# Tampere University of Applied Sciences

# Developing Service Culture To Enhance Customer Experience By Improving Employee Interaction With Customers

Case: GOGO Liikuntakeskus Oy

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BACHELOR'S THESIS

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# ABSTRACT

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The objective of this study is to enhance the service culture of GOGO by improving the interactions employees have with customers. The purpose of this study is to examine the current culture of GOGO and to cross examine literature to discover how the company's culture can be enhanced. The focus of this study is to develop attitudes and practices that will improve the employees' interactions with customers by examining what customer experience is and what are some common customer expectations based on recent research.

The data concerning the commissioning company was collected by method of an unstructured interview with the management of the company. The data was collected to discover the needs of the company to develop the objective, purpose and research topics of this study. The literature review was then conducted to develop the conclusions of the study.

It was concluded that the attitudes and practices of the employees required development. It was also concluded that by applying the attitudes based on GOGO's values the employees' ability to collect information about the customer, which is foundational to successful interactions, will improve. Furthermore, by understanding what an experience is and what common expectations are, the practices that will improve employee interactions with customers were discovered.

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Key words: service culture, customer experience, attitude theory, consciousness, customer expectations, gogo, building relationships, employee interactions.

**CONTENTS**

# ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

| | |
|---|---|
| TAMK | Tampere University of Applied Sciences |
| cr | credit |
| GOGO | GOGO Liikuntakeskus Oy |

# 1 INTRODUCTION

As humans we start our journey in the world completely dependent upon our parents to provide for all of our needs. One could suggest, it is impossible to understand how dependent we are upon others to meet our needs, whether mentally, physically, and emotionally until we are the ones providing the service. Have you ever seen how parents behave when it comes to their child's education and sports or when their child is bullied? Tenacious is the word that comes to mind when thinking of a parent. This emotion is one of the strongest forces in the world. The level of love, care, and commitment to fulfil for them the highest quality of the human experiences possible, whether it be their knowledge, health, or emotional experiences, is greater than that of the parents' themselves. Is this picture not an excellent example and resource to gain insight to what characterizes how to care?

The questions begging to be answered are: What is service culture? What is customer experience? What is the nature of the interaction in itself? Is it not like the relationship and experience between a parent and child? Consider this, the company, like a parent, makes themselves available to provide the best they can by utilizing their strengths and opportunities. When starting a business, it is a good practice to come up with a business strategy. One of the ways to discover your strategy is to make a S.W.O.T. analysis. This provides the company with an in-depth, honest look into their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The purpose for examining these metrics is to compare them to the market to discover their competitive advantage. Raising a child is not so different. When planning for a child one must maximize their strengths and opportunities and then minimize their weaknesses and threats. Through this kind of analysis, it provides insight on how to develop a family culture for the purpose of creating the best human experience for the child as possible.

The commissioning company of this thesis has been considering how the company can exceed the expectations of their customers. Evidently, there are many aspects to consider when attempting to improve a company's service culture. Therefore, the company must first determine what their competitive advantage is within the market. The fitness industry has been rapidly changing

for the past 30 years during the time GOGO has been operating in Finland. The one thing that has not changed for GOGO is that it has stayed as a family-owned company allowing them to adapt quickly to the changes giving the company a competitive advantage. GOGO's desire and customer promise is to treat their customers and employees as they are family. As mentioned previously, family is made up by its culture.

## 2   THESIS PLAN

The topic of this thesis is about improving employee interaction with customers to develop the service culture of GOGO to enhance customer experience. The aim is to examine how the culture of GOGO can be developed for the purpose of discovering practical ways the employees can use to improve their interactions with customers.

The topic is not new as discovered in the introduction; in fact, it is as old as human existence. Although the study of human interaction and culture is not new, the fact remains that the effectiveness of interaction is still in need of improvement. One could suggest through the development of technology and the human dependency on it, humans are losing the skills, attitudes and practices needed to effectively collect quality information through their direct interactions with others. Furthermore, the ability to apply that data in a way that exceeds expectations is often lost. The goal is to discover the kind of interaction that provides both parties engaged in the interaction with a sense of value, purpose, community, and belonging.

GOGO Liikuntakeskus Oy is a family-owned full-service fitness club, that was founded in January of 1990 by two sisters who still manage the company to this day. GOGO currently operates three full-service fitness clubs in Tampere, as well as eleven GOGO Express budget clubs throughout Finland. GOGO currently employs around 100 people.

