

CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE MANAGEMENT AT TRANSNET FREIGHT RAIL IN GAUTENG: AN EMPLOYEE PERSPECTIVE

William Tsholedi Mokoena

Transnet Freight Rail Gauteng (tsholedim@mailbox.co.za)

Kirsty-Lee Sharp

Vaal University of Technology (kirsty-lee@vut.ac.za)

Contact number: +27 74 284 6422

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-4858-9593

ABSTRACT

It is becoming vital that organisations in all industries, all around the globe, develop a loyal customer base. It is imperative that they keep their customers satisfied in all spheres, ensuring organisations not only survive, but that they are successful. Consequently, it has become evident that the management of customer experiences is imperative to ensure sustainable profitable growth for organisations. There are currently no known research studies to date which have measured CEM within TFR in Gauteng from an employee perspective. Therefore, the need to conduct a research study on CEM within TFR in Gauteng from an employee perspective is important, in order to identify any gaps that may exist between the current practices of CEM within the organisation, in comparison to existing literature on CEM and where the organisation would like to be with regards to their CEM processes. This research study will benefit both management as well as its employees, to identify ways and means of how it can and should improve upon its CEM, in an effort to close any gaps that may exist in terms of the organisation's current position as opposed to where the organisation would like to be. This research study employed the use of a non-probability, judgement sample. The sampling frame consisted of 387 employees, of which 128 managers and supervisors, from the customer care, sales and marketing departments of TFR in Gauteng were taken in June 2018. Descriptive statistical analysis and correlation analysis were used to conduct the statistical analysis of the collected data.

It is evident from the findings of this research study that the employees of TFR in Gauteng have strong, positive assessments of the CEM that is currently being applied by TFR in Gauteng.

Key words: Customer Experience Management, customer-centric vision, culture, visionary leadership, employee engagement, South Africa

1. INTRODUCTION

Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:3) highlight the increasing importance for organisations in all industries, all around the globe, to develop a loyal customer base. Parumasur and Roberts-Lombard (2014:9) state that for organisations to survive in the long-term, it is imperative that they keep their customers satisfied in all spheres. This has contributed to a change in the way customers are treated, due to the fact that customer satisfaction has become a vital component in ensuring organisations not only survive, but that they are successful. Consequently, it has become evident that the management of customer experiences is imperative to ensure sustainable profitable growth for organisations (Macgillavry & Wilson, 2017:3).

Customer experience management (CEM) is the practice of designing and reacting to customer interactions, with the aim of meeting or exceeding customer expectations, in an effort to increase customer satisfaction, loyalty and advocacy (Gartner, 2018). Consequently, creating and managing customer experiences has become a vital activity for most organisations in recent years (Grønholdt, Martensen, Jørgensen, & Jensen, 2015:2). Wheeler (2013) suggests that the CEM Maturity model is a useful tool that organisations may employ in an effort to guide the leadership and employees of organisations through the change process. Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:3) theorise that the CEM Maturity Model can be used by organisations to evaluate the actual performance of an organisation against five dimensions, which will in turn indicate the level of maturity an organisation's CEM program is experiencing.

1.1 Customer Experience Management Maturity Model

The CEM Maturity Model constitutes five dimensions, namely customer-centric vision, customer-centric culture, visionary leadership, employee engagement and customer-centric processes and tools.

1.2 Customer-Centric Vision

Rouse (2013) highlights that an organisation's vision is a declaration of the organisation's values and purpose, concentrating on the future, particularly the organisation's mid-term and long-term goals. Organisations have the opportunity to employ the use of a customer-centric vision in an effort to engage the organisation's employees in the organisation's customer-centric strategies. Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:11) postulate that the presence of a customer-centric vision is a constant element used within organisations that tends to be altered over time, in an effort to shape an organisation's customer-centric strategy. As such, an organisation's customer-centric vision needs to be clear, specific, relevant and meaningful to guide employees in everything that they do, to ensure it is always right and aligned with the organisation's customer-centric strategy. This in turn will assist in making sure employees understand how they are required to deliver continuous and expected customer experiences (Griffin, 2011; Franz, 2017).

