blood to the brain, whilst facial expressions provide feedback to a person about how they are feeling, thus confirming positive feelings (Labroo & Dong, 2014).

Thereafter a video was shown illustrating CS behaviours by an airline front desk attendant who had to deal with customer reactions to a flight cancellation on New Year's Eve. Video analysis using the pause button and reflection were used to identify and discuss body language cues indicating angry and frustrated customers. In small groups, staff were asked to think of similar experiences they may have had on the casino floor and how they dealt with these situations. During group work they shared their experiences of difficult customer situations and wrote down similar experiences they had had on the casino floor in relation to the video. These narratives were collected by facilitators and thematically analysed after the workshop in order to identify themes concerning host's experiences in dealing with difficult customers (discussed later in more detail). At this point, group discussion resulted in participants identifying constructive behaviours to address such challenges.

The researcher facilitated the session on cultural difference and participants discussed their experiences of difficult encounters with guests from another culture and how they reacted in such situations. The facilitator began asking participants about the perceived positive characteristics they had experienced and observed in dealing with customers from an African, European and Asian culture. Participants provided considerable feedback on perceived characteristics identified in dealing with guests from an African culture and little feedback was provided in terms of dealing with guests from European and Indian cultures. This could have been a result of the majority of participants being largely from Black and Indian race groups. When mentioning cultural traits of Chinese customers, participants mentioned that Chinese customers often did not communicate well in English and were often aggressive and would swear when unhappy during their interactions with hosts. Cultural behaviours of African, Indian, Asian and European cultures were discussed and presented. Model for Dealing with Offensive Customers during Cross-cultural Interactions (mentioned above) was developed by the researcher specifically for the workshop in relation to the research findings of the pre-intervention interviews with management, where it was found that predominantly Black frontline staff were experiencing discrimination largely from Indian customers. The model was adapted from Human (2005) and takes the participant through a process of being self-aware, not stereotyping the guest and understanding the context of the situation. The host is then urged

to gather relevant information to obtain facts regarding the customer's problem whilst remaining calm. The host should then educate the customer on procedure and take action to solve the customer's problem. By providing a swift solution, the host can then break the perpetuation of the customer's stereotypes which can occur if the host reacts defensively to prejudice by withholding service. Exceeding service standards in this situation empowers the hosts and can increase their self-confidence (for more information on Model for Dealing with Offensive Customers during Cross-cultural Interactions see Appendix G).

At the end of the workshop, staff were asked to use their flipchart notes to create a storyline to a play depicting typical challenges they faced in providing excellent CS. Using scenarios pointed out in the flipchart notes, staff depicted pressurized CS situations, often occurring at peak times, where one host had to deal with several customer requests simultaneously. Participants then illustrated appropriate responses to these situation during the play, by using the CS models which formed part of the course content which had been delivered earlier. Staff were provided with props and the entire process was an enjoyable experience serving to pick up the energy in the room.

## **Workshop 2:**

**\*Please note that information regarding intervention activities are not discussed in relation to Observation 2 so as to prevent duplication from Observation 1.**

**Date:** 5 November 2014

**Time:** 13:00 – 17:00 (afternoon session)

**Location:** Training room, Human Resources Department

**Researcher's role:** Facilitator and Participant Observer

### **Atmosphere**

Although being after lunch, this session had a high level of participation from delegates. There was a positive energy in the room, with participants keen to get the workshop going and get involved in the interactive activities.

### **Reflective Notes**

After communicating the customer satisfaction survey results to staff, there was a lot of othering and blaming of the supervisors by a few of the slots hosts. This could have been a result of staff not wanting to accept negative feedback from the customer satisfaction survey and place blame on leadership for the poor CS evaluation.

One participants noted the problem of supervisors not letting hosts go into other sections to help customers. This was due to some slots host shirking their duties when allowed to go into other host's sections, as they were not responsible for those areas. Such behaviour resulted in the application of stringent work rules where hosts had to remain in their designated sections, which did not benefit the customer. One participant in the group began constantly making negative comments about the supervisors and used the session to vent frustration at the supervisors (sups). Sups in the session felt under attack and defended themselves by trying to put down the young host with negative comments. At one point, the facilitator had to step in to silence the slots host in order to keep the workshop moving in a positive direction, as the host was continually providing negative feedback regarding supervisors.

In response, the facilitator used the Victim/Empowerment model to deal with the othering and to point hosts towards looking at themselves first and what they could do before blaming others. This model was applied in accordance with guidelines provided by Karpman (2004). The Victim/Empowerment model is a model of perception that individuals have about the world and how they fit into it i.e. their self-concept. The Victim model holds that certain people unconsciously see themselves as “victims” being persecuted when in difficult situations and wait to be rescued by someone i.e. the hero. However the Empowerment model shifts this dynamic and rather views the victim from the previous model as a “creator” who can develop a creative response to the persecution. The creator sees the persecutor as someone who challenges him to improve whilst seeking the guidance of a coach to make the right decision to improve the situation (Karpman, 2004). The idea behind the model is taking responsibility for one’s power to change things when faced with a difficult situation. In this instance, the model was utilised to explain the victim mentality of the host who was constantly blaming supervisors for all his work-related problems. The facilitator tried to shift the host’s thinking towards taking more accountability by being a creator when facing CS problems. However by this stage, the individual had felt as though he was being ganged up on by the supervisors and had disengaged from group discussion.

The facilitator noted that problems between supervisors and hosts needed to be addressed to ensure a healthy relationship by creating a sense of “being on the same team.”

During the intervention, the facilitator referred to one participant as a slots attendant, at which point the participant replied: *“I’m not an attendant, I’m a host.”* This response indicated the need of staff to identify themselves positively in their work role as hosts, which may be seen as a more hospitable and higher-status role in comparison to an attendant. This job title also fitted well with the organisations mission to be the city’s best entertainment destination.

Prior to the session on Body Language, facilitators presented a Model of Effective Communication for Problem-Solving in Service Interactions (see Appendix G – Customer Service Superheroes Training Booklet), which was developed by the facilitator as an outcome of the pre-intervention interviews and focus group. The model began with the host listening attentively to the customer’s problem and understanding the issue, deciding on a solution and taking action, providing feedback to customers on the process, solving the problem and lastly obtaining feedback from the customer to see if their problem had been solved. To provide guidelines for staff when dealing with difficult customers, a Conflict Resolution Model was

presented to assist staff in dealing with such situations (Zemke & Woods, 1999). At first, hosts were to listen to the irate customer, apologize for inconvenience and not take the negative interaction personally. Hosts were then encouraged to acknowledge the customer's request and empathize with the customer, identify the problem and take action to solve problem.

### **6.3.3 Participant feedback during the activities**

Due to there being various similar issues concerning CS challenges being raised both during pre-intervention findings as well as during the participant observations conducted during the workshops, a tabular presentation of pre-intervention findings that were supported in the implementation phase will be provided so as to reduce repetition. In addition, new findings and insights from the participant observation conducted during the workshops will be highlighted. Thereafter additional aspects that only emerged during the workshops will be outlined. In the table below the various issues influencing CS that were raised in the pre-intervention interviews as well as the focus group discussions and which emerged again during the workshops are depicted. Similar findings relating to long process delays, malfunctioning equipment, high workloads and poor communication and team work were highlighted across the situation analysis and in the workshop. In addition, issues concerning diversity related to discrimination from customers, language barriers and negative customer reactions to service failures seemed to have impacted the frontline staff on an affective level.

**Table 16: Findings From Situation Analysis Supported in the Implementation Phase**

SITUATION ANALYSIS		SUPPORTED IN IMPLEMENTATION		NEW FINDINGS DURING IMPLEMENTATION	
Theme (Source)	Quotation	Theme (Source)	Quotation	Theme (Source)	Quotation
CS Challenge Processes (Focus Group)	"...there is a procedure on everything that you do on the floor. There is no way to make it fast, you have to follow the procedure even if it's a minor thing	Dealing with Difficult Customers (Documented Scenario)	"I was busy with jackpots and a card transaction. The cashier is also busy so I have to follow the queue. And the guest will arrive at the cash desk screaming asking why I'm taking so long."	CS Challenges (Participant Observation)	Long waiting periods at cash-desk were seen as a mitigating factor resulting in poor CS. Groups mentioned that a specific cashier should be allocated solely to deal with hosts so as to prevent long waiting periods for customers.
		CS Challenges (Participant Observation)	System errors on the slots machines created frustrated guests and results in CS slowing down due to long procedures		
		CS Challenges (Flipchart Activity)	16% of CS challenges identified during the flipchart activity were viewed as being due to long processes related to bill disputes, inexperienced cashiers & delays from other departments		
CS Challenge – Information Technology and Equipment (Focus Group)	"...they bring a different card reader which blocks the card from being removed which also causes problems ...it's causing too much hassles."  "If the system can be accurate, everything will be fine on the floor."	CS Challenges (Flipchart Activity)	Card reader problems and an old back-end IT system were also sighted as causes of poor CS		
		Challenges in Dealing with Difficult Customers (Documented Scenarios)	"I was involved in a system down situation whereby all our machines were down so as a guest you couldn't cash out from your machine. So I was involved in explaining to the customer the problem and a big time delay for our system to get back up."		

**SITUATION ANALYSIS****SUPPORTED IN IMPLEMENTATION****NEW FINDINGS DURING IMPLEMENTATION**

<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>
		CS Challenges: System/Equipment (Flipchart Activity)	22% of CS challenges identified during the flipchart activity were viewed as being due to a poor IT system and equipment resulting in transfer failures, card jams and system errors		
		Challenges in Dealing with Difficult Customers (Documented Scenarios)	When participants wrote down situations where they had dealt with difficult customers, 48% of responses suggesting the machine malfunctions were the most common cause of customers becoming difficult in their interactions with hosts.		
CS Challenge Workload (Focus Group)	"...cause sometimes you will be standing by one machine and there is like five guests around you. One will be asking you to do something else, the other will ask you for change or cards."  "...technicians are also busy..."	CS Challenges: Staffing (Flipchart Activity)	One group mentioned that staff shortages culminated in situations where one host was being called by several customers at the same time resulting in confusion and stress for hosts.		
		CS Challenge (Participant Observation)	Staff shortages and communication between hosts, cashiers, technicians and supervisors were highlighted as common factors resulting in poor CS.		
CS Challenge Communication And Teamwork (Focus Group)	"The problem is we can't know exactly where is the technician and what they are doing there... And we don't even know how many calls that technician got already..."	CS Challenges: Interpersonal Relationships (Flipchart activity)	29% of CS challenges identified during the flipchart activity were seen as being a result of poor interpersonal relationships i.e. teamwork, communication, morale	CS Challenges: Interpersonal Relationships (Flipchart activity)	"Some of our staff members are not team players, they stand around doing nothing when it's busy."
				CS Challenges: Teamwork (Participant Observation)	The researcher noted complaints made about supervisors by slots hosts as a result of some supervisors shirking and not helping out during busy periods.

**SITUATION ANALYSIS**

**SUPPORTED IN IMPLEMENTATION**

**NEW FINDINGS DURING IMPLEMENTATION**

Theme (Source)	Quotation	Theme (Source)	Quotation	Theme (Source)	Quotation
					"There are some supervisors, we know who they are, that are the problem. We can't do anything about them. Let's do what we can."
CS Challenge Negative Attitudes & Body Language (Interviews)	"...these are the things that are lacking... eye contact, positive body language and I reiterate positive body language, interaction with the guest, acknowledgement of the guest..."	CS Challenge (Participant Observation)		CS Challenges: Interpersonal Relationships (Flipchart activity)	Group discussion revealed that some supervisors were also seen as grouping with hosts on the floor thereby setting a bad example.
The Impact of Diversity on CS Interactions (Interviews)	"Unfortunately the things that have to be addressed are cultural issues...there are more issues with a Black (host) on an Indian customer."	Diversity Problems: Racial Discrimination (Participant Observation)	Some Chinese and elite Indian guests were often seen as being rude and dismissive by slots hosts.	Diversity Problems: Race (Participant Observation)	One white supervisor spoke about how some older Afrikaans guests ask to deal with white managers only.
	"Because the host has said before that 'we get to you, we sort your machine', when he comes back then the client is saying 'what the %\$#*, we are waiting so %\$#!& long' .... basically demoralises him in that one sentence...They take it personally..."	Challenges in Dealing with Customers from other Cultures: Racism & Differential Treatment (Documented Scenarios)	"It was an Indian lady who stormed on me and went on and on about how stupid we Black people are. I just lost my cool and refused to help her."	Challenges in Dealing with Customers from Other Cultures: Documented Scenarios - Racism & Differential Treatment	"I was called by a Black guest and when I passed one of the machines one guest (Indian) pulled me and asked me for help. I told the guest I will help her when I'm done helping the other guest and she said oh because he's Black. And I said no because he called me first."
	"But the host has seen it the opposite way and (their) defensive wall cuts off their way of communication."			Challenges in Dealing with Customers from Other Cultures: Language Barrier (Documented Scenarios)	"A Chinese guy needed help, they couldn't speak a word of English. I used body language to help him by pointing and predicting what he needed."  When staff documented scenarios where they experienced challenges in dealing with customers from other cultures, 65% recounted situations during

**SITUATION ANALYSIS****SUPPORTED IN IMPLEMENTATION****NEW FINDINGS DURING IMPLEMENTATION**

<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>	<b>Theme (Source)</b>	<b>Quotation</b>
					service interactions where they had experienced language barriers
					"When a guest can speak English but will speak to you in Zulu after telling him or her that you can't speak Zulu."
				Gender Discrimination	One host related an incident where an older Zulu man refused to deal with a female host when having a problem with his machine... "In his culture that is the norm, but now he is in Company X's culture."
Guest Reaction to Service Failure (Focus Group)	"Sometimes somebody can put you in a bad mood, you come in happy and they just put you in a bad mood ... you won't have that bubbly feeling when greeting the guest...."	Staff Recognition (Participant Observation)	"The first time I deal with them and they are angry...by the second time I deal with them I have already shut off."	Guest Reaction to Service Failure (Focus Group)	A supervisor mentioned that one angry customer can upset the others, so he uses humour to put guests in a good mood with his initial interaction.
	"Maybe until you find someone that puts you in the good mood again, cause the guests are not the same. Some of them are very nice and some are very difficult."	Challenges in Dealing with Customers from Other Cultures: Verbal abuse (Documented Scenarios)	"I remember the day when a guest called me and told me that his machine was supposed to pay him and it didn't. I came to him smiling and explained why it didn't because the combination was not in a line. He swore me everybody was looking."	CS Challenges: Difficult Guests (Flipchart activity)	Another group mentioned that rude behaviour from customer resulted in staff slowing down their service behaviours and ignoring customers
		Staff Recognition (Participant Observation)	"Between dealing with management and dealing with angry customers on the floor, it's demotivating between the two."		

### **6.3.4 Additional Comments on the Workshops**

#### **Situations where Hosts Faced Difficult Customers**

In one workshop, a group of hosts noted there were five main situations and processes where hosts faced difficult customers. Firstly, system errors on the slots machines created frustrated guests and results in CS slowing down due to long procedures. When the system goes down tempers flare and guests complain about refunding credits and the time it takes to receive payouts. In situations when there is a jammed card in the machine card reader, management and cashiers need to be informed to refund the credits on the card to the customer which can result in long waiting periods for customers. When a bank of machines go offline (often due to electricity outages), guests may want to cash out and play on other machines but cannot. A player profile needs to be created by the host on the machine and funds need to be loaded back to the guest via the new profile. In addition, when there is a problem with a machine's system, the machine needs to be rebooted and this can result in a long time delay for customers.

It is in these situations, the CS skills of staff are challenged and hosts need to be equipped with relevant knowledge and skills to deal with these situations.

#### **Impact of Negative CS Feedback**

On six occasions, the researcher observed that after the facilitator had presented negative qualitative comments from customers that had been recorded in the online customer feedback survey, the majority of staff became visibly demotivated whilst others became defensive and made excuses by placing the blame on process problems that resulted in poor CS. However once this customer feedback was provided, hosts began listening more attentively and tended to take more responsibility for dealing with these problems constructively.

This was seen as a powerful part of the workshop that created dissatisfaction with the status quo and a motivation to change and take action. It was at this point of the intervention, that facilitators encouraged staff to shift from a negative outlook to a more constructive approach on how to deal with these issues, which subsequently motivated staff to change their behaviours and take action.

## **Staff Recognition**

During two workshops, specific staff members were recognized by other slots hosts for their excellent work performance. The researcher observed these instances of recognition as being very motivational for the host in question. It was clear from participant observation, that slots hosts felt there was a need for more appreciation of hosts, both from management as well as customers.

One Coloured female supervisor talked about how when continuously dealing with an angry customer, during the first interaction she tries to calm the customer down and deal with the situation. However in dealing with the same customer a second time she has already disengaged from providing an excellent CS experience. This indicates the impact of having a negative experience with a customer at the start of the interaction and how this experience can impact the service provided to the customer thereafter. This finding also suggests the importance of slots hosts depersonalizing such situations, detaching from the human element of the service experience and distancing themselves so as to reduce the impact of the negative interaction on their personal state of mind. In addition, as a result of the above response from the Coloured female respondent, the researcher identified the need for slots hosts to be emotionally intelligent and resilient when dealing with angry customers, and to have the ability not to take negative customer interactions personally. In support of this finding, one supervisor mentioned how he viewed negative interactions with customers as an attack on the uniform (the organization you represent) and not a personal attack on the individual.

The same Coloured female supervisor then went on to mention that between dealing with angry customers on the casino floor and being reprimanded by management, which the statement suggests is a common experience, can result in demotivating the slots host which can have an impact on frontline service behaviours. The above statement also substantiate a finding from the interview with a manager in the situation analysis phase, who mentioned that management does not always hear about when the staff provide good service, however when there is a problem with a CS interaction, supervisors and managers are always involved due to escalation of the problem. As a result supervisors and managers are only exposed to the negative interactions that a host is involved in and thus need to be able to separate the individual host from the situation they are dealing with.

## **Diversity Problems**

### ***Gender***

In terms of gender issues, a Black female host related an incident where an older Zulu man refused to speak to her (a female host) when having a problem with his machine. The guest mentioned that in his culture he speaks to men to solve his problems.

This example illustrates how as diverse individuals, guests bring their own value systems, beliefs and culture with them to the casino. However, sometimes these values and beliefs, need to be of secondary importance in relation to the organisation's values, beliefs and culture, and in this instance, in terms of how women are seen as equal to men in relation to work roles. This is an interesting juncture in terms of providing excellent CS to guests from different cultures, as appealing to guest's cultural beliefs and values may be interpreted as excellent service by guests from certain cultures, and thus improve retention of such customers. This issue will be discussed later in terms of future directions for participatory CS interventions within the context of the casino industry.

### ***Race***

Some Chinese and elite Indian guests (the black card guests or "high rollers") were often seen as being rude and dismissive by slots hosts. On two occasions, the researcher observed that participants had identified Chinese customers as getting angry and wanting to leave when they experienced problems with machines or long waiting times. A distinct language barrier was identified when dealing with Chinese guests and hosts often circumvented this problem by referring the guest to a Chinese member of staff to assist with translation. However, participants mentioned that due to there being only two Chinese staff members who were on different shifts, it was often difficult to gain access to them.

A possible racial problem was identified by hosts in dealing with many Chinese guests, suggesting that racism was experienced from some hosts in dealing with such guests. In addition, on two occasions, hosts spoke about instances where a Black male or female customer would speak in vernacular (Zulu) when interacting with a White or Indian hosts even when hosts believed that these guests could in fact speak English. During the workshop hosts indicated that in such situations, they often referred the customer to another host who spoke the customer's language.

One white supervisor mentioned how some older Afrikaans guests don't take Black management seriously and preferred to work with lower level white staff members. One Coloured male slots host spoke about how when he was interacting with a customer, the customer asked him "What are you?", in referring to the host's race. The host mentioned that he was offended and did not know how to respond.

Whilst setting up the venue, prior to the beginning of one of the morning workshops, an Indian technician mentioned that there seemed to be a divide between some Black and Indian technicians. The Indian technician mentioned that some Black technicians display a "don't care attitude" and do not help and assist them, and often wait for the Indian technicians to do the work. There seemed to be no teamwork between the Black and Indian technicians which suggests racial divisions, which could impact efficiency in solving technical problems thus impacting CS.

### ***Racialisation of Events***

On four occasions, the researcher noted participants relating stories of how guests would racialize incidents that had occurred on the floor, with the host indicating that the incident was not a racial one but rather an incident based on gaming policies and procedures. Ironically, on two occasions, the researcher noted that Black hosts were told that they were racist by Black guests if they served Indian guests before Black guests. Often, the hosts responded to such customers by mentioning that they served these guests first as these guests had requested assistance first. One supervisor mentioned that everything tends to get racialized on the casino floor. Racialisation of seemingly innocuous events by guests can create problematic situations for hosts who require the relevant skills and knowledge of how to deal with such situations.

### ***Cultural Traits of Different Groups***

Various observations were noted by the researcher when facilitating the group discussion where hosts were asked to identify perceived positive characteristics of cultural groups that they had observed on the job. The intention behind this activity was not to identify and reinforce stereotypes held by staff of people from other race groups, but was used to show how individual's views can impact their interactions with customers from different racial groups.

One host mentioned that Whites were more likely to understand once a host had explained a procedure or policy. The same host (an Indian male) mentioned that Whites were more educated due to preferential apartheid policies so they tended to understand the rules of the games better and required less attention than Indian and Black guests. Alternatively, one host mentioned that Blacks guests were the most patient and that Indian guests never listened to hosts. In one of the workshops, a host mentioned that Chinese guests have a tendency to touch you with a backslap if they know you. The workshop was designed so that hosts could share their perceived observations of cultural traits of customers from specific cultural groups thus allowing them to understand expected cultural behaviours. It was believed that sharing positive perceptions about customers from different race groups derived from hosts' on-the-job experiences, would allow other hosts to pre-empt behaviour from guests from specific cultural groups, thereby improving CS.

### **Resistance to the Workshop from Participants**

There were various instances during workshops where participants resisted the workshop content as well as challenged the contextual experience of the facilitators in relation to the casino industry. During one of the workshops, a White Male manager challenged the definition of CS in the context of Casino X. Considering that both facilitators were of Indian origin, it is not certain whether the racial group membership of facilitators had an impact on the participant's contestation of the course content (a possible racialization of events by the facilitators) or whether this was rather a result of the participatory approach to the intervention set by the facilitators encouraging co-creation of knowledge.

In addition, at the beginning of one of the workshops, two individuals were hard to win over as they felt that the facilitators did not understand the context due to having no previous casino related work experience. Facilitators then explained that the workshop was designed to tap into the collective intelligence of participants through the sharing of knowledge and best practices through group work and group discussion amongst casino staff.

During another workshop, a shift manager displayed very defensive behaviour from the outset by always disagreeing and challenging facilitators and taking a patronizing perspective in attempting to explain casino processes and procedures. This shift manager also took every opportunity to point the finger at system and equipment problems as being the cause of all CS issues (it is important to note that after returning to the casino to conduct post intervention

interviews in September 2015 this shift manager had left the organisation apparently due to conflict with the organisation's culture). The facilitator addressed the issue directly with the manager in the intervention by highlighting that this could not be the case in all instances and that the workshop would not be beneficial if staff were going to blame the system for all CS issues. The facilitator also pointed out that the purpose of the workshop was to identify areas that hosts could control (e.g. their interaction with customers and each other) and change specific behaviours in order to improve CS. There was more critical analysis of CS issues after the facilitator's intervention.

### **Teamwork**

The need for better teamwork between slots hosts, technicians, cashiers and supervisors to improve CS, was noted on more than three occasions indicating that this was a strong theme emanating from participant observation.

Supervisors were seen as a major problem on a number of occasions (discussed in detail later) as a cause of poor CS. Some supervisors were criticized for delegating tasks to frontline staff during busy periods on the casino floor rather than assisting slots hosts. One participant mentioned that there were some supervisors who did not carry out their duties in the correct manner and that slots hosts did not have authority to correct the situation. This comment suggested that a proactive approach to CS challenges was initiated by certain participants despite the prevalence of ineffective supervisors, thus illustrating accountability being taken by hosts. During the workshop, it became evident that there were some underlying issues between slots hosts and supervisors. One host mentioned:

*“They have forgotten that they were once hosts.”*

On six occasions, the researcher noted complaints made about supervisors by slots hosts as a result of supervisors shirking and not helping out during busy periods. Due to weekends being the busiest times, not all staff had free weekends for family time. There were complaints from slots hosts about supervisors not allocating the correct number of hosts to the staff roster resulting in overstaffing and understaffing. Those with families complained about weekend rostering, especially if they were doing the graveyard shift. It was evident from the continued complaints about supervisors, that there was a need for understanding the bigger picture and

more teamwork between staff on different organizational levels, rather than slots hosts and supervisors blaming one another for poor performance.

### **6.3.5 Solutions to CS Challenges**

In one of the workshops, participants noted a host of solutions to CS problems. These solutions included:

- To reduce long waiting periods for hosts at cash desk, a specific cashier (for loading credits onto guest cards and paying jackpots) should be allocated to deal with hosts only, so as to prevent long waiting periods for customers.
- The need for supervisors to report to an individual (so as to create accountability) with regards to staff rostering, as incorrect rostering results in staff shortages on the floor and increased workload impacting CS negatively
- Introduction of a self-help service to teach customers how to play slots so that the host can be freed up to deal with other customers. This suggestion was also echoed by a slots host during the pre-intervention focus group
- The need for hosts need to solve problems on the frontline more readily rather than escalating to technicians (techs). A need for job rotation between techs and slots hosts to understand each other's work experience and increase empathy
- Allow hosts to sell white day cards (for loading credits) to guests on the floor to reduce guest waiting time rather than guests having to go to the cashiers
- The creation of T-shirts for slots hosts to create a positive team identity with the text "How can I help you?"
- A redesign of CS processes to reduce guest waiting time
- Increase jackpot swipe limit (R3000 at the time of research) so that hosts do not require sign-off from supervisors to pay out small jackpots to customers
- Clear policy and signage for guests on casino policy regarding reservation of machines

### **6.3.6 Using Humour as a Technique for Service Recovery**

When role-playing the issue of a bank (line) of slots machines going offline, a supervisor mentioned that one angry customer can upset the others, so he uses humour to put guests in a good mood with his initial interaction. An example of how to deal with such situations was

provided by the supervisor, who in the role-play defused the situation effortlessly using experience and charm, and made sure guests were informed of when the machines would be back online whilst offering them a complimentary drink. The idea that one angry customer can upset other customers is in alignment with emotional contagion theory which refers to an individual or in this case a customer, 'catching' the emotion being experienced by another customer (Pugh, 2001).

Another host spoke about how when guests wave at him for help, he waves back and then turns around as if nothing has happened. He then assists the guest and makes a joke about it in order to put the guest in a good mood. The above two instances highlight the important role of humour in de-escalating CS interactions where guests are in a negative frame of mind due to machine malfunctions or have experienced long waiting times in solving their query. Here effective use of humour by the frontline service employee can change customers mood to a positive state and humanize the host to the customer, who may be less likely to use offensive language (that negatively impacts the mood of the host), which in turn negatively impacts their subsequent service interactions. The researcher has also noted in previous research (Govender, 2010) that humour can be used effectively in the discussion of race during diversity workshops to break the ice between diverse participants, reduce tension and drop participants' defences, whilst creating a sense of closeness and warmth between group members.

Furthermore, when attending a brand engagement workshop run as part of induction for new staff in the organisation (which the researcher was invited to attend by the HR manager), during role-plays of staff interactions the researcher noticed that male frontline staff often used flattery of female staff members to resolve disputes, by creating an initial reduction of tension and dropping of defences to address the staff member's core problem. Whether such techniques could be used in CS interactions could be answered by further research on the use of flattery by frontline service staff to effectively resolve customer disputes.

The above discussion began by providing a narrative account of participant observation of one of the initial workshops conducted with casino staff. Thereafter, thematic analysis was employed to identify common themes across the observations of the eight workshops. A host of themes were identified, with there being various similarities in themes across pre-intervention findings as well as research outcomes from the implementation phase.

## 6.4 Themes Emerging from Group Discussion and Flipcharts

**Table 17: Flipchart Summary of Themes - Challenges Impacting Excellent CS**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Process & Procedure	Float & Day cards Bill Disputes Trainee cashiers Reservation of machines Delays from other departments	7 (16%)
System/Equipment	Transfer Failures Card jams System Errors Day cards at cash desk	10 (22%)
Difficult Guests	Impatient guests Rude Customers Guest perceptions	6 (13%)
Interpersonal Relationships	Teamwork Staff not doing their job Morale Communication Laziness Poor Service Roles and Accountability Challenges with Supervisors Disputes in other departments	13 (29%)
Staffing/Headcount	Helping more than one guest at a time Staff shortages Staff Rostering	7 (16%)
Cultural Barriers	Cross-Cultural Barriers	2 (4%)
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>45 (100%)</b>

The above summary table illustrates themes that emerged during a group activity in the first half of the workshop where participants were grouped and asked to record on a piece of flipchart paper, three challenges they faced on a daily basis in trying to provide excellent CS. Thereafter, the impact of each of these challenges were noted down and teams were also asked to generate solutions to each of the recorded challenges. Thematic analysis of the flipchart notes was conducted inductively in order to identify emergent themes. For a full description of the flipchart notes please see Appendix H.

### 6.4.1 Process and Procedures

Many groups suggested reviewing policies and procedures to reduce guest waiting times when following due processes as well as gaining junior staff input to improve these processes. In

addition, reservation of machines by guests playing more than one machine (by inserting their cards in more than one machine at a time) and delays when waiting for assistance from personnel from other departments, were also identified by groups and included in this category. Process and procedures had a frequency count of seven, thus occurring 16% of the time in relation to other themes, suggesting that it emerged as a fairly strong theme.

#### **6.4.2 System and Equipment**

In support of findings from the situation analysis phase, system and equipment challenges appeared as a theme ten times and occurred 22% of the time, thus making this category the second strongest theme emanating from the flipcharts. The availability of adequate spares e.g. card readers, for fixing slots machines, was also mentioned as a challenge on two occasions that resulted in longer waiting times for customers. On three occasions groups suggested that the system used at the casino was too old and in order to solve system problems, a system upgrade should be completed to improve frontline service.

#### **6.4.3 Difficult Guests**

Rude customers and impatient guests were seen as creating challenges for staff in attempting to provide excellent CS. One group indicated that impatient guests lowered morale while another group mentioned that it created a loss in focus and concentration of slots hosts. A solution to this problem was for procedures to be fully explained to guests to increase understanding and keep them informed. One group also mentioned that rude customers demotivated staff. The group suggested that hosts should counter such behaviours by providing excellent service and not take rude behaviour and comments from customers personally. Another group mentioned that rude behaviour from customers resulted in staff slowing down their service behaviours and ignoring customers. Although this was only mentioned by one group, it is a significant finding as it triangulates with outcomes from the pre-intervention interview with management, thus providing insight into how frontline service staff may withhold the speed of service delivery as a means of resisting rude behaviours from customers, thus further reducing guests' impression of CS at the organisation. Guest perceptions that staff were not busy on the floor, was seen as a challenge as guests often did not know that hosts

operated using a queuing system to identify the next customer. This theme occurred 13% of the time indicating that it was the second weakest theme in terms of recurrence.

#### **6.4.4 Interpersonal Relationships**

This theme addressed interpersonal relations concepts such as communication, teamwork, motivation, relationship with supervisors and laziness as challenges in providing excellent CS. A lack of teamwork and communication between hosts, technicians and supervisors appeared on two occasions as an impediment to providing excellent CS and was also mentioned as a possible solution to providing better service.

On three occasions participants pointed out that there was apparent laziness from some frontline staff who did not do their jobs during busy periods and waited for other staff to do all the work. In response to laziness from some staff members, some groups suggested that more motivational workshops be run with staff to enhance motivation, improve morale and create a team climate. One group mentioned that staff did not understand their responsibility towards the guest, thus affecting guest service and identified that more training was needed in this area. A need for more support from other departments when hosts go on break was also identified as a challenge, suggesting a lack of teamwork and some staff not seeing the bigger picture of providing excellent CS from an organisational perspective.

To counter demotivation from staff, one group suggested a recognition system for rewarding staff who always did their best. Understanding of individual roles was also seen as a challenge to providing excellent service by one group, which was seen to impact service delivery. The group suggested that more accountability should be taken by staff members for their job duties and responsibilities. When disputes in other departments impacted service, taking accountability was suggested as a solution by three teams. In addition, taking accountability was also seen as a means of improving teamwork.

Unfair supervisors were also viewed as a challenge and this theme was identified by two groups. One group mentioned that some supervisors did not treat all staff equally which can change the host's mood. Some supervisors would keep the host waiting longer when requesting assistance to deal with customer queries. Unequal treatment by supervisors was also seen as fostering the grouping together of hosts on the casino floor. Some supervisors were also seen as grouping with hosts on the floor thereby setting a bad example through irresponsible

leadership. Participants noted that according to company regulations grouping of frontline staff was not allowed for long periods on the casino floor. Hosts were only allowed two minutes interaction time with each other whilst on the floor so as to prevent grouping which created poor impressions of CS.

As a theme, interpersonal relationships appeared 13 times thus occurring 29% of the time, making it the strongest theme. This category was viewed as low hanging fruit by the researcher that could be targeted if management wanted to increase CS in the unit, as it required addressing behavioural change to improve CS rather than implementing costly initiatives such as upgrading technological systems or equipment.

#### **6.4.5 Staffing**

Staff shortages were seen as resulting in high workloads and delays in CS delivery. One group mentioned that staff shortages culminated in situations where one host was being called by several customers at the same time resulting in confusion and stress for hosts. As a solution to this, hosts were advised to inform customers that they were dealing with one request at a time and would get back to them after following the queue. Another group mentioned that in order to nullify the staff shortage, management should re-analyse the staff versus flooring ratio. Staffing had a frequency count of 7 and occurred 16% of the time, thus together with process and procedure being the fourth strongest theme.

#### **6.4.6 Cultural Barriers**

Cross-cultural factors such as the language barrier were identified only on two occasions as impacting CS. This was the weakest theme, thus suggesting that it was not viewed by hosts and supervisors as a significant factor impacting CS delivery.