The full-service fitness clubs offer over 250 group fitness classes per week, weight training equipment, personal training, full-time gym attendant, body measurements, small groups and events, squash, sauna, infrared sauna, massages and massage chairs, tanning beds, a blog, free parking, childcare, etc. GOGO also offers flexible membership options including daytime, family, student, corporate, as well as no-contract memberships.

## 2.1 Motivation

The author of this thesis began working in the year of 2007 in a corporate convenience store close to his home. The entry level position consisted with interacting with customers helping them to find what they need as well as developing relationships with returning customers. It was clear in the performance reviews that the author's greatest quality was the impact he made with customers. After two and half years in this position, he moved on to work for a different company for two and a half more years, to collect textiles from fire water smoke damaged homes. The environment of the interaction with the customers were in most cases filled with emotions of uncertainty, fear, shock and anxiousness, sometimes even frustration and anger. However, this gave the author insight on how to handle interactions in difficult situations. From 2013 to 2016 the author served food and beverages to customers further developing his skills in enhancing the customer experience. The last six months of that time, prior to leaving to further his education at TAMK, he served at the pool and beach for Four Seasons Hotel and Resort in Palm Beach, Florida. It was then and there he received world-class training from the company that would change his perspective on what customer experience is and how one can exceed customer expectations. Four Seasons' service culture has been awarded for the past 61 years to be one of the best in the world.

The author has been observing the commissioning company GOGO since he first began to visit Finland in 2014. With the author being close to the family who owns the company, he has helped with all kinds of tasks and jobs whenever needed in the company. In August 2017 he began working in the company's childcare services until this present time. There he began observing first-hand the company's culture and services. In conversations with the managers, they had expressed their desire to see the company's values clearly communicated and executed by all of their employees regardless of their personalities or skills. Out of the author's need of completing his thesis at TAMK and of the personal desire to see GOGO and their employees succeed, he wanted to write this thesis to help improve the service culture of the company through the insights gained through this research.

## 2.2   Thesis objectives, purpose, and research questions

The objective of this study is to enhance the service culture of GOGO by improving the interactions employees have with customers.

The purpose of this study is to examine the current culture of GOGO and to cross examine literature to discover how the culture can be enhanced. The focus of this study is to develop the attitudes and practices that will improve the employee interaction by examining what customer experience is and what are some common customer expectations based on recent research.

The topics being researched in this thesis to meet the objective are culture, attitude theory, customer experience, and common expectations according the research. The main research questions that will be answered are: What is GOGO's current service culture and how can it be enhanced? How can applying the culture of GOGO to understanding what the customer experience is develop the employee interaction with customers. How can understanding what common relevant customer expectations are today help to develop the employee interaction with customers?

## 2.3   Concepts and theories

The main concepts studied in this thesis include culture, attitude theory, and customer experience.

### 2.3.1   Culture

Culture is defined according to Merriam Webster dictionary as – "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization." By cross examining GOGO's mission, vision, customer promise and value statements with what culture is, the current shared attitudes, values, goals and practices of GOGO are discovered.

### 2.3.2 Attitude theory

Attitude is defined as "a bodily state of readiness to respond in a characteristic way to a stimulus (such as an object, concept, or situation)." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020.) According to Breckler, S. J. (1984), "empirical validation of affect, behaviour and cognition as distinct components of attitude" based on the previous work of Rosenberg, M. J., & Hovland, C. 1. (1960) the tripartite model theory of attitude suggests there are three components of attitude. The components include cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of attitudes that have "several theoretical traditions that lend support to the three-component view". (Breckler, S. J. 1984.) The three components are found within an attitude response that stems from a stimulus. Those components are affected, behaviour, and cognition. Through application of this theory, the attitudes of employees are discovered based on the behavioural statements and actions made regarding the interaction with customers.

### 2.3.3 Customer experience

Customer experience by definition is "the totality of a customer's individual interactions with a brand over time". (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 40) Customer experience is a broad perspective of all of the experiences the customer has, it includes aspects outside of the realm which individual interaction takes place. The hypothesis being made is that understanding what the foundational principles of the concept are will shape the perspectives and attitudes of the employees to gain more insight of who the customer might be. The more information employees have concerning the customer, the better the employees will be equipped to understand every individual customer and how they feel about the brand and the company.