TFR in Gauteng has adopted a new customer centric-vision, which is more commonly known as Transnet 4.0, with the aim of addressing the challenges and opportunities of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which has necessitated the transition beyond merely satisfying customer needs, wants and expectations, to fostering long-term customer relationships. This may be achieved through developing an understanding of customer needs, wants and expectations. TFR remains hopeful that by concentrating efforts on addressing and meeting the needs, wants and expectations of the organisation's customers and building long-term relationships with the organisation's customers, TFR in Gauteng will be able to harness the value of customer loyalty, while building a resilient, sustainable market presence (Transnet, 2017).

1.3 Customer-centric culture

With the use of a customer-centric culture, organisations can encourage employees to see how their work influences customer experience and it also assists in ensuring that employees make correct and appropriate day-to-day decisions. It encourages the adoption of customer experience as a concerted and continual shift toward customer value creation across the entire customer life cycle, rather than simply as a series of once-off projects (Polk & Ray, 2017). Customer centricity is not just about offering great customer service, but offering a great experience, beginning at the awareness stage, through the purchasing process and finally through the post-purchase stage (MacDonald,

2017). Consequently, customer centricity is a strategy that is built on the foundation of ensuring customers come first, at the core of the organisation (Solomon, 2018).

According to Dalton (2016), when organisations develop an understanding of customers, to the extent that the understanding may contribute to changes in the behaviour of customers, it becomes beneficial for both the organisation and the organisation's customers. In order to develop a deep understanding of customers, organisations need to familiarise themselves with the experiences, needs, wants, beliefs and behaviours of their customers (Ozeritskaya, 2015).

TFR in Gauteng relies on surveys regarding customer feedback to measure the satisfaction levels of customers and Net Promoter Survey or Score (NPS). These involve the measurement of customer experience, with the intention to predict the growth that the organisation will undergo, based on customers' responses to certain questions. It constitutes a scale, ranging from zero to ten, which is used to measure the degree to which a customer would recommend a specific organisation or brand to friends, family and colleagues. The ratings comprise of those customers referred to as detractors, who score between zero and six, passives, who score either seven or eight and promoters, who score between nine and ten (Esposito, 2014). As such, TFR in Gauteng is in the process of implementing real-time customer feedback systems which they hope will enable stakeholders to make informed assessments about an organisation's performance, which forms an integral part of the organisation's newly developed strategy focus (Transnet, 2017).

1.4 Visionary leadership

Cantero-Gomez (2019) theorises that the leadership teams of organisations need to formulate positive and inspirational customer centric-visions, which will attract and engage employees. Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:19) add that organisational leadership teams need to show the rest of the organisation that they visibly believe in the customer-centric vision and they need to act accordingly, so that employees can observe their behaviour, as such, leading by example. One way in which the leadership teams of organisations can make this a reality, is by engaging with the majority of customers and personally involving themselves in dealing with customer issues, ensuring the issues are resolved in an efficient and timely manner. This will not only make the organisation customer-centric, but it will also allow the leadership teams to send the appropriate signals to the entirety of the organisation regarding

what is required of the employees in terms of behaviour and as to what is of most importance.

1.5 Employee Engagement

Bhattacharjee, Moreno and Ortega (2016) argue that creating superb customer experience requires the workforce of an organisation to be both energised and engaged, which can assist in transforming individual experiences into satisfying end-to-end customer journeys, which have the ability to be continuously improved upon in an effort to maintain a competitive edge. Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:23) indicate that for employees to engage with the organisations they are employed by, their individual needs have to be fulfilled, which range from basic working conditions, getting the support from managers to do the job they are employed to do, collaborating with other employees as a team, to being able to develop personally and grow professionally. In addition, Kruse (2015) articulates that the three most significant drivers of employee engagement are growth, where employees are eager to develop themselves and engage in lifelong learning, recognition, where employees want to feel appreciated and trusted, where employees want to trust that the future of the organisation within which they are employed is positive.