### **6.5 Documenting Past Incidents in Dealing with Customers**

During the session which addressed how to deal with customers from different cultures, staff were asked to write down two scenarios from their personal working experiences. The first scenario was meant to be a situation where employees or a colleague of theirs, experienced a challenge in dealing with a customer from a different culture. Participants were asked to

indicate their race, gender and age as well as that of the customer. In the second scenario, staff were meant to write down an instance where they or a colleague experienced a challenge in dealing with a difficult customer. The purpose of recording individual’s experiences was to get participants to share their stories with the group (if they were comfortable to), as well as collect slots hosts and technicians experiences of dealing with difficult customers or difficulties in dealing with a guest from another culture. These narratives were coded inductively using open coding, and the following themes emerged. Narrative analysis will be used to relate stories by frontline staff collected during the intervention with regards to dealing with difficult customers as well as dealing with customers from different cultural groups. Please note that respondents cannot be identified according to their written narratives due to the facilitator mentioning that names would remain confidential after the exercise.

### 6.5.1 Documented Incidents: Challenges in Dealing with Difficult Customers

Narratives that were written down by participants were thematically analysed through the process of continuously re-reading the textual data. Chunking of data was implemented and data chunks were named and coded. Codes were subsumed into larger emergent themes (Braun & Clarke, 2005).

**Table 18: Themes Identified from Documented Scenarios in Dealing with Difficult Customers**

	Machine Problems	General Complaints	Abuse	Waiting Time	Conflict Between Guests	Other	Total
<b>FREQUENCY</b>	21 (48%)	3 (7%)	3 (7%)	4 (9%)	3 (7%)	10 (22%)	44

From the above table it is evident that slot machine problems was the theme that occurred most frequently when participants wrote down situations where they had dealt with difficult customers. This theme accounted for 48% of responses suggesting that machine malfunctions were the most common cause of customers becoming difficult in their interactions with hosts. Often machine malfunctions were attributed to electricity outages and systems going down. This finding substantiates research outcomes from the flipchart group activity which revealed that 22% of CS challenges arose from system and equipment failure. The focus group outcomes

and interviews with management in the pre-intervention phase also echoed this finding. The second most common theme resulting in difficult customers was long waiting times experienced (9%). 3% of hosts reported verbal abuse from customers and 3% also related stories of how guests would quarrel with one another due to one guest reserving a machine that the other wished to play.

Common problems that were documented under machine problems included a whole bank of machines going offline as well as the impact of electricity outages (or load-shedding):

*“I was involved in a system down situation whereby all our machines were down so as a guest you couldn’t cash out from your machine. So I was involved in explaining to the customer the problem and a big time delay for our system to get back up.”*

(Slots Host)

In relation to load-shedding, one host mentioned:

*“Last week there was load-shedding in the casino and all the slot machines went off but in ten to fifteen minutes the electricity was back. The other guest told me that his machine was on a free spin so he was worried if he will still carry on with his free games. So I told him yes...and he asked me how do I know?”*

(Slots Host)

The above excerpt indicates how unforeseen circumstances such as load-shedding can impact host-customer relations and negatively impact CS, which can have an impact on the business.

Guest complaints that were documented when staff recorded situations where they dealt with difficult customers, included complaints regarding following long procedures, machine problems and long waiting times. Hosts often dealt with these situations by calling their supervisors or getting the customer a free drink:

*“There were trouble with events (when the machine is rebooted and reloads). I called the tech (technician), when the tech came, he told us to switch off the machine for thirty minutes. The guest complained about the money he put in. I called the supervisor to organize drinks while waiting.”*

(Slots Host)

It was evident from the documented anecdotes that slots staff suffer abuse at the hands of customers. These situations tended to occur when machine malfunctions caused guest frustration as well as long waiting times resulting in poor customer perceptions of CS:

*“A machine went on a tilt (a machine malfunction) and a guest called one of the attendants who walked away but informed the guest that he is coming back – so the guest was swearing and I had to explain to the guest what was the problem and what I can do to help – I had to apologize for my fellow colleague.”*

(Slots Host)

The above excerpts indicate the extent of verbal abuse that slots staff are exposed to on a daily basis. In the pre-intervention interview, a manager mentioned how physical abuse from customers towards frontline staff had also occurred. He stated that 70% of CS interactions are negative and the mental state of the customer who often has just lost large amounts of money, is such that if he is approached in the wrong manner he may become violent.

Often times, customers were found to complain when they had to wait long periods for a machine problem to be solved or for a specific procedure to be followed involving multiple individuals (e.g. host, supervisor, shift manager). One host mentioned:

*“I was busy with jackpots and a card transaction. The cashier is also busy so I have to follow the queue. And the guest will arrive at the cash desk screaming asking why I’m taking so long.”*

(Slots Host)

The above excerpts illustrate the various situations that occur on the casino floor when staff deal with difficult customers. Often these complaints arise from machine problems, long procedural delays and conflict between guests.

## 6.5.2 Documented Incidents: Challenges in Dealing with Customers from other Cultures

**Table 19: Themes Identified from Documented Scenarios in Dealing with Customers From other Cultures**

<b>THEMES</b>	Language Barrier	Racism & Differential Treatment	Cultural Difference	Verbal Abuse	Other	Total
<b>FREQUENCY</b>	<b>43 (65%)</b>	<b>12 (18%)</b>	<b>5 (8%)</b>	<b>1 (1%)</b>	<b>5 (8%)</b>	<b>66</b>

From the above table it is clear that a large number of respondents (65%) recounted situations on the job where they had experienced language barriers in dealing with customers. The second strongest theme was racism and differential treatment where twelve participants (18%) recorded incidents where they had experienced racism from customers or been accused by guests of treating them (the guests) differently due to the racial group membership of the guest.

### Language Barrier

When dealing with customers from different cultures and where a language barrier existed, many staff mentioned the use of sign language to attempt communication with the guest. The use of body language was also mentioned and in many instances staff requested the assistance of other hosts who spoke the customer’s language.

*“There was a Chinese guy who wanted a host to take his card from the machine. But the thing is he couldn’t speak English, we ended up doing sign language and it helps...”*

(Slots Host)

Here the host talks about the use of sign language which seems to refer to basic sign language rather than suggesting that both individuals were well versed in sign language. Language barriers seemed to be prevalent when Chinese customers were requesting service, thus suggesting a low level of English literacy amongst such guests.

*“A Chinese guy needed help, they couldn’t speak a word of English. I used body language to help him by pointing and predicting what he needed.”*

(Slots Host)

In this quote, there seems to be a misunderstanding of the terms body language and sign language, where sign language is used as an alternative to formal, verbal communication whilst body language concerns informal, non-verbal communication. What is important here, is identifying that hosts were already using sign language and body language to communicate successfully with guests where a language barrier existed as well as predicting what guests required.

However, in some cases the language barrier can be an impediment to providing good service as mentioned by the following respondent:

*“I was helping a guest who spoke a different language. He gave me his pin number and he could not say it properly so I ended up blocking his card.”*

(Slots Host)

One respondent commented on the characteristics of Chinese customers and indicated that when dealing with such customers there was often a language barrier. He mentioned that one had to be aware of their customs as well as expect erratic behaviour when dealing with them.

He then went on to discuss strategies that he used to counter the above problems:

*“Use more body language, be more descriptive, have patience and be accommodating. Also use his body language to understand the problem.”*

(Slots Host)

It is clear from this statement that slots hosts have developed their own ways of dealing with language barriers through practice, including using sign language to communicate, body language to understand the problem, predicting customer needs as well as requesting assistance from staff who can speak the hosts language. In addition, hosts try to be descriptive, patient and accommodating when dealing with customers where there is a language barrier.

### **Racism and Cultural Difference**

There was one instance where outright racism from a guest was reported in the narratives:

*“It was an Indian lady who stormed on me and went on and on about how stupid we Black people are. I just lost my cool and refused to help her.”*

(Slots Host)

Two respondents noted how Black guests mockingly speak to Indian hosts in Zulu even though they know English and they know that the hosts do not understand Zulu:

*“When a guest can speak English but will speak to you in Zulu after telling him or her that you can’t speak Zulu.”*

(Slots Host)

An Indian host spoke about dealing with some Black customers:

*“I have helped a lot of them but what I have noticed is they like to bully. They show you the machine by calling you, approach is not good. The customer (was a) Black Male, 42.”*

(Slots Host)

One candidate mentioned being discriminated against by a guest who did not want to deal with him:

*“I greeted the guest, he looked at me from top to bottom and asked me if I know my job. He asked if there was anyone who can help him because he does not want to talk to me.”*

(Slots Host)

The above statements suggests that some staff may be seen as being incompetent due to their racial group membership. It is evident that slots staff are exposed to clear racism from guests which can impede their own performance and impact them emotionally. These statement corroborated findings from observations conducted during the workshop that revealed various accusations of racism from slots host against guests.

Some staff mentioned that guests had accused hosts of treating them differently due to the racial group membership. One respondent also mentioned how a Black guests often complain to Black hosts that they are not helping Black guests but are only helping Indian and White guests.

This feedback indicates how the casino floor can be seen as a minefield for diversity conflict situations to occur. There seems to be a two-way flow of discrimination with some guests being racist towards hosts, whilst in turn hosts are accused of providing differential treatment to guests from different racial groups. These accusations seems to occur across racial groups as well as within racial groups. The above statements also suggest that there is racialisation of events by guests in terms of service interactions on the casino floor, often when there seems to be no rationale for racialisation to occur. This can serve to create a difficult situation for slots

hosts to deal with as well as possibly tarnish the employer's image if the guest complains in public forums of discrimination or unequal treatment.

Two respondents provided accounts of cultural difference and how it impacts the service interaction. One respondent spoke about a 51 year old Chinese male who did not allow staff to clean around his machines as he believed it was bad karma. In Buddhism, karma refers to the aggregation of a person's actions in their current and previous lives and is viewed as deciding their future births and experiences. The guest often littered the area around the machine with Coca Cola and chips packets for long periods of time. The other guests often found this ritual unhygienic.

One host spoke of how as an African male, a White customer was happy when playing slots as he was on a winning streak and touched the host's head. The host was not happy with this due to this being unacceptable in his culture, however the host did not say anything as he saw the man as his guest. This example illustrates the subordination of one's cultural values to meet the service requirements of one's job.

In terms of his experience in interacting with guests from different racial groups, one host described white people as being patient and understanding when dealing with them. Blacks were seen as being reserved and respectful and Indians were seen as being willing to learn how to play the casino games.

In dealing with customers from different cultures, one host mentioned that slots staff should be polite, stick to company rules, explain their role to the guest, help wherever they can as much as they can and not to panic when dealing with a diversity situation.

### **Verbal Abuse**

One guest wrote about how he was trying to assist a Chinese, VIP guest with a pay dispute. The guest was loud and swearing at the host. The host listened to the guest and did as he asked, but the guest was not happy even though he got his way in the end.

Such verbal abuse was also reiterated by hosts in the workshop sessions indicating that they often suffered abuse from high rollers (VIP) guests as well as Chinese guests who were perceived as being very temperamental.

## **6.6 Discussion of Major Findings from the Implementation of the Intervention**

After the situation analysis had been conducted, findings from this phase of research were used to design an intervention to address the identified CS challenges, educate staff on how to identify body language of customers indicating a need for assistance, enhance cultural awareness and motivate staff ahead of the peak season. The main findings that emerged from the implementation phase are discussed below.

When facilitating the intervention, the impact of negative comments from customers in the customer satisfaction survey results presented to staff during the intervention, resulted in visibly demotivated staff in all eight interventions conducted. However, despite having a demotivating effect on participants, this provision of information did serve to create accountability for CS issues. Nevertheless some staff sought to shift the blame for poor CS onto other departments, processes and technology. Similarly a study on the views of frontline staff on the delivery of service quality in call centres found the tendency of frontline staff to place blame for poor service on organisational factors such as equipment and service processes (Dean & Rainnie, 2009). The high impact of providing negative customer satisfaction results to frontline staff cannot be understated, however researcher observations suggest that CS trainers looking to provide such information to staff, should subsequently seek to pick up the group's mood during the course of the intervention through engaging group activities. This can be achieved through positive reinforcement of service behaviours in role plays and participation, recognition as well as the provision of positive customer feedback regarding frontline service later on in the intervention.

As mentioned earlier, feedback from frontline staff during the intervention revealed that there was a tendency of some guests to only request hosts who were from their own race group due to not taking hosts from other race groups seriously or seeing them as incompetent. There was also a tendency of some customers to racialize incidents on the casino floor when decisions were being made by slots hosts based on in-house policy. As discussed previously, racial divisions and cliquing between some Indian and Black staff was evident in the research findings from the implementation phase. The existence of such racial divisions was also alluded to in an interview with a shift manager during the process evaluation phase of the study (discussed later). Racial polarization of staff issues can result in a negative impact on teamwork, thereby negatively affecting CS (Singal, 2014).

In addition, the role of humour and flattery in defusing negative CS interactions was noted by hosts during the intervention. This was a significant and unexpected finding of the study which was found to very effective and widely used by frontline staff when dealing with difficult customers. Lam (2011) also found the use of humour to be an effective strategy used by frontline staff during CS exchanges.

Findings from the flip-chart activity that sought to identify the main challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS, were similar to how slots hosts and technicians identified CS challenges during the focus group discussion in the situational analysis phase of the study. A poor IT software system running the slots machines and equipment problems such as card-reader issues, transfer failures and procedural delays were seen as key challenges that negatively impacted CS. Similarly, Lo, Wu and Tsai (2015) found that inefficient service processes were a major challenge affecting frontline CS. Poor staff rostering resulting in staff shortages on the casino floor as well as difficult guests, also hindered the provision of excellent service at Casino X. In addition, poor interpersonal interactions between frontline staff such as a lack of coordination and team work, poor communication, laziness and low morale were seen as major factors resulting in poor frontline service.

The language barrier between hosts and Chinese staff was noted on many occasions during the intervention. In relation to on the job scenarios where hosts faced challenges in providing good service to customers from other cultures, language barriers were identified as the major factor impacting cross-cultural service interactions. Liu and Wan (2011) identified language barriers between customers and staff to be a cause of customer dissatisfaction. In addition, Wan (2009) and Zopiatis, Constanti and Theocharous (2014) found conflicts and misunderstandings often arising during service interactions due to communication challenges as a result of cultural differences, with particular regard to language barriers. In order to deal with the language barrier at Casino X, hosts often referred Chinese guests to Chinese hosts or used body language to interpret customer needs. Alternatively basic sign language was used to communicate with Chinese guests or translator phone applications were used to convey messages. Similarly Wang, Luo and Tai (2017) found that where a language barrier existed, frontline service staff used body language to understand customer needs. In addition, cultural nuances of guests from different cultural groups were identified by frontline staff during the intervention through their interaction with diverse customers. One participant in the evaluation questionnaire noted that frontline staff should learn from the diversity of customers they were exposed to on the casino

floor and seek to use this cultural knowledge when dealing subsequently with other customers from the same racial group.

In terms of customer conflict during service interactions, participants noted that VIP guests (Very Important Persons) or Black card holders as well as Chinese customers were seen as being particularly abusive towards hosts. In response, research findings suggested that management had a tendency to allocate their most experienced female staff to these areas, due to their higher tolerance levels in comparison to male hosts who would get angry if customers were abusive. This finding suggests a preference for female frontline service staff in dealing with high rollers within the context of the South African casino industry. This finding is explained by a study conducted by Wan (2013) which found that female frontline staff may deal better with stressful situations at work than their male counterparts due to the use of personal coping strategies.

Prentice and King (2011) highlighted that high emotional intelligence was a significant predictor of frontline service performance of staff when dealing with VIP guests. It is important to note that VIP guests can account for over 40% gross casino revenue and tend to bet in high amounts, resulting in emotionally charged service encounters (Prentice & King, 2011). Thus hosts in the VIP area are mandated to ensure customer satisfaction and retention. Whilst guests are not always right, often management requires putting the customer first at all times and casino staff are often expected to endure offensive behaviour from such customers (Wan, 2010).

During the intervention, some shift managers were perceived to not take the intervention seriously and seemed to oppose the trainer's efforts at facilitating discussions on improving CS. These managers displayed defensive behaviour and shifted the blame for poor customer feedback onto other departments in addition to challenging facilitators in terms of lacking contextual experience. When taking on a facilitator role during the intervention, the researcher noticed that there was a tendency for some managers to try and teach from their seats during the intervention, in trying to maintain the perceptions of their "superior" work roles in relation to frontline staff.

In my reflective observations during the session, it was also evident that some supervisors saw the intervention as being an open platform or forum for hosts to complain about their supervisors. Waterman (2001) notes that participatory interventions often entail conflict between individuals from different positions in the organisational hierarchy, with conflicting

objectives. This can result in staff with more power in the organisation dominating discussions. Foucault (1977) views power as resulting from the interactions between individuals, from institutional practices and the exercise of different types of knowledge. Foucault's writings on discipline and control perceives disciplinary power as occurring through surveillance and internal discipline of individuals to maintain obedience. During one of the interventions, a young slots host continuously complained about the poor leadership of his supervisor, resulting in two supervisors verbally disciplining the staff member during the training session. This incident illustrated how some staff used the workshop as a forum to critique the actions of supervisors and in turn how leaders use their power in the organization to censure such challenges to their leadership. In direct contrast to the organizational hierarchy, the participatory approach to interventions challenges the system of surveillance and control by empowering participants to become knowledge creators and think critically to arrive at solutions to CS challenges. As a result, the participatory nature of such interventions can create a context which goes against the traditional organisational structure, culture and patterns of working relationships.

In response to the participatory approach being in conflict with the organizational structure, support from top leadership is required to maintain the course of change. Facilitators require an understanding of how organisations and individuals interact and the competencies to mobilize these interactions for the benefit of the programme. Whilst a participatory approach may be in conflict with the organizational hierarchy and culture, there are nevertheless benefits for using the approach such as staff empowerment and ownership of the intervention (Nastasi et al., 2000). Montgomery and Doulougeri (2014) in their study of action research interventions in hospital settings, point out that resistance to change may be a pre-cursor for positive long term effect.

## **6.7 Limitations**

It was evident from participant observations that diversity was a major issue affecting frontline service staff at Casino X. In terms of the framework for the intervention, content regarding diversity could be added to future workshops to provide participants with greater skills to deal with diversity situations. The researcher noted that diversity techniques to be included in future interventions could teach staff how to respond effectively to racism and stereotyping from customers as well as how to respond to language barriers. In addition, recommendations for

how to respond to guests who insist on speaking their own language as well as how to respond to guests who racialize a problem, would be useful skills for staff to be equipped with in future interventions.

The action research process is an iterative cycle of problem identification, planning and analysis through initial data collection; developing solutions and taking experimental action; testing the effects of the action by collecting more data and then redefining the problem. At this point, the process is continuously repeated to get closer to a final solution of the initial problem. In addition, the activity of each step is monitored in order to make adjustments for continuous improvement. A limitation of the study was that a continuous cycle of the action research process was not feasible due to there not being a series of interventions (due to time and cost constraints) that would have allowed for further reflection on implemented actions and iteration.

The need for separate workshops for managers and slots hosts for future interventions was evident in the level that the workshop was pitched at (for frontline staff) and the resistance that facilitators experienced from some managers who felt the need to position themselves as experts in front of their staff. The impact of management was evident when the HR manager, Recruitment manager and Employee Services Manager sat in on a session resulting in a noticeable decline in participation in group discussion in comparison to preceding groups.

The resistance from some managers towards the intervention was seen to negatively impact participation of staff who reported to these managers in the organizational structure. Manager resistance in the intervention was also seen to impact transfer of training onto the job by frontline staff reporting to these managers, which was revealed by a manager during the process evaluation phase (discussed later). These findings are in alignment with social cognitive learning theory (SCLT) where subordinates model the behaviours of authority figures (Bandura, 2001). As discussed in the literature review, individuals can learn most behaviours through modelling the actions of role models who have similar personal characteristics, values and attitudes that individuals aspire towards. Observational learning is dependent on four elements namely attention, retention, reproduction and motivation. It is possible that through managers being resistant towards the CS intervention, this may have negatively impacted frontline staff in terms of the attention they paid to the learning content during the intervention, thereby negatively affecting subsequent retention, reproduction and motivation to enact CS behaviours on the job. However Bandura (2001) also points out that there is a cognitive

component to observational learning. Internal motivators also have an impact on observational learning and an individual's existing attitudes and behaviours can affect whether a person wants to observe and learn a new behaviour. In addition, personal and environmental factors also play an integral role in social learning and a person's agency and self-efficacy are key elements in determining whether an individual adopts a model's behaviour. The findings from the post-intervention research conducted at Casino X support the arguments set out by Waterman (2001), suggesting a need for separate employee and manager interventions as well as stronger top management support for future interventions.

With regard to limitations of the intervention, as a result of being a facilitator, the impact of the researcher on the research subjects cannot be denied due to being in a position of authority as a facilitator and external consultant, thus creating researcher bias. Participants may have been hesitant to speak openly on certain topics due to perceiving the facilitator as a representation of management. In addition, the identity of the two facilitators as Indian males, could have affected participant's responses to questions posed on race and gender during facilitation.

In addition, a longer time-span could be set for future workshops to ensure that adequate time is given to different aspects of the intervention framework. A half-day session was only possible due to staffing requirements at the casino. The body language session was a favourite amongst the participants and could be examined in greater depth and detail to improve CS skills. A need for equipping frontline staff with emotional intelligence skills and resilience training was noted, as a result of the harsh working environment staff are exposed to in terms of verbal abuse, racism and sometimes violence from customers.

## **6.8 Future Directions**

Considering the difficult casino environment that frontline slots staff are exposed to, it is recommended that supervisors and management make a concerted effort to take every opportunity to recognize staff for providing excellent service to enhance morale.

The researcher acknowledges that future interventions should encompass an element that provides more direction on how hosts can respond to situations which have been racialized by guests but which in fact are related to staff members following standard operating procedures. Racialisation of events by customers that do not contain a racial element can have a negative

impact on the organisation's image and reduce customer retention. The researcher suggests that future interventions provide frontline staff with skills of how to use humour to deracialise events that have been incorrectly perceived as racist by guests (as mentioned earlier) as well as employ humour to change the mood of customers who have been waiting for long periods for machine problems to be solved. This would serve as cost-effective way of dealing with these issues as well as protecting the hosts from customer abuse thus negatively affecting their future service interactions. In addition, using humour to defuse CS situations would reduce social stigma for customers who have verbally abused a host in front of other guests.

An interesting area for further research may be to investigate the long-term effects of conflicting behaviour between a staff member's cultural values and the behavioural requirements of one's job description in service contexts.

## **6.9 Chapter Summary**

This chapter provided a descriptive account of the delivery of the intervention through the provision of researcher narratives from participant observations. Thematic analysis of flipchart activities conducted during the intervention were discussed to identify CS challenges identified by frontline staff. Documented stories of staff experiences in dealing with difficult customers as well as customers from diverse groups were discussed as part of an intervention activity. In terms of the main findings from the implementation of the intervention, frontline staff revealed that the main factors resulting in poor service could largely be attributed to inefficient service processes and technology challenges. Poor interpersonal interactions between frontline staff resulting in poor teamwork and communication, as well as laziness and poor morale were also seen as contributing factors to poor CS. Racism from customers, language barriers and racialisation of events by customers were seen as diversity challenges to the provision of good service. In addition, the resistance of managers towards the intervention and some hosts seeing the workshop as a forum for complaining about supervisors thereby challenging the organisational hierarchy, were seen as important findings for future studies in this area. In addition, the use of humour by frontline staff to defuse customer service situations was seen as a unique finding of the study. The following chapter provides a detailed process evaluation of the CS intervention.

## **Chapter 7: Evaluation**

### **7.1 Introduction**

The previous chapter provided a discussion on the implementation of the CS intervention at Casino X. This chapter aims to present the findings of the post-intervention phase of the research. The statistical analyses applied to the quantitative data generated from the training evaluation questionnaire will be discussed. In addition, findings from the post-intervention interviews with management and post-intervention focus group with frontline staff will also be examined. The findings from observations conducted on the casino floor after the intervention had taken place will also be provided.

To recollect, research objectives were to identify challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS. Aims of the intervention were to provide slots hosts with observational skills on how to identify body language cues of customers indicating guests' need for assistance. In addition, the intervention aimed to provide slots hosts with tools to assist them in dealing with customers from different cultures who may speak different languages or have different values, beliefs, attitudes and behavioural norms. Lastly, the intervention aimed to motivate staff to enhance CS prior to the then upcoming peak December season at the casino. This chapter will seek to assess to what extent the intervention achieved the above objectives set during the situation analysis phase. We will first examine this by looking at the findings of the workshop evaluation questionnaire.

### **7.2 Results of the Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire**

Respondents who completed the delegate evaluation form were the same participants who attended the intervention (demographic breakdown provided in previous chapter). The below table provides frequency results of the delegate evaluation form according to three dimensions: learnings gained, perceptions of learning activities and evaluation of facilitation.

**Table 20: Frequencies Results of the Delegate Evaluation Form**

Item	N	Strongly Disagree N	Disagree N	Neutral N	Agree N	Strongly Agree N
<b>LEARNINGS GAINED</b>						
1. Identify Body Language leads to CS complaints	105	2 (1.9%)	0 (0%)	4 (3.8%)	32 (30.5%)	67 (63.8%)
2. Deal with Customer Problems	105	7 (6.7%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	41 (39%)	57 (54.3%)
3. Deal with Difficult Customers	105	3 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	6 (5.7%)	51 (48.6%)	45 (42.9%)
4. Deal with Different Cultures	105	0 (0%)	13 (12.4%)	0 (0%)	47 (44.8%)	45 (42.9%)
8. Can apply learnings in my daily job	105	3 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	43 (41%)	59 (56.2%)
9. Motivated me to provide better CS	105	3 (2.9%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	31 (29.5%)	71 (67.6%)
<b>PERCEPTIONS OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES</b>						
5. Videos helped identify body language	105	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	7 (6.7%)	45 (42.9%)	53 (50.5%)
6. Play helped apply learnt tools	105	10 (9.5%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	49 (46.7%)	46 (43.8%)
7. Flipchart helped identify CS Challenges	105	0 (0%)	5 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	50 (47.6%)	50 (47.6%)
<b>EVALUATION OF FACILITATION</b>						
8. Facilitators were knowledgeable	105	4 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	46 (43.8%)	55 (52.4%)
9. Facilitators explained concepts clearly	105	5 (4.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	46 (43.8%)	55 (52.4%)
10. Facilitators encouraged participation	105	4 (3.8%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	42 (40%)	59 (56.2%)

\*Note: CS refers to CS

As indicated in the above table, in terms of **learnings gained**, learning objectives were met with a strong positive evaluation by participants who felt better equipped to identify body language leading to customer complaints, as well as deal with customer problems and difficult people more effectively after the workshop.

The majority of participants 91.5% (48.6% agreed and 42.9% strongly agreed) that they were better equipped to deal with difficult customers. In addition, the overall majority 88% of participants agreed and agreed strongly that they were better equipped to deal with customers from different cultures. Of this group 42.9% agreed strongly that they were better equipped to deal with customers from different cultures. Therefore it is evident that these results indicate a high degree of skills efficacy from learners with a possibility of the participatory nature of the intervention contributing to this result. Over 56.2% of participants agreed strongly that they could apply learnings from the workshop in their daily jobs. 43% of participants also agreed with this statement indicating that this item was rated very positively by learners, suggesting increased skills efficacy in terms of CS from learners after the intervention. The workshop also seemed to have motivated the participants (68% strongly agreed and 30% agreed) to provide better CS in their daily tasks.

In terms of **perceptions of learning activities**, the majority of respondents strongly agreed that discussing the videos helped them identify positive and negative non-verbal communication in dealing with customers. Respondents also felt strongly that the flip-charting session helped them identify challenges they faced on a daily basis in trying to provide excellent CS, and helped them come up with solutions to those challenges. 43.8% agreed strongly and 46.7% agreed that the use of the play as a learning method assisted staff in applying CS tools and techniques learnt during the intervention.

With regards to the **facilitation**, the facilitators were positively rated by the participants in terms of their knowledge (52.4% strongly agreed), explanation of concepts (52.4% strongly agreed) and in encouraging the participants in delivering high quality CS (56.2% strongly agreed). In summary, the intervention was positively evaluated by the participants across the three main aspects of the questionnaire namely learnings gained, the perception of learning activities and facilitation.

As mentioned in the research methodology chapter, three indices were developed for Learnings Gained ( Items 1, 2, 3, 4, 8 and 9); Perceptions of Learning Activities ((Items 5, 6 and 7) lastly Evaluation of Facilitation (Items 10, 11 and 12). The descriptive statistics of the indices are presented in table 7 below.

**Table 21: Descriptive Statistics of Indices**

	<b>Index</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Standard Deviation</b>	<b>Skewness</b>	<b>Kurtosis</b>
5.	Learnings Gained	101	27.03	2.79	-.85	.177
6.	Perceptions of Learning Activities	102	13.18	1.70	-.86	.296
7.	Evaluation of Facilitation	100	13.76	1.27	-.32	-1.61

The results of the t-tests to identify demographic group differences (gender and race) regarding the indices showed no significant difference among the groups.

**Table 22. T-test Results Illustrating Mean Differences between Gender Groups on Learnings Gained, Learning Activities and Facilitation**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig</b>	<b>MD</b>
Learning Gained	Male	26.72	2.887	-.68	84	.49	.43
	Female	27.15	2.961				
Learning Activities	Male	12.81	1.841	-1.86	85	0.07	-.68
	Female	13.49	1.467				
Facilitation	Male	13.72	1.344	-.37	83	.71	-.10
	Female	13.82	1.211				

*\*Significant at 0.05*

**Table 23: T-test Results Illustrating Difference between Race Groups on Learnings Gained, Learning Activities and Facilitation**

	<b>Race</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>t</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig</b>	<b>MD</b>
Learning Gained	Black	27.12	2.76	-.12	81	.91	-.08
	Indian	27.20	3.12				
Learning Activities	Black	13.33	1.52	.69	81	.49	.26
	Indian	13.08	1.70				
Facilitation	Black	13.66	1.24	-.73	80	-.73	-.22
	Indian	13.88	1.40				

*\*Significant at 0.05*

The results of the one way ANOVA to identify demographic group differences (across age group and job position) regarding the indices showed no significant difference among the groups.

**Table 24. One-way ANOVA Results Illustrating Mean Differences between Age Groups on Learnings Gained, Learning Activities and Facilitation**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Learning Gained	18-25	26.38	3.38	.56	2	.58
	26-35	27.20	2.70			
	36-45	27.00	2.65			
Learning Activities	18-25	13.00	1.90	.16	2	.85
	26-35	13.25	1.57			
	36-45	13.10	2.00			
Facilitation	18-25	13.88	1.36	.53	2	.59
	26-35	13.81	1.23			
	36-45	13.50	1.36			

*\*Significant at 0.05*

**Table 25. One-way ANOVA Results Illustrating Mean Differences between Job Position on Learnings Gained, Learning Activities and Facilitation**

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Job Position</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Learning Gained	Service Level	27.18	2.70	1.41	2	.25
	Supervisor Level	26.68	2.78			
	Manager Level	28.80	2.68			
Learning Activities	Service Level	13.33	1.55	3.57	2	.29
	Supervisor Level	13.12	1.70			
	Manager Level	12.29	2.81			
Facilitation	Service Level	13.75	1.21	.176	2	.89
	Supervisor Level	13.76	1.37			
	Manager Level	14.00	1.55			

*\*Significant at 0.05*

### **7.3 Comments on Open-ended Questions**

There were four open-ended questions at the end of the evaluation questionnaire which sought to determine the participants' views on the strengths of the workshop; aspects they found useful, recommendations for improvement and views on cultural barriers to providing excellent CS. A narrative account of participants' views on the value of the workshop aligned to the approach outlined by Harding and Whitehead (2013) was used, followed by a frequency analysis of the coded identified themes. This procedure was followed as it allows for both a "thick description" as evidenced in the participants' own voices and indicates the number of participants who shared these views. It should be noted that some aspects raised as a strength of the intervention were also addressed in the question regarding the aspects found to be most useful in their jobs. As a result, the responses to these two questions will be discussed together under perceived strengths of the workshop.

#### **7.3.1 Perceived Strengths of the Workshop**

With regards to the perceived **strengths of the workshop** several participants pointed to the benefits of the different learning methods that were used such as video analyses and role plays. One participant alluded to the video enabling staff to stand back from being directly involved

in the situation, as they are on a daily basis, and see the situation from a different perspective, thus allowing for depersonalization and learning through perspective taking:

*“The videos that were shown, showed us from another view how the way you speak to a guest can have an impact on the guest’s behaviour.”* (Slots Host)

The use of role play and theatre was mentioned by a few participants as allowing them to identify, visually, the problems they face in dealing with guests on the floor.

*“The act or play. It made me realise the fact (of the) problems I’m facing.”* (Slots Host)

This statement indicates that the play in comparison to non-visual learning methods such as the use of slides, discussion and lecturing was more useful in allowing learners to identify the problems they face. As previously mentioned, the role plays used in the training were developed through observation of real CS interactions on the casino floor by the researcher. One participant made reference to this by stating:

*“Role plays, helped identify real situations.”* (Slots Host)

From the below statement, it is implied that through the use of role plays and plays in the training, participants were able to express themselves indirectly by taking on the role of a character, thus allowing for more authentic expression.

*“Role plays and chats because it made things easier for us to express what we deal with on a daily basis.”* (Slots Host)

The real slot machines that were installed in the training room for the role plays were also seen as creating realistic situations whilst the props provided for the plays such as costumes, wigs and hats created a sense of fun that made acting easier and people more care-free.

*Slot machines and acting material made it easy to act (out) scenarios.”* (Slots Host)

Many participants also spoke about specific content in the addressed in the workshop such as body language, as being a memorable learning point allowing them to visually identify guests who require assistance as well as providing them with tools to deal with difficult situations:

*“Provided me with a better knowledge of how to identify guests in need of help and how best to deal with them.”* (Slots Host)

The recognition of the impact of cultural difference on CS interactions within the casino environment was also recognized by participants. One learner mentioned the importance of body language in dealing with customers from different cultures who may speak different languages. The participant suggested that this language barrier can be counteracted through the understanding of and use of body language:

*“Since we work with people from different backgrounds and languages, the only language we share is body language so it is important to understand it.”* (Slots Host)

This is a key finding suggesting the importance of body language in CS interactions within the casino environment, particularly when dealing with customers from different cultures who may speak different languages. The language barrier can therefore impact the communication process between parties, thus having an effect on CS experienced by the guest.