## 2.4 Working methods and data

This section describes the means of implementation for the study carried out to accomplish the objective. A basic research strategy was used for this study.

### 2.4.1 Methods used to discover the focus of the study

At the beginning of the research process it was required to obtain information from the management of GOGO to discover and decide what would be the most profitable course of action proceeding with the thesis process. Therefore, the author conducted unstructured interview with the management. The interview was conducted on December 1st, 2019. The goal of the author in using this as the research method was to collect two kinds of data. First, to discover the needs of the company. Second, to collect the data regarding the current solutions the company has in this area to apply to the literary review to develop a theoretical framework the company can use as a basis for their training program.

By nature, the purpose of a thesis is to conduct research to discover a solution to a problem, therefore, to begin the discussion the author asked management what some of the challenges were within the company that he could help to improve. The management had stated the concern of inconsistency in interactions from employee to employee when handling customers directly. The management said the company uses a service called Happy-Or-Not to collect feedback from their customers, and the results of the service have revealed an inconsistency in the customer service from club to club and from employee to employee. This was an important concern to the company because the management stated that it was the desire of the company to have their competitive advantage based on their values to be "caring" and to treat their customers as family.

The management provided materials to the author concerning the company's mission, vision, and values. The values guide how the employees should operate in the company. Since the values of the company are the guideline for employees to follow, the next logical question was: Why is there inconsistency in the performance of different employees? Management stated that the current training solution for employees is that the previous employee trains the new employee,

and therefore a more formal training solution would benefit the company. It was then decided with the management for the thesis process that it was better to conduct a basic research concerning the topic to gain new knowledge and understanding that could be used for a later time to create a training program for the company. There was also another question that the management had difficulty answering: What resources and training are given to the employees to practically "show" or "prove" to their customers they "care"? This question is the foundation of the study.

The interview conducted by a method of an unstructured interview with the management was indeed an excellent source to obtain the objective. It allowed the author to feel free to discover the needs of the company as well as to take advantage of the background of his own experience in the field. The information that was provided by the management regarding the company's specific needs were justified and the goal was discovered.

## 2.4.2 Literature review

The method used to identify and locate sources for the literary review was through the use of ANDOR online resource. ANDOR is Tampere University Library's discovery service. This was an excellent resource as it searches library's collections including their books, e-books, journal titles, journal articles, and various databases. To bring further understanding, Merriam-Webster Dictionary was used to define certain words. While inputting the key terms in the ANDOR service, for example; customer service, customer experience, and attitudes, the author found it to be challenging to find the type of information he was looking for. Therefore, he began using terms that were more specific, for example; how to care in customer service, customer service intelligence, building customer relationships, transforming customer experience, and delivering quality service attitude theory. The use of more specific keyword searches regarding the focus of the study provided the resources for the literature review. The resources provided important insight and succeeded in answering the "what" and "how" questions. In other words, "what" was needed to meet the objective of the thesis. As the author began to familiarize himself with the topic, he then began to look

for other resources to answer more questions that required a response in this thesis.

The rational used upon the selection of the sources in this research were based on various criteria. First, the source relevance was assessed to whether it answered the research question. Second, the sources' credibility was analysed.

To establish the relevance of the content of the sources, the author began by evaluating the table of contents to see whether the overall body of work suited similar objectives to this thesis objective. He also checked to see if there was an adequate amount of references in the text and if the index was used to establish the authority of the work. The author then considered the intended audience of the work and found that in the case of the majority of the reviews the intended audience was the managers of companies.

The language used in the resources further established the credibility of the content. The chosen sources exhibited an informative and educational approach with no detected biases. Regarding the main sources used, the work covered the fields extensively with multiple primary and secondary reference materials. All of the main sources used exercised excellent style and functionality. The resources used were logical and easy to read with adequate navigation that was clearly labelled.

The method to define the credibility was first to assess the authority of the author. All of the authors in the sources chosen were all leaders in the fields of the study. Second, was to consider what would be an acceptable date of publication of the content that was acceptable. Most of the sources chosen were from two to fifteen years old with the exception of one older source. The reason for selecting an older reference was due to its empirical evidence and recognition in the field as well as its detailed use of references. Scholarly articles were not a particular criterion due to the lack of relevance of the articles found during the research.