Engaged employees are believed to care about the organisation they work for, which encourages them to take ownership of tasks and projects, develop a clear understanding of goals and expectations, while feeling empowered to take action (Eisenhauer, 2018). Kruse (2015) suggests that rail industry leaders should conduct annual engagement surveys, which are not only measured but improved upon annually. This should take place at a strategic level. It is believed that even though the freight rail industry is capital intensive and the investment in new lines, stations and modern locomotives is necessary, the leadership of these organisations must not forget that the industry is also human capital intensive, where the investment in employee engagement may very well result in significant returns on investments (Eisenhauer, 2018).

1.6 Customer-Centric Processes and Tools

According to Macgillavry and Wilson (2017:24), modern, digital tools and processes are vitally important for organisations to be able to serve customers in a manner they anticipate and demand. Wright (2006:65) adds that an organisation can implement a number of digital tools or software programs to develop communication and feedback processes throughout a customer

journey, which will ensure that all information needed to satisfy customers in a manner that they anticipate and demand, can be obtained. In addition, the two crucial factors required to deliver a superb customer experience include the ability of an organisation to capture and analyse the behaviour and opinions of customers throughout the entire customer journey and the ability of organisations to process and employ the information captured, while proactively making continuous improvements.

TFR in Gauteng established a Customer Interaction Centre, with the intention of responding timeously to customer complaints and compliments in accordance with the rules and regulations of the organisation, known as the Transnet Freight Rail Customer Service Charter, as well as to the satisfaction of the customer (Transnet Freight Rail, 2015). In addition, although TFR in Gauteng still lags behind with regards to modern digital tools, the organisation has still been able to maintain a customer-centric focus and intends to enhance key account management abilities through the implementation of integrated customer planning with the use of innovative digital platforms within the organisation (Transnet, 2017).

2. RESEARCH PROBLEM

There are currently no known research studies to date which have measured CEM within TFR in Gauteng from an employee perspective. Therefore, the need to conduct a research study on CEM within TFR in Gauteng from an employee perspective is important, in order to identify any gaps that may exist between the current practices of CEM within the organisation, in comparison to existing literature on CEM and where the organisation would like to be with regards to their CEM processes. This research study will benefit both management as well as its employees, to identify ways and means of how it can and should improve upon its CEM, in an effort to close any gaps that may exist in terms of the organisation's current position as opposed to where the organisation would like to be regarding their CEM practices.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study is to examine the current customer experience management practices applied by TFR in Gauteng from an employee perspective. The measuring scale of Macgillavry and Wilson (2017) was adapted to formulate the variables in the research study. Section B measured if TFR in Gauteng employees possess an organisational vision that differentiates the organisation from its competitors and provides a desirable value proposition to its customers. Section C measured if TFR in Gauteng

employees know what their customers' needs are and if these needs are met in a timely manner to ensure that TFR in Gauteng can achieve profitable growth. Section D measured if the management of TFR in Gauteng manage the organisation in such a way that it is clear that the customers are the priority. Section E measured if the employees of TFR in Gauteng are happy at work and motivated to make the customers happy. Section F determined if there are systems and tools in place to provide customer information and feedback across the entire customer journey. Section B, C, D, E and F all constituted six items each. In an attempt to address the needs of this research study, all the scale items were rephrased. A six-point Likert scale, ranging from 1= strongly disagree to 6= strongly agree, was applied in all five sections of the questionnaire, namely Section B to Section F.

The target population of this research study contains the managers and supervisors of the customer care, sales and marketing departments of TFR in Gauteng. The sampling frame of this study was obtained from the Human Resources Department of TFR in Gauteng and the sampling frame comprised of 387 employees, of which 128 managers and supervisors from the customer care, sales and marketing departments of TFR in Gauteng, were taken in June 2018 (Sibanyoni, 2018). Replacement sampling was not used in this research study.

The Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) combined with AMOS, Version 25.0 for Windows was incorporated to analyse the research study's captured data.

4. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Cronbach alpha was used to test the reliability of the scale. Based on the findings in Table 1, Cronbach alpha values for each of the five factors exceeded the 0.6 level, thereby indicating satisfactory reliability.