On the whole, learning how to read body language was identified as the one aspect of the workshop which was seen as a major strength and being most useful to slots staff work roles, in that it taught staff how to identify the frustration level of customers before approaching them:

*“How to deal with angry guests and how to identify them cause sometimes you can confuse someone who is upset with someone who is really angry by their expressions.”* (Slots Host)

In addition, one respondent noted the importance of portraying positive body language from a host’s perspective in order to create a good first impression:

*“Body language. It is the first impression that I give to the guest.”* (Slots Host)

The importance of body language in identifying people’s true feelings was also identified by one participant:

*“Body language, because sometimes what we say and body language are different.”*  
(Slots Host)

In addition, learning about cultural difference and how to understand others from different cultures better was seen as being a useful aspect of the workshop:

*“How to deal with guests from other cultures, because we deal with a lot of cultures and races sometimes not easy to understand.”* (Slots Host)

Furthermore, the importance of being cognisant of diversity in CS interactions, as well as having a positive outlook when dealing with difficult situations or customers was also highlighted by one participant:

*“To remind us that we are dealing with different people and their different behaviours and we need to stay focused on our jobs and remain positive at all times.”* (Slots Host)

In addition, learning how to approach guests was seen as a strong point in preparing staff for dealing with guests in difficult situations:

*“The ability to shape us to face any major dispute related to guests services.”* (Slots Host)

Learners identified that the workshop taught them how to deal with challenges on the frontline and how to solve them. One participant specifically mentioned that a strength of the training was learning how to approach guests who were experiencing a difficult situation and who may be frustrated or angry. Learning how to calm the guest down, allows the employee access to the guest to communicate with them, thereby promoting service recovery:

*“Learning to access a person and situation and how to defuse a situation.”* (Slots Host)

The creation of a knowledge sharing environment was identified and supported by some participants. One participant mentioned:

*“The strengths were that we got a chance to listen to other people’s views and get ideas on how to handle some problems.”* (Slots Host)

The importance of the workshop as a forum for open and honest communication was also recognized by participants. In addition, the opportunity to contribute to a conversation on problems frontline staff face in providing excellent CS was seen to create accountability for service amongst hosts:

*“The facilitators encouraged everyone to speak out about their problems and I think that was great cause the only way this can work is if we all get involved and start taking accountability.”* (Slots Host)

The use of the workshop as a channel for communicating employee views upwards i.e. towards management was also identified. This seems to indicate that such forums for staff do not currently exist in the workplace (although channels for making recommendations to management were available) and could indicate the need for the creation of such platforms:

*“This helps us to voice out our concerns and pass our views to our management.”*

(Slots Host)

The fact that facilitators actually conducted research on the casino floor through observations, focus groups and interviews with staff, was mentioned to staff in the training and was recognized as being indicative of facilitators understanding the context of the slots working environment. There was also a sense that participants appreciated the effort by the facilitators to gain knowledge of the casino work environment prior to the workshop, as mentioned by one participant:

*“Trainers took the time to learn the industry specifics and researched what employees deal with and designed a workshop around it.”*

(Slots Host)

In table 22 it is clear that the majority of participants (30%) believed that the workshop improved the CS skills of participants. A substantial number of participants’ (12%) believed that one of the main strengths of the workshop was that it provided a forum for open communication. A smaller number of participants (9%) mentioned that the workshop content which provided staff with skills on how to identify negative body language of guests and how to use positive body language in dealing with guests, was the greatest strength of the intervention.

**Table 26: Perceived Strengths of the Workshop**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Video	4 (4%)
Body Language	9 (9%)
Dealing with Difficult Guests	7 (7%)
Forum for Open Communication	12 (12%)
Cultural Difference	2 (2%)
Facilitators	8 (8%)
Play	1 (1%)
Role-play	3 (3%)
Research background	3 (3%)
Other	21 (21%)
Improve CS Skills	29 (30%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>99 (100)</b>

\* Other refers to different responses from participants concerning the workshop allowing for interaction, being informative, allowing staff to understand their individual contribution to service and being pitched at the right level.

The feedback from the questionnaire indicates that participants saw the major strengths of the workshop as being the enhancement of their personal CS skills, the use of the workshop as a forum for open communication through which to raise issues to management, the understanding of body language cues to identify customers in need of service, as well as the improvement in interactional skills in how to deal with difficult guests.

In terms of the main learning points from the intervention, several participants noted that learning how to deal with difficult people and different situations was useful for their work role. One participant highlighted the need for slots hosts to be adaptive to the difficult casino environment due to the noise and pressure characterizing the setting and the need to be resilient to operate in such an environment.

*“This environment that we work in, the gaming floor is unique, it’s unlike anywhere else, it’s hectic, it’s quiet, it’s busy, it’s noisy, it’s everything out together and if you are not that type of character to adapt to it then you lose it and that’s how you get these bad CS (experiences) and things like that.”*

(Shift Manager)

Another participant mentioned the risk of transferring negative emotional states, as a result of dealing with a difficult guest, onto the next customer that you deal with. This seems to indicate the need for staff to exhibit emotional labour in displaying positive emotions, even when such positive states do not concur with their true feelings at the time.

*“Thats when I walk away from a difficult guest – I should not take the frustration out on the next guest.”*

(Slots Host)

Many participants also mentioned that what was most useful from the workshop was the ability to always have a positive attitude when dealing with guests, despite having negative experiences with guests they had dealt with earlier.

*“My attitude, I never take everything the guests throw into my face into consideration especially criticism.”*

(Slots Host)

The importance of having a high level of self-esteem was seen as being important in order to do one’s job within the high stress casino environment:

*“Self-esteem because when I get offended I would take it as (an) offence and lack trust in what I’m doing.”*

(Slots Host)

A sense of resilience and grit seemed to echo through participants responses, which they suggested was an important trait to have in order to function within the casino environment. In addition, one participant mentioned the importance of being able to depersonalize negative interactions with customers as they tend to have a negative impact on one's emotional state. This message was delivered through the training after being conceived as a common problem by slots hosts by one of the managers who had been interviewed during the situation analysis. One respondent mentioned:

*“Don't take everything personal. It will make you lose your mind.”*

(Slots Host)

One participant indicated that what they found useful was hearing their colleagues' experiences in dealing with guests, through which they vicariously learnt how to respond in such situations:

*“The experiences that my other colleagues has faced before. This will help me to apply what I learnt today in future just in case I face similar situations.”*

(Slots Host)

One participants highlighted the importance of having everyone understand a common goal and work together as a team. The notion of understanding the big picture, related to how facilitators linked excellent CS to casino profitability and resultant job security during the training session:

*“Helping others understand the goal. Helps if everyone looks at the big picture.”*

(Slots Host)

Feedback from the questionnaire suggests that participants noted the importance of not passing on negative emotional states arising out of negative interactions with previous guests, when interacting with new customers and resiliency as key resources required for service work in the casino environment. In addition, many participants maintained that the content on cultural difference was useful for their work role. Furthermore, respondents highlighted aspects of the workshop illustrating how to communicate effectively with the guest, identify body language and deal with difficult people as being useful for their work roles. A discussion on participants' recommendations for improving the intervention follows.

### 7.3.2 Recommendations to Improve the Intervention

A large majority of participants mentioned that more time should be allocated to the workshop session.

*“Increase the time to maybe a full day.”* (Slots Host)

In addition, some participants felt that the workshop should be run across all departments.

*“To roll out the workshops to other departments e.g. cashiers, security and food and beverages.”*

(Slots Host)

One participant indicated that the workshop should be run twice a year.

*“To be done at least twice a year for all floor staff.”*

(Slots Host)

Another delegate suggested that the workshop should form a part of the induction process for new staff so to better prepare them of what is expected of them with regards to CS delivery.

*“To have it every time when Company X hires new staff...that will help those joining the company to know what is expected of them.”*

(Slots Host)

Some participants requested more role-play and videos in future in order to identify the correct way to deal with customers in specific situations:

*“Perhaps slightly longer – more in depth role playing of the correct CS procedure – maybe in the form of video clips – comment on good service.”*

(Slots Host)

One candidate indicated that not all participants enjoyed the role plays thus suggesting that future workshops should ensure for more variation in terms of learning methods.

*“The role plays are fun and helps but (for) some people it’s easier in real life to do – that not to act it out so, so I think the role plays should stop.”*

(Slots Host)

It was suggested that a more direct approach be used in the training by interacting with customers as part of the session:

*“Maybe conduct the training outdoors in a more open space and also have a more direct approach (with the training) with guests on the floor.”*

(Slots Host)

Another participant recommended that guests directly form part of the training to hear their side of the story:

*“The guest must be invited (into the session) especially the high profile ones to get their side of the story.”*

(Slots Host)

One participant recommended that facilitators spend more time with slots attendants to better understand the work context and get a better feel of what they have to deal with.

Some participants mentioned that it was important to get more manager involvement in the training so as to make them aware of challenges to providing excellent CS.

*“Get managers involved, to be aware of challenges affecting and blocking good CS.”*

(Slots Host)

One participant recommended that facilitators go into more depth on cultural diversity while another participant indicated that maybe the training should be done outdoors in a more open space.

In summary, after attending the intervention participants recommended that more time be given to the intervention as well as more use of video and role plays in workshop activities.

The codes derived from the third open-ended question of the questionnaire which sought to determine participants' recommendations for improving the workshop are presented below.

**Table 27: Recommendations to Improve the Workshop**

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<b>Codes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
More time	23 (27%)
More frequent training	6 (7%)
Wider provision of training	6 (7%)
More role-plays	4 (5%)
More videos	3 (4%)
More management involvement	1 (1%)
More content on cultural difference	1 (1%)
More customer involvement in training	3 (4%)
Positive comments	20 (23%)
Other?	18 (21%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>85 (100%)</b>

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Note: Other refers to different responses from staff concerning provision of more breaks during the intervention, more debates, less role plays and more focus on the customer

A majority of 27% of participants recommended that more time be given to the training which was only run for half-day sessions (4 hours). Over 23% provided positive comments in relation to recommendations thus highlighting the positive response received from participants in regard to their experience of the workshop. In addition, 7% of participants requested a wider provision of training through a series of intervention rather than a stand-alone intervention whilst 7% also recommended that similar training be done more frequently.

The responses pertaining to cultural barriers that are experienced are addressed below.

### **7.3.3 Cultural Barriers to Providing CS**

In the questionnaire, the language barrier was identified by participants as a critical barrier to providing high quality CS. The use of body language for communication between hosts and guests where language barriers exist, as well as the impact of language barriers in service interactions are discussed below.

#### **Language Barriers and Body Language**

Five respondents identified language barriers, especially between Chinese guests and local slots hosts as being a cultural barrier to providing excellent service. One participant mentioned how she used body language to overcome the language barrier:

*“I had a guest that does not talk English so I had to explain by using body language to understand me and brought someone that understood them.”*

(Slots Host)

One respondent mentioned the problems in dealing with Chinese guests who did not speak English:

*“Chinese guests normally have poor English skills and it’s hard to sometimes meet their expectations if you don’t know what they expect from you, cause of poor communication.*

(Slots Host)

The above excerpts on cultural barriers to excellent service in the casino environment indicate the different strategies that frontline casino staff used on the frontline to deal with language barriers. These include referring guests from cultures other than their own to staff members who are from similar cultures, to the use of language translation phone apps (applications) and the use of body language to interpret and identify customer needs. In some instances, slots hosts were unable to assist the guest due to the language barrier. The impact of cultural difference on service interactions is discussed below.

## **Cultural Difference**

Many respondents highlighted that a lack of understanding of other cultures was a barrier to providing excellent CS. This finding highlights the need for more cross-cultural educational interventions that seek to educate staff in the casino industry on cultural difference so they are better able to understand customers from different cultures.

Some staff highlighted how cultural nuances can impact CS, thereby suggesting that knowledge of cultural nuances can improve CS:

*“I am a Zulu person and for us the eye contact with someone old is being rude.”*

(Slots Host)

Another respondent (Indian male) highlighted that extroversion can also be interpreted as disrespect by older black guests:

*“My loud voice and joking nature and personality does not sit well with older black guests. I have had a few bad experiences.”*

(Slots Host)

A female slots host also highlighted gender issues apparent in the casino environment where low expectancies of female staff can create a self-fulfilling prophecy:

*“Sometimes the guest thinks cause you a woman you can’t make it.”*

(Slots Host)

A discussion on the strategies used by frontline staff for dealing with racism from customers follows.

### **Racism as a barrier in CS**

Several respondents identified racism as a cultural barrier to providing excellent CS. There were many participants who mentioned that some customers preferred to interact with hosts from their own race group:

*“Some guests don’t want to be helped by black women technicians and they ask specifically for white technicians.”*

(Slots Host)

Another respondent mentioned that some customers do not show confidence in black hosts being able to resolve their issues:

*“Some of our guests find it difficult to believe or trust us (Blacks) when dealing with disputes. Most prefer to get someone from their group or race.”*

(Slots Host)

Some black staff reported racial stereotyping by customers when trying to solve customers’ problems:

*“When a white person thinks I’m taking my own time just because I’m Black and Blacks are always slow.”*

(Slots Host)

One slots host directly addressed the problem of racism and its impact on the feelings of staff members:

*“Basically and briefly is just the matter of racism. Some customers just don’t have respect for other people and they never care about peoples’ feelings.”*

(Slots Host)

One respondent highlighted the fact that people close their eyes to racism and pretend that it does not exist. The intervention had addressed stereotyping as part of the workshop content, however extracts from the evaluation questionnaire provided below illustrate employee requests for more in depth training on how to deal with stereotyping and discrimination from customers.

The following statement by the respondent was a plea for training on how to deal with discrimination in the correct manner:

*“We dealt with stereotypes but I feel we ignore the fact that racism is still alive, (and) exists. But no one is telling us how to deal with that problem.”*

(Slots Host)

One female technician mentioned the demotivating impact of racism on technical casino staff, suggesting that such behaviours from customers can reduce motivation and job satisfaction.

*“It demotivates me to see that people think less of me.”*

(Slots Technician)

The above statement is particularly insightful in that it suggests that racism from customers demotivates slots hosts.

Other participants had a positive view on stereotyping and how to deal with it by exceeding performance expectations and thus falsifying the customer’s assumptions about a specific group. This message formed part of the workshop material (Model of Dealing with Diverse Customers - discussed earlier) in attempting to provide staff with ways of dealing with discrimination:

*“Some customers have stereotypes and believe in differently however I try by all means to solve that perception.”*

(Slots Host)

Some participants mentioned that the training had helped equip them to deal with such situations. One participant also pointed out that the session made him more open-minded about his job.

One participant mentioned that some customers accuse hosts of being racist when they help other guests first, even when the guest is not from the same race group as the host:

*“Some other guests are so difficult, when you helping others first they think you being racist.”*  
 (Slots Host)

With regards to the frequency distribution of the kind of comments provided, the majority of the participants (57%) agreed that they do face cultural barriers in trying to provide excellent CS. The particular cultural barriers they experienced were reported by only about half of the participants and were largely related to language difference (40%), a lack of understanding of other cultures (20%) as well as perceived racism from guests (13%).

**Table 28: Identified Cultural Barriers in Providing Excellent CS**

<b>Codes</b>	<b>Frequency</b>
Language Barrier	18 (40%)
Racialisation of Events by Guest	1 (2%)
Racial Stereotyping from Guest	4 (9%)
Racism from Guest	6 (13%)
Demotivation in Response to Racism	3 (7%)
Gender Stereotyping from Guest	1 (2%)
Understanding other Cultures	9 (20%)
Other	3 (7%)
<b>Total</b>	<b>45 (100%)</b>

Note: “Other” refers to responses from staff concerning demotivation as a result of customers stereotyping hosts and customers needing to understand good service from a host’s cultural background.

The findings from the open-ended question regarding cultural barriers experienced in CS delivery such as the impact of language barriers, lack of understanding of other cultures and racism (i.e. discrimination, prejudice and stereotyping) from guests was seen to have a negative impact on service interactions.

#### **7.4 Summary of Findings from the Workshop Evaluation Questionnaire**

The frequency results of the workshop evaluation questionnaire suggested increased skills efficacy in terms of CS from learners after the intervention. Subsequently, staff felt better equipped to identify body language leading to customer complaints, as well as deal with

customer problems and difficult people more effectively. The intervention also motivated staff to provide better CS and facilitators were evaluated positively by participants in terms of content knowledge and encouraging participation.

The open-ended aspects of the evaluation question revealed that a considerable number of participants saw the strong points of the workshop as being the improvement of their personal CS skills, the use of the workshop as a mechanism for voicing their issues to management, the understanding of body language cues to identify hidden customers needs as well as the improvement in interpersonal skills in terms of how to deal with difficult guests.

The use of different learning such as role play and video analysis were seen as a strength of the intervention by providing different viewpoints of service interactions for staff, thus contributing to new learnings. The participatory nature of the intervention was also seen as a strength by allowing staff to communicate openly on work issues thereby promoting involvement, accountability and ownership.

The intervention was seen as being useful to slots hosts and technicians, as strategies that staff used to deal with CS issues were shared amongst participants, thus contributing to collective learning and development of practical knowledge. Participants also highlighted the importance of high self-esteem for dealing with a stressful working environment.

A substantial proportion of participants recommended that more frequent training and a wider provision of such training be provided in future. Future interventions were said to benefit from utilizing supervisors as internal trainers due to their contextual knowledge.

It seems that cultural barriers such as language barriers and responding to perceived racism from guests are impediments to providing excellent CS. The culturally specific nature of body language was highlighted as a challenge, with staff needing to enhance their cultural knowledge to improve service behaviours.

## **7.5 Post-Intervention Evaluation Interviews and Focus Group Discussion**

As mentioned previously in the Research Methodology chapter, for the process evaluation phase, the interviews were conducted with the same respondents in the situation analysis phase, 10 months after the intervention had been implemented. Four semi-structured interviews were held with two managers, an HR consultant and a supervisor. However, one focus group was

conducted with only two respondents. The remaining participants from the initial focus group (two slots hosts and a technician) conducted in the situation analysis phase were interviewed individually due to unavailability for the focus group. Furthermore, four additional interviews were conducted with three managers and the Managing Director, who were not available for interviews during the situation analysis phase, in order to gain an understanding of their view of the intervention as well as CS challenges at the casino. In terms of post-intervention observations, like in the situation analysis phase, purposive sampling was used during the process evaluation phase to identify two hour periods where the researcher was permitted to observe interactions in the slots area of the casino floor.

As employed in the analysis of the open-ended aspects of the evaluation questionnaire, thematic analysis was utilized to analyse the data collected through the post-intervention evaluation interviews and focus group discussion, in order to gain an understanding of the outcomes of the intervention in relation to improving frontline CS in Casino X. The following themes and sub-themes were developed from the data analysis.

**Table 29. Themes and Sub-Themes Generated from Post-Intervention Interviews and the Focus Group Discussion**

Themes	Sub-Themes
Outcomes of the Intervention	Staff Experiences of Intervention Strengths of the Intervention Recommendations

After the development of a code list, an overarching theme (outcomes of the intervention) was developed at first followed by the creation of sub-themes including staff experiences of the intervention, strengths of the intervention and recommendations (Braun and Clarke, 2006). The following discussion of findings presents data from the interviews and focus groups in line with the above themes.

### **7.5.1 Theme: Outcomes of the Intervention**

During the post-intervention interviews and focus group, participants' views on evaluating the intervention were consolidated into the larger theme of the outcomes of the intervention. This

theme constituted three sub-themes including staff experiences of the intervention, recommendations and strengths of the intervention.

### **Staff Experiences of the Intervention: Slots Hosts' Views**

When discussing the impact of the intervention, one host mentioned that the intervention had served as a reminder to provide positive CS experiences as well as learning to depersonalize negative CS situations:

*“The workshop helped us a lot. I’m a long time in my job you lose focus and need a reminder that I’m in a workplace and what my job is? It recharged me, it’s your job it’s for you as a host to meet the standard.*

*Also I learnt that in dealing with hard customers, you don’t have to take it personally. The guest has already been waiting for one hour and maybe you just entered the shift. You don’t have to be angry with the customer, just understand the situation. You need to tell them you’ve just arrived. The guest only wants the card back, they think you the one who served them earlier.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

When asked what she does differently on the job after attending the workshop, one slots host mentioned that she communicates to the customer the expected waiting time before the task is complete:

*“When you do a jackpot, it takes 10-15 mins. Now I tell the guest the jackpot will take 10-15 minutes in advance. I knew that before the training.”*

(Respondent 5, Slots Host)

The fact that the host mentioned that she knew before the training that she had to communicate the expected waiting time to customers, indicates that much of the content that was covered in the intervention was common knowledge, with the intervention serving largely as a motivational reminder of how to deal with customers.

In relation to changes made by management after the intervention, one slots host noted that attendants were now allowed to process unclaimed credits on the slots machines:

*“There has been adjustment in some procedures. We have been authorized to do unclaimed credits when credits are left on the machine. The host has to make sure that credits have been removed. If they can trace the customer, the customer can unclaim it under their guest profile online. We used to have golf security to come with you, the sup to collect the card. As a host, we have access to do an unclaim without having to have access to golf security.”*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

Excerpts from interviews on the impact of the intervention from a leadership perspective follows.

### **Staff Experiences of the Intervention: Leaders’ Views**

When asked about the impact of the intervention, one shift manager noted that there was little change in behaviour due to there being no continuation of the programme:

*“They were not reminded of it. It was there, there were certain things that people took out of it, certain tactics that you could use, stuff like that but I think overall it definitely died off and my reasoning is cause it was done and it stopped. That was it. 4 hours on the day, for some staff it was getting 4 hours off the floor, that’s what it was for certain people, certain people I am sure took a lot out of it. Overall, if you said a year later, or 6 months later, are you actually implementing or using what you have learnt in the superheroes CS workshop, no, they don’t, definitely don’t.”*

(Respondent 8, Shift Manager)

When asked whether the intervention had any impact on behavior change and in terms of the duration of that change, the shift manager mentioned:

*“Let’s say, give it a month. It ran over two week’s right? So let’s just say for those two weeks and two weeks after that.”*

(Respondent 8, Shift Manager)

One supervisor mentioned that there was no application of the learnings on the job after the workshop:

*“There was no transfer of learning. They have to be reminded, it ends up looking like military school. I want to listen to solutions. They don’t apply what they’ve learnt.”*

(Respondent 7, Supervisor)

Nevertheless, the same supervisor noted later that there was a small change in behaviour of frontline staff after the intervention, however that the organisation's culture worked against new learnt behaviours:

*“Yes there was change in behaviour in approximately one out of ten staff. This lasted for about four to eight weeks in each person. The problem is that the culture changes you back.”*

(Respondent 8, Shift Manager)

One important aspect to note is the importance of leaders' behaviours in the workplace as a beacon of transmitting culture at a team, departmental or organizational level. It is suggested that if there was more leadership buy-in into the intervention, that sustainable behaviour change would have been more likely (Kotter, 1996).

One of the managers pointed out that during some of the workshops, some shift managers displayed a negative outlook towards the intervention due to either feeling defensive against customer feedback data that had been provided in the session as well as some being resistant towards facilitators who they felt did not understand industry specifics due to lack of industry experience. In line with social learning theory (Bandura as cited in Taylor, Chan & Russ-Eft, 2005), the manager suggests that if leaders do not take the intervention seriously, then staff will not take it seriously either, resulting in little behaviour change:

*“Managers see CS as reactive, as conflict resolution. The impact is that in groups where there was no resistance from managers in the training there still remains a positive impact today from certain groups. The training depends on people's needs at the time, there needs to be changes with autocratic managers.”*

(Respondent 8, Shift Manager)

One staff member mentioned the absence at the intervention of the manager who initially requested the training, indicating a lack of management buy-in and support for the intervention:

*“Manager X has a director style – I would expect the manager to attend the training. Slots has transactional communication. There is a robotic culture, there's no time for communication – they need a coaching style.”*

(Respondent 13, Supervisor)

The above comment suggests a transactional, mechanistic and directive leadership style that is displayed by the manager which filters down into the culture of the department. A lack of communication and a need for a coaching style of leadership is identified as a need in the department to encourage problem-solving, staff development and better CS. Recommendations provided by staff for improving the CS programme are discussed below.

### **Strengths of the Intervention: Leaders Views**

Strengths of the intervention in relation to improving CS at the casino were discussed by participants in the interviews and focus group discussion. Subsequently participants also provided recommendations for improving the CS programme.

One shift manager noted that he had learned some new CS techniques but seemed to indicate that as a manager, the workshop content was not sufficient. This concern was addressed by the manager requesting the training who communicated a preference for workshop content targeting slots hosts rather than managers, thus resulting in the workshop being pitched at slots host level:

*It was for me as an individual, it was, I gained definite insight, as I said I learnt a few little tricks that have helped me. I am saying little tricks but it has made a big difference. It's not something that I didn't know existed, I just needed to be reminded of it and going through it, you sit there and think back to it. I should have been doing that more, this is the right thing to do, I didn't know. As a manager, I am one for 8 months now, I can't comment. I don't know hey.*

(Respondent 8, Manager)

Lastly, one supervisor mentioned the difficulty in being in a supervisory role due to having to deal with both people issues and customer issues and needing to find a balance:

*"Being a sup (supervisor) can be difficult because you deal with both guests and staff issues. This training helped me find a balance between the two."*

(Respondent 7, Supervisor)

One slot host identified the role-play situations as being a strength of the workshop:

*"The role-play situation where the host had to deal with two irate customers was good, it really happened. It was a good accurate reflection. It served as a reminder, a refresher and showed*

*us how to handle the guest complaint. How to approach the guest. You need to leave personal issues aside and don't let it affect your service."*

(Respondent 2, Slots Host)

A slots host also highlighted the importance of resolving internal issues due to their impact on CS behaviours:

*It reminded both the employer and employees how to deal with internal problems and the employer is not aware that this is affecting the work.*

(Respondent 1, Slots Host)

### **Recommendations for Improving the Programme: Leaders Views**

The lack of casino industry experience of the facilitators was highlighted by one of the managers as an area of improvement for future workshops. The importance of staff achieving a reward in terms of a monetary gain or recognition for providing excellent CS was also proposed as a way to encourage positive CS behaviours by staff:

*"You need to understand the nature of this business properly, it's easy to say that you need to give good CS in a casino, it's a total different thing giving that CS in a casino industry...it has to be done if not by the people within the industry then somebody who has spent enough time to understand the industry. It has to be something that staff themselves have to buy in to, be committed to it and understand it and like it. It must something whereby they must derive something from it. Whether it is, monetary gain or recognition, rewards etc. but if it's something of that nature, staff definitely tend to buy in."*

(Respondent 8, Manager)

The shift manager mentioned how social learning theory can be used to encourage more uptake of the CS intervention, by conducting a train the trainer course with supervisors who then train their subordinates on the course content:

*"Ok, maybe not, the [brand engagement programme] isn't focused on CS but if it were a CS intervention then supervisors are now equipped and taught and trained how to teach and how to bring about and how to train your fellow staff on CS then I promise you, if you have a room filled with 10 attendants and 2 supervisors training this thing, attendants now see and hear their supervisors preaching this, watch them acting it out on the floor, that sort of thing,*

*definitely you will have greater buy in. Huge buy in.”*

(Respondent 8, Manager)

The importance of ownership of the programme where people from the organisation train the other staff on the content was echoed by this respondent. One manager discussed how the manner in which the workshop was facilitated resulted in an inversion of the organizational hierarchy, which could therefore explain managers' resistance during the workshop:

*“The style of the workshop works against traditional culture, it is not conducive. The manager experience and staff experience of the workshop is totally different.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

The above statement was echoed by another supervisor who mentioned:

*“They use forums to complain, in a chorus we can influence, they use intimidation. Sometimes you need to focus on the customer.”*

(Respondent 13, Supervisor)

One manager mentioned the need for a more consistent approach to ensure behaviour change in terms of CS:

*“For sustained change you need 20% of staff to change especially the lower and newer staff. You need a more consistent approach, more of a journey. The sustained change creates positivity and energy which comes from confidence.”*

(Respondent 6, Manager)

One manager mentioned that he particularly enjoyed the body language aspect of the workshop, where participants were taught to display non-threatening body language when approaching a difficult situation:

*“I can't remember much of the content (interview conducted 10 months after intervention), except the hand gestures which were for me, brilliant, it worked very well, I used it a lot with the guests , especially when you walking into a situation and you are going to get cut, (opens hands) ‘Ay, what's up?’. For me that was a good one.”*

(Respondent 8, Manager)

One of the supervisors who had been interviewed in the pre-intervention phase, mentioned that the specific needs of the department could have been better addressed during the pre-intervention phase to develop an intervention more suited to the department's needs:

*“If we had more time we could have focused on specific needs of the department. We could have dug deeper to find out what the problem is. We could have dug deeper in the preparation phase to find out what we want from it?”*

(Respondent 13, Supervisor)

The above discussion provided a comprehensive account of the outcomes of the intervention and sub-themes generated from the post-intervention interviews and focus group including staff experiences of the intervention, strengths of the intervention and recommendations for improvement. An account of the post-intervention observations conducted by the researcher in the slots area of the casino follows.

## **7.6 Post-Intervention Naturalistic Observation**

Naturalistic observation was conducted on two occasions by the researcher in the post-intervention phase in order to assess the outcome of the CS intervention at Casino X.

### **7.6.1 Post-Intervention Observation 1**

The first post-intervention observation was conducted on 1 October 2015 at 7pm in the Smoking Prive, located on the main casino floor. The smoking section was filled to capacity and I proceeded to the cashiers. I loaded credits on my card and proceeded to play slots in the smoking prive of the casino. I played slots (5c and 10c machines) for approximately 30 minutes and lost R140. An older coloured female was very sociable and spoke about how the machines always beat her. “I’m better off spending my money on a draught,” she said. “You know if you are drinking you can just lose all your money. I only play the nutty machine. That machine you playing on, always beats you, but when it pays it pays.”

She spoke about relationships.

“You must take your girlfriend out, she needs that. Our Coloured men they must stay at home. When you young you must go out. Take her to the casino. Don’t go by yourself. I put R... in the machine and I didn’t win once. I’m gonna complain, that’s impossible.”

Hosts were walking around, there were approximately four hosts on the smoking prive floor, it was hard to find a host. One host (a Black Female) was seen chatting and walking with her arm around the shoulder of a waitron.

### **Key Talking Points:**

There was a problem with a machine which an elderly Indian Female was using. This was either a transfer failure or reboot where the events go up. The host attended to the guests warmly. He opened the machine and made a call on the radio. It was a very noisy environment, I could not hear what was said on the radio.

He opened the machine again. The guest was now waiting over 11 minutes and started to look a bit frustrated, standing behind the host expectantly, wanted to rush off and play another machine. The host then talked nicely to the older guest and reassured her while taking the machine offline. The guest then moved to another machine. The host had remained calm, displayed positive body language and social skills in solving the customer's problem.

When I walked around observing hosts, at least three hosts looked unhappy with no smiles on their faces. These hosts had blank expressions on their faces showing no enthusiasm. When walking on the main floor it was apparent a whole row of machines had gone offline near the entrance.

A Black Male waiter served drinks and food to an older Black Female guest. The food was left on the side of the slots machine. The interaction was over in 20 seconds and the customer thanked the waiter.

I noticed that lots of customers place their legs at the side of the slots machines to make themselves more comfortable, possibly due to long spells of play. Many white couples were gambling together with their partners. One older White Female could not remove her card from the machine. I assisted by pressing menu so as to remove the card but it didn't work. Another player next to her assisted and it worked, while her husband had gone to look for a host to assist.

### **Reflective Notes:**

I started playing on one slot machine. I lost R90 (R4 a spin) and began devising strategies to beat the machine. I began playing faster (reducing time between spins) as I thought I would confuse the slots machine. I also tried played slower as I believed the machine paid out based on time spent at that specific machine.

After losing R90 I went to another slots machine. I lost the remaining R50 in 10 minutes. I then went to a 5c machine and lost the remaining R0.50. I knew I was going to lose the rest of the money about half way in. But I had a little faith that I could still win after winning R800 on the slots during my pre-intervention observations. I was more concerned about winning and playing slots rather than observing CS. The sound and visual stimuli of the machine created positive feelings and responses in me. I noticed that when playing a slots machine, you are looking straight at the machine – it has your total attention, your eyes are fixed upon the screen. After losing my money I reached for my wallet and wanted to put another R100 onto my card, but I decided against it.

When I was observing an interaction between a host and a customer, one customer kept looking at me as if to say you don't belong here if you're not playing the machines. There seemed to be a gamblers code and the gamblers seemed to notice if you weren't gambling.

Over the speaker came a booming announcement: "Another Casino X Winner!" It was at that point that I noticed how noisy the environment was. There was a constant ringing of slots machines in the background at all times which was very loud and disorientating. When I first got to the casino floor I could not stand the noise and lights and constant ringing of the machines. I thought to myself: "What am I doing here?" I wanted to leave but I then realized I had to get my research done and proceeded with the observation.

The second post-intervention observation conducted by the researcher can be found in Appendix I and the findings of both observations are discussed below.

### **7.7 Summary of Findings from Observations**

The two post-intervention observations conducted by the researcher revealed one positive CS interaction being observed by the researcher where an Indian female experienced a technical fault delay on her machine, and was dealt with calmly and with confidence by the slots hosts.

Waitrons were also found to be helpful, friendly and efficient by the researcher. There was one occasion where slots hosts were difficult to find on the casino floor when a customer required assistance. Some hosts were found to display negative facial expressions whilst walking on the casino floor suggesting the experience of negative emotions and negative attitudes. One slots host also approached a customer requesting assistance for a technical fault, attempted to fix the machine and then left abruptly without communicating to the guest in any way. From the observed evidence that emerged, it was evident that the intervention did have an impact on some service interactions whilst other hosts continued serving customers without communicating effectively or displaying positive body language and attitudes.

## **7.8 Findings from the Process Evaluation**

In this section, findings from the process evaluation phase are discussed in relation to the examined literature and are critically discussed below in terms of whether they related to immediate outcomes of the workshops or long-term outcomes of the intervention.