## 2.5   Thesis process

The process of this thesis goes as follows; the first chapter is the introduction. The second chapter is the thesis plan which describes what the field of study is, motivation, thesis objectives and purposes, concepts and theories, working methods and data, and the thesis process. The third chapter is a literature review. This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section examines what culture is. Furthermore, it examines the values present by GOGO cross examined with attitude theory. Then it examines the goals of GOGO and what some practices are. The second section describes what attitudes can be improved by understanding what customer experience is. The third section examines what an experience is, how to observe it and why to observe it. The fourth section describes what common expectations customers have according to literature. The fourth chapter is the conclusion. The fifth chapter is the discussion section. Then last chapters are references and the appendix.

# 3  LITERATURE REVIEW

The type of literature review used was a thematic approach. The themes addressed were organized by logical reasoning of progression. The first section defines what culture is. Based on what culture is, attitude theory and GOGO's values are applied to describe what the service culture should look like in the company. By understanding GOGO's service culture, it brings clarity to what attitudes and values are necessary to succeed when enhancing the customers' experience during interactions with employees. The second section defines what customer experience is and how by understanding what it is it can be applied with the service culture of GOGO to develop the culture. The third section examines common expectations of customers according to recent studies and how they can be used use to improve the service culture.

## 3.1  Culture

Culture is defined according to Merriam Webster dictionary as – "the set of shared attitudes, values, goals, and practices that characterizes an institution or organization."  To develop the service culture of GOGO it is necessary to examine first by definition what attitudes, values, goals and practices are. This benefits the study to clearly identify how GOGO's culture is currently defined. The mission, vision, customer promise and core value statements are analysed by identifying what attitudes, values, goals and practices are defined by these statements.

### 3.1.1  Values and attitudes

Value as a noun is defined as "relative worth, utility, or importance" and as a verb "to rate or scale in usefulness, importance, or general worth". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020.) During the interview, the management of GOGO provided the customer promise and core values. The information was collected to discover what GOGO finds important and valuable. GOGO's promise to their customers is: "With us you are part of an exercise family." The promise reveals the desire of GOGO for their employees to interact with customers as they are family.

The value statement was also collected and GOGO's core values are: (GOGO Liikuntakeskus Oy. 2019)

- *Caring* - "GOGO is a family-owned company who treats their customers and employees as their family. Where caring means meeting the customer with a genuine face, carefully listening and valuing the customer. GOGO is committed to honouring their customers with honest and transparent procedures."
- *Courage* - "GOGO was born from the brave vision of two sisters to open up an exercise facility, inspired from around the world to change the way Finnish people move. GOGO is a forerunner who offers the most interesting new exercise trends first in Finland and is not shy to try new things."
- *Wellness* - "Wellness is born from healthy lifestyle habits and repeating them daily. Regular exercise is one of the most important pillars of wellness. Having mercy on yourself is an important part of wellness therefore GOGO encourages people to listen to themselves to find out sustainable ways to move."
- *Community* - "GOGO wants people to find the joy of exercise which is most successfully found by doing things together. GOGO's services and the way to face the customer enforces the sense of experiencing the community and openness. Both members and employees are seen as members of the united exercise family. GOGO is a place where everyone is welcome."

These values reveal what type of attitudes the employees should exhibit working for the company. To further understand what kind of attitudes employees currently have toward interactions with customers, it must be examined what attitudes are.

Attitude is defined as "a bodily state of readiness to respond in a characteristic way to a stimulus (such as an object, concept, or situation)." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020.) According to Breckler , S. J. (1984, 1191–1205), "empirical validation of affect, behaviour and cognition as distinct components of attitude"

based on the previous work of Rosenberg, M. J., & Hovland, C. 1. (1960) the tripartite model theory of attitude suggests there are three components of attitude. The components include cognitive, affective, and behavioural components of attitudes that have "several theoretical traditions that lend support to the three-component view". (Breckler , S. J. 1984.) The three-component view can be best illustrated through visualization. (Breckler , S. J. 1984.)