Table 1 Reliability and average inter-item correlation values

	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha	Average Inter-item Correlation
Customer-centric vision	6	0.845	0.476
Customer-centric culture	6	0.707	0.287
Visionary Leadership	6	0.902	0.606
Employee engagement	6	0.849	0.484
Customer-centric processes and tools	6	0.896	0.589

Table 2 summarises the descriptive statistics of the research study.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of constructs

Construct	Valid N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Customer-centric vision	32	4.48	0.80	-1.006	1.408
Customer-centric culture	32	4.45	0.73	-0.458	0.248
Visionary Leadership	32	4.40	1.15	-1.378	2.487
Employee engagement	32	4.71	0.84	-1.176	1.197
Customer-centric processes and tools	32	4.43	1.08	-1.798	3.838

The skewness and kurtosis values for the data set in this research study are reported on in Table 2. Given that all skewness values ranged between -2 and +2, all scales can be considered as normally distributed. Based on the peakedness of the data distribution, all kurtosis values calculated indicate no indication of irregularity and as such, the data is deemed as normally distributed.

The highest mean values were computed for employee engagement (mean=4.71) and customer-centric vision (mean= 4.48), indicating that the managers and supervisors of TFR in Gauteng have a strong, positive assessment of the employee engagement practices within TFR in Gauteng and the values held by TFR in Gauteng. In addition, all had means of above 4, customer-centric culture (mean=4.45), centric processes and tools (mean=4.43) and visionary leadership (mean=4.40), indicating that the managers and supervisors of TFR in Gauteng have a strong, positive assessment of the customer-centric culture encouraged by TFR in Gauteng, the customer-centric processes and tools currently employed by TFR in Gauteng and the visionary leadership practices within TFR in Gauteng.

The lowest standard deviations were recorded on customer-centric culture (Std. Dev. = 0.73), values (Std. Dev. = 0.80) and employee engagement (Std. Dev. = 0.84), indicating that there was less dispersion in managers' and supervisors' of TFR in Gauteng reported assessments regarding the customer-centric culture encouraged by TFR in Gauteng, the values held by TFR in Gauteng and the employee engagement practices within TFR in Gauteng. Higher standard deviations were recorded on customer-centric processes and tools (Std. Dev. = 1.08) and visionary leadership (Std. Dev. = 1.15). This indicates that there was more dispersion in managers' and supervisors' of TFR in Gauteng reported assessments regarding the customer-centric

processes and tools currently employed by TFR in Gauteng and the visionary leadership practices within TFR in Gauteng.

In order to ascertain whether there is a relationship between TFR managers' and supervisors' assessment of the values held by TFR in Gauteng, customer-centric culture encouraged by TFR in Gauteng, the visionary leadership practices within TFR in Gauteng, the employee engagement practices within TFR in Gauteng and the customer-centric processes and tools currently employed by TFR in Gauteng were significant to the effectiveness of CEM within TFR in Gauteng, a correlation analysis was conducted.

Table 3 Correlation matrix

Constructs	1	2	3	4	5
Customer-centric vision	1				
Customer-centric culture	0.695**	1			
Visionary Leadership	0.717**	0.863**	1		
Employee engagement	0.652**	0.749**	0.811**	1	
Customer-centric processes and tools	0.630**	0.817**	0.875**	0.823**	1

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

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

Based on Table 3, a significant positive correlation at a significant level of $\alpha=0.01$ between each of the pairs of constructs indicates that nomological validity can be asserted. As such, the customer-centric vision held by TFR in Gauteng, the customer-centric culture encouraged by TFR in Gauteng, the visionary leadership practices within TFR in Gauteng, the employee engagement practices within TFR in Gauteng and the customer-centric processes and tools currently employed by TFR in Gauteng influence the effectiveness of CEM at TFR in Gauteng. Owing to the presence of no evidence that exists of irregular correlations, it may be presumed that no multicollinearity exists between the constructs of the research study.