### **Immediate Outcomes of the Intervention**

As discussed earlier, the participatory nature of the intervention was seen as a strong point by allowing staff to communicate openly on work issues thereby promoting involvement, accountability and ownership. The social and interactive nature of the participatory approach was seen to have a positive relational effect on staff, with one respondent in the post-intervention evaluation questionnaire mentioning that the workshop allowed them to listen to other people's views and speak out about the CS problems they faced. Many participants saw the enhancement of CS skills and the creation of a forum for open communication as being strengths of the workshop. The literature on engagement has illustrated how positive relationships between learners and their peers can contribute to increased engagement (Fredricks, Filsecker & Lawson, 2016).

Body language training teaching staff how to approach customers so as to display friendly cues, as well as identify non-verbal cues of customers that indicate a need for assistance, was seen as the most enjoyable aspect and a major strength of the workshop. Bohn (1999) notes that portrayal of positive body language is a skill needed for success in the professional services and sales sector. Some participants in the intervention mentioned that the body language aspect

of the programme was most useful as it was the first impression slots hosts provided to guests. Similarly, a study by Yuksel (2008) found that service employees exhibiting positive body language result in more satisfied customers, due to influencing customer perceptions of service quality from frontline staff. In addition, positive body language of service staff is linked to increased perceptions of competence and efficiency of frontline staff by customers (Pugh, 2001).

The role plays and video analysis were viewed as effective learning methods allowing hosts to identify the body language cues of customers requiring assistance, practice service behaviours as well as see CS situations from different perspectives. Role play is seen as an effective training method for dealing with sensitive situations and allows learners to practice learnt skills and reflect as a group on integral parts of their job (Managheb, Zamani, Shams & Farajzadegan, 2012; Martin, Kolomitro & Lam, 2014). In addition, video role-play and analysis together with structured reflection has been found to be effective for imparting communication skills as participants can view performance, reconsider feedback and create plans to modify behaviour in relation to a scenario. Hearing colleagues' experiences in how they had dealt successfully with difficult customers in the past, provided participants with strategies they could apply when facing similar work situations. This finding is supported by research outcomes by Waterman (2001) who found that action research interventions develops practical knowledge and providing learning opportunities through knowledge-sharing amongst participants.

In addition, the workshop was found to have a considerable effect on staff motivation with over 97% of staff agreeing that the workshop motivated them to provide better CS. Similarly, a study by Bekker, Nijssen and Hens (2001) found that employees who underwent CS training tend to approach service interactions with a more positive attitude and feel more valued and supported by the organisation. One respondent in the post-intervention interview reported feeling recharged after the intervention. This finding corresponds with the outcomes of a study by Le Blanc, Hox, Schaufeli, Taris and Peeters (2007) who found that participants in action research interventions within a hospital setting experienced low levels of emotional exhaustion and burnout immediately after the intervention, as well as six months later.

Findings from the focus group revealed that participants reported higher levels of self-efficacy in being able to deal with difficult customers after attending the training session. During the intervention, many respondents displayed low levels of self-efficacy in relation to their belief that they as individuals could not have an impact on CS within casino X, due to environmental

factors such as poor CS processes and faulty equipment impeding service performance. By the end of the intervention, when evaluating learnings gained as a result of the intervention, many respondents revealed high levels of skills efficacy relating to their ability to apply learning from the intervention in their jobs suggesting increased confidence in their ability to use these newly learnt skills. Similarly, Liao and Chuang (2004) highlight that CS training interventions can increase frontline service employees skills and knowledge to deal effectively with difficult customers. Findings of the study at Casino X suggest that participatory teaching methods may be able to develop self-efficacy and encourage application of skills on the job. Furthermore, in the post-intervention interviews, some respondents noted that they had continued to use the body language techniques imparted during the intervention suggesting a transfer of training onto the job. This was in direct contrast to the comments made by a manager during the post-intervention interview who highlighted that no transfer of training occurred due to staff not being reminded of the workshop through a series of interventions.

Suggestions by participants on improving the training workshop include making future interventions for a longer duration. Many participants felt that the time allocated for the workshop (4 hours) was too short and in future perhaps a full day would be suitable to cover all content thoroughly. A wider provision of training across the entire organisation was also recommended by participants to ensure consistency in service (Waterman, 2001). Both a manager and supervisor interviewed after the intervention, highlighted the limited impact of the intervention and application of knowledge and skills on the job, due to there being no continuation of the programme and staff not being reminded of the intervention.

### **Medium-Term Outcomes of the Intervention**

A lack of team work and an ineffective communication system, particularly between slots hosts and technicians, were identified during the research conducted at Casino X suggesting possible causes of poor CS at the organisation. Kralj and Solnet (2010) point out that support and cooperation amongst frontline staff are integral factors in enhancing CS quality. Wildes (2007) found that elements of organisational culture such as team work, supervision and monitoring, leadership and communication have an effect on service quality. One manager in his interview mentioned that when working in shifts, frontline staff from a specific cultural group often left more work for staff members from other cultural groups. In comparison, when working with members from their own cultural groups, these members worked harder and helped each other

to a greater degree. This finding was supported in the implementation phase and suggests the existence of subtle discrimination between employees from different cultural groups that may have a negative impact on team work, which is integral to providing excellent CS (Jones and George, 2006).

In terms of the stressful environment and prolonged shifts characterised by casino work, staff expect good facilities in terms of break rooms and cafeterias (Wan & Chan, 2013). These findings were supported in the interview with a shift manager at Casino X, who highlighted the excellent facilities available to staff at the casino including the break rooms with plasma screens and the cafeteria providing free coffee to staff. During post-intervention interviews, one manager highlighted that frontline staff who are seen as not being able to adapt to the difficult casino environment, were pointed out as being the individuals involved in poor customer interactions. A study by Chi, Yang and Lin (2016) found that frontline staff who were victims of customer mistreatment experienced negative emotions, which often results in a negative impact on the physiological and psychological state of staff. This results in experiences of strong, negative emotions, culminating in staff withdrawal from work, deviant and avoidance behaviours such as evading service situations, idling and prolonging breaks, as well as resulting in absenteeism and turnover. Such behaviours were noted by managers at casino X during the pre-intervention interviews who highlighted complaints from customers when slots hosts could not be found on the casino floor and clustered in social groups whilst on duty rather than serving customers. Chi, Yang and Lin (2016) note that periods of absence were seen as a way of avoiding negative service situations so as to allow for mood stabilization. Findings from this piece of literature may provide a possible explanation of why slots hosts do not provide attentive service to customers on the casino floor in Casino X. Such avoidant behaviours contributing to poor CS, may be as a result of past mistreatment from customers.

In order to reduce repetition, intercultural challenges that were identified in the situation analysis phase will now be discussed in relation to the literature. Thereafter intercultural challenges identified in the process evaluation phase will also be discussed.

During an interview in the situation analysis phase, one manager discussed service interactions with customers and highlighted the importance of hosts' communicating the process of what events were going to occur so as to resolve their dispute. He mentioned that often due to a lack of communication from the hosts, guests were left uncertain as to whether anyone was dealing with their query and when to expect a response. By not closing the information loop, the host

would return to an angry customer. Booyesen (2001) states that collectivist cultures have a higher tolerance for uncertainty than individualistic cultures who favour structure, rules and a less ambiguous context. Individuals from individualistic cultures therefore experience higher levels of stress and anxiety and feel discomfort in unstructured situations. Malhorta et al. (2005) notes that due to different cultural contexts, consumers from different countries may have different perceptions of what service quality is. Booyesen (2001) notes that to ensure effective cross-cultural interactions in the workplace, staff need to become socially aware of the different subcultural orientations in the environment.

During an interview in the situation analysis phase, one manager mentioned that Black hosts often reacted defensively to angry White and Indian customers who had experienced service delays. In some instances, hosts would interpret the customer's anger as discrimination and withdraw service behaviours, thereby perpetuating a negative stereotype of the host's race group (that the customer may or may not have had to begin with). Hofstede (2007) notes that saving of face, respect for tradition and social reciprocation are characteristic of collectivist cultures. The concept of face refers to positive social self-worth that an individual wants others to have of themselves in a relational social context (Bao, Zhou & Su, 2003). The social aspect of face is a function of one's social standing, prestige and honour that results from one's successes. In collectivist cultures, a person views himself or herself not as an individual, but rather in relation to others. As a result the social self-face of an individual reflects also upon one's family and even work colleagues. In contrast, the moral aspect of face relates to the confidence of others in one's moral character. Face consciousness relates to a person's desire to enhance their "face" or avoid losing face to significant others in social interactions. Gaining or losing face is dependent on positive or negative social evaluations of others, and losing face can entail being embarrassed, shamed or humiliated by others in social interactions. In collectivist cultures, when one's social face is attacked, people try to defend or save their faces (Zhang, Cao & Grigoriou, 2011). Considering that a large majority of slots hosts at Casino X were Black (from collectivist cultures), it is possible that these staff viewed negative interactions with customers as losing face in public and therefore resorted to defending their faces and withdrawing service behaviours.

It is possible that the defensive response of slots hosts in such situations can be partly explained by slots host losing face in such situations as a result of abuse from customers (Zhang, Cao & Grigoriou, 2011). In relation to whether casino management should protect the dignity of frontline staff who have been verbally or racially abused by customers, Karoul (2006) states

that not all customers are good for the well-being of the organization and its people. This statement suggests that employee well-being is more important to organisations than the retention of abusive customers. Sturdy (2001) highlights that in frontline CS situations with high pressure, low levels of trust, lack of mobility and requiring emotion management, cooperation by staff may appear only at a surface level. Rather workers in such situations use compliance with required work behaviours as a form of defensive resistance, by distancing thoughts and feelings so as to maintain a sense of control of the work situation. In contrast to the finding by Sturdy (2001), the study at Casino X found that specific frontline staff (slots hosts) displayed explicit defensive behaviour by delaying service behaviours to customers who may have stereotyped them or discriminated against them.

Zourrig, Chebat, Toffoli and Medina-Borja (2012) note that customers may adapt their conflict style during intercultural service encounters according to their cultural values orientation and whether the other party is from a similar cultural group or not. Similar to Hofstede's framework of individualistic and collectivist cultures, Zourrig et al. (2012) distinguish between allocentric cultures (collectivist cultures such as African and Asian cultures) and idiocentrists cultures (individualistic Western cultures). When responding to intercultural service failures involving out-group members, allocentric members assume a defensive stance and distance themselves from idiocentrists, who are viewed as a threat to group harmony. In contrast, idiocentrists view service failures in a critical manner and with their emphasis on dominance and self-direction have an inclination to claim their rights. Idiocentrists pay little attention to the group membership of frontline services staff (Zourrig et al., 2012). These findings from the literature seem to corroborate findings from the interviews with managers as well as observations. In addition, Menon and Dube (2000) highlight that when guests are in a negative mood they expect reassurance, comfort and speedy resolution of their problem so as to diminish their experienced negative emotion.

Findings from the focus group in the situation phase revealed that frontline staff believed that a more lucrative reward system that could clearly attribute positive service behaviours to specific employees could assist in motivating staff to provide excellent CS. In terms of rewarding frontline staff, Chung & Schneider (2002) highlight that service rewards are an important driver of staff service behaviours and communicate the expected behaviours in relation to service standards. Staff service behaviours are affected by visible and specific reward systems. Bao, Zhou and Su (2003) note that due to the concept of face, people from collectivist cultures have a greater preference for publicly visible possessions than

individualistic cultures, and are likely to consume luxury products featuring upmarket brand names.

In addition, Hofstede (1983) notes that customers from collectivist cultures are more likely to rely on informal conversation and quality of interaction as creating the foundation for mutual understanding and trust. This evidence suggests that guests at Casino X may prefer to visit the casino rather than play online, due to the social benefits of human interaction they experience at the casino. This finding suggests the importance of personalised, frontline service for customer attraction and retention at Casino X.

During the interview with a manager during the situation analysis phase, it was apparent that slots hosts' negative attitudes towards customers and in particular, the lack of positive body language portrayed towards customers was seen an area for much needed improvement. Negative body language such as lack of eye contact when interacting with guests and social grouping between hosts on the casino floor when customers required assistance, were seen to create a negative impression of service in the slots area. It is important to note that the majority of slots hosts at Casino X were from Black and Indian race groups. Pillay (2008) notes that Black South African sub-culture is highly oriented to groups and places emphasis on the need for people to find their place in the societal structure. In addition, Indian sub-culture is also collectivist in nature thereby suggesting an emphasis on social needs and group interaction. This suggests that the social grouping of Black and Indian slots host during quiet times could be a result of high social needs of collectivist cultures.

In addition, cultures vary in relation to the importance they attach to circumstances, events and contexts. Paramasur notes that high context cultures (such as African and Asian) utilise body language to a greater degree than low-context cultures (European). This suggests that Black and Indian staff may accentuate both positive and negative body language reflecting their emotional state which becomes more visible to customers.

Whilst the discussion above has integrated the literature into intercultural challenges that were identified in the situation analysis phase, the following discussion critically analyses the findings from the process evaluation phase concerning intercultural challenges, in relation to the literature.

Shaq & Skarlicki (2014) found that employees from different cultures responded to customer mistreatment differently. In comparison to North American frontline staff (an individualistic culture in Hofstede's cultural orientation) who preferred to deal with customer mistreatment

through more direct methods e.g. customer sabotage and confrontation, East Asian staff (a collectivist culture) were found to withdraw citizenship behaviours (involving going above and beyond the job requirements). Shaq & Skarlicki (2014) note that emotionally involved events can trigger behaviours that are consistent with an individual's cultural norms. In line with the aforementioned findings from the literature, it is expected that White slots hosts at Casino X will respond to customer mistreatment more directly e.g. confrontation or sabotage (as done so from an individualistic culture perspective) whilst Indian, Black and Coloured hosts will respond through withdrawal of service behaviours due to being from collectivist cultures. The response of frontline staff from different race groups to customer mistreatment in the South African casino industry deserves further local research to understand how employees from these groups respond to customer abuse, so as to determine the impact on CS.

During the focus group discussion conducted during the process evaluation, hosts mentioned how after informing customers of how to play the slots machines, customers' would repeat the same behaviours and ask hosts the same questions regarding the rules of playing the machines. It is expected that the language barrier between hosts and guests in a multicultural context could play a part in this repeat behaviour (Lin & Wan, 2011; Wan, 2009).

Mai, Perry & Loh (2014) note that the cultural contexts of customers determine their gambling behaviours and preferences. Finding from the post-intervention interviews conducted at Casino X also revealed the importance of approaching guests from diverse cultures differently in alignment with their cultural values. These findings corroborate research outcomes of the study by Wan, Kim & Elliot (2013) which differentiated between the behaviours of customers from different cultures.

Considering that the intercultural challenges affecting CS that were identified in the situation analysis and process evaluation have been critically discussed in relation to the literature, additional findings relating to medium term outcomes of the intervention will now be discussed.

In an interview conducted during the process evaluation, one manager pointed out that the transmission of the bad elements of the casino environment (i.e. gambling, alcohol, prostitution, drugs) onto employees were also seen to have a negative impact on staff behaviour such as mistrust and jealousy. An interview with a shift manager revealed that the impact of the casino environment on the individual can result in transmission of negative workplace behaviours. This finding was in alignment with a study conducted on customer relationship

management in the casino environment which was found to have an impact on frontline staff behaviour (Kale, 2005), and is in line with Lewin's (1951) approach of seeing behaviour as a function of the person and the environment.

During a post-intervention interview, one manager noted that there was a need for incentives for attending the CS intervention and displaying learnt behaviours so as to encourage greater transfer of training onto the job. Mai, Perry & Loh (2014) note that organizational change efforts have a high rate of failure due to poor planning and execution of the change process. Burnes (2009) notes that the lack of a valid framework for implementing and managing change as well as the human factor, are critical reasons for the failure of change initiatives. In this study, an intervention was developed through an intervention research process. Whilst an organizational change process was not included in the design of the study due to a once-off intervention being developed, for future such interventions it is proposed that a series of interventions are run within an organizational change process (e.g. Lewin's change model of unfreeze-move-refreeze) to encourage sustainable change of service behaviours. Waterman (2001) notes that two to three years is the adequate amount of time required for developing, implementing and evaluating an action research intervention.

Originating from Lewin's theory that behaviour is a function of the individual psychology and the environment, there is a consensus amongst organizational development scholars that an enabling environment is needed in order to effect behaviour change (Kotter, 1996; Lewin, 1951; Schein, 2010). Within the context of Casino X, the CS workshops were introduced as a once-off intervention (as mentioned above) without any follow-up interventions or formal changes to the internal environment e.g. amendments to the performance management system, incentives encouraging service behaviours or leaders role modelling positive service behaviours that were proposed during the intervention. As a result, long-term sustainable change regarding improved CS behaviour was not achieved as indicated by various respondents in post-intervention interviews, nor was this an explicit objective as discussed with management at the outset of developing the intervention. In future CS interventions within a similar context, it is recommended that such interventions are positioned within a larger change management strategy that impact the internal environment to sustain new behaviours.

During interviews and focus group, many frontline staff pointed out that poor CS at Casino X was largely a result of factors such as poor equipment, high workload and poor CS processes. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) aims to forecast and explain behaviour in particular

contexts. TPB states that behaviour can largely be explained by an individual's intention to perform a specific behaviour. Intentions encompass the motivating factors that impact a behaviour and suggest how hard a person is willing to work or try in an attempt to perform a behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The stronger a person's intention to perform a behaviour, the more likely the behaviour will be performed. An individual's intention regarding a behaviour can be predicted and understood by three factors namely perceived behavioural control, attitude and the subjective norm concerning the behaviour. Perceived behavioural control relates to how easy or difficult a person perceives it is to perform a behaviour as well as having the resources to enact the behaviour and having obstacles to performing the behaviour removed. The attitude towards the behaviour concerns whether the individual has a positive or negative evaluation or disposition of performing the behaviour, stemming from a person's beliefs about the behaviour itself. The subjective norm refers to the perceived social pressure from peers to perform the behaviour or not. Generally speaking, the more a person has a positive attitude towards a certain behaviour and a positive subjective norm exists in relation to the behaviour, as well the individual having a high perception of behavioral control regarding the behaviour, the stronger the person's intention to perform the behaviour. The importance of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioural control in predicting intention to enact a behaviour varies according to different behaviours and settings (Ajzen, 1991).

In relating the TPB model to the CS intervention administered at Casino X, findings suggest that frontline staff had a weak perception of behavioural control in terms of providing CS behaviours promoted during the intervention. This was revealed during the pre-intervention and post-intervention interviews and focus groups as well as during the workshops, where frontline staff highlighted equipment, information technology and environmental issues such as high workloads and poor CS processes as the major cause of poor CS. The majority of these factors were out of the perceived behavioural control of frontline staff, thus weakening their intention to perform CS behaviours. It is not clear whether the subjective norm or individual attitudes concerning providing positive CS behaviours was affected by the intervention or not. However, post-intervention interviews with management indicated that positive CS behaviours in frontline staff where leaders showed support for the intervention, lasted for two to four weeks after the intervention and then faded out. This could have been a result of reduced perceived behavioural control of providing CS behaviours in relation to the existence of negative environmental factors. One respondent did mention in interviews that after the intervention there had been a change in some CS procedures where slots hosts were now authorized to

transfer unclaimed credits on slots machines back to customers without having to have a member of the security team present. Schneider (2011) notes that increasing work autonomy of service staff can be seen as a step in the right direction in terms of creating a more empowering service climate.

The following discussion looks at the use of autocratic leadership styles of supervisors and managers at Casino X, as identified by respondents during both the situation analysis and process evaluation phase. A discussion of the literature concerning the effect of autocratic leadership styles on CS, as identified in the situation analysis phase will be provided at first. Thereafter a discussion of research outcomes concerning autocratic leadership, as identified in the process evaluation phase, will be compared to the literature.

During the situation analysis phase, the need for team work was noted by hosts and technicians, especially during times where various role players such as a supervisor, host, technician and security person were required to meet at a specific slots machine to resolve a customer issue e.g. machine malfunction or jackpot. According to linkage research (Kralj & Solnet, 2010), if effective leadership practices are found in an organisation, then employee productivity and enthusiasm are positively impacted which translates into customer satisfaction. In addition, Hui, Chiu, Yu, Cheng and Tse (2007) note that when the organisation and the working environment (service climate) is not conducive to providing good internal and external CS, leadership behaviours play a critical role in enhancing service quality. However Booyesen (2001) notes that collectivist cultures have a tendency to conform to group norms and be accepting of power structures, thus suggesting their responsiveness to high power distance contexts. Hofstede (1983) notes that in high power distance cultures (such as South Africa) managers may need to be more autocratic in order to be effective.

Findings from the interviews in the situation analysis phase and the intervention conducted at Casino X suggested the use of an autocratic style of leadership by a significant number of supervisors which was seen to negatively affect communication and interaction between staff, thereby indirectly impacted CS.

Autocratic leadership is characterised by centralisation of power and decision-making in a single leader operating in a clearly defined hierarchy. Punitive leadership by supervisors such as reprimanding staff when customers' waiting times exceeded the norm, were identified as being a possible source of demotivation for frontline staff thereby negatively impacting the CS experienced by customers (Krajl & Solnet, 2010). Autocratic leadership can have negative

effects on team performance and team climate by making individuals feel undervalued and create perceptions of injustice (Bass & Bass, 2008). However, autocratic leadership can also create a sense of stability and predictability through a clearly delineated hierarchy which may enhance team functioning. Clark, Hartline and Jones (2009) note that service contexts required more flexible forms of leadership in comparison to autocratic leadership styles, so as to allow service staff to respond make decisions and respond creatively to customer issues. As purported by the literature, the use of autocratic leadership styles by supervisors at Casino X may inhibit team functioning by making slots hosts feel undervalued, thereby contributing to negative staff attitudes which may spill over onto customer interactions.

In the interviews during the process evaluation phase, one shift manager highlighted that autocratic leadership styles were still in use by some managers whilst another manager noted the transactional leadership style of a senior member of the organisation. The findings suggest a lack of use of transformational leadership styles by supervisors and managers which can impede service performance in the unit. Lee (2011) found that transformative leadership behaviours enhance staff attitude and motivate employees to actively offer services. Antonakis, Avolio and Sivasubramaniam (2003) note that when deciding whether to use transformational or transactional leadership styles, context must be taken into account where different contexts may require the use of different leadership styles by leaders. As discussed in the literature review, perceived and experienced transformational leadership styles have been found to be positively associated with service performance of staff and higher self-efficacy (Liao & Chuang, 2007). In addition, employees with high levels of self-efficacy were found to provide better service.

One manager noted that the majority of interactions (70%) that hosts have with clients are negative resulting in there being a negative expectancy by hosts when approaching customers. This is an interesting finding which can be incorporated into future CS training interventions. A study by Chi, Yang and Lin (2016) found that frontline staff who were victims of customer mistreatment experienced negative emotions which often results in a negative impact on the physiological and psychological state of staff. Frontline staff with high levels of self-esteem were seen to deal with customer mistreatment more constructively through their belief in their ability to influence external events, deal with aggressive customers and being able to regulate negative emotions. These findings from the study by Chi *et al.* (2016) are corroborated by

findings from the post-intervention evaluation at casino X where a participant highlighted the importance of high self-esteem to carry out one's duties in a high stress casino environment.

The following discussion aims to link the findings of the study to the conceptual framework that was developed as an outcome of the literature review in Chapter 3. The major findings of the situation analysis, implementation phase and process evaluation are discussed below in relation to the Multi-level Systems Model of Customer Service.

### **7.9 Linking Major Findings of the Study to the Multi-Level Systems Model of CS**

As discussed in detail in the literature review, the Multi-Level Systems Model of CS (MSMCS) was used as the conceptual framework for the study. The MSMCS Model adapted and combined three conceptual models including the socio ecological model, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance, as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes (refer to pg 89 for more detail). This conceptual framework allowed the researcher to present the situated context on different levels and interpret the relationships between relevant CS concepts and theories as identified in the literature. The findings of the study will now be discussed in relation to the MSMCS Model.

When looking at the interpersonal level of the MSMCS Model, the study found various challenges affecting CS. As discussed above in the process evaluation findings, there appeared to be little teamwork between staff from different cultural groups indicating a lack of trust across staff from different races. Findings from the situation analysis interview with a manager highlighted that there was an inclination for Black staff to respond to perceived discrimination from customers from dominant groups by reacting defensively through slowing down or withdrawing service behaviours, and did not know how to respond constructively to such situations. The social grouping of slots hosts on the casino floor, which could have been a way of accessing social support in responding to negative emotion experienced in CS interactions (Wan, 2013), was seen to result in staff displaying negative attitudes towards assisting customers as well as presenting negative body language. Findings from the pre-intervention interviews and implementation phase identified that the language barrier between some customers and slots hosts also impeded the provision of excellent CS. In addition, one manager in the pre-intervention perceived many frontline staff as lacking communication skills when

interacting with customers e.g. by not closing the information loop with customers to indicate when they could expect their request to be resolved.

There were various organisational factors that were seen to affect CS in the slots department. Poor equipment, inadequate CS processes and high workloads were highlighted as internal factors impeding service in the interviews and focus groups conducted across the situation analysis, implementation and process evaluation phases of research.

When looking at the HR systems at Casino X, it was evident from the post-intervention focus group that frontline staff required a more visible and lucrative reward system that incentivised positive CS behaviours. In a study on frontline service in the Chinese casino industry, Wan (2009) found that employee perceptions of the reward system increased motivation to provide excellent CS. In addition, findings from the interviews in the situation analysis phase and the intervention highlighted the use of an autocratic style of leadership by several supervisors which was seen to demotivate staff and could have resulted in frontline staff not advocating organisational values in service (Clark, Hartline & Jones, 2009). This general negative attitude of frontline staff towards some supervisors (observed during the intervention) could have contributed to negative staff attitudes towards CS, as well as having a negative effect on communication and interaction between staff.

When looking at the above findings holistically in relation to the MSMCS Model and the reviewed literature, it appears that the negative casino environment characterised by high stress for customers and staff alike, as well as the transmission of negative emotion from customers suffering financial loss onto frontline staff, could have contributed to social grouping of slots hosts on the casino floor to access social support as well as negative attitudes and body language of hosts towards customers. In turn, autocratic leadership styles may have been used by supervisors to address these challenges (negative staff attitudes, social grouping and poor body language), which in turn could have negatively affected the service climate.

Ostroff and Bowen (2000) note that service climate is created through shared staff perceptions of the organisation through CS policies, practices and procedures and the resultant behavioural expectations. Schneider, White and Paul (1998) note that poor staff perceptions of organisational practices such as rewards, which are meant to emphasize service, is an indicator of a poor service climate. Service climate can impact the collective attitudes of staff in terms of work commitment and motivation and has proven to have a positive impact on service quality (Bowen & Pugh, 2009) and customer satisfaction (Dean, 2004). Bowen and Schneider

(2014) note that major antecedents of service climate include leadership, HRM practices as well as systems support (IT and operations). Findings from the situation analysis, implementation phase and process evaluation reveal that frontline staff have a poor, shared perception of the rewards system (which was not seen to incentivise CS behaviours), leadership styles of supervisors (complaints of autocratic leadership) and systems support (inadequate IT system and equipment). These findings indicate the possible existence of a weak service climate at Casino X, which can negatively impact staff commitment, motivation and service quality.

Due to the immediate effect on frontline staff, leadership behaviours are important for shaping how staff interpret the service climate. Effective leadership behaviours impact service work performance particularly when the service climate is not favourable (Hui et al., 2007), suggesting the need for the use of a transformational leadership style (Lam & Schaubroek, 2000) or a servant leadership style (Kwak & Kim, 2015) by supervisors, to encourage positive CS behaviours and service quality at the slots department. The following discussion provides recommendations from frontline staff for improving CS at Casino X.

### **7.10 Staff Guidelines to Management to Improve CS**

During the situation analysis, implementation of the intervention and the process evaluation, various recommendations were made by managers and staff during interviews and focus groups to enhance CS at the casino. Some of these suggestions included improving the IT system, equipment and providing specific slots machines to train customers on how to play slots. These recommendations from staff were used to develop the following guidelines to improve CS at the casino:

- On busy days a specific cashier should be dedicated only to slots hosts so as to prevent delays in paying jackpots to customers (suggested by staff during implementation of the intervention). Experienced cashiers need to be scheduled to prevent long waiting periods.
- Better rostering and staff allocation should occur to prevent staff shortages at peak times. Supervisors should have to report on staff rostering to shift managers to increase accountability (suggested by staff during implementation of the intervention).
- Upgrade the IT system/software that runs the slots machines to minimize errors e.g. transfer failures and the delays resulting from re-booting the machine

- Review CS processes such as bill disputes to reduce waiting times
- Increase the jackpot swipe limit (currently R3000) so slots hosts can pay out jackpots over R3000, rather than following a timeous jackpot pay out procedure where a supervisor and security person need to be present, resulting in a time delay to coordinate said individuals
- A team building intervention for technicians should be introduced to address tribalistic thinking, promote “a sense of being on the same team”, build community and a common identity (suggested by staff during implementation of the intervention).
- A handbook of common work processes explaining how to address common customer problems should be developed and translated into Chinese. For e.g. the process of dealing with a transfer failure can be explained with visual aids and used to provide information to Chinese guests as well as other non-English speaking customers (suggested by staff during implementation of the intervention).
- Management should introduce greater job rotation between slots hosts, cashiers and technicians to promote teamwork , empathy, understanding and flexibility (suggested by staff during implementation of the intervention).
- In order to improve employee recognition and engagement, an employee recognition system should be introduced that tracks each CS interaction so as to reward hosts for solving customer problems on the floor (suggested by staff during pre-intervention focus group).
- Future CS interventions should be facilitated by internal trainers like managers and supervisors who have industry experience (suggested by manager during process evaluation interview). If these new CS behaviour are role modelled by leaders within the organisation, then positive CS behaviours can occur more rapidly through social learning (Waterman, 2001).

### **7.11 Researcher’s Guidelines for Management to Improve CS**

As an outcome of the findings from the interviews, focus group and observations conducted during intervention research at Casino X, the researcher provides the following guidelines to management in order to make future CS interventions successful and improve CS at the organisation going forward:

- In future a series of participatory interventions should be run rather than a once-off intervention to encourage improved CS on the frontline driven with more support for the

programme from top management (suggested on three occasions in post-intervention interviews with a shift manager, supervisor and a HR staff member). Leaders should facilitate the programme to share their contextual knowledge and role model positive service behaviours. The intervention should be run over a full day and form part of induction (suggested by a slots host in workshop evaluation questionnaire) and a long-term change management process, to ensure sustainable behaviour change concerning CS.

- In future, separate employee and manager interventions should be administered to prevent conflict during the intervention between staff from different management levels concerning the cause of CS issues (conflict between a slots host and two supervisors was evident during one of the workshops due to the host complaining about poor leadership from his supervisor). Separate manager and employee interventions will also ensure that the training content is pitched at the right level for all staff (alluded to by a shift manager in the post-intervention interview).
- More in-depth body language training to be provided to slots host to improve skills in identifying non-verbal language of customers, as the session was found to be very useful by participants in carrying out their service duties (suggested by slots host in workshop evaluation questionnaire and during implementation of the workshop). Petersen (2005) points out that non-verbal behaviours are culturally specific, with gestures and body language in one culture having a different meaning in another. These findings were echoed in the study at Casino X where cultural nuances were identified across Zulu and European cultures and should be incorporated into future body language training interventions.
- Technicians on duty should provide expected time of completion of their current task to hosts on the radio communication system, so hosts can be notified of which technician is most likely to assist as well as be informed of their expected time of arrival at the required slots machine. This information can then be communicated to keep customers informed when slots machines malfunction (suggested by manager during pre-intervention interview).
- A gambling code of conduct should be provided to protect staff members from racist behaviour well as verbal and physical abuse from customers. Gamblers who do not abide by this code should be asked to leave the premises in order to protect the dignity of staff members (suggested by slots hosts during implementation of the workshop).

- Diversity training to be conducted with all staff to address racial divisions and provide cross-cultural education so that hosts learn to approach guests from diverse cultures in alignment with their cultural values.
  - Several staff highlighted that they experienced demotivation in response to racism from guests and 6% highlighted racism from guests as being a barrier to excellent CS (workshop evaluation questionnaire). A diversity training programme should be implemented that provides staff with specific skills training on how to respond to discrimination from customer without sacrificing CS (suggested on several occasions in workshop evaluation questionnaire). Future training interventions should provide staff with perceptive skills to assist them in identifying racial discrimination or stereotyping (which can be difficult to identify due to occurring both overtly and covertly) so as to reduce the likelihood of racializing interactions that do not contain a racial element. Future research is required in this area to determine the specific competencies and criteria for differentiating between racist guest behaviour and complaints from customers from dominant groups. Incorrect perceptions of verbal abuse as being related to racial discrimination, can result in disengagement and suspension of service behaviours of the slots host resulting in a poor CS experience (suggested by manager in pre-intervention interview), which in some situations should not have occurred in the first place.
  - In regard to situations where guests racialize events concerning service, hosts should be trained on how to address these situations by pointing to a policy and procedure handbook which should be available on hand for hosts (suggested by slots hosts during implementation of the intervention).
  - Management should defend staff integrity during situations where they have been racially discriminated by customers. This can increase loyalty, engagement and CS behaviours in the long run (suggestion made by researcher).
  
- Resilience training and emotional intelligence training should be delivered providing hosts and technicians with psychological tools for depersonalizing negative customer interactions (during implementation of the workshop, hosts highlighted the impact of negative customer interactions on their emotional state and how this was transferred onto subsequent customers). Frontline staff should be equipped with emotional management skills to perceive, understand and regulate their emotions during service encounters, thus

improving performance and enhancing customer perceptions of service quality. Staff should be allowed to take a five-minute break after experiencing negative interactions with customers to allow them to let go of negative emotions.

- The role of humour and flattery in defusing negative CS interactions was found to be very effective and widely used by frontline staff when dealing with difficult customers (mentioned by two slots hosts in group discussion during the workshop). Future training interventions should take into account that during the majority of interactions between frontline staff and customers, there is a negative expectancy from hosts due to customers usually initiating interactions with hosts when a gambling related problem exists (mentioned by a manager in the pre-intervention interview). Thus hosts should be trained on how to shift customers from a negative emotional state to a positive emotional state through the use of humour and flattery. Current techniques in use should be shared across frontline teams as a best practice.
- Staff should be provided with additional tasks during quiet times to prevent social grouping on the casino floor (shift manager in post-intervention interview suggested that hosts should keep their areas tidy during quiet times). Staff incentives should encourage hosts to provide excellent CS experiences during quiet times with small rewards being put into place such as rewards vouchers.
- Other than in the case where language barriers exist, the researcher recommends that management and staff should not allow customers to request staff from their own race to assist them, but rather customers should be compelled to use the services of hosts who are available so as to reduce stereotyping by customers.
- Allocate most experienced female staff to VIP guest areas as these are often the most difficult guests (manager in post-intervention interview suggested that female hosts are better equipped to deal with angry customers than males). Past experiences suggest that female hosts have higher tolerance levels than male staff and should therefore be allocated to these areas.
- The training evaluation revealed that participants found the video analysis aspect of the intervention useful (indicated in the workshop evaluation questionnaire). In future, it is recommended that CS interventions for frontline staff entail greater use of video analysis to identify body language cues suggesting customer frustrations or needs for assistance.
- The researcher recommends that coaching skills training for supervisors should be introduced to foster problem-solving by frontline staff to enhance CS (Schneider, 2017)

and signify a shift from the old autocratic organizational culture to a more participative, employee-centred culture. Leadership development training emphasizing the benefits of transformational leadership should be conducted for supervisors to encourage transformational leadership practices that enhance frontline service behaviours (Lee, 2011).

- The use of social learning by leaders in the workplace was highlighted in the research findings (shift manager in post-intervention interview mentioned how hosts follow his lead when he tidies up his area). Behaviour modelling training should be considered for future CS interventions where only one group of staff attends a training course so as to induce a possible spill-over effect from participants in the control group to other staff. This can result in a sharing of knowledge between employees who had attended training and those who had not attended the intervention as well as reduce training costs (Pattni, 2007).

The above guidelines provide direction to management in order to make future CS interventions successful and improve CS at the organization. As a final suggestion for improving CS at casino X, the following section takes a deviation from the intervention research design by providing a theoretical discussion of innovative technological solutions to identified CS challenges at the organization.

## **7.12 Technological Solutions for Addressing CS Challenges at Casino X**

This part of the thesis seeks to recommend technological solutions to CS challenges facing Casino X as well as improve future CS training interventions through the introduction of technology. In order to assist the reader, a summarized version of this section on technological solutions is provided at this point in the thesis (please see Appendix K for the full version). This section begins by highlighting specific CS challenges and improvements on the CS intervention which can be addressed through technology to achieve cost-savings and efficiencies. A theoretical discussion of technology theories follows with a discussion of how social media networks can be used to enhance employee engagement and encourage knowledge-sharing. Thereafter Alvin Tofler's concept of the experience economy is discussed and its relation to the casino context. A discussion of virtual reality as an experienced-based, training tool follows. Finally a discussion on the use of mobile technology to track employee movement on the casino floor is provided to improve CS.

Specific outcomes of the research findings highlighted in the process evaluation chapter, are better suited to be addressed through technological means. For example, the long delays experienced by customers waiting for technicians to arrive at slots machines which had malfunctioned, could be addressed through tracking the physical location of technicians on the casino floor, so as to provide information to customers on expected time of arrival of technicians. In addition, the lack of staff recognition by management, poor communication between team members, negative impact of diversity interactions on CS as well as low levels of staff engagement were also identified as research outcomes that could be adequately addressed through technology platforms. It is envisaged that use of technology, to address the above mentioned outcomes of research will assist in cost reduction and improved efficiencies for the organisation. Furthermore, technological solutions will be recommended to enhance the delivery of future CS training interventions. CS challenges at Casino X which can be adequately addressed through technology include:

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Technological Solution</b>
Communication between staff	Social media networks (communication)
Lack of Recognition of Staff	Social media networks
Long CS Processes	Mobile Tracking of Physical Location of Staff
Negative Attitudes & Body Language of staff	Social media networks (engagement)
Impact of Negative Customer Interactions on Staff	Social media networks (social support)
Negative Impact of Diversity on CS Interactions	Social media networks (knowledge-sharing)

**Table 30: CS Challenges that can be addressed through Technological Solutions**

In addition, the use of technology shall also be discussed in terms of providing an improved platform for delivering CS training by encouraging simulation of service behaviours and enhancing learner engagement. After the post-intervention evaluation, areas of improving the intervention identified by participants included providing more time for the intervention, more frequent training, a wider provision of training as well as the use of more role-plays and videos in the training. By using virtual reality (VR) technology (to be discussed in detail later) to train staff, training costs could be reduced and run flexibly, resulting in longer training times, more frequent training as well as a wider provision of training to staff in other parts of the

organisation. More in-depth role-playing of reacting to customer situations was also identified as a recommendation for improving the intervention, and VR could be used to provide more detailed and realistic simulations of customer interactions.

Research findings suggested that the main cultural barriers facing slots hosts included language barriers and racism from guests. Language barriers could be addressed through the provision of smartphones to slots hosts containing translator applications. VR could assist in teaching slots hosts how to react behaviourally to racism from guests as well as allow staff from different racial groups e.g. white staff, to experience such situations and thereby encourage empathy. Due to the difficult casino environment and the high number of negative customer interactions slots hosts have to deal with, it is recommended that social media networks be used to provide social support to staff who have become upset after dealing with difficult customers.

In the post-intervention interviews, managers highlighted the need to encourage a coaching culture in the organization whereby hosts are coached by their supervisors on problem-solving skills to improve CS on the frontline. This could be facilitated through an employee social media network such as Yammer (to be discussed in detail later) where through social learning, managers drive culture through their interactions with staff through the channel.

A theoretical discussion of social media networks, the experience economy, mobile tracking of frontline service staff and virtual reality technology follows in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of these technologies and how they can be mobilized to address the above-mentioned challenges.

### **The Use of Social Media Networks for Employee Engagement and Knowledge-Sharing**

The concept of social media relates to internet-based and mobile technologies that have capabilities to transform communication into an interactive dialogical exchange. Social media includes social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, internet forums, blogs, wikis (user editable websites e.g. Wikipedia), podcasts and digital video-sharing repositories (e.g. YouTube). Whilst the first version of the web allowed people to access information that was authored by a select few, the concept of Web 2.0 relates to the second version of the World Wide Web which placed emphasis on the social dimension of the online experience, enhanced connectivity, people's ability to share information openly, participate and collaborate through social networks as well as become content creators through wikis (user edited websites) which

can be used to democratize knowledge. Web 2.0 is characterized by user generated content, cloud computing, advanced mobile technology and social content curation (Alberghini, Cricelli & Grimaldi, 2014).

Social media networks allow individuals to communicate and share information easily. At their most basic level, social media networks entail mapping the relationships between persons and groups of people who have shared interests and a common identity. Internal corporate wikis and blogs allow managers to interact with staff informally, allow employees to participate in decision-making culminating in enhanced job satisfaction and engagement, resulting in improved performance and retention (Azeem & Yasmin, 2016). Social media networks, wikis and blogs improve the learning process through allowing for contribution, organisation and distribution of information, knowledge and experiences. This allows for knowledge-sharing as well as promoting creativity and deep, interactive learning. In order to benefit from Web 2.0 applications, a collaborative organisational work culture is a prerequisite, allowing for sharing of information and participative decision-making. Social networking is viewed as encouraging informal learning which is seen as resulting in behaviour change. This is believed to occur as a result of the social support provided to learners by other learners in the social network as well as immediate feedback provided and facilitation of interactive discussions between learners (Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012). When evaluating the importance of social media networks in learning and development within organisations, it is important to keep in mind that over 70% of work related knowledge is said to occur as a result of informal, collaborative learning (Bell, 2012).

A well thought out social networking platform within an organisation can assist management in discerningly monitoring goal achievement without coercing specific outcomes from staff. Social networks also establish close bonds between employees thus contributing to a positive work climate and improved tenure. Social media networks can provide informal learning experiences through the use of hyperlinks to link relevant content concerning job tasks and procedures for internal use. These informal learning experiences can be created and managed by peers thus allowing for more experienced staff to coach and mentor newcomers. (Azeem & Yasmin, 2016).

Heiberger and Loken (2011) point out that the use of social media in learning allows learners to develop cognitive and metacognitive skills such as critical thinking, reflection, constructing knowledge and understanding of how one learns i.e. understanding one's own learning process.

One of the key benefits of social media in learning is its ability to get users attention due to its familiar feel and structure as part of most people's daily lives. Thus social media can assist in motivating staff to get involved in tacit knowledge-sharing by fostering social capital within the organisation. Leidner, Koch and Gonzalez (2010) found that the use of social media in organisations increased the morale of younger employees by promoting a sense of belonging to the culture. In a study by Ouiridi, Ouiridi, Segers & Hendrick (2015), social media was also found to increase job performance and the use of an internal micro-blogging tool was perceived to promote social capital.

Yammer is a private social media platform geared towards organisations. The platform is based on the design of Facebook and aims to provide the benefits of a social media platform to organisations to encourage improved communication, employee engagement, knowledge-sharing and real-time collaboration. The platform provide staff with a forum to ask questions, receive immediate feedback, use Wikis to develop user generated content, create threads to categorize content, create groups for specific teams or departments as well as stimulate discourse (Bell, 2012).

The researcher recommends that Casino X utilise Yammer to encourage employee engagement and foster employee involvement in decision-making where intended. The use of such a platform could allow opportunities for management to recognize positive staff behaviours immediately, share CS knowledge internally, allow managers to access the collective intelligence of staff in decision-making as well as develop a database for recording organizational memory to assist newcomers. Implementation of Yammer could also use in reduced training costs and time efficiencies with learners contributing to the curation of learning material, sharing informal learning experiences and engaging in self-determined learning. In addition, the use of such a platform would encourage usage by younger staff (a majority of whom are employed in frontline positions) in comparison to formal communication methods such as team meetings and email, as well as improve communication between team members.

### **The Experience Economy**

Schull (2012) notes that economies are changing from producing products and services towards the creation of experiences. Tofler (1972), provides a futurist's perspective on the creation of experiential industries after the advent of the services industry. He points out that in the current

future people will begin to collect and purchase experiences much like they purchase products due to increasing wealth amongst populations and a consequent decline in the yearning to own physical products. Stasiak (2013) notes that more important than the tangible, physical products available on the future market economy are the emotions, impressions and psychological gratification linked to these products which creates lasting value for the customer.

In linking the experience economy to the casino industry, it is evident that the business of casinos entails the provision of experiences which are deemed of value to customers who consume these experiences. The manager interviewed at Casino X during pre-intervention interviews highlighted this by pointing out that the product purchased by consumers at the casino was not the slots machines, but rather “the product was the experience.”

The thrilling experience of winning is also an aspect of the gambling experience that lures consumers to casinos. Schull (2012) points out that slots machines are designed around creating a satisfying user experiences and have been described as the crack cocaine of the gambling industry in terms of their ability as a delivery mechanism to provide a multi-sensory experience including visual, auditory and rhythmic (through continuous repetition of game-based play) experiences on slot machines. Video-based gambling machines has been known to invigorate the brain in cycles, encouraging emotional peaks and dips. The repetitive, rhythmic process of playing slots machines has been known to induce a suspended state allowing players to escape from their daily problems into a trance-like state called “the zone.” It is believed that addiction to slot machines is not necessarily based on the chance of winning but rather the suspension of individual identity and hardships of one’s life by continued immersion in the zone (Schull, 2012).

The idea of the experience economy provides a new conceptual framework for understanding the products and services offered by casinos to their customers. Alternatively, the experience economy is also having an impact on the training and education industry, where learning experiences characterized by memorable educational events are becoming more commonplace. The technology of virtual reality is expected to revolutionize the education and training market, and will be discussed in relation to being used as training tool to improve the delivery of future CS interventions at casino X.

## **Virtual Reality as a Training Tool for CS Interventions**

Virtual Reality (VR) involves an immersive, multi-sensory experience for participants through the creation of an artificial environment developed through software (Lau, 2015). Access to the artificial environment is provided to the user through wearable or non-wearable technology. VR allows the creation of presence in situated learning experiences by allowing participants to interact with a virtual environment which they are fully immersed in through multi-sensory experiences utilizing visualization, auditory stimuli and interactivity. The recent advancements in computer hardware and software have made the use of VR technology in training more practical through reduced costs of use. VR technology has been used in training across various industries including design, manufacturing, military, nuclear power plants as well as transportation. In particular, VR technologies are being increasingly used to re-enact scenarios where errors in action may result in costly mistakes or be too high risk due to dangerous environments e.g. simulations of war and brain surgery.

Fully immersive VR technology relies on the use of visual and auditory headsets to transport users into new virtual worlds. Virtual worlds are 3D, digital representations of the real world. Virtual worlds often entail the use of avatars which are an online representations of oneself in the virtual world. Expected advancements in technology promoting the creation of enhanced sensory realities, could result in online experiences eventually becoming indistinguishable from the physical world within the next decade (Knight, 2015).

Virtual worlds are designed to record all data received from users whilst interacting in the virtual world including eye-tracking, body movement, facial expressions, personal taste, identifying the other avatars people engage with and interaction times (Pridmore, 2014).

Rosenberg (2006) highlights that virtual reality can reduce the gap between formal learning and informal learning. Research has shown that use of immersive virtual learning environments results in higher learner engagement, interest and motivation as well as promote active learning experiences and the deeper understanding of concepts (Dickey 2005; Richter, 2007). Advantages of using VR in training include replication, flexibility and low costs of the technology in comparison to face to face training. One of the key benefits of VR as a training tool is it's ability to make abstract concepts concrete. Use of VR in training has been found to improve participants familiarity with concepts and application of content, decrease error in completion of tasks, reduce training risk due to operating in a virtual environment as well as result in time efficiencies. In manufacturing VR training simulations, participants can view

components in 3D from various different angles allowing for deeper understanding of how components work, machine structure as well as allowing learners to simulate procedure. Cates, Lonn and Gallagher (2016) illustrated the use of VR training methods improved performance from between 17% – 49%. In addition, doctors trained on VR have been reported as having better surgical competencies (Chao *et al.*, 2016).

A study comparing a typical, in-house CS, behavioural training programme with the use of a VR platform to teach the same course within a virtual mall, yielded surprising results with no significant difference being identified with the use of the different methods. However, the use of the virtual environment allowed the organisation to track how individuals solved CS problems and accumulate data regarding the individual's personal learning process. The VR environment allowed the replaying of situations to facilitate learning through repetition and also created an organizational memory by recording training data to improve organizational learning in the long run (Lau, 2015).

VR also allows learners to learn from a distance without the limitations of time and space and can be used as a highly engaging learning method particularly for teaching behavioural skills. Virtual simulations can be used to recreate CS situations where frontline staff can re-enact problem-solving techniques (Deloitte, 2016). Here an avatar can be used as a performance coach for problem-solving or analyzing customer body language to identify a customer's emotional state and need for assistance.

In the context of Casino X, delivering a CS intervention through a virtual reality platform would be more cost-effective, efficient and flexible than face-to-face training. In addition, immersion within a virtual world would ensure maximum attention of the learner during the programme. Most importantly, the technology would place learners in virtual situations involving dealing with difficult customers, thus allowing them to be present and experience such situations in a realistic environment, in comparison to in-class role plays. The technology would allow for virtual world application of training content, allowing for visual identification of body language cues of customers (through avatars) as well as allowing hosts to follow CS processes in a virtual casino environment to address customers' problems. Hosts could repeat these situational learning experiences to build muscle memory and CS skills efficacy.

In the case of experiencing poor service as a customer, VR training could allow slots hosts to experience empathy by being placed in the shoes of a customer who requires assistance, but is not being helped by slots hosts who display a negative attitude towards customers whilst

socializing with each other on the casino floor. This experience could serve as catalyst for behaviour change by providing more understanding of poor CS from a customer's perspective. Similarly VR simulations can be used to immerse hosts from a dominant groups in a situations where their avatar is a frontline employee from a non-dominant group being discriminated against by a customer during a diversity interaction. Such an experience would allow for perspective-taking and empathy. In addition, the virtual experience would allow for the slots host to practice their responses to CS situations involving discrimination and diversity issues, which are high risk situations that can be difficult to train through role-play due to causing learner discomfort. Furthermore, through storing of learner data, VR could assist in understanding employee's individual learning processes and measure progress in terms of application of CS skills in a virtual casino environment.

The last technology recommended is the use of smartphones to enable mobile tracking of frontline staff location on the casino floor in order to improve CS experiences. The next section provides a brief discussion on how this technology can be used to reduce customer waiting times for technicians and provide information to customers regarding the physical location and expected arrival time of technicians when slots machines have malfunctioned at Casino X.

### **Mobile Tracking of the Physical Location of Frontline Employees**

According to Pandey, Singh and Kumar (2011), Wifi-based cellphone technology, which allows wireless connection to a network through radio waves, can be used as a cost-effective way to track customer movement in shopping malls and analyse purchasing patterns. The introduction of Wifi technology allowed an electronic device to connect to the Internet or receive or transmit data wirelessly through the use of microwave signals (Bai, WU, Ong, Retscher, Kealy, Tomko, Sanderson, Wu & Zhang, 2014). In the past decade, Wifi has become a standard feature of smartphones, which have become a central aspect of daily life serving as the key source of entertainment, telecommunication and services based on location. For these reasons, smartphones have been outfitted with an array of sensors including Global Positioning System (GPS), accelerometers and gyroscopes (to recognize and track movement), digital compasses (used to gauge direction through sensing magnetic fields), cameras as well as Wifi and Bluetooth (short-range wireless technology for exchanging data on devices) capabilities.

There are drawbacks with tracking smartphones indoors through the use of GPS due to the reflection of satellite signals. However tracking systems based on the ping or transmission

signal sent by a smartphone to sense and connect to Wifi hotspots in public places, can be used to track the location of the smartphone indoors as well as obtain information regarding an individual's location and movement. Often, shopping malls attract customers through free Wifi whilst obtaining access to this important data that can provide information regarding purchasing decisions (Bai et al., 2014).

The benefits of tracking employee movement is the ability to analyse work patterns to improve productivity and efficiency, as well as manage deviations from company policy in terms of presence. Zones which are often frequented by staff can be identified as cluster zones and analysed for further information. In a study on mobile location tracking of employees of a software company, the use of the Media Access Control (MAC) Address of a user's phone (referring to the physical identification address of a piece of hardware), Received Signal Strength Indicator (RSSI) of smartphones captured by monitoring equipment, as well as the use of localization software installed on mobile phones generated a timestamped record of zones visited as well as accurate descriptions of walking paths of employees (Lopez-de-Teruela, Garcia, Canovasa, Gonzalez & Carrasco, 2017).

Similarly, the use of mobile tracking technology can be utilized to identify the physical location of frontline service employees in the casino setting such as technicians, so that slots hosts can provide information to customers in terms of expected time of arrival in relation to fixing of slot machines, thereby reducing uncertainty and improving CS. Such information can be used to create time efficiencies, where technicians who have just completed a previous job, and are within the closest proximity to a slots host awaiting assistance with a faulty slot machine can attend to the request. Use of such technology can also assist in identifying individual's walking paths in terms of deviation from company policy concerning social grouping of slots hosts on the casino floor, which creates a perception of a lack of concern for the customer. The data obtained regarding common walking paths and "busy areas" (those having the highest customer requests) in the casino can be utilized to improve decision-making regarding staff rostering and allocation, especially during peak times.

In addition, applications on smartphones providing translation services can also be used where language barriers exist between frontline staff and customers. Whilst, the initial cost of outfitting all frontline staff with smartphones may be expensive, perhaps the creation of a mobile application that can be downloaded by staff who have smartphones, could assist in reducing costs of entry to use of this technology. It is suggested that a return on investment

calculation be developed before the organisation decides to invest in such technology in order to determine feasibility and economic benefit to the organisation.

It is apparent that the above technologies can be utilized as solutions to address the above mentioned challenges impacting CS at Casino X, as well as improve training methods for future CS training interventions. The above discussion highlights how mobile technology can be employed to provide information to customers awaiting technical service for inoperative slots machines. The use of virtual reality to improve the delivery of CS training interventions through enhanced engagement, simulation, collaborative learning and storing of individual learning data was provided as a suggestion to Casino X to improve future interventions. In addition, the use of organizational social media networks such as Yammer, was recommended to create a knowledge-sharing platform for frontline staff to increase communication and engagement of younger workers, build social capital, serve as a means of social support as well as create an online organizational culture to induct new team members.

### **7.13 Chapter Summary**

This chapter illustrated the researcher's findings in relation to the post-intervention training evaluation questionnaire measuring participants' feedback on the intervention. The findings of the post-intervention focus group with slots hosts and technicians were also critically discussed examining staff perceptions on the outcomes of the intervention. In the same vein, post-intervention interviews with management also assessed manager's perceptions of the effect of the programme and obtained their recommendations for improving the intervention. Findings from the post-intervention participatory observations that sought to identify the behavioural outcomes of the programme were discussed. Finally, an innovative discussion on the use of technologies as solutions to CS challenges identified at Casino X was presented and critically discussed. The following chapter sets out the conclusions of the study and presents the study's contribution to the body of knowledge. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research in the area.

## **Chapter 8: Conclusion**

### **8.1 Introduction**

This chapter begins by providing a reflective overview of the study. Thereafter the contribution of the study to the body of knowledge is discussed. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations of the study as well as recommendations for future research in the area. Finally, the chapter concludes by highlighting the achievement of the research objectives of the study.

In a globalised economy, CS has been identified as a key driver of competitive advantage for organisations (Karmaker, 2004). Training has been positively correlated with service quality due to enhancing staff knowledge and skills concerning services, communication, dealing with difficult customers and handling complaints (Tsai & Tsang, 2008). The systematic review of the literature in Chapter 3 provided no empirical research on CS training interventions in the South African context. As noted earlier, this study sought to address CS challenges within a casino organisation in South Africa. The researcher was commissioned by management of Casino X to develop an intervention that improved CS of frontline staff, up-skilled staff on how to identify body language of customers to pre-empt service needs, improved cultural awareness and motivated staff in the run up to the peak holiday season. Intervention research was conducted in three stages (Rothman & Thomas, 1994). At first, a situation analysis was conducted through interviews with management, a focus group with frontline staff and observations of frontline service to determine CS challenges within the organisation. The pre-intervention findings together with a briefing from management were used to develop and implement a participatory, CS intervention for 105 staff from the casino organisation including slots host, slots technicians, supervisors and shift managers from the slots department.

In terms of a conceptual framework, during the situation analysis phase the social ecological model was adapted (as discussed in Chapter 5), to determine challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS and understanding the impact of the different factors affecting CS interactions on different levels (CDC, 2014). In addition, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance was adapted as a framework for understanding the impact of HR systems on individual and firm performance with regard to CS (Ostroff & Bowen, 2000). Furthermore, the Integrated Multi-level model of transformational leadership (TL), employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes was used to understand the impact of TL on service climate. These three models were combined to develop a new conceptual framework, the Multi-Level Systems Model of Customer Service (MSMCS), which served as

a holistic organising framework for representing the situated context and relationships between relevant concepts and theories within the study.

From the findings of the interviews, focus group and observations conducted in the situation analysis phase, a framework was developed to illustrate the factors that had an impact on CS at the casino. The training programme was designed in line with a participatory action research approach where an intervention framework was developed from the findings of the pre-intervention interviews and a focus group with frontline staff and management to identify CS challenges (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Lewin's Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze change management model was used as a theoretical framework for developing the CS intervention and promoting more effective CS behaviours from frontline staff. In addition, the Participatory Intervention Model (Nastasi et al., 2000) which seeks to apply theory and conduct research in creating interventions for particular contexts, was used in the intervention design.

The researcher and a co-facilitator facilitated the eight sessions of the intervention. Thereafter a process evaluation of the training intervention was conducted through the use of a training evaluation form as well as post-intervention interviews with management, a focus group with frontline staff to determine the implications of the intervention for improving CS and observations of frontline staff service behaviours after the intervention. The major findings of the study have been presented and discussed in detail in Chapter 7.

When reflecting on the process of intervention research that was followed in conducting the study, it is evident that the intervention research process as well as the participatory nature of the intervention itself was useful to the organisation in various ways. Firstly, from the interviews and focus groups conducted in the situation analysis phase, a customised intervention was developed that directly addressed specific challenges facing frontline staff in providing excellent CS. One participant in the process evaluation noted that facilitators had taken time to research the organisation therefore meeting the immediate needs of staff and management in terms of improving CS. Another participant in the process evaluation highlighted that the intervention allowed staff to voice their concerns to management concerning environmental factors affecting CS such as poor work procedures, process delays and the inadequate IT system. Group discussion and the flip-charting activity in the intervention where staff were asked to identify CS challenges, allowed for critical analysis of CS problems facing staff on the frontline and the development of solutions. One respondent in the process evaluation phase noted how the intervention design promoted knowledge-sharing

amongst staff in terms of responding to CS issues, as well as promoting ownership of CS challenges and encouraging staff to be proactive in addressing such issues.

Many respondents highlighted various strengths of the workshops during the process evaluation. The facilitators who set out to create an engaging and participatory learning environment as well as encourage the co-creation of content during the workshop, were evaluated very positively by participants, suggesting respondents' preference for a participatory and engaging style of facilitation. In addition, the facilitators' use of video analysis to identify body language cues of customers requiring assistance, as well as the use of role-play to respond to CS scenarios were seen to be effective learning methods. One participant also noted in the post-intervention focus group that the participatory nature of the intervention allowed both staff and managers to identify hidden internal problems that were affecting the provision of excellent CS. When analysing the findings from a higher interpretive level, it is clear that the participatory intervention provided value to the organisation as a diagnostic mechanism, by taking attendees through a participatory process to identify key factors affecting excellent CS in the organisation, critically analysing these factors from multiple perspectives and providing recommendations to improve CS through group discussion and knowledge-sharing amongst staff. The participatory workshop served as a research instrument itself through recording CS challenges through group activities such as flip-charting, recording of narratives of CS experiences and group discussion. This inductive process culminated in emergent findings that were relevant to the context and could be practically applied by participants.

By taking a participatory approach, the learning activities and reflection sessions were designed to hear the CS issues and best practices of frontline staff for knowledge-sharing, thereby locating staff as experts of their workplace context and duties. The questions posed by the facilitators concerning CS issues and the ensuing group discussions, resulted in the workshop becoming a microcosm of the organisation, with power structures and organisational issues such as poor leadership by supervisors and racial cliquing of hosts and technicians playing out in the learning environment.

As prescribed in the iterative, Participatory Intervention Model (Nastasi et al., 2000), follow-up interventions could have been used to address specific aspects related to improving CS in more detail, such as how to deal with diversity issues during CS interactions. A subsequent intervention could also have been utilised to report on testing of recommended solutions to CS

issues as identified in the initial intervention, as well as serving as a reminder about the learnings from the initial workshop. However subsequent interventions were seen as not being feasible by management considering time and cost constraints.

The study revealed various ways in which the intervention could be improved for future use. The need for follow up interventions to support the initial intervention were highlighted by various respondents in the process evaluation, thus supporting the iterative nature of the Participatory Action Research process (Montgomery & Doulougeri, 2015). Many participants also highlighted the need for the intervention to be of a longer duration rather than having just a half-day session, which had been suggested by management at the outset to ensure adequate staff allocation on the casino floor. One manager also pointed out that rather than having external trainers, the intervention would have been more effective had managers and supervisors been trained to facilitate the intervention themselves, considering their industry experience and the likelihood of staff role modelling CS behaviours (Bandura, 2001). The democratic learning environment created through the PAR process was also seen to disturb the organisation's power structure within the context of the intervention, resulting in resistance from some managers. Future interventions can seek to build these findings into workshop design. In addition, the non-attendance of a key leadership figure at the intervention was seen as indicating a lack of support for the intervention from top management resulting in the intervention being perceived as being unsustainable. Having discussed the learning outcomes as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the intervention, the study's contribution to the body of knowledge will now be discussed.

## **8.2. Summary of Major Findings from the Study**

One of the key findings from the situation analysis was that the mood of frontline staff was impacted by their interactions with customers. Thus if hosts came across a negative customer early in their shift, they would be in a negative state of mind when dealing with guests that followed. This negative mood would continue until the host had a positive interaction with another customer that would change their mood to a positive state. It was also evident from the interviews and focus groups that the IT software system running the slot machines as well as aspects of the slot machines such as the card reader were not effective and negatively impacted service delivery. Long, inefficient work processes and procedures requiring many staff to

coordinate and converge at one place, were also seen to cause long delays and result in poor service perceptions by customers.

Perceived racial discrimination from guests towards slots hosts was also identified resulting in disengagement and demotivation from hosts. Hosts would often react defensively to discrimination from guests which was then interpreted by the customer as poor CS. The need for hosts to depersonalize such incidents was also highlighted by one manager. The manager also stressed the importance of hosts' communicating what was going to happen next in order to resolve the customer's dispute and provide information to the guest on the service process, so as to close the loop and reduce uncertainty. Management also noted that customers who are in a negative frame of mind after having lost money on the slots machine, often have their first human interaction thereafter with a slots host, and therefore transfer blame onto slots hosts, resulting in disengagement. Further findings from the focus group in the situation phase also revealed that frontline staff believed that a more lucrative reward system that could clearly attribute positive service behaviours to specific employees, could assist in motivating staff to provide excellent CS.

In terms of the main findings from the implementation of the intervention, frontline staff revealed that the main factors resulting in poor service could largely be attributed to inefficient service processes and technology challenges, thus echoing findings in the situation analysis. Poor interpersonal interactions between frontline staff resulting in poor teamwork and communication, as well as laziness and poor morale were also seen as contributing factors to poor CS. Language barriers and racialisation of events by customers were seen as diversity challenges to the provision of good service. In addition, the use of humour by frontline staff to defuse customer service situations was seen as a unique finding of the study.

Findings from the training evaluation questionnaire revealing the immediate outcomes of the workshop highlighted the participatory nature of the intervention as being a strong point by allowing staff to communicate openly on work issues thereby promoting involvement, accountability and ownership. Body language training teaching staff how to approach customers so as to display friendly cues, as well as identify non-verbal cues of customers that indicate a need for assistance, was seen as the most enjoyable aspect and a major strength of the workshop. The role plays and video analysis were viewed as effective learning methods allowing hosts to identify the body language cues of customers requiring assistance, practice

service behaviours as well as see CS situations from different perspectives. In addition, the workshop was found to have a considerable effect on staff motivation.

In terms of medium term outcomes of the intervention, findings from the focus group conducted ten months after the intervention, revealed that participants reported higher levels of self-efficacy in being able to deal with difficult customers after attending the training session. Furthermore, in the post-intervention interviews, some respondents noted that they had continued to use the body language techniques imparted during the intervention, suggesting a transfer of training onto the job.

One manager noted that the majority of interactions (70%) that hosts had with clients were negative resulting in there being a negative expectancy by hosts when approaching customers. This is an interesting finding which can be incorporated into future CS training interventions. Furthermore, the use of social learning by leaders in the workplace was highlighted in the research findings as a possible technique for improving CS on the casino floor.

A discussion on the methodological, theoretical and practical contributions of the study to the body of knowledge follows.

### **8.3 Methodological Contribution**

A strength of the study was the use of a mixed method design where the use of both qualitative and quantitative research methods served to enrich the research findings. The qualitative aspect was more heavily emphasized in the research and allowed the researcher to understand the experiences of slots hosts, technicians, supervisors and managers in terms of challenges faced in trying to provide excellent CS as well as obtain a rich, in-depth understanding of the context and work processes. In terms of evaluating the training intervention from a quantitative perspective using the training evaluation questionnaire, T-tests and One-way ANOVA tests revealed no significant differences across the groups i.e. gender, race, age and job positions. Using guidelines provided by Babbie and Mouton (2002), an index was developed from the items creating cumulative scores for learnings gained, perceptions of learning activities and evaluation of facilitation, with positive feedback from learners on all three indices. Open-ended questions from the questionnaire were thematically analysed as suggested by Braun & Clark (2006). Findings from the questionnaire were triangulated with the results of the post-

intervention focus group and interviews where respondents provided their perceptions of the intervention.

This intervention utilized multiple methods of data collection allowing for triangulation of findings as well as a deep, immersive understanding of the case being investigated by the researcher. The post-intervention participatory observations allowed the researcher to observe to a small degree whether transfer of training onto the job had occurred. In addition, participant observation allowed the researcher to gain a gambler's perspective of playing slots machines and experience the highs and lows of gaming. This allowed the researcher to develop empathy for the casino's customers and obtain an experience of gambling on slots machines.

### **8.3 Theoretical Contribution**

This study contributed to the body of knowledge by filling a gap in empirical research on CS training interventions in the South African context, as identified in a systematic review of the literature (Pattni, 2007; Peccei, 2000; Rice, 2009; Sturdy, 2000; Sulek, 1995; Van Lill, 2009; Wannenburg, 2009). In particular, the study contributes to the body of knowledge by being the first South African study utilising intervention research to understand CS challenges within the casino industry and develop and evaluate an intervention to address these challenges.

The study adopted a multi-disciplinary approach to gain a theoretical understanding of CS and the various factors affecting service from an organisational and individual level perspective. Literature from a various disciplines including Human Resource Management, Industrial Psychology, Management Studies, Services Marketing, Psychology, Sociology, Implementation Science as well as Information Technology domains were explored. Three conceptual models including the socio ecological model, the multi-level model linking HR systems and firm performance as well as the integrated multi-level model of transformational leadership, employee service performance and customer relationship outcomes were combined to develop a new conceptual framework, the MSMCS model. The MSMCS model served as a holistic organising framework for representing the situated context and relationships between relevant concepts and theories within the study and provides a theoretical contribution to the CS literature.

## **8.4 Practical Contribution**

This thesis makes an array of practical contributions for managers and trainers within the casino industry looking to develop a participatory intervention to address CS challenges. Firstly, the study establishes a framework for a participatory CS intervention designed to identify CS challenges facing frontline staff, enhance motivation as well as train staff in identifying body language cues of customers and deal with diversity issues in interacting with diverse customers. In addition, this study provided a detailed contextual understanding of CS challenges in a South African casino from the subjective experience of slots hosts, technicians, supervisors and managers. A rich description of the process of developing, implementing and evaluating a participatory intervention for improving CS was provided together with recommendations, which can be used by future researchers looking to conduct intervention research in this area. For future intervention researchers, this study provides an understanding of and guidelines on the group learning process for participatory interventions. The study illustrates how learning activities were sequenced in line with Lewin's Unfreeze-Move-Refreeze change management model to encourage positive CS behaviours. The study also demonstrates how the researcher used various engaging learning methods to address the learning outcomes of the workshop through participatory practices. The use of group reflection as a learning tool (e.g. for video analysis of body language cues to identify hidden needs) as well as the use of role play for applying behavioural skills to CS scenarios, were a few of the methods that were applied by the researcher in the intervention. Through reflective notes of the researcher's observations of the intervention, the study also provides direction to intervention researchers on how to facilitate group discussion towards constructive solutions on CS issues. This participatory intervention structure can be practically implemented or modified by other casino organisations in the South African context who are looking to achieve similar learning objectives to the client in this research study.