5. FINDINGS

In terms of a customer-centric vision, the results indicate that not only do employees see the organisation's cultural values as a guide to their daily decision making, but they share a clear vision of what the organisation aspires to be in the future. Not only is the vision held by the organisation realistic and achievable, but the overall benefits offered to the organisation's customers are clearly outlined and relevant, while distinguishing the organisation from its competitors.

With regards to customer-centric culture, it was found that if an employee notices that a customer is not happy with the organisation the employee feels upset. Consequently, the organisation's employees always look for ways to make things better for customers, are good at listening to and understanding customer needs and as a result everything carried out by the organisation and its employees demonstrates that the best interest of the customer is always kept in mind. Lastly, the employees are good at sharing customer opinions and feedback with others in the organisation.

The findings on visionary leadership show that the organisation's management actively takes part in solving customer issues, make improvements and frequently review and discuss customer opinions and feedback with employees. In addition, when a customer issue arises, the organisation's management ensures that it is dealt with immediately and focuses on understanding the needs of the organisation's customers. Moreover, customer experience is an item on every management meeting agenda.

In terms of employee engagement, not only are employees proud to work for the organisation, but they feel that the vision and purpose of the organisation contributes to the importance of their jobs and they would recommend this organisation as an employer to their family and friends. The findings indicate that direct managers give praise and recognition when employees do something good for a customer. Lastly, employees have the freedom they need to fix customer issues and ensure that they are satisfied, making it is easy to meet customer expectations in an employee's day to day work.

The findings suggest that the organisation does make use of customer feedback metrics to measure team performance and undertakes a detailed analysis of customer feedback in order to find ways to improve the service provided, continually capturing customer opinions and feedback over multiple channels and tracking customer satisfaction at every interaction along the customer journey. Furthermore, employees have the tools necessary to meet customer expectations and respond effectively to their requests. Lastly, customer satisfaction plays an important part in how employees are incentivised.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

If TFR in Gauteng wants to improve upon the organisation's customer-centric vision, it is recommended that the organisation makes use of the customer-centric vision to engage employees in the organisation's customer-centric

strategies. Furthermore, the organisation can create a clear, specific, relevant and meaningful customer-centric vision that is aligned with the organisation's customer-centric strategy, in an attempt to guide employees in everything that they do and assist in making sure employees understand how they are required to deliver continuous and expected customer experiences.

To improve upon the customer-centric culture, employees should be encouraged to see how their work impacts customer experience, while ensuring that employees make the right day-to-day decisions. Employees should be encouraged to adopt customer experience as a concerted and continual shift toward customer value creation across the entire customer life cycle, rather than simply as a series of once-off projects. Employees should also be made aware that customer centricity is not just about offering great customer service but requires offering a great experience from the awareness stage, through the purchasing process and finally through to the post-purchase stage. TFR in Gauteng can also build a customer-centric strategy that is based on putting the customer first, at the core of the organisation. It is vital that the organisation's top management embrace the customer-centric culture and that there is continuous engagement among top management, in an attempt to drive satisfaction and customer advocacy. Top management should be encouraged to collaborate with employees, customers and suppliers in order to analyse, plan and implement an organisational strategy that focuses on creating and keeping profitable and loyal customers. It is important that the organisation develops a deep understanding of customers. The organisation can employ the use of surveys to measure customer satisfaction, capture customer feedback across different contact channels, such as organisational websites, email addresses, mobile devices or social networking sites. The organisation can also employ the use of web analytics programs to gather important information about how many customers are visiting the organisation's website, the use of social media by the organisation's customers and the navigation paths used by the organisation's customers. In addition, the organisation can implement web analytics to identify what customers are browsing for, how long customers stay on the organisation's website and whether or not they are returning customers. The organisation can also consider the use of social media monitoring software to monitor what customers are saying about the organisation on social media, how often the organisation is mentioned on social media and which social media channels are being used, while at the same time being able to identify complaints and recognise trends that may arise. The organisation may make use of register

comments, complaints or suggestion boxes or cards, in an attempt to enhance service quality and reputation. Lastly, the organisation may make use of Toll-free numbers for interactive communication, where customers can talk to a service representative via telephonic means.