Furthermore, the study also proposed an innovative approach to addressing specific CS challenges in the organisation and improving future CS interventions through the use of technological solutions such as social media networks, virtual reality and mobile tracking applications, so as to achieve cost reduction and efficiencies.

## 8.5 Limitations

Only one case was used in the study due to time and cost constraints. The use of two cases would have allowed for a comparative study thus generating more reliable results. A comparison between other participatory CS interventions conducted in other South African casinos could have resulted in a more comprehensive study with more dependable results. The study cannot generalize to a larger population however analytical generalizations can be made to similar cases in similar contexts (Yin, 2009). The subjective bias of the researcher is acknowledged in terms of writing up of participant observation narratives as well as reporting on interviews and focus group data. In addition, the researcher's bias with regards to being a co-facilitator in intervention and taking on a role of authority is acknowledged, in terms of his impact on group discussion and participation due to the possibility of respondents seeing him as a representation of management.

Considering the conflicting objectives of management and staff in relation to the employment relationship, the researcher notes the limitations of employing a fully participatory design for a CS intervention within a private sector organisation, where the hierarchical structure of the organisation can be challenged in such contexts. Participatory approaches may be more suited to organisations with flatter organisational structures and may provide limited use within a hierarchically structured organisation by being in conflict with the organisational climate. The study cannot make any claims as to the long-term effects of the intervention due to the impact of the intervention only being measured directly at the end of the workshop. Nevertheless, a post-intervention focus group with hosts and technicians as well as interviews with management and observations, occurred after the intervention had been delivered. However, all of the initial workshop participants were not evaluated again at a second point in time and therefore the researcher also cannot claim that participants applied learnt skills in their jobs after the training.

In addition, the end user of casino services (i.e. customers) were not researched as part of the study due to permission not being granted by management. Consequently, research findings only reflected the experiences of frontline staff and management in relation to CS challenges at the casino. Furthermore, due to the cycle of participatory action research not being repeated, participants could not report on the testing of their suggested solutions identified in the initial workshop. On this note, it is important to bear in mind that the study was designed to be

practical and easy to complete and as such, the aforementioned suggestions were not achievable.

Nastasi et al. (2000) highlights two limitations of conducting participatory interventions. The sustainability and institutionalisation of the intervention is dependent on the stakeholders taking responsibility for intervention efforts once support from the researcher has concluded. In addition, stakeholders need to facilitate access to resources and create an infrastructure for continuing and maintaining the established participatory process. In the case of Casino X, leadership did not set out to achieve long term effects for the intervention which was conducted on a once-off basis to enhance frontline staff motivation in the run up to the peak December season and provide staff with training on communication, body language and dealing with cultural difference. As a result, there was no continuation of the process resulting in the effects of the intervention fading out after two months, as suggested by both a shift manager and supervisor in the post-intervention interviews. In addition, as the researcher was not allowed access to the organisation's SERVQUAL customer satisfaction survey data by management, this contributed to a shortcoming of the outcome evaluation, which rather than relying on objective, quantitative measurement of CS was based on the findings of pre and post intervention focus group, interviews and observations. Nastasi et al. (2000) notes that the success of a participatory intervention requires time and commitment to develop partnerships, conduct research, document the intervention process, conduct an evaluation and plan for institutionalisation. It is suggested that future intervention researcher ensure that resources including time, effort, budget and development of an infrastructure are provided for sustainability and institutionalisation of CS behaviours.

## **8.6 Conclusion**

This doctoral study has: 1) conducted a systematic review on CS training interventions; 2) investigated the challenges facing frontline service staff in providing excellent CS in a casino; 3) investigated the use of body language to pre-empt and improve service interactions; 4) investigated diversity issues facing frontline staff in the casino industry and developed strategies to address these issues; 5) developed a participatory intervention to improve CS of frontline staff and enhance staff motivation 6) made recommendations to management to address CS challenges within the case 7) suggested technological solutions to improve the delivery of CS interventions and address specific CS challenges such as recognition,

communication and knowledge-sharing amongst frontline staff within the organisation 8) made recommendations for the design and implementation of future CS interventions in the South African casino industry.

Apart from a few studies on frontline CS in the retail environment (Browning, 2006; Gotham and Erasmus, 2008; Malhorta and Mukherjee, 2004; Terblanche & Boshoff, 2010), a study on customer perceptions of casino gaming areas (Wannenburg, 2008) as well as an evaluation of a management development programme for service differentiation within the casino industry (Van Lill, 2007), there has been little scientific, evidence-based research published on CS challenges facing frontline staff in the South African casino industry.

The main theoretical contribution of this study was the establishment of guidelines for management to develop, implement and evaluate a participatory intervention to address CS challenges within a casino context. The findings of this thesis can contribute considerably to the development and evaluation of future CS interventions in the casino industry. Further research outcomes suggest that frontline service interactions between customers and staff in the context of a South African casino are littered with discrimination, racialization of events, employee disengagement, language barriers and abusive behaviour, all of which have a major impact on CS experiences. These results describe for the first time the impact of perceived discrimination from customers from dominant groups (race groups with social power) toward frontline staff from target groups (race groups with less social power) in the South African casino industry. The study found that frontline staff from target groups respond to perceived discrimination through disengagement, withdrawal or slowing down of service behaviours. These responses can be interpreted as poor CS, but as revealed in the pre-intervention interview with a manager, such reactions can be understood as defensive behaviours to reduce expected discrimination from the customer, which is a new finding in the CS literature. Future diversity interventions in service environments within the South African context should address this issue and should be guided by further research to better understand the dynamics and effects of cross-cultural complaints on the frontline, culminating in the development of tools and techniques to assist staff in this regard. There have been various international studies addressing the impact of racial discrimination by customers on frontline service behaviours (Brewster & Rusche, 2012; Chebat et al., 2010; Das, 2008; Kozak & Tasci 2005 as cited in Zourrig et al., 2014). A further gap in the literature exists on the impact of discrimination by customers on frontline service staff in the South African casino industry, which as discussed earlier, can have economic benefits for organisations related to customer satisfaction, staff

retention and loyalty (Heskett et al., 2008). Casino management can use this finding to deliver practical training interventions that provide coping strategies and psychological resources for frontline staff to deal with such situations and the harsh realities of the casino environment.

In addition, the shifting of mood states of frontline staff through positive or negative interactions with customers was an interesting finding that can help understand the prevalence of emotional contagion theory on the frontline in the South African casino environment (Gelade & Young, 2005). Further research is required in this area to investigate this phenomenon and what techniques staff can be equipped with (e.g. self-management tools) to shift their moods so as to improve CS in casinos within the South African context. The socio-technical aspect of gaming, with customers transferring blame for financial loss as a result of gambling to slots hosts (due to the triviality associated with blaming a machine rather than a human being) is an interesting psychological finding that warrants further research. Furthermore, the use of humour and flattery by slots hosts to defuse a difficult CS situation and shift customer moods in a positive way, was an unexpected finding which is a practical and cost-effective method for improving service in situations involving irate customers.

Future research should also be conducted into the moral dilemma facing profit-driven organisations when customers discriminate against the company's employees. Further research should be conducted into the moral stance of organisations in such catch twenty-two situations considering the CS philosophy of "the customer is king." This issue is particularly important in the South African context where specific race groups continue to hold economic purchasing power as a result of a historical inequality and discrimination.

The study has succeeded in providing detailed guidelines for trainers in the gaming industry on how to develop, deliver and evaluate a participatory intervention aiming to address CS challenges within the casino environment. This study has made significant practical contributions to the organisation in the form of guidelines to management, and it is envisaged that the findings of the study will be put to use within the wider South African gaming and hospitality industry to improve CS and competitiveness of South African organisations within this sector.

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## ***Appendix A: Interview and Focus Group Schedule***

### **Focus Group Schedule for Situation Analysis (Slots Hosts and Technicians)**

- 1) What does excellent customer service (CS) mean to you?

Probe: Why is CS important for you? What does excellent CS involve? Service with a smile, efficient responses to customers. What service criteria are important for guests? What the benefits for hosts and technicians for providing good CS?

- 2) What are some of the challenges that you face on a daily basis with regards to providing excellent CS?

Probe: Beside inadequate equipment or system, what other challenges do you face in providing excellent CS? Is there anything else that you can do to solve that problem? Do cross cultural interactions impact CS?

- 3) Tell me about a time you or a colleague had a customer complaint. What happened?

Probe: What types of complaints do you get most often?

- 4) Rate your level of service to customers on a scale of 1-5, with 1 being a poor rating and being excellent.

Probe: What is the reason for your rating?

Is the rating a true reflection of the way in which you provide CS on a daily basis?

- 5) What recommendations do you have for improving CS in your area?

Probe: How can we improve the situation as it is now? How can we create a system where the customer is happy and his/her problem is getting solved. What needs to happen in order for your work environment to be such so you are able to provide that service, that's not happening now. What strategies do you use on a daily basis to improve service to customers?

## **Interview Schedule for Situation Analysis (Supervisor and Manager)**

- 1) What are some of the challenges that staff face on a daily basis with regards to providing excellent CS?

Probe: Beside staff behaviours, what other challenges do slots hosts and technicians face in providing excellent CS? Is there anything else that you can do to solve that problem? Describe staff attitudes and body language towards customers.

- 2) Do cross cultural interactions impact CS?

Probe: In what way in particular? Do language barriers have an impact on CS? Does cultural difference between customers and hosts have an impact on CS?

- 3) What recommendations do you have for improving CS in the slots area?

Probe: What would be the most important factor for improving CS? What are the possible solutions to CS challenges that you identified earlier? What strategies have been used by management to improve CS? Why have they or have they not worked?

### **Focus Group Schedule: Process Evaluation (Slots hosts and technicians)**

- 1) What challenges do you face in terms of providing excellent CS?

Probe: Has there been any changes since the CS Superheroes intervention? What should have been done to encourage better CS in the slots area?

- 2) What was the impact of the CS training intervention?

Probe: What did you learn? Did you use any of what you learnt in the intervention on the job? If there was any effect, how long did it last? Why did the effect of the intervention not last longer?

- 3) What are your recommendations for improving the programme CS intervention?

Probe: What did you enjoy the most? What were the strengths of the programme? What did you not enjoy about it? Why?

- 4) What impact does the culture of a guest have on how you serve them?

Probe: How does the language barrier affect CS in your job? Does the different culture of a customer make it more difficult or easier to serve them? Why?

## **Interview Schedule: Process Evaluation (Supervisor and Managers)**

- 1) What challenges do slots hosts and technicians face in terms of providing excellent CS?

Probe: Has there been any changes since the CS Superheroes intervention? What should have been done to encourage better CS in the slots area?

- 2) What was the impact of the CS training intervention?

Probe: What did staff learn? Did staff use any of what they learnt in the intervention on the job? If there was any effect as a result of the intervention, how long did it last? Why did the effect of the intervention not last longer?

- 3) What are your recommendations for improving the programme CS intervention?

Probe: What were the strengths of the programme? What about the intervention could have been improved? Why?

- 4) What impact does diversity have on frontline CS interactions?

Probe: How does the language barrier affect hosts and technicians in providing excellent CS? Does the different culture of a customer make it more difficult or easier for hosts and technicians to serve them? Why?

## ***Appendix B: Informed Consent Request to Conduct Research***

**Discipline of Psychology  
School of Applied Human Sciences  
College of Humanities  
University of KwaZulu-Natal**

Dear Participant,

My name is Praneschen Govender, a PhD student at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Durban, South Africa conducting a study as part of my final research thesis. The purpose of the study is to identify frontline customer service challenges facing the organisation.

Interviews, a focus group and observations will be conducted to determine customer service challenges. From these findings a participatory customer service intervention will be developed to improve customer service skills of frontline staff. The intervention will be evaluated through a focus group, interviews and observations which will be conducted after the intervention has been completed.

Insight gained from this study will extend the existing body of knowledge around improving customer service in the South African casino industry.

The research data will be kept for five (5) years in accordance with the University regulations and thereafter it will be disposed of by means of shredding.

Ethical clearance for this study was obtained from the ethics committee of the University of KwaZulu-Natal and you may address any inquiries to Ms Phumelele Ximba, Tel. no. 031 2603587 E-mail: ximba@ukzn.ac.za

Your participation will be highly appreciated. Please feel free to contact either me or my supervisor for any further clarification regarding this study.

Yours sincerely,

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**INFORMED CONSENT FORM**

**(Situation Analysis – Interviews & Focus Group)**

**PROJECT TITLE: Customer Service Challenges in a South African Casino.  
A Participatory Intervention.**

- AIMS:**
- Obtain feedback from slots staff on challenges faced in terms of providing excellent customer service.
  - Identify areas of improvement regarding customer service to inform the content of the upcoming customer service training workshop

**STATISTICAL INFORMATION:** Please circle the correct option.

<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male			
<b>Race</b>	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Other
<b>Age</b>	17-25	26-34	35-43	44-52	52>
<b>Work Experience</b>	0-2	3-5	6-10	11-20	More than 20

**TERMS OF PARTICIPATION:**

Participation in this research and disclosure of information is voluntary. Any data collected will remain strictly confidential. Respondents cannot be tracked as there will be a non-disclosure of names in the research report.

I, .....

(FILL IN YOUR NAME ABOVE)

Hereby confirm that I understand the contents of the document and the nature of the research project, and I consent to participating in the research project.

I understand that I am at liberty to withdraw from the research project at any time, should I so desire.

.....

**SIGNATURE OF PARTICIPANT**

.....

**DATE**

## ***Appendix C: Observation Criteria – Slots Hosts Interacting with Guests***

### **Observation of the context:**

- 1) Describe the setting, was it noisy and energetic or not? Was the casino busy. Was there adequate staffing?

### **Observations of the hosts on the casino floor**

- 1) What was the location of slots hosts and technicians on the casino floor?  
Were host and technicians clustering in social groups?  
Were hosts and technicians responsive to customer's requests for assistance?  
What was the general body language of hosts like when they were not dealing with customers?  
Was the appearance of hosts and technicians appropriate?

### **Observations of guests on the casino floor**

- 2) What was the emotional state of guests when playing the slots machines?  
What were the typical service requests of guests?  
What was the average time that guests played on the slots machines?  
When were guests frustrated or angry?  
When were guests happy?

### **Observations of customer interactions**

- 3) What was the body language like of the host or technician prior to interacting with the customer?  
Was the customer promptly greeted?  
Describe the greeting by the host or technician, was it friendly?  
If not immediately greeted, was the slots host or technician talking with other staff, helping another customer or was there no staff member present?  
Did the host communicate effectively when dealing with the customer?  
Did the slots hosts ask good questions to find out what the guest's problem was?  
Did the host try to solve the problem himself or herself?  
Did the host resolve conflict effectively where required?  
If there was a technical fault on the machine, how long did it take for other staff to assist e.g. technicians  
Was the service provided by the host affected by environmental factors?  
Was the customer's problem solved promptly by the host or technician?  
Did cross-cultural interactions have an effect on how hosts dealt with customers?  
Rate the host's overall customer service during the interaction

## *Appendix D: Case Study Protocol*

### **Overview**

The study aims to investigate challenges facing frontline staff in the casino industry in providing excellent customer service. As mandated by management, the study aims to develop an interactive, engaging intervention that aims to train staff on how to identify body language cues of customers suggesting a need for assistance so as to pre-empt customer requests. The intervention will increase staff understanding of cultural difference to improve service interactions as well as equip them with skills for problem-solving and communicating effectively with customers. The initiative will also serve to motivate staff in the run-up to the peak December season.

A situation analysis (pre-intervention phase) entailing interviews with management and focus groups with frontline staff will be conducted. An intervention implementation phase including participant observation and a process evaluation including a post-intervention training evaluation questionnaire, interviews with management and a focus group with frontline staff will be administered.

### *Relevant Readings:*

Customer Service: Zeithmal, Bitner & Gremier, 2009; Kandampully and Duddy, 2001; Karmarkar, 2004; Heskett, 1997; Schneider, 1991; Zeithmal, Parasurman & Berry, 1990.

Diversity Management: Henderson, 1994; Cox, 1996; Van Dyk, 2001; Buelens *et al*, 2002; Human, 2005.

### **Primary Objectives:**

- To investigate challenges facing frontline staff in the casino industry in providing excellent customer service.
- To develop and evaluate an intervention that aims to train staff on how to identify body language cues of customers suggesting a need for assistance so as to pre-empt customer requests, increase staff understanding of cultural difference as well as equip them with skills for problem-solving and communicating effectively with customers.

### **Secondary Objectives:**

- To identify strategies used by staff in responding to customers where there is a language barrier
- The initiative will also serve to motivate staff in the run-up to the peak December season.

### **Data Collection:**

Questionnaires (Frontline service staff and management Perspective)

Semi- structured interviews (Management's Perspective)

Focus Group (Frontline service staff Perspective)

Participant and Direct Observation (Multi-Perspective)

### **Field Procedures**

Training Evaluation Questionnaires

- To be handed out after the intervention by facilitators. Have twenty copies of the document available per session as well as spare pens.

Semi- structured interviews (Management)

- Have interview schedule, writing material as well as charged recording device available
- For interviews have an office in the administrative area available to conduct the interview

Focus Group (Participants)

- Conduct during the lunch break in the training venue. Begin by providing a brief overview of the study. Thereafter initiate recording and refer to interview schedule in guiding discussion on challenges facing frontline service staff in providing excellent customer service.

Participant Observation

- Have writing material and observation checklist available.

Actively participate in workshop activities. Record relevant observations during the workshop. Observe from a second facilitators point of view.

## Participant Observation

- Read through observational criteria of staff prior to entering the research site
- Play slot machines in the casino and observe behaviour of slots host when interacting with customers
- Identify body language of customers and how frontline staff respond to customer body language as well as diversity interactions
- After the observation, immediately take notes, record observations and mark observation checklist.

## *Appendix E*

### TRAINING EVALUATION FORM

**BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Please mark the relevant box with an X.**

<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male			
<b>Race</b>	Black	Coloured	Indian	White	Other
<b>Age</b>	17-25	26-34	35-43	44-52	52>
<b>Work Experience</b>	0-2	3-5	6-10	11-20	More than 20

**AGE: How old are you?** .....

**JOB TITLE:** .....

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

<b>After the workshop:</b>	<b>STRONGLY DISAGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>
I am better equipped to identify body language that leads to customer complaints					
I am better equipped to deal with customer problems effectively					
I am better equipped to deal with difficult customers					
I am better equipped to deal with customers from different cultures					

#### LEARNING METHODS

<b>After the workshop:</b>	<b>STRONGLY DISAGREE</b>	<b>DISAGREE</b>	<b>NEUTRAL</b>	<b>AGREE</b>	<b>STRONGLY AGREE</b>
Discussing the videos helped me identify positive and negative non-verbal communication in dealing with customers					
The play helped me apply the tools and techniques that were provided in the workshop					
The flipchart session helped me identify challenges I face on a daily basis in trying to provide excellent customer service and helped me come with solutions to these challenges					
I can apply learnings from the workshop in my daily job					
The workshop motivated me to provide better customer service in my daily tasks					



## *Appendix F: Customer Service Superheroes Training Booklet*

### **WHAT IS CUSTOMER SERVICE?**

Making sure customers have a pleasant and positive experience when purchasing a product or service.

### **WHY IS CUSTOMER SERVICE IMPORTANT?**

Provides personal meaning and motivation to one's work. Ensures customer retention and referrals.

### **WHAT DO CUSTOMERS EXPECT?**

- Customers expect you to solve their problems
- Customers expect friendly service
- Customers expect responsive service
- Customers want positive relationships

### **LIVING CASINO X:**

- **T**eamwork
- **S**ervice
- **O**pportunity
- **G**rowth
- **O**wnership

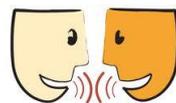
How can we live the Casino X Values when providing exceptional customer service to our customers?

## Model for Dealing with Offensive Customers During Cross-Cultural Interactions

Process	Behaviour / Thinking	Impact	Value
<b>SELF-AWARENESS</b>	Critically analyze your thoughts  Do I hold a stereotype?	Clear thinking	Seek truth  See a human being not a group
<b>CONTEXT</b>	What is the situation?	Focus on the aim	Purpose Meaning
<b>GATHER RELEVANT INFORMATION</b>	Listen Obtain clarity Focus on the Facts	Deal with all customers equally	Equality Respect Education
<b>PROVIDE FEEDBACK</b>	Explain the situation and what needs to happen.  Remain calm	Increase customers understanding  Calm down the customer	Education
<b>TAKE ACTION</b>	Take action and solve the problem	See an opportunity to falsify stereotypes  Take ownership and gain self-confidence	Responsibility  Empowerment
<b>SOLVE THE PROBLEM</b>	Exceed Expectations	Reduce perpetuation of stereotyping	Service Empowerment
<b>SEEK FEEDBACK</b>	Is the customer happy?	Seek feedback  Thank the customer	Self-improvement  Humility

(Adapted from Human, 2005)

\*Perpetuation of stereotyping refers to the default response of frontline service staff to discrimination from customers through defensive behaviour i.e. slowing down their service and displaying a negative attitude. As a result, such defensive behaviour justifies the customer's discriminatory views thereby perpetuating stereotyping.



## BACK TO BASICS: BODY LANGUAGE

- Be *Happy*...make eye contact and smile!
- Greet and welcome each and every guest
- Say please and thank you, and call people by name
- Seek out Guest contact to build relationships
- Listen to what the client wants
- Provide immediate service recovery
- Have a positive attitude
- Show enthusiasm by always displaying appropriate body language at all times
- Create and preserve the “Suncoast” Guest experience.
- Thank each and every Guest!



### How to get into the friend zone:

- Smile (indicates friendliness)
- Raising of eyebrows (indicates openness)
- Empty hands (shows you're not a threat)
- Hands at sides (shows you're not a threat)

### How to Identify a Customer in Need of Assistance

- Pacing the floor
- Looking around
- Playing with hands or fingers
- Hand gestures away from body
- Rapid head movements



### How to Identify a Frustrated Customer:

- Biting lip
- Shaking Head to signify “No!”
- Sour look on face
- Fixed gaze on person who caused the problem
- Hands and arms making fast, sharp movements
- Throwing hands in the air

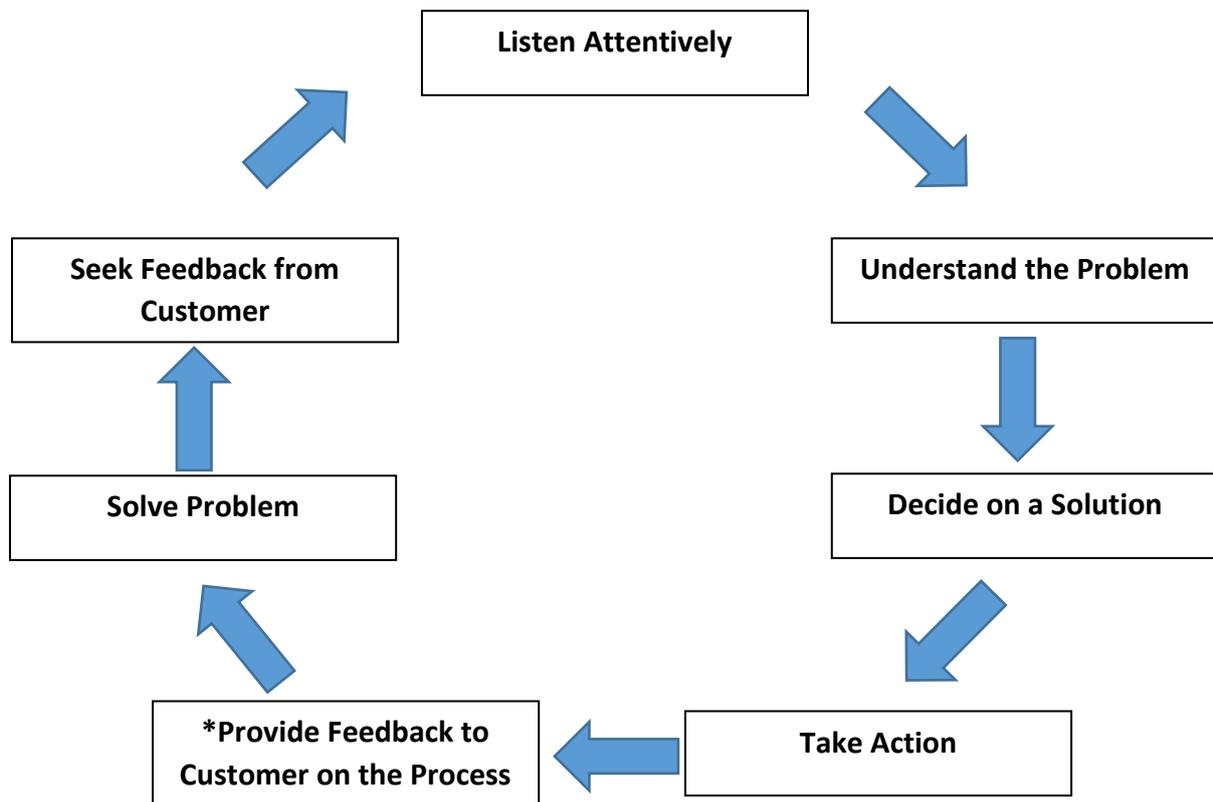


## How to Identify an Angry Customer

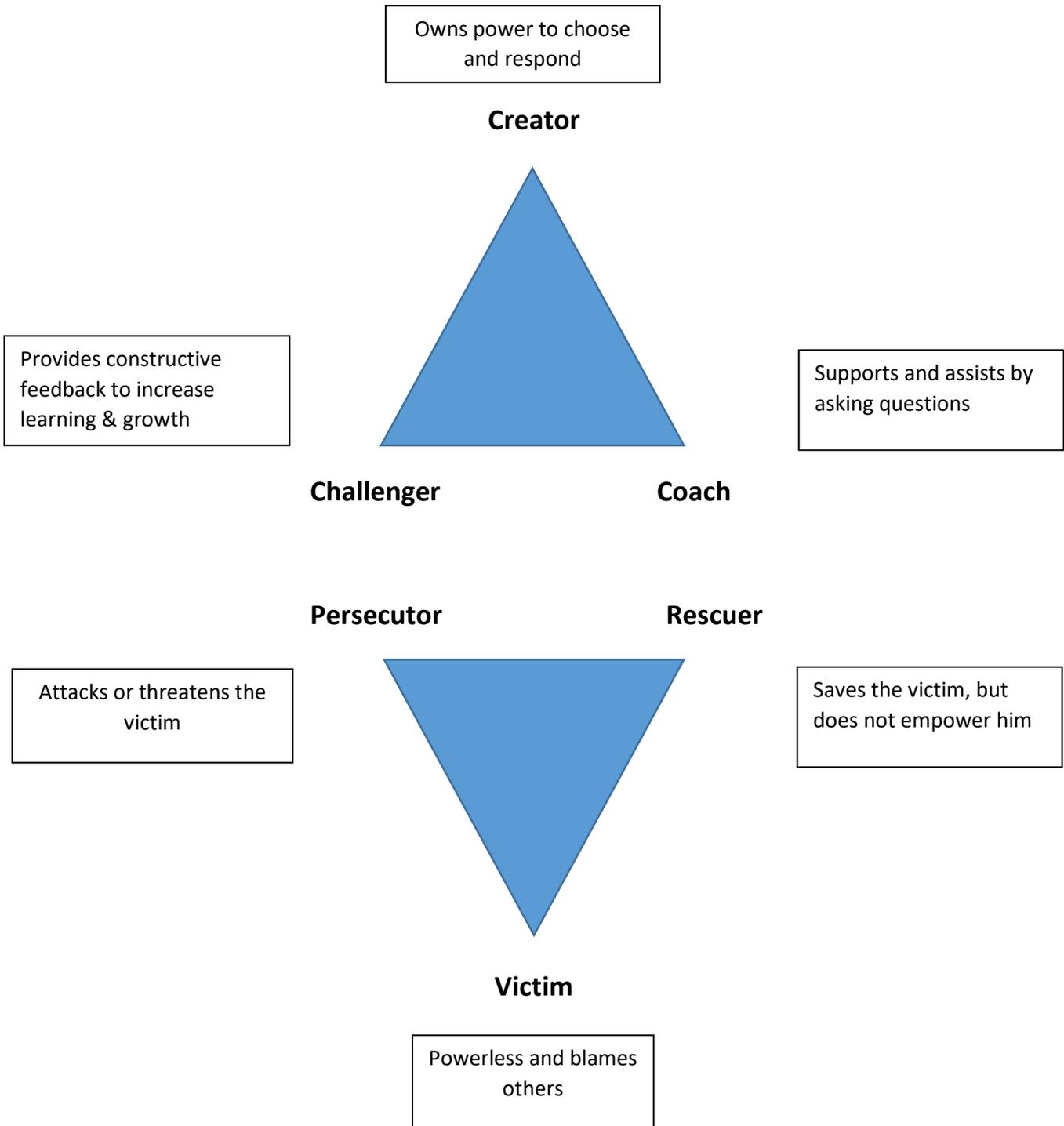
- Eyebrows tilted downwards towards the centre of the face
- Glare of the eyes
- Deep, excessive breathing
- Standing straight up
- Puffed up chest
- Making fist with hands
- Hands shaking
- Narrowing of the lips



## COMMUNICATION MODEL FOR DEALING WITH CUSTOMERS



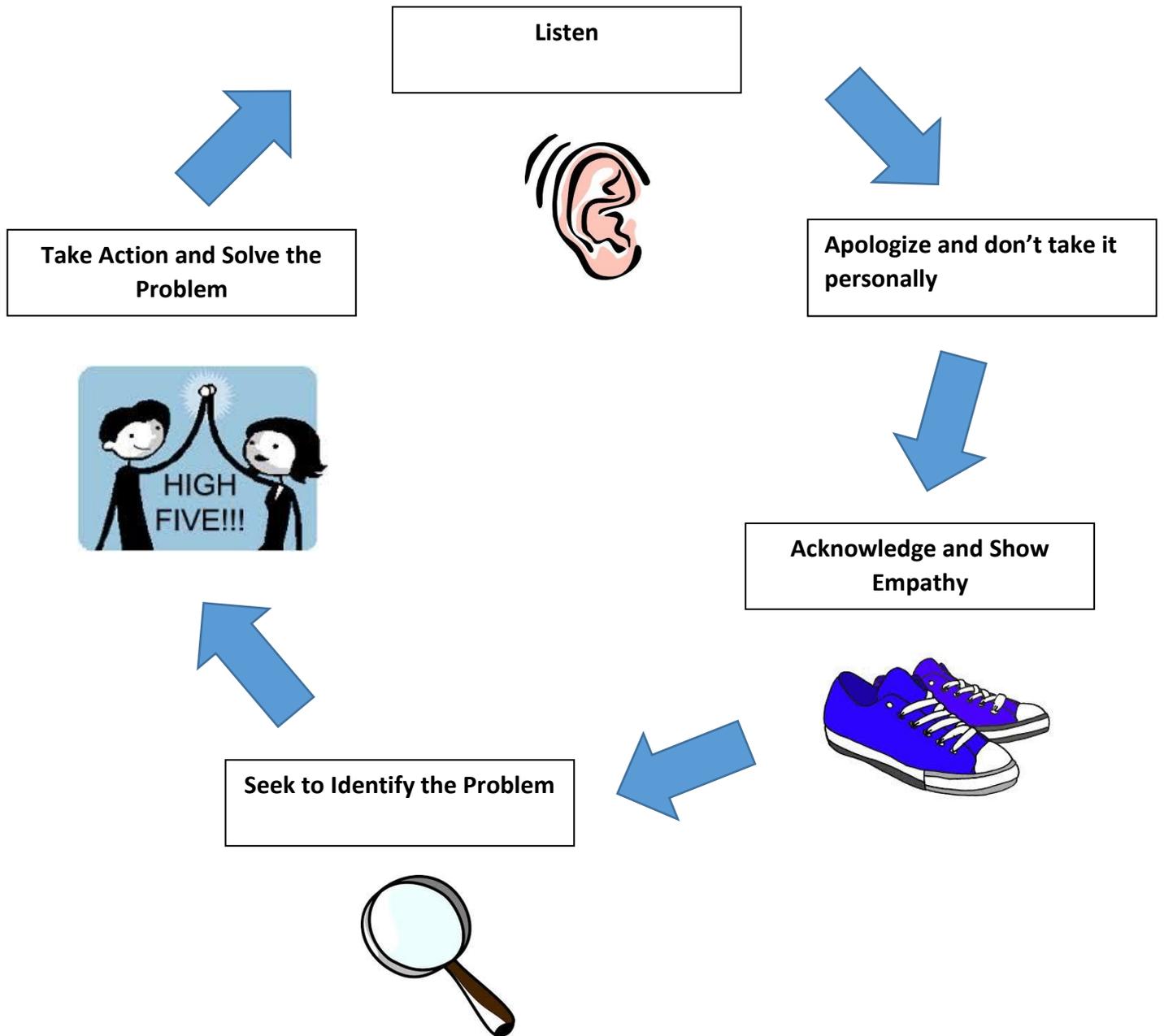
## THE EMPOWERMENT DYNAMIC



## THE DREADED DRAMA TRIANGLE

(Emerald, 2006)

# Conflict Resolution Model



## *Appendix G: Flipchart Notes from the Intervention*

During the CS intervention, hosts were asked to flipchart challenges they faced daily in providing excellent CS. The impact of these challenges and possible solutions were recorded:

**28/10/2014**

Challenges	Impact	Solution
Card reader problem	Not Completed by staff	Not Completed by staff
IT system back-end old involving manual processes		
Staff shortage		
Communication with technicians		
System and process issues		

**30/10/2014**

Challenges	Impact	Solution
<b>GROUP 1</b>		
Headcount before and after changeover	45 min	People need to wait for staff to sign on floats before leaving the floor
System errors	Guests are very angry	Upgrade system
Support from other departments	Have to wait for response	Create a breaker to take over when I go on break
<b>GROUP 2</b>		
Procedures delays	Customer service affected	Amendment of procedures and junior staff input
Staff not understanding responsibility towards guest	Guest service is affected	Training
Poor planning and staff rostering	Additional stress on staff, guest services affected	Better planning

<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Solution</b>
<b>GROUP 3</b>		
System errors	Puts strain on us and slows us down	Communication with guests Perfecting our system
System limits	Delayed service delivery	Increasing jackpot swipe limits
Staff shortages	Delay services and frustrates the guest	Increase headcount
<b>GROUP 4</b>		
Cross Cultural barriers	Loss of clientele	More cultural diversity courses and educate yourself equally
Policies and procedures	Service delivery	Communication via signage/employees
Equipment	Delayed service	Liaise with management to provide new equipment/monthly audit
Staffing	Customer Service	Management to re-analyse staff / flooring ratio
<b>Challenges</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Solution</b>
<b>GROUP 5</b>		
No day cards at cashdesk	Guests have to stand in long queues at the cashdesk	They must make sure they have cards all the time to provide both to slots people as well as to the guests
System	Guests have to wait a long time	Upgrade system
Poor service	Complaints from customers	Change our mindset so we can attract more customers

5/11/2014

Challenges	Impact	Solution
<b>GROUP 1</b>		
Rude customer	Demotivated	To offer better customer service to them and don't take it personally
Guest perception	Pressurize the environment	Give better relationships to our guests
Challenges	Impact	Solution
<b>GROUP 2</b>		
Card jam	Waiting long	Card jam must be visible and needs to show on the system
Trainee cashiers on busy days	Delays process of transactions	Have experienced cashiers on busy days
Bill disputes	Guests wait a long time	Procedure needs to be reviewed
<b>GROUP 3</b>		
Communication	Time delays and leads to poor customer service	Communicate and work as a team
Having many guests asking for help at the same time or at once	Confusion and stress	Try and control requests, acknowledge and try and inform guests that you are busy and will get to them as soon as you can, or call for assistance
Laziness	Work load on an individual, delayed service and frustration	Motivation

6/11/2014

Challenges	Impact	Solution
<b>GROUP 1</b>		
Lack of teamwork	Demotivating	Communication
Impatient guests	Loss in focus and concentration	Explain procedures
Unfair supervisors	Changes your mood and keeps guests waiting longer	They must be helpful because they have been attendants before
<b>GROUP 2</b>		
Float and daycards	Slows the host down from providing prompt service	A specific place should be setup for guests to get change and buy day-cards
Lack of equipment e.g. card readers	If a card reader does not work properly causes guest to wait longer and renders a machine unplayable	Bench technicians should have ample spares, should fix the machine and there should be other techs available in their absence
Demotivation	Leads to staff not performing at their peak	There should be a programme in place to reward staff who always do there best
<b>GROUP 3</b>		
System failures	Delays service and pressurizes service	Update system
Reservation of machines	Problem of explaining to guests	Management decisions
Delays from other depts	Delays guest service	Dedicated people for certain depts
Shortage of staff	Workload too high	Allocation of more staff on busy days e.g. weekends and holidays

Challenges	Impact	Solution
<b>GROUP 4</b>		
Rude customers	Results in staff slowing down in providing customer service & ignoring customers	Keep wearing a smile and share it with somebody
Shortage of staff	Not enough people to help	Increase headcount
Some of our staff members are not team players, they stand around doing nothing when its busy	Slows operations	Need to work together and take ownership
Get targeted for foreign language to guests		Improve service
Equipment and tools	Slow service	Efficiency
Unfair supervisors	Makes the attendants group together	Treat everyone equally
<b>GROUP 5</b>		
Transfer failures	Waiting time while the supervisors are still checking	System upgrade like at Club Select
Helping more than one guest at a time	Delays everything Float shortage	Increase our headcount Sups to help where they can
<b>GROUP 6</b>		
Lack of staff on busy days	Effects service	More staff
Team work	Poor service delivery, some of our colleagues don't help when you need assistance	Teamwork
Customer service poor	We can lose our guests	Training, take pride in your work

Challenges	Impact	Solution
GROUP 7		
Impatient guests	Low staff morale	Better communication from staff
Low staff morale	Poor service and attitude	More workshops and team building
Understanding of individual roles	Service delivery	Accountability
GROUP 8		
Processes	Impacts directly on customer service, revenue loss hampers productivity	Review current processes for enhancements
Difficult guests	Business and on staff	Direct approach
Other depts. disputes	Time consuming and frustrating	Accountability and effective communication

## *Appendix H*

### **Post-Intervention Naturalistic Observation 2**

The second post-intervention observation was conducted on 2 October 2015 at 7pm on the main casino floor, which was fairly busy for a week night.

I proceeded to play on the casino main floor and loaded R50 onto my card. I began losing money and was down to R30 quite quickly. I waved down the waiter and ordered a coke. The waitron had a good approach, greeted and asked what I would like. I received the coke within 5 minutes. I handed over R100 and asked for change. She said she would get change for me. She was back in 2 minutes with the change and I tipped her R11.

I met one of the supervisors on the floor who I had interviewed during the pre-intervention stage of the project to determine training needs. He said:

*“It’s all well complaining about things in the training but when you actually observing them (the hosts) on the floor, that’s when you’ll really see how they interact with guests.”*

#### **Key Talking Points:**

The machine next to me was broken and a Black Female guest asked me for help. The machine said EGM disabled on the screen. I waved down a Black Female host immediately. The host greeted the guest in Zulu which lacked enthusiasm. There was no smile from the host, just a casual approach in dealing with the customer. She opened the machine, using a key to unlock it, checked something and walked away without saying anything to the customer. The customer removed the card and left to use another machine. A second host, an Indian Male approached and greeted me. He recognized me from the training and asked how I was doing and what I was doing here. He said the previous host had put the timing off on the machine. The other host (Black Female) re-appeared and apologized. The Indian Male host explained to her in a suitable manner what to do the next time this happened.

I then walked into the smoking prive to win back the money I had lost. I now felt that I was here more for the excitement of gambling than to do research (Note: I had gambled the previous evening in my first post intervention observation and had lost R50 of my R100. I was here to win it back!)

I went over to a slots machine called the PANDA where I managed to increase my R30 to R50. When I noticed the machine was on a down run I transferred my credits onto the card and left to find another lucky machine called Temple Tiger. It was well-lit, had booming, loud music and a very visually appealing screen. I settled in and began playing. Within ten minutes I had made my R50 into a R100. Within twenty minutes I had made my R100 into R220. I was given free spins. When I won 3000 credits (x4 times) the whole machine lit up with gold coins flying down all the screens. The machine congratulated me “What a ripper!” “I’m impressed!” “You’re a winner!” This together with the loud Tomb Raider type sounds (referring to the movie and video game Lara Croft Tomb Raider) the machine was making made me feel embarrassed at first and I looked around to see if anyone was noticing the attention that the machine was bringing to me. Then I began to enjoy it. The excitement of it all. The fear of losing but the adrenalin and excitement of winning lured me to double and then quadruple my bets per spin.

I then began losing so I reverted back to my initial minimum bet. I noticed the machine was on a down run and left to another machine with my R200 going down to R100. I settled in at another machine which was also Temple Tiger as I was now loyal to that specific brand of machine. I began spinning faster to try and confuse the machine, as well as clicking spin and then clicking spin quickly again which puts a brake on the spin, in an attempt to confuse the machine. Within ten minutes I had lost all the remaining money on the card.

When looking back, at one point, I did not care about losing all the money on the card. I was so pumped up with excitement and adrenalin and was really beginning to enjoy the thrill! I decided to play with no fear and to have fun. I was enjoying the rush.

### **Reflective Notes:**

My style of playing the slots machines when I initially began playing the machines during my pre-intervention observations, was in stark contrast to my approach now during post-intervention observations. Initially my approach to play was cautious with the aim being to double or triple my money and cash out straight away when I noticed the machine was on a down run. Now my approach to playing had changed and I lived dangerously and payed for it in the end. At the end of it, I can safely say that it was worth every cent in terms of the thrill and excitement of playing fearlessly. Temple Tiger made my Friday night!

It is important to note that when doing pre-intervention observations in September 2014, I also played slots and after loading R100 on my card went on to win R800. I immediately cashed out, split the money with my research partner. This was smart gambling.

I feel that if I go into a casino now, I will no longer gamble smartly to make money but will gamble emotionally to feel the high associated with winning, which I first experienced when winning the initial R800.

It is important to note that I, the researcher, separated with my significant other of six years and sold my consulting business to my business partner during the course of conducting research. These two major life events cannot be discounted as not having an effect my state of mind during the course of data collection which could have made me more susceptible to developing a possible addiction to gambling.

## *Appendix I*

### **CUSTOMER SERVICE INTERVENTION: DIVISIONAL FEEDBACK REPORT CASINO X SLOTS**

#### **AIMS OF INTERVENTION:**

- Share understandings about what customer service (CS) means to team members and the importance of CS to the business
- Share outcomes of the e-Guest Survey
- Provide information to slots host to pre-empt and identify body language that leads to customer complaints
- Equip slots hosts with a behaviour model on how to deal with difficult customers
- Allow slots hosts to role-play typical scenarios they face on the floor with regards to dealing with difficult people
- Identify cultural differences and language barriers and ways of dealing with them • Motivate slot hosts to exceed customer expectations

#### **BACKGROUND RESEARCH:**

- Briefing provided by slots manager and HR practitioner
- Focus group conducted with 3 slots host and 2 technicians on the challenges faced with regards to providing exceptional customer service.
- Semi-structured interviews with management
- Mystery shopper conducted on 3 occasions
- Analysis of e-guest survey results March – September 2014

#### **OUTCOMES OF FOCUS GROUP:**

- Delays related to transfer failures main cause of customer service problems
- Staff shortages and high workload during busy periods
- Problems of dealing with more than one customer at the same time
- Delays in waiting for technicians to assist
- New card reader creating unnecessary work

- System problems – too many machine faults in comparison to competitors
- Scope of work for hosts is too general resulting in them taking on work from other staff members and clients that is not within their scope
- When card is issued, marketing needs to communicate to customer about how to use day-cards, rather than slots host (identification of silos)
- Need for training area that teaches clients how to gamble to save time
- Communication - need for information to be provided by techs about waiting times

## **OUTCOMES OF INTERVIEWS:**

- Hosts overly sensitive to profanity especially involving cultural encounters resulting in disengagement. Perceived by client as an attitude problem
- Hosts take negative interactions personally and disengage
- Interactions with guests lacking eye contact, enthusiasm, verbal communication and positive body language
- Lack of communication results in making more mistakes as hosts not checking for understanding with the client and themselves
- No closing of feedback loop by providing information to the guest on what the process is when a fault/delay occurs resulting in complaints
- Hosts are usually dealing with guests in a negative frame of mind, so that human interaction must be positive
- Hosts talking in groups create a perception for the guest that they are not interested in the customer
- No prioritization of tasks

## **OUTCOMES OF OBSERVATION:**

- Lack of staff on the floor, poor visibility of green uniforms
- First experience at cashiers- Poor customer service with no smile or greeting and took 15 min to get a card. Cashier was inexperienced on computer system, eventually issued the card after being shown by supervisor
- Second customer experience – No greeting, not enough information given to client regarding minimum amount of money that can be loaded onto card (cash vs. debit card) resulting in a negative experience
- First slots experience – Greeting with no smile and enthusiasm by supervisor, negative body language. Very knowledgeable and solved problem swiftly but did not thank the guest at end of interaction.
- Second slots experience – No prompt greeting, lack of communication and engagement with guest. 3 minutes to get to customer, 10 minutes to pay jackpot

- Third slots experience – excellent customer experience, greeting with positive body language, dealt with three customers at one time and successfully resolved all queries through providing information and prioritization

### **JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY RESULTS:**

- Research on customer service indicates that levels of customer service are linked to job satisfaction (Kralj & Solnet, 2010).
- Of the 105 slots staff who attended the workshop, 100 completed the job satisfaction survey

<b>WORKLOAD</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
I do not have time to do the work that must be done.	43%	37%	6%	12%	2%	1%
I work intensely for prolonged periods of time.	12%	34%	10%	35%	7%	2%
I have so much work to do on the job that it takes me away from my personal interests.	16%	42%	13%	19%	9%	1%
I have enough time to do what's important in my job.	4%	7%	13%	48%	25%	3%
I leave my work behind when I go home at the end of the workday.	14%	19%	9%	37%	19%	2%

<b>CONTROL</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
I have control over how I do my work.	5%	11%	10%	49%	24%	1%
I can influence management to obtain the equipment and space I need for my work.	10%	25%	23%	33%	8%	1%
I have professional autonomy / independence in my work.	6%	12%	15%	47%	19%	1%

I have influence in the decisions affecting my work.	11%	20%	20%	34%	12%	3%
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<b>REWARD</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
I receive recognition from others for my work.	21%	31%	14%	28%	6%	0%
My work is appreciated.	13%	21%	20%	36%	9%	1%
My efforts usually go unnoticed.	4%	27%	23%	32%	13%	1%
I do not get recognized for all the things I contribute.	3%	32%	21%	28%	15%	1%

<b>COMMUNITY</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
People trust one another to fulfill their roles.	8%	27%	26%	32%	6%	1%
I am a member of a supportive work group.	6%	24%	15%	42%	13%	0%
Members of my work group cooperate with one another.	5%	18%	28%	38%	10%	1%
Members of my work group communicate openly.	9%	28%	24%	31%	7%	1%
I don't feel close to my colleagues.	14%	45%	20%	18%	2%	1%

<b>FAIRNESS</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
Resources are allocated fairly here.	7%	21%	23%	44%	5%	0%
Opportunities are decided solely on merit.	19%	26%	28%	23%	2%	2%
There are effective appeal procedures available when I question the fairness of a decision.	9%	25%	28%	32%	3%	3%
Management treats all employees fairly.	28%	28%	24%	15%	2%	3%
Favouritism determines how decisions are made at work.	8%	20%	19%	32%	19%	2%
It's not what you know but who you know that determines a career here.	6%	23%	27%	24%	20%	0%

<b>VALUES</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Did not answer</b>
My values and the Organization's values are alike.	2%	21%	28%	45%	3%	1%
The Organization's goals influence my day to day work activities.	2%	11%	15%	61%	9%	2%
My personal career goals are consistent with the Organization's stated goals.	2%	20%	24%	47%	6%	1%
The Organization is committed to quality.	3%	16%	16%	49%	16%	0%

### **MAIN OUTCOMES:**

- High numbers of staff leaving behind work at day-end signifying high workloads
- Lack of staff recognition and appreciation for work done
- Lack of fairness in how management treats all employees
- Favouritism related to decision-making and career advancement
- Opportunities not being distributed solely on merit indicating high levels of corporate politics and power constellations

## CHALLENGES TO PROVIDING EXCEPTIONAL CUSTOMER SERVICE (CS)

- Hosts asked to flipchart challenges they faced daily in providing excellent CS • Hosts were asked to focus on areas that they could change e.g. negative attitude
- The impact of these challenges and possible solutions were recorded:

### SUMMARY OF FEEDBACK: THEMES IDENTIFIED

THEMES	Items	Occurrence
Process & Procedure	Float & Daycards Bill Disputes Trainee cashiers Reservation of machines Delays from other depts	18%
System/Equipment	Transfer Failures Card jams System Errors Daycards at cashdesk	21%
Difficult Guests		14%
Interpersonal Relationships	Teamwork Staff not doing their job Morale Communication Laziness Poor Service Roles and Accountability Challenges with Supervisors Disputes in other depts	30%
Staffing/Headcount	Helping more than 1 guest Staff shortages Rostering	14%
Cultural Barriers		3%

<b>LEARNING OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
I am better equipped to identify body language that leads to customer complaints	2%	0%	4%	32%	62%
I am better equipped to deal with customer problems effectively	1%	2%	4%	39%	54%
I am better equipped to deal with difficult customers	1%	3%	4%	50%	43%
I am better equipped to deal with customers from different cultures	0%	1%	11%	45%	43%

<b>LEARNING METHODS</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Discussing the videos helped me identify positive and negative non-verbal communication in dealing with customers	2%	0%	4%	45%	49%
The play helped me apply the tools and techniques that were provided in the workshop	1%	0%	8%	47%	44%
The flipchart session helped me identify challenges I face on a daily basis in trying to providing excellent customer service, and helped me come up with solutions to these challenges	0%	1%	5%	46%	48%
I can apply learnings from the workshop in my daily job	1%	0%	2%	43%	54%
The workshop motivated me to provide better customer service in my daily tasks	1%	0%	1%	30%	68%

<b>FACILITATION</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Hard to Decide</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Strongly Agree</b>
Were knowledgeable on the topic	1%	0%	3%	44%	52%
Explained the models and concepts clearly	1%	0%	4%	36%	59%
Encouraged participation of delegates through questioning and reflection	1%	0%	3%	40%	56%

### **MAIN OUTCOMES:**

- Learning objectives were met with an average of 93% of participants feeling better equipped to identify body language leading to customer complaints, as well as deal with customer problems and difficult people more effectively.
- In comparison, only 88% of participants agreed and strongly agreed that they were better equipped to deal with customers from different cultures, possibly indicating a need for a dedicated intervention on cultural difference
- 68% strongly agreed and 30% agreed that after the workshop they were motivated to provide better customer service in their daily tasks

## **FACILITATOR FEEDBACK:**

**28/10/2014**

### **MORNING SESSION:**

- Good interaction from the group at the outset, discussed the importance of teamwork between technical and slots hosts.
- Teams often felt a bit down after receiving the feedback from the e-guest survey with some pointing to process problems resulting in the negative feedback. Facilitators challenged staff on “what they could do” in terms of what they had control over e.g. negative attitudes.

### **AFTERNOON SESSION:**

Hosts identified various situations where they faced difficult customers:

- System errors – double-up. Guests get frustrated. Customer Service slows down. Guests leave very unhappy
- Systems down – Tempers flare and guests complain about credits and the time it takes to receive payouts
- Jammed cards, management informed. Cash desk informed by slots management. Long delays due to process.
- Bank of machines went offline. Guest wants to cash out but cant. Wants to stop playing, ended in creating a profile and loading funds.
- Low events, system down. Events coming up slowly.

**30/10/2013**

### **MORNING SESSION:**

- Few strong individuals who were a bit defensive to start off with, pointing to the work environment as having a big impact on customer service.
- Once the feedback from the e-guest survey was given these individuals agreed that there were problems that could be changed through positive customer service behaviours.
- There seemed to be a strong sense of community about this group.
- There seems to some “othering” (silos) between technicians and slots staff in relation to teamwork and communication.
- People took ownership of the negative comments in the e-guest survey and showed commitment in terms of wanting to turn the results around.
  
- Majority of challenges identified related to system errors, staff shortages and delays with procedure all affecting customer service. Participants were challenged to think of other ways they could improve customer service other than changes in systems and procedures.

**AFTERNOON SESSION:**

- Small group with low participation but got into the discussions in latter half
- Poor reading skills of some of the participants was identified

**5/11/2014****MORNING SESSION:**

- Some supervisors were seen as being aloof by the group and often shirking their duties, with some sups preferring to delegate when the hosts are busy and not helping guests when they are needed.
- On participant mentioned: "These individuals have forgotten that they were once hosts. We know who these individuals are and we know we can't do anything about it and we rather do what we can to rectify the situation."
- Team work and process improvements needed between techs, cashiers and slots hosts to provide better customer service experiences.
- An understanding of the bigger picture in relation to positive customer experiences and customer retention was noted by hosts.
- Variance in floats serves as a problem for hosts in relation to selling cards.
- At the hoppers, the group requested a specific cashier that is dedicated only to slots hosts to prevent delays.
- Better rostering and staff allocation is required.

**AFTERNOON SESSION:**

- After communicating the e-guest survey results to staff, there was a lot of othering and blaming of the supervisors by a few of the slots hosts, which could have been a result of staff not wanting to accept negative results & place blame elsewhere.
- Problem of supervisors not letting hosts go into other sections to help customers (due to shirking) and unless communicated to supervisors resulted in delays.
- One participant constantly made negative comments about the supervisors and used the session to vent frustration at the sups.
- Sups in the session felt under attack and defended themselves by making negative comments towards the individual.
- Victim/empowerment model used to deal with the othering and to point hosts towards looking at themselves first and what they could do before blaming others.
- Problem between supervisors and hosts needs to be addressed to ensure a healthy relationship and creation of a sense of "being on the same team."
- Participants spoke of doing away with free weekends if you do the graveyard shift to allow for better rostering as it occurred in the past.
- However those with families complained of needing weekends for family time.
- Problems identified in dealing with angry customers:

One participant said in 1st interaction tries to calm the customer down and deal with situation. When she has to interact a second time with the same angry customer she has already shut off and goes through the procedure to solve the problem whilst detaching from the human element of the customer experience.

- One participant said: *“Between dealing with management and dealing with angry customers on the floor, it’s demotivating between the two.”*
- One participant mentioned: *“I’m not an attendant, I’m a host.”* Indicating the need of staff to identify themselves positively in the work roles.
- When role-playing the issue of a bank of slots going offline, a supervisor mentions that one angry customer can upset the others so he uses humour to put guests in a good mood with his initial interaction.
- An excellent example of how to deal with this situation was provided by this supervisor, who effortlessly defused the situation and made sure guests were informed whilst offering them a complimentary drink.
- Some hosts spoke of how when guests wave at them for help, they wave back at them and then turn around as if nothing happened. They then go to help the guest and make a joke about it to put customers in a good mood.

**6/11/2014**

### **MORNING SESSION**

- Low participation from staff possibly due to presence of 3 members from HR in the workshop.

### **AFTERNOON SESSION**

- Queues at the cashdesk, some supervisors not helping when they were needed and delegating instead as well as slots hosts overcommitting to customers were seen as challenges.
- Problem identified of supervisors not being accountable to anyone and needing to report to each other. Supervisors seen as needing to speak one language. Some supervisors still seen as grouping with attendants.
- Lack of trust between hosts and need for teamwork was identified.
- Facilitator highlighted the need to depersonalize negative feedback from customers and to be emotionally intelligent and not take it personally.

### **RECOGNITION:**

- At the end of the workshops, facilitators asked participants to identify any outstanding individuals who provide exceptional customer service and a coloured female supervisor and two black male hosts were identified by various participants.
- This small piece of recognition went a long way to motivating the staff members who felt appreciated. One participant noted: *“All people want is a thank you.”*

### **LEADERSHIP:**

- There are some really strong and positive leaders amongst slots hosts and supervisors who took a constructive approach to customer service challenges
- These individuals mobilized values to create possible solutions and should be taken into consideration for the leadership pipeline

## **DELEGATE FEEDBACK:**

### **WHAT WERE THE STRENGTHS OF THE WORKSHOP?**

<b>THEMES:</b>	<b>COMMENTS:</b>
Methods	<p><i>"The videos that were shown, showed us from another view how the way you speak to a guest can have an impact on the guest's behaviour."</i></p> <p><i>"To get to act out the experience of our customers."</i></p>
Customer Service	<p><i>"To educate us more about customer service and how to handle angry and difficult guests more appropriately."</i></p> <p><i>"Helped us to see the small things that are missing when it comes to customer service."</i></p> <p><i>"The ability to shape us to face any major dispute related to guests services."</i></p>
Body Language	<p><i>"Provided me with a better knowledge of how to identify guests in need of help and how best to deal with them."</i></p> <p><i>"Since we work with people from difference backgrounds and languages, the only language we share is body language so it is important to understand it."</i></p> <p><i>"Learning to access a person and situation and how to defuse a situation."</i></p>
Forum for Open Communication	<p><i>"We got a chance to listen to other people's views and get ideas of how to handle some problems."</i></p> <p><i>"Getting to voice out our daily problems, this helps us voice out our concerns and pass our views to management."</i></p>
Cultural Differences	<p><i>"To remind us that we are dealing with different people and their different behaviours and we need to stay focused on our jobs and remain positive at all times."</i></p>

Facilitators	<p><i>“The facilitators encouraged everyone to speak about their problems and I think it was great because this can only work is if we all get involved and start taking accountability.”</i></p> <p><i>“Trainers took the time to learn the industry specifics and researched what employees deal with and designed a workshop around it.”</i></p> <p><i>“The simplicity of the content made it easy to understand.”</i></p>
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**WHAT RECOMMENDATIONS CAN YOU MAKE FOR IMPROVING THE WORKSHOP?**

<b>THEME:</b>	<b>COMMENT:</b>
Time	<p><i>“Give more time because the workshop is a wonderful tool for us and the guests and to make life more accommodating and comfortable.”</i></p> <p><i>“The session was short because I don’t think the facilitators did go deep with everything, it was just highlighted. If they can have at least a day session instead of a couple of hours.”</i></p>
Wider provision of training	<p><i>“To have the workshop every time Casino X hires new staff, that will help those joining the company know what is expected of them.”</i></p> <p><i>“It shouldn’t be one department involved, different departments should engage in the same training. Don’t separate each other.”</i></p>
Role plays and Videos	<p><i>“More role-plays it demonstrates the exact situation.”</i></p> <p><i>“Show more videos so we can identify difficult customers.”</i></p>
Management Involvement	<p><i>“Get managers involved to be aware of challenges affecting and blocking good customer service.”</i></p>
Cultural Difference	<p><i>“Even better understanding and go in depth about cultural diversity.”</i></p>

Positive Comments	<i>"Training was good from this morning, I will go back positive to my job and the guests. Facilitators were friendly with us."</i>
Positive Comments	<i>"It was absolutely fantastic the way it is."</i>
	<i>"I think it was cool and well-planned. It was very helpful to understand our industry."</i>

### WHAT DO YOU FIND USEFUL FOR YOUR ROLE?

<b>THEME</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
Methods	<p><i>"Videos showed an example of what to do and what not to when dealing with a guest"</i></p> <p><i>"Slot machine and props made it easier to act out scenarios."</i></p> <p><i>"Role plays and chats made it easier for us to express what we experience on a daily basis."</i></p>
Body Language	<p><i>"Because sometimes what we say and what we express through our body language is different."</i></p> <p><i>"Body language because it's the first impression I give to a guest."</i></p> <p><i>"Body Language and how to both interpret and understand it."</i></p>
Cultural Difference	<p><i>"How to communicate with different cultures more easily and know their differences."</i></p> <p><i>"How to deal with guests from other cultures because we deal with a lot of cultures and races sometimes it's not easy to understand."</i></p>

General	<p><i>“Being a supervisor can be difficult because you deal with both guest and staff issues.”</i></p> <p><i>“To keep the communication running in a fluent way.”</i></p> <p><i>“To watch my attitude towards guests, because it improves relationships with guests.”</i></p>
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### **CULTURAL DIFFERENCE: FACILITATOR FEEDBACK**

**28/10/2014**

- Open and honest communication on diversity challenges especially from white staff. A staff member spoke of how some older Afrikaans guests ask to deal with white managers only. Guests don't take black management seriously preferring to work with lower level white staff members.
- Difficulties in dealing with Chinese guests due to language barrier.
- Coloured staff member being offended by guest who asked him: *“What are you?”* and not knowing how to respond.
- Common problem of reserving of machines resulting in guests racializing issues.

**30/10/2014**

- Some Chinese guests and elite Indian guests are often seen as being rude and dismissive by slots hosts.
- Guests often accuse staff of being racist if they deal with a customer of their own racial group before they deal with another customer
- Language barrier with Chinese guests, with there only being two translators available who are on different shifts.
- There seems to be a divide between some Indian and Black technicians with some Indian techs mentioning that some black techs display a “don't care attitude” and do not help and assist them, and often wait for the Indian technicians to do the work. There is no teamwork between the two groups and this is a cause for concern.

**5/11/2014**

- One host spoke of how due to an unequal history and lack of educational opportunities, many of the non-white guests (mainly Indian) are not equipped to

understand the rules of gambling and thus ask for help on many occasions in comparison to white guests who required less attention.

- Some Chinese guests seen as getting very angry when things go wrong and preferring to leave the casino if there issue is not resolved.
- In the culture game where groups were asked to highlight positive communication styles and non-verbal behaviours of different cultural groups, blacks were seen as being patient customers, Indians were seen as refusing to listen to hosts and whites were seen as being more likely to understand you once you've explained yourself
- A gender issue where an older Zulu man refused to speak to a female supervisor to solve his problem as he only wanted to speak to a man. The host saw this as a cultural problem (traditional culture) whereas the customer was now operating in the Casino X Cultural (urban) context and needed to observe those norms.

THEME	COMMENT
Language Barrier	<p><i>"A Chinese guest needed his or ID number to pay a jackpot over R25 000. He didn't understand me, he just wanted his money which we could not give him without that specific information."</i></p> <p><i>"Chinese guy needed help and couldn't speak a word of English. I used body language to help him by pointing and predicting what he needed."</i></p> <p><i>"I was helping a guest who spoke a different language. He gave me his pin number and he could not say it properly so I ended up blocking his card."</i></p> <p><i>"I had a Chinese guest who was very angry and tried to explain the problem to him but he didn't understand English. I then asked a Chinese man I knew to translate."</i></p> <p><i>"I was dealing with a guest from France who didn't understand the language. I saw another known guest with a translator app on his phone and asked him to assist."</i></p> <p><i>"I had a Zulu guest insert money that didn't reflect (bill dispute). I tried to get info from the guest about how many notes he inserted but he only spoke Zulu. I tried a few of my Zulu words to get some info but ended up calling my Zulu colleague to translate."</i></p>

Discrimination	<i>“It was an Indian lady who stormed at me and went on and on about how stupid we black people are. I just lost my cool and refused to help her.”</i>
Prejudice	<i>“When guests can speak English but will speak to you in Zulu after you telling him/her that you can’t speak Zulu.”</i>

### **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- Technicians on duty to provide expected time of completion of current task to hosts on radio, so host can be notified of which tech is most likely to assist and ETA which can be communicated to keep customer informed.
- On busy days a specific cashier dedicated only to slots hosts can prevent delays. Experienced cashiers need to be scheduled to prevent long waiting periods.
- Better rostering and staff allocation is required to prevent staff shortages at peak times. Supervisors need to report on staff rostering to shift managers to increase accountability
- Self-help training services for guests on how to gamble can help reduce customer requests to teach them how to use the machines and free up hosts (3x machines)
- Deep-level Two day Diversity Awareness foundational training for all staff to address diversity issues identified
- Intercomprehension Approach to Foreign Languages training developed for the maritime industry, aims to make sense of what someone from another culture is saying in a different language and make use of this competence to make communication work. Technique does not allow learners to speak a foreign language but could be used to help hosts understand Chinese guests as well as guests from other cultures. Involves situation awareness and comprehending body language (see [www.intermar.ax](http://www.intermar.ax))
- 360 feedback assessments (management impact) for supervisors to gain an understanding of how they are viewed by hosts, peers, self and managers can increase self-awareness and gaps can be addressed in facilitator-led debrief and used for personal development. Feedback together with open and honest sup-led sessions with hosts on how to improve customer service and a commitment to implementing changes with a focus on improving relationships
- Team building intervention for technicians to address tribalistic thinking, promote “a sense of being on the same team”, build community and a common identity
- Flip-file of common processes/customer problems translated in Chinese e.g. transfer failure with visual aids can be used to provide information to international guests  
(creation of an app for tablets where budget allows)
- Greater job rotation between slots hosts, cashiers and technicians to promote teamwork , empathy, understanding and flexibility

- Roll-out of Customer Service Superheroes intervention with cashiers, dealers and waitrons to ensure consistency across units
- Low visibility of slots hosts uniform with brighter clothing. Increase visibility with bright T-shirts/Collared shirts for peak times stating: “How can I help you?” at front and Slots Host Team with superhero symbol at back. Alternatively hosts to dress up voluntarily in superheroes costumes during Christmas season to make initial interaction with client humorous and serve as a marketing tool (suggestion by HR).

## *Appendix J: Technology Solutions – Full Discussion*

This part of the thesis seeks to recommend technological solutions to customer service challenges facing Casino X as well as improve the customer service training intervention through the introduction of technology. The chapter begins by highlighting specific customer service challenges and improvements on the customer service intervention which can be addressed through technology to achieve cost-savings and efficiencies. A theoretical discussion of technology theories follows with a relation being made between Manuel Castell's theory on the network society and how social media networks can be used to enhance employee engagement and encourage knowledge-sharing. Thereafter Alvin Tofler's concept of the experience economy is discussed and its relation to the casino context. A discussion of virtual reality as an experienced-based, training tool follows. Finally a discussion on the use of mobile technology to track employee movement on the casino floor is provided to improve customer service.

Specific outcomes of the research findings highlighted in the previous chapter, are better suited to be addressed through technological means. For example, the long delays experienced by customers waiting for technicians to arrive at slots machines which had malfunctioned, could be addressed through tracking the physical location of technicians on the casino floor, so as to provide information to customers on expected time of arrival of technicians. In addition, the lack of staff recognition by management, poor communication between team members, negative impact of diversity interactions on customer service as well as low levels of staff engagement were also identified as research outcomes that could adequately addressed through technology platforms. It is envisaged that use of technology, to address the above mentioned outcomes of research will assist in cost reduction and improved efficiencies for the organisation. Furthermore, the use of technology will be recommended to enhance the delivery of future customer service training interventions.

Customer service challenges at Casino X which can be adequately addressed through technological solutions include:

<b>Challenges:</b>	<b>Technological Solution</b>
Communication between staff	Social media networks (communication)
Lack of Recognition of Staff	Social media networks
Long Customer Service Processes	Mobile Tracking of Physical Location of Staff
Negative Attitudes & Body Language of staff	Social media networks (engagement)
Impact of Negative Customer Interactions on Staff	Social media networks (social support)
Negative Impact of Diversity on Customer Service Interactions	Social media networks (knowledge-sharing)

In addition, the use of technology shall also be discussed in terms of providing an improved platform for delivering customer service training by encouraging simulation of service behaviours and enhancing learner engagement.

After the post-intervention evaluation, areas of improving the intervention identified by participants included providing more time for the intervention, more frequent training, a wider provision of training as well as the use of more role-plays and videos in the training. By using virtual reality technology (to be discussed in detail later) to train staff, training costs could be reduced and run flexibly resulting in longer training times, more frequent training as well as a wider provision of training to staff in other parts of the organisation. More in-depth role-playing of reacting to customer situations was also identified as a recommendation for improving the intervention, and VR could be used to provide more detailed and realistic simulations of customer interactions.