To improve upon the visionary leadership practices within the organisation, it is recommended that management is ready and prepared to embrace change, viewing the use of new processes and ideas as progress, while finding faster and more improved methods to achieve organisational success. Management should know that they are responsible for the organisation becoming effectively and efficiently customer-centric, which requires a shift from advisory and “ivory tower” positions to more operationally structured positions. The organisation’s management needs to direct the activities of the organisation, ensuring the creation of a positive and inspirational customer centric-vision, that will attract and engage employees. In addition, management needs to show the rest of the organisation that they visibly believe in the customer-centric vision and they need to act accordingly, so that employees can observe their behaviour, leading by example. Management needs to engage with lots of customers and personally involve themselves in addressing customer issues, ensuring timely resolutions, while sending the right signals to the rest of the organisation as to what is required of them in terms of behaviour and as to what is of most importance.

To improve upon employee engagement practices, it is recommended that TFR in Gauteng engages and energises the workforce, which can translate individual experiences into satisfying end-to-end customer journeys. The organisation should also aim to fulfil the individual needs of employees. These needs may include basic working conditions, giving managerial support needed to do the job required, collaborating with other employees as a team and providing employees with the chance to participate in developmental programs, to develop personally and grow professionally. In addition, managers should be encouraged to learn their employees' personalities and understand what their employees like about their jobs. Managers should also be encouraged to provide work that makes use of employees' skills and experience and is positively challenging. The organisation should develop a competitive advantage by investing in human capital and conducting annual engagement surveys, which are not only measured but improved upon annually.

To improve upon the customer-centric processes and tools currently employed by TFR in Gauteng, it is recommended that the organisation keeps abreast of the latest developments in technology and how these developments may influence the organisation. The organisation needs to consider implementing numerous digital tools or software programs to create communication and feedback processes throughout the customer journey. This will allow the organisation to capture and analyse the behaviour and opinions of customers along the entire customer journey and process and action the information captured, while proactively making continuous improvements in order to deliver a superb customer experience.

7. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research study, it is evident that the employees of TFR in Gauteng indicated strong, positive assessments of the practices of CEM that are currently applied by the organisation, namely the presence of a customer-centric vision, a customer-centric culture, visionary leadership, employee engagement and the use of customer-centric tools and processes within the organisation, which suggests that the CEM currently in place within the organisation is effective. With regards to the influence of CEM on customer satisfaction, the customer-centric processes and tools currently employed by the organisation are used to provide a detailed analysis of customer feedback in order to find ways to improve upon services provided, continually capturing customer opinions and feedback over multiple channels and tracking customer satisfaction at every interaction along the customer journey. The employees also have the tools necessary to meet customer expectations and respond effectively to customer requests, while customer satisfaction plays an important part in how employees are incentivised.

If TFR in Gauteng instils the process of managing customer experience, customer satisfaction is likely to be one of the end results. If attention is given to customer experience, satisfaction is believed to occur naturally. Providing powerful and compelling customer experiences will set the organisation apart from its competitors. In addition, it is believed that by improving upon the overall customer experience, the organisation can create a competitive advantage, which if managed well will result in more consistent and loyal customers accompanied by positive word of mouth, which will hopefully lead to an increase in sales and therefore profits.

8. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

The research study was conducted among customer care, sales and marketing managers and supervisors based in Gauteng which may limit generalisation across TFR as a whole. The limited amount of time spent on this research study, resulted in the conclusion drawn from the research study being only indicative and not exhaustive in nature. The low participation rate from the targeted managers and supervisors is another limitation, which may be attributed to the busy schedules of TFR managers and supervisors and consequently nonresponse bias may limit the generalisability of the research study's findings to the whole organisation. Future research studies may be carried out to collect larger samples to balance out the limitations. In addition, research may be conducted to determine the role management plays in improving customer experience management, the role of technology in improving customer satisfaction, the critical assessment of employee engagement in relation to organisational performance and the impact of social media towards improved customer interaction.

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