Research finding suggested that the main cultural barriers facing slots hosts included language barriers and racism from guests. Language barriers could be addressed through the provision of smartphones to slots hosts containing translator applications. VR could assist in teaching slots hosts how to react behaviourally to racism from guests as well as allow staff from different racial groups e.g. white staff, to experience such situations and thereby encourage empathy. Due to the difficult casino environment and high number of negative customer interactions have to deal with, it is recommended that social media networks be

used to provide social support to staff who have become upset after dealing with difficult customers.

In the post-intervention interviews, managers highlighted the need to encourage a coaching culture in the organisation. This could be facilitated through an employee social media network such as Yammer (to be discussed in detail later) where through social learning, managers drive culture through their interactions with staff through the channel.

A theoretical discussion of social media networks, the experience economy, mobile tracking of frontline service staff and virtual reality technology follows in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of these technologies and how they can be mobilized to address the above mentioned challenges.

## **The Network Society**

Manuel Castell's theory of the network society is a grand narrative of the present that humanity is currently living through in the age of information, advanced technologies and social networks. Central to Castell's sociological macro-theory is the idea of a world re-organising itself through a web of interconnected, global networks enabled through advanced communication technologies (Stalder, 2006). A few of Castell's key concepts from the network society such as the space of flows, informationalism and networks will be briefly uncapped as a theoretical underpinning to provide a sociological understanding of the centrality of networks in today's society. These concepts will then be related to addressing customer service challenges at Casino X, primarily through the use of social media networks.

### **Space of Flows, Social Movements and Informationalism**

The first of Castell's concepts that we will look at is the space of flows which refers to a time-sharing environment brought about by the advancement of information technologies, where individuals can operate in a virtual environment through online representations of themselves called avatars. Here time and location is suspended, reducing the limitation of physical geographical presence and time difference (Stalder, 2006). The space of flows is characterized by real-time interaction and connecting people and places to one another. The creation of spaces reflects and influences social relations. Castell's notes that it is the space of

flows which becomes the new environment for economic organisation. Castell's notes that it is the medium which is the message in that it is not what communication technologies communicate but rather how they structure communication that occurs through the technology which has the greatest impact.

Castell's also discusses the concept of social movements and how they are empowered through the information technology infrastructure (Stalder, 2006). Social movements are based on collective identity and appeal to people by their narrative thus providing people with meaning to their actions. Social movements challenge dominant social groups and if they are successful they are integrated into the existing power structure. As a result, Castell's views social movements as being concerned primarily with producing their own cultural codes through challenging old and forming new cultural values.

Castell's compares television, as a one-way mass communication channel resulting in a unifying culture, with a networked information technology infrastructure where individuals can interact and co-produce messages (Stalder, 2006). He acknowledges that whilst individual human experiences exist outside technology, it is through technology that collective experiences and shared messages are co-created and shared. He points that it is these collective experiences and shared messages which are culture as a social medium, thus highlighting the power of social networks enabled through information technology to co-produce shared culture in new ways.

In his theory of informationalism, looking at the importance of information in the current technological paradigm, Castells notes that initially technologies were created to do things more efficiently through automation (Stalder, 2006). However, thereafter technologies began to produce information (or data) that could be used to create new knowledge (e.g. improved efficiency), resulting in the production and consumption of knowledge in the knowledge economy. This is in contrast to the production and consumption of natural resources and goods in previous industrial modes of production. Castells points out the ability of technology such as the internet to bring together all types of information that can be used to create something novel and meaningful. The internet embodies the ability to connect almost anything with almost everything, as well as create new values from these networks and connections which are not restricted by spatial or professional boundaries.

## Networks

According to Castell's, a network can be defined as a set of interconnected nodes, with a node being the intersection points of the network (Stalder, 2006). A more detailed explanation is provided where networks are seen as being a sustainable pattern of interactions between parties that define one another. Networks are coordinated based on common goals, values and procedures. By responding selectively to environmental stimuli, networks create their own environment. Important characteristics of a network unfold over time.

In explaining the relationship between a living system and the environment, Capra (1997) points out that a living system receives material to renew and preserve it self, whilst ejecting waste which is recycled by the environment, resulting in there being no waste in the system. Living systems are viewed as living networks which are in a continuous state of renewal as decaying components of the system are replaced, resulting in maintenance of form. This process results in the continuation of the patterns of interdependence in the system (or network) which represent the identity of the system.

The living system also receives stimuli from the environment, and the reaction to the stimuli is dependent on the internal state of the system at that time (Capra, 1997). As a result, systems can react unpredictably to stimuli, resulting in small causes having large effects. In addition, due to the plethora of stimuli being transmitted within in an environment, a living system can be said to create it's own environment by selectively noticing specific events in the environment and disregarding others.

Capra (2002) points out that social networks generated by communication technologies serve as creators of culture by continually generating images, meaning and influencing the behaviours of members through communicating values and reinforcing acceptable behaviours. The values and beliefs generated by the social network create a lens of the world through which members interpret their experiences. In addition, the social network generates a shared pool of knowledge encompassing information, ideas and competencies that influence member culture. The system of shared values and beliefs create an identity for members of the social network.

A common cultural frame is required by network members to ensure messages communicated within the network are not misinterpreted (Stalder, 2006). A lack of a common culture results in poor communication and disintegration of the network. A shared project becomes the frame of reference against which coordination and internal negotiations occur between

members of a network. The nodes making up a network are given importance according to the valuable information they provide to the network. The more contributions, the higher the node is valued by the network and where no contributions are made, the network recreates itself without that node. If nodes contribute negatively they can be expelled from the network e.g. in online groups, members may be expelled due to the use of negative discriminatory statements or offensive language. The value of a node is also determined by its relation to the shared project, which in turn is influenced by the actions of members. The performance of a network is dependent on connectivity and consistency. Consistency relates to whether goals and interests of members are met by the network, and in turn if individual members help the network in achieving its goals. Connectivity refers to the network's ability to foster clear and noise-free communication between nodes through a shared culture reducing misinterpretation of messages. As a result connectivity, has both a technical aspect (in terms of increased speed of technology) as well as a cultural aspect governing correct interpretation of messages.

In addition, the benefits of organizational hierarchies have been nullified by the advent of communication technologies (Stalder, 2006). Hierarchies have been designed for bureaucratic organisations to ensure coordination, simplified communication up and down the structure, as well as command and control of member behaviours all allowing for economies of scale of production. Networks on the other hand are more flexible and responsive, enable more and efficient communication as well as involvement from members. The introduction of communication technologies allowed networks to be coordinated without a centre, through coordinated, quorum decision-making, resulting in the erosion of the fundamental weakness of hierarchies in achieving coordination without rigidity. This culminated in an improved form of organisation that allowed for a flatter organizational structure, flexibility, coordinated decision-making and decentralized execution as well as greater degrees of individual expression and horizontal communication.

A key difference between hierarchies and networks in terms of dispute resolution, is that a network form of governance involves at least two parties with enduring exchange relations, with either party having no legitimate authority to resolve any disputes that arises as a result of the exchange. Consequently, negotiation is required to arrive at a resolution within networked organisations.

## **Networks Bring Forth Their Own Worlds**

The most important effects of a network are created by the interaction of its different elements where small causes can have large effects. Emergent effects are high-level phenomena and can be reflected in financial markets, where actions of the market are cumulatively created through the actions of individuals. However, the actions of the market cannot be controlled and takes on an identity of its own and becomes a material reality in itself i.e. a financial market. As a result of emergent effects, elements of a network defining one another and due to a network responding to environmental stimuli selectively and ascribing importance to events differentially, Castells famously states that networks are said to “bring forth their own worlds” (Stalder, 2006).

Networks create their own environments by operating outside of and in relation to an objective reality. Information regarding the objective reality is selectively identified and responded to, thus allowing the network to provide its own definition of external reality and create its own internal world with its own internal dynamics. The network's internal world is removed from the objective reality, having its own culture where members have online identities which are representations of their real-world selves. The social media network Facebook is an excellent example of this with individuals' Facebook identities often representing the most exciting aspects of the life of the real-world self, creating the ideal representation of that individual in the network. Topics that trend on Facebook are often defined by the network's members thus establishing importance to specific aspects of the external world and ascribing popularity to the event or action, resulting in the sharing of mass popular culture.

The network's internal world also relies on the redefinition of space where an internal world is created collapsing geographical boundaries through connectivity. New temporal frameworks are developed within these internal world. For e.g. online financial trading applications allow for local traders to trade in international markets at the operating hours of those markets to accrue temporal benefits. When understanding networks as a framework containing resources which allow action to occur (in relation to social movements), Castells notes that action outside of a network can be challenging due to lack of access to resources, due to fact that the majority of these resources are cultural in nature, action also becomes difficult to a lack of communication outside the network (Stalder, 2006). As a result, Castells notes that survival of a node outside of a network can be very difficult as within networks, opportunities and

resources are provided. If nodes no longer form part of the network, the network reconstitutes itself and bypasses that node and resources continue to flow to other nodes making up the network. Thus due to the inclusion exclusion ability, networks act as gatekeepers to resources and opportunities. Nodes that have been excluded from the network, no longer exist in the internal world created by the network. However, these nodes can also interact and recombine to force themselves back into the network and transform it.

### **The Use of Social Media Networks for Employee Engagement and Knowledge-Sharing**

The concept of social media relates to internet-based and mobile technologies that have capabilities to transform communication into an interactive dialogical exchange. Social media includes social networks such as Facebook and Twitter, internet forums, blogs, wikis (user editable websites e.g. Wikipedia), podcasts and digital video-sharing repositories (e.g. YouTube). Whilst the first version of the web allowed people to access information that was authored by a select few, the concept of Web 2.0 relates to the second version of the World Wide Web which placed emphasis on the social dimension of the online experience, enhanced connectivity, people's ability to share information openly, participate and collaborate through social networks as well as become content creators through wikis (user edited websites) which can be used to democratize knowledge. Web 2.0 is characterized by user generated content, cloud computing, advanced mobile technology and social content curation (Alberghini, Cricelli & Grimaldi, 2014).

At their most basic level, social media networks entail mapping the relationships between persons and groups of people who have shared interests and a common identity. Social media networks allow these individuals to communicate and share information easily. Internal corporate wikis and blogs allow managers to interact with staff informally, allow employees to participate in decision-making culminating in enhanced job satisfaction and engagement resulting in improved performance and retention (Azeem & Yasmin, 2016). Social media networks, wikis and blogs improve the learning process through allowing for contribution, organisation and distribution of information, knowledge and experiences. This allows for knowledge-sharing as well as promoting creativity and deep, interactive learning. In order to benefit from Web 2.0 applications a collaborative organisational work culture is a prerequisite allowing for sharing of information and participative decision-making. Social networking is viewed as encouraging informal learning which is seen as resulting in

behaviour change. This is believed to occur as a result of the social support provided to learners by other learners in the social network as well as immediate feedback provided and facilitation of interactive discussions between learners (Hinchcliffe & Kim, 2012). When evaluating the importance of social media networks in learning and development within organisations, it is important to keep in mind that over 70% of work related knowledge is said to occur as a result of informal, collaborative learning (Bell, 2012).

A well thought out social networking platform within an organisation can assist management in discerningly monitoring goal achievement without coercing specific outcomes from staff. Social networks also establish close bonds between employees thus contributing to a positive work climate and improved tenure. Social networks can provide informal learning experiences through the use of hyperlinks to link relevant content concerning job tasks and procedures for internal use. These informal learning experiences can be created and managed by peers thus allowing for more experienced staff to coach and mentor newcomers. (Azeem & Yasmin, 2016).

Heiberger and Loken (2011) point out that the use of social media in learning allows learners to develop cognitive and metacognitive skills such as critical thinking, reflection, constructing knowledge and understanding of how one learns i.e. understanding one's own learning process. Benefits of learning through social media such as collaboration in terms of information search and distribution, knowledge accumulation and user generated content results in the development of cognitive skills. McGoughlin and Lee (2008) highlight that the design of social media platforms results in self-directed learning and gets learners ready for life-long learning, which remains a core requirement in the age of drastic technological advancement. Heutagogy refers to the study of self-determined learning, where the learner is seen as being the key agent in their own learning process and encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning (Blaschke, 2014).. This learning theory places emphasis on learners being able to apply what they have learned to complex situations as well as develop key capabilities such as knowing how to learn, teamwork, empathy, creativity, independent learning and experiential learning, self-efficacy, being an involved member of society and engaging in purposeful dialogue.

Social bookmarking refers to a system for categorizing information on the web for the purpose of storing, retrieving and sharing content online. One worded "tags" are used to label webpages or links to content that may be of interest to a user e.g. #Casino X where all

information related to casino X would be linked. In addition, the user can access information based on collective tags that may be popular and contain specific user recommendations regarding content. The tag links the user to other users who have linked content associated to that tag, which are often ranked due to popularity. Social bookmarks can also be used to rate the quality of the content through a five star rating system as well as comment on content, engage in dialogue and network with users sharing similar interests. In this way a user, can mobilize the collective intelligence of the crowd to identify popular and high quality resources on a topic on the internet. Users can subscribe to feed of new bookmarks created by specific users concerning specific content and can utilize this information in their own personal social media space. In addition, tags can be integrated and shared across various social media platforms and are a common feature amongst a majority of such platforms.

Within an organizational context, social bookmarking can allow for the diffusion of ideas within companies, thereby fostering creativity (Churchill, Wing Wong, Law, Salter & Tai (2009). One of the key benefits of social media in learning is its ability to get users attention due to its familiar feel and structure as part of most people's daily lives. Thus social media can assist in motivating staff to get involved in tacit knowledge-sharing by fostering social capital within the organisation. Leidner, Koch & Gonzalez (2010) found that the use of social media in organisations increased the morale of younger employees by promoting a sense of belonging to the culture. In a study by Ouiridi, Ouiridi, Segers & Hendrick (2015), social media was also found to increase job performance and the use of an internal micro-blogging tool was perceived to promote social capital.

Yammer is a private social media platform geared towards organisations. The platform is based on the design of Facebook and aims to provide the benefits of a social media platform to organisations to encourage improved communication, employee engagement, knowledge-sharing and real-time collaboration. The platform provide staff with a forum to ask questions, receive immediate feedback, use Wikis to develop user generated content, create threads to categorize content, create groups for specific teams or departments as well as stimulate discourse (Bell, 2012).

It is recommended that Casino X utilise Yammer to encourage employee engagement and foster employee involvement in decision-making where intended. The use of such a platform could allow opportunities for management to recognize positive staff behaviours immediately, share customer service knowledge internally, allow managers to access the

collective intelligence of staff in decision-making as well as develop a database for recording organizational memory to assist newcomers. Implementation of Yammer could also use in reduced training costs and time efficiencies with learners contributing to the curation of learning material, sharing informal learning experiences and engaging in self-determined learning. In addition, the use of such a platform would encourage usage by younger staff (a majority of whom are employed in frontline positions) in comparison to formal communication methods such as team meetings and email as well as improve communication between team members. The use of such a social media platform could also be used to build an online version of the Casino X culture which could be managed by the younger frontline workers and used as an additional mechanism for inducting new staff members (Stalder, 2006).

Next the concept of the experience economy is introduced, and the importance of this concept to the product and services provided by casinos to their customers, as well as its relevance to the training context and the delivery of customer service training is critically discussed.

### **The Experience Economy**

Schull (2012) notes that economies are changing from producing products and services towards the creation of experiences. Tofler (1972), provides a futurist's perspective on the creation of experiential industries after the advent of the services industry. He points out that in the current future people will begin to collect and purchase experiences much like they purchase products due to increasing wealth amongst populations and a consequent decline in the yearning to own physical products. He notes that the education industry will expand where experiential education will be used to teach knowledge and values. Pine and Gilmore (1998) point out the shift from a services economy to an experience economy, and track the progression of economic value from the extraction of commodities (agrarian economy), to production of goods (industrial economy), delivering of services (service economy) to the experience economy. Stasiak (2013) notes that more important than the tangible, physical products available on the future market economy are the emotions and impressions linked to these products which creates lasting value for the customer.

Entertainment as well as culture and tourism are seen as long-standing aspects of the experience economy. In the contemporary experience economy, activities that were once

banal, assume an experience-based component such as themed restaurants and shopping malls using events and experiences to attract customers.

An experience involves the service provided as the stage and the product as the prop to create a memorable event for the customer. The experience is individualized as it is socially constructed by the individual in terms of his or her interaction with the experience and the individual's state of mind. The consumption of a service in the experience economy is a process resulting in the organisation having to manage the relationship with the customer as well as understand the customer's value system so as to understand needs and decision-making choices. Some experiences have experience as the core to the product (e.g. a theatre show) and others have experience as having auxiliary value (e.g. the games provided on smartphones). Criteria of novelty, repetition, unpredictability and personal involvement are used to determine whether experiences have high or low experience value (Lorentzen, 2009).

Lorentzen (2009) notes the move towards hedonism in today's experience economy where experiences are increasingly consumed. The consumption of an experience serves to construct individual identity as consumption of an experience provides a narrative of the person that the individual would like to become. Surplus income is a material requirement of the experience economy and the high incomes of individuals from developed countries allows for consumption of luxury items and the existence of the experience economy. Tofler (1972) forecasted the creation of an economy where products or service provided psychological gratification which are linked to leisure activities, possibly due to the wide-scale meeting of material needs and isolation resulting from pervasive technological use in the post-industrial economy. The experience-based economy is as so much concerned about the content of product or service sold to the client but places more emphasis on the way the product or service is sold through customer involvement. The experience enhances the value derived by the customer.

In linking the experience economy to the casino industry, it is evident that the business of casinos entails the provision of experiences which are deemed of value to customers who consume these experiences. The manager interviewed at Casino X during pre-intervention interviews highlighted this by pointing out that the product purchased by consumers at the casino was not the slots machines, but rather "the product was the experience."

The consumption of experiences in the casino industry are evident in the architecture and themed interior of casinos in Las Vegas e.g. Caesars Palace, which are designed to transport

the customer to different a realm encouraging a feeling of escapism from daily life (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). The thrilling experience of winning is also an aspect of the gambling experience that lures consumers to casinos. Schull (2012) points out that slots machines are designed around creating a satisfying user experiences and have been described as the crack cocaine of the gambling industry in terms of their ability as a delivery mechanism to provide a multi-sensory experience including visual, auditory and rhythmic (through continuous repetition of game-based play) experiences on slot machines. Video-based gambling machines has been known to invigorate the brain in cycles, encouraging emotional peaks and dips. The repetitive, rhythmic process of playing slots machines has been known to induce a suspended state allowing players to escape from their daily problems into a trance-like state called “the zone.” It is believed that addiction to slot machines is not necessarily based on the chance of winning but rather the suspension of individual identity and hardships of one’s life by continued immersion in the zone (Schull, 2012).

The idea of the experience economy provides a new conceptual framework for understanding the products and services offered by casinos to their customers. Alternatively, the experience economy is also having an impact on the training and education industry, where learning experiences characterized by memorable educational events are becoming more commonplace. The technology of virtual reality is expected to revolutionize the education and training market, and will be discussed in relation to being used as training tool to improve the delivery of customer service interventions.

### **Virtual Reality as a Training Tool**

Virtual Reality (VR) involves an immersive, multi-sensory experience for participants through the creation of an artificial environment developed through software (Lau, 2015). Access to the artificial environment is provided to the user through wearable or non-wearable technology. VR allows the creation of presence in situated learning experiences by allowing participants to interact with a virtual environment which they are fully immersed in through multi-sensory experiences utilizing visualization, auditory stimuli and interactivity. The recent advancements in computer hardware and software have made the use of VR technology in training more practical through reduced costs of use. VR technology has been used in training across various industries including design, manufacturing, military, nuclear power plants as well as transportation. In particular, VR technologies are being increasingly

used to re-enact scenarios where errors in action may result in costly mistakes or be too high risk due to dangerous environments e.g. simulations of war and brain surgery.

Fully immersive VR technology relies on the use of visual and auditory headsets to transport users into new virtual worlds. Virtual worlds are 3D, digital representations of the real world. Virtual worlds often entail the use of avatars which are an online representations of oneself in the virtual world. Expected advancements in technology promoting the creation of enhanced sensory realities, could result in online experiences eventually becoming indistinguishable from the physical world within the next decade (Knight, 2015). In daily life, VR will allow people to blend their real world life with virtual life. In a virtual world platform called Second Life, users can live as an avatar in a virtual world as they would in the real world, rather than operating in a goal-directed game-based environment. Virtual worlds are designed to record all data received from users whilst interacting in the virtual world including eye-tracking, body movement, facial expressions, personal taste, identifying the other avatars people engage with and interaction times (Pridmore, 2014).

Rosenberg (2006) highlights that virtual reality can reduce the gap between formal learning and informal learning. Virtual environments are also believed to encourage the creations of communities of practice as well as reduce the disjuncture between on-screen training and face-to-face training interactions. Research has shown that use of immersive virtual learning environments result in higher learner engagement, interest and motivation as well as promote active learning experiences and the deeper understanding of concepts (Richter, 2007; Dickey 2005). Schrage (2000) and Dodgson (2005) noted that VR could be used as a faster and cheaper way of experimenting with new skills and knowledge.

Advantages of using VR in training include replication, flexibility and low costs of the technology in comparison to face to face training. One of the key benefits of VR as a training tool is it's ability to make abstract concepts concrete. There are three main forms of VR namely non-immersive using a desktop computer, semi-immersive and fully immersive. Side effects of interacting in a virtual environment include cyber-sickness (motion sickness), disorientation, vertigo, disorientation, headache and queasiness. Shortcomings of VR technology include restricted field of view, poor graphic quality and low-quality methods of interaction with other individuals.

In a study assessing the use of non-immersive VR to train individuals in assembly of automotive component, VR has been found to be more effective than the use of technical

training manuals (Chao, Wu, Yau, Feng & Tseng, 2016). Use of VR in training has been found to improve participants familiarity with concepts and application of content, decrease error in completion of tasks, reduce training risk due to operating in a virtual environment as well as result in time efficiencies. In manufacturing VR training simulations, participants can view components in 3D from various different angles allowing for deeper understanding of how components work, machine structure as well as allowing learners to simulate procedure. Cates, Lonn & Gallagher (2016) illustrated the use of VR training methods improved performance from between 17% – 49%. In addition, doctors trained on VR have been reported as having better surgery competencies (Chao *et al*, 2016).

Lau (2015) notes that international organisations have been shifting their traditional internal training programmes towards the use of online learning communities, with some based in virtual reality. VR is also believed to assist in the development of online communities of practice through the use of avatars where individual's avatars interact with other avatars on group tasks. Surprisingly, it has been found that such group interactions through avatars in virtual reality result in virtual teamwork and a new group learning process where through chat forums people can learn collaboratively, as well as think and act collectively. New group dynamics are formed online where through a shared, lived experience group members can assist one another, leaders emerge and humour is utilized to ease online tensions between participants (Gillen, Ferguson, Peaching & Twining, 2012).

Communities of practice entail the creation of an environment to support peer learning and social learning (Bandura, 2006). It is believed that through interactive learning experiences which can occur in virtual and online learning environments, communities of practice can be created. A study comparing a typical, in-house customer service, behavioural training programme with the use of a VR platform to teach the same course within a virtual mall, yielded surprising results with no significant difference being identified with the use of the different methods. However, the use of the virtual environment allowed the organisation to track how individuals solved customer service problems and accumulate data regarding the individual's personal learning process. The VR environment allowed the replaying of situations to facilitate learning through repetition and also created an organizational memory by recording training data to improve organizational learning in the long run (Lau, 2015).

The interactions in a VR world between group members are believed to increase learning motivation and encourage self-directed learning. The increased engagement as a result of

immersive virtual environments and interaction within these environments are believed to deepen learners understanding of curriculum content (Richter, 2007). VR also allows learners to learn from a distance without the limitations of time and space.

Stahl (2005) found that blended learning approaches (using face-to-face instruction as well as online and virtual reality) could enhance participants social skills, promote community and trust as well as improve active and self-directed learning. Within the virtual environment, the presence of an instructor was seen to improve feedback to the learner in the learning process. According to Statista (2017), the number of active VR users is believed to increase from 90 million in 2017 to 171 million in 2018 indicating a substantial annual growth rate of 90%.

VR can be used as a highly engaging learning method particularly for teaching behavioural skills. VR simulations can be used to recreate customer service situations where frontline staff can re-enact problem-solving techniques (Deloitte, 2016). Here an avatar can be used as performance coach for problem-solving or analyzing customer body language to identify customer states and need for assistance.

In the context of Casino X, delivering a customer service intervention through a virtual reality platform would be more cost-effective, efficient and flexible than face-to-face training. In addition, immersion within a virtual world would ensure maximum attention of the learner during the programme. Most importantly, the technology would place learners in virtual situations involving dealing with difficult customers, thus allowing them to experience and respond to such situations in a realistic environment, in comparison to in-class role plays. Thus the technology would allow for virtual world application of training content, allowing for repetitive, simulations of responding to such customers. In the case of dealing with discrimination and diversity situations, the virtual experience would allow for the slots host to practice their responses to such situations. In addition, VR training could allow slots hosts to experience empathy by be placed in the shoes of the customer during a diversity interaction, thus allowing for perspective-taking. Furthermore, through storing of learner data VR could assist in understanding employee's individual learning processes as well as facilitate the development of communities of practice through the creation of collaborative learning experiences.

The last technology recommended is the use of smartphones to enable mobile tracking of frontline staff location on the casino floor in order to improve customer service experiences. The next section provides a brief discussion on how this technology can be used to reduce

customer waiting times for technicians and provide information to customers regarding the physical location and expected arrival time of technicians when slot machines have malfunctioned at Casino X.

### **Mobile Tracking of the Physical Location of Frontline Employees**

According to Pandey, Singh and Kumar (2011), Wifi-based cellphone technology, which allows wireless connection to a network through radio waves, can be used as a cost-effective way to track customer movement in shopping malls and analyse purchasing patterns. The introduction of Wifi technology allowed an electronic device to connect to the Internet or receive or transmit data wirelessly through the use of microwave signals (Bai, WU, Ong, Retscher, Kealy, Tomko, Sanderson, Wu & Zhang, 2014). In the past decade, Wifi has become a standard feature of smartphones, which have become a central aspect of daily life serving as the key source of entertainment and telecommunication and services based on location. For these reasons, smartphones have been outfitted with an array of sensors including Global Positioning System (GPS), accelerometers and gyroscopes (to recognize and track movement), digital compasses (used to gauge direction through sensing magnetic fields), cameras as well as Wifi and Bluetooth (short-range wireless technology for exchanging data on devices) capabilities.

There are drawbacks with tracking smartphones indoors through the use of GPS due to the reflection of satellite signals. However tracking systems based on the ping or transmission signal sent by a smartphone to sense and connect to Wifi hotspots in public places, can be used to track the location of the smartphone indoors as well as obtain information regarding an individual's location and movement. Often, shopping malls attract customers through free Wifi whilst obtaining access to this important data that can provide information regarding purchasing decisions (Bai *et al*, 2014).

The benefits of tracking employee movement is the ability to analyse work patterns to improve productivity and efficiency as well as manage deviations from company policy in terms of presence. Zones which are often frequented by staff can be identified as cluster zones and analysed for further information. In a study on mobile location tracking of employees of a software company, the use of the Media Access Control (MAC) Address of a user's phone (referring to the physical identification address of a piece of hardware), Received Signal Strength Indicator (RSSI) of smartphones captured by monitoring

equipment, as well as the use of localization software installed on mobile phones generated a timestamped record of zones visited as well as accurate descriptions of walking paths of employees (Lopez-de-Teruela, Garcia, Canovasa, Gonzalez & Carrasco, 2017).

Similarly, the use of mobile tracking technology can be utilized to identify the physical location of frontline service employees in the casino setting such as technicians, so that slots hosts can provide information to customers in terms of expected time of arrival in relation to fixing of slot machines, thereby reducing uncertainty and improving customer service. Such information can be used to create time efficiencies, where technicians who have just completed a previous job, and are within the closest proximity to a slots host awaiting assistance with a faulty slot machine can attend to the request. Use of such technology can also assist in identifying individual's walking paths in terms of deviation from company policy concerning social grouping of slots hosts on the casino floor, which creates a perception of a lack of concern for the customer. The data obtained regarding common walking paths and "busy areas" (those having the highest customer requests) in the casino can be utilized to improve decision-making regarding staff rostering and allocation, especially during peak times.

In addition, applications on smartphones providing translation services can also be used where language barriers exist between frontline staff and customers. Whilst, the initial cost of outfitting all frontline staff with smartphones may be expensive, perhaps the creation of a mobile application that can be downloaded by staff who have smartphones, could assist in reducing costs of entry to use of this technology. It is suggested that a return on investment calculation be developed before the organisation decides to invest in such technology in order to determine feasibility and economic benefit to the organisation.

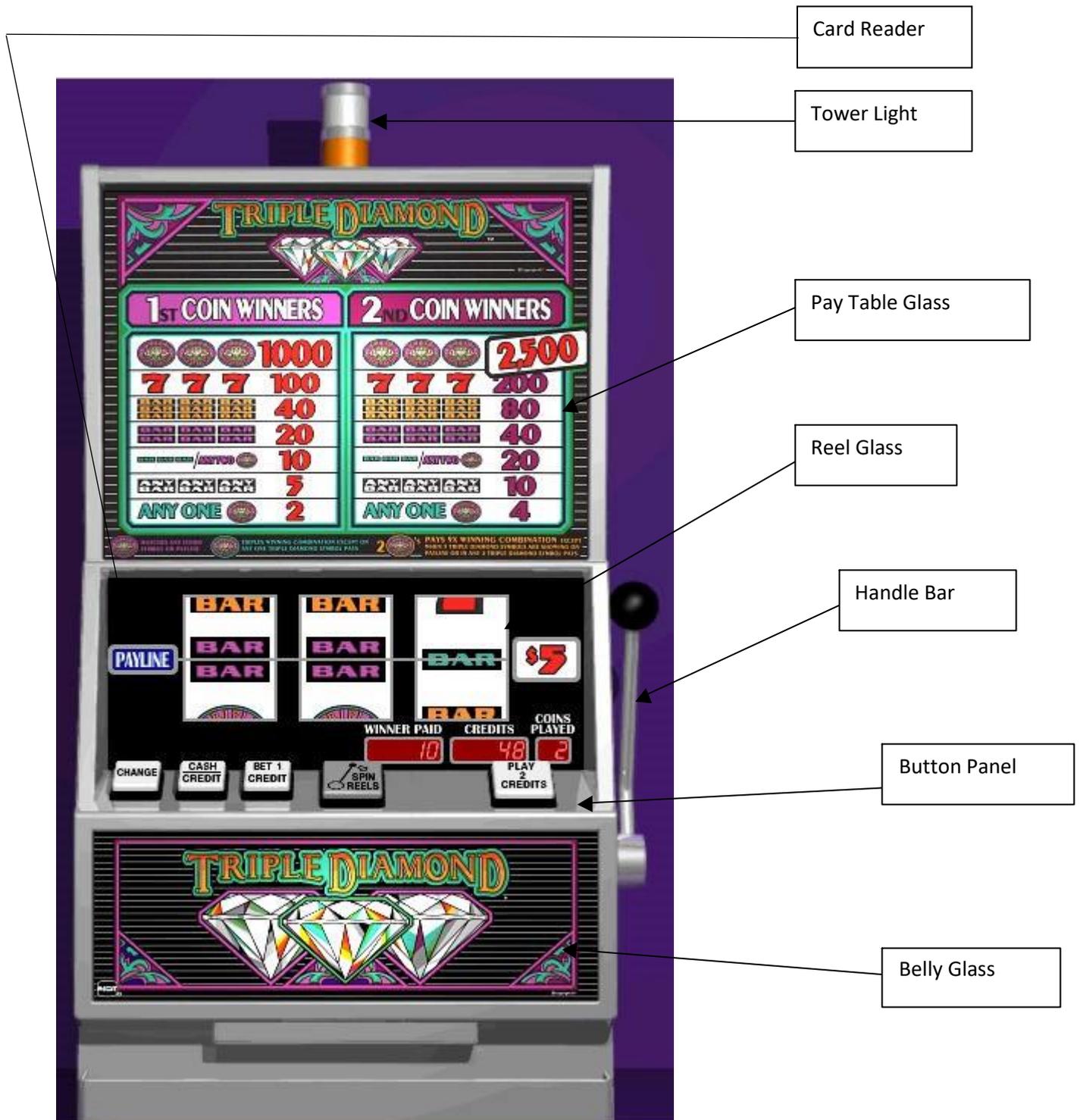
It is apparent that the above technologies can be utilized to address the above mentioned challenges impacting customer service at Casino X as well as improve training methods for future customer service training interventions. The above discussion highlights how mobile technology can be employed to provide information to customers awaiting technical service for inoperative slots machines. The use of virtual reality to improve the delivery of customer service training interventions through enhanced engagement, simulation, collaborative learning and storing of individual learning data was provided as a suggestion to Casino X to improve future interventions. In addition, the use of organizational social media networks such as Yammer, was recommended to create a knowledge-sharing platform for frontline

staff, increase communication and engagement of younger workers, build social capital, serve as a means of social support as well as create an online organizational culture to induct new team members.

## **Conclusion**

This discussion sought to address customer service challenges facing Casino X as well as areas of improvement of the customer service intervention through the provision of technological solutions. The discussion began by providing a theoretical explanation of social networks and the use of social media in organisation, the experience economy and virtual reality as a training tool as well as the use of mobile technology for tracking employee movement on the casino floor. These use of these existing technologies were employed to address the aforementioned challenges as well as assist in answering the research questions of the study.

*Appendix K: Illustration of a Slots Machine*



*(Adapted from Pacyniak, 2000)*

*Appendix L: Letter of Permission to Conduct Research*

Telephone: 031 3283195

Fax: 031 3283006

To : Whom it may concern

Date : 05<sup>th</sup> December 2014

Re : Permission for Research

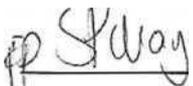
Dear Sir/Madam,

This letter serves to confirm that \_\_\_\_\_ has provided Praneschan Govender permission to do research on Customer Service at the Unit in Durban.

Should you require any further details please do not hesitate to contact me on the above address and contact number.

Yours Sincerely

HRD Practitioner



*Appendix M: Cover of Customer Service Training Booklet*

**CUSTOMER SERVICE  
SUPERHEROES**