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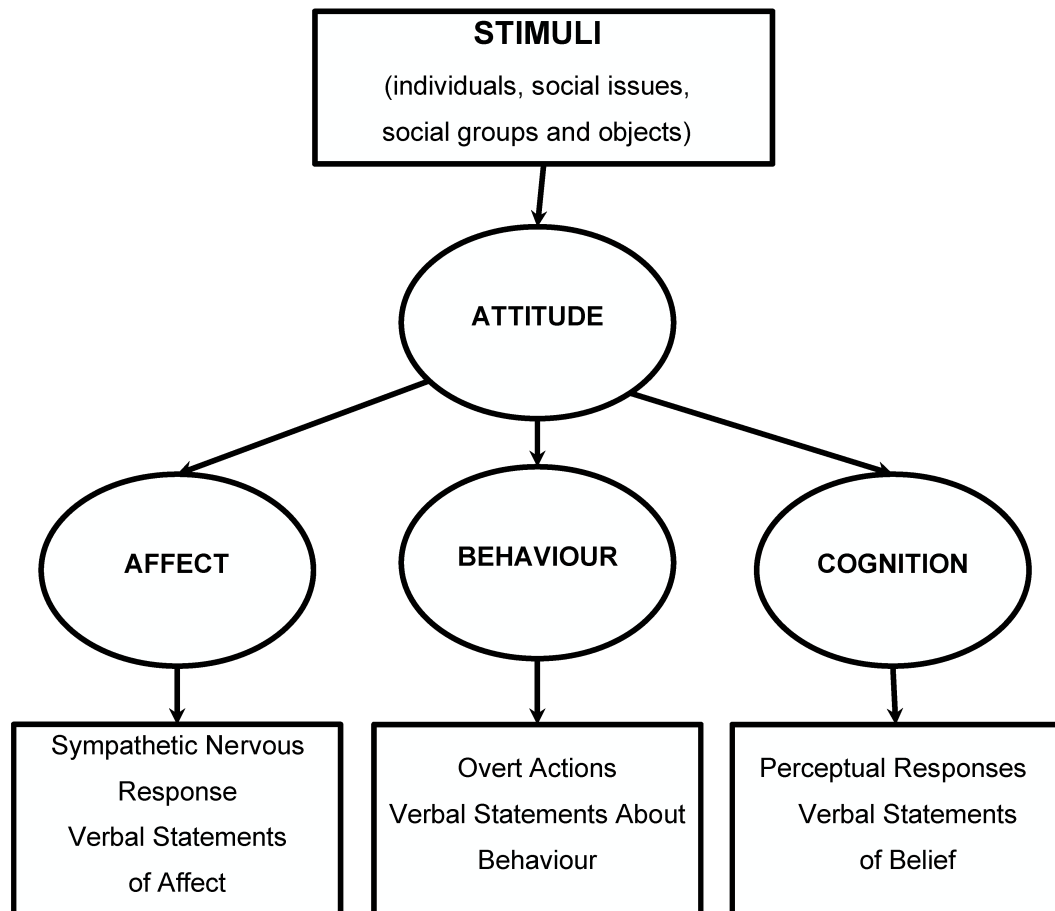| Sympathetic Nervous Response Verbal Statements of Affect | Overt Actions Verbal Statements About Behaviour | Perceptual Responses Verbal Statements of Belief |
|---|---|---|

FIGURE 1. The tripartite model of attitude structure. (Breckler , S. J. 1984, Rosenberg & Hovland, 1960.)

Figure 1 offers a visual representation of the behaviour component and describes the actions or statements about behaviour regarding a specific stimulus, whether it be an individual, social issue, a social group or object. For example, one statement made about interaction with customers based on the interview with management of GOGO was that some employees "do not know what to ask or say to the customers". Another action made by some employees concerning interaction with customers based on the interview was "not smiling,

acknowledging, and/or engaging a customer when present". The tripartite model suggests that all the three components are linked into the word attitude. Therefore, these behaviors can reveal both the cognitive and affective response. The verbal statements of beliefs of the employees based on their behavioural statements suggest they believe they are unequipped to interact with customers. The actions of the employees suggest their perceptual response to interact with customers reveal a lack of understanding of the significance of the engagement. The affective component is related to a person's feelings and emotions about the stimuli and based on the employees' behaviour it suggests the statements of affect to be either "I do not care or do not understand how to care".

Based on the value of GOGO to be "caring" for the customers, the attitudes of the employees reveal insufficiency in their behaviour, affective responses and beliefs in their interactions with customers. Based on the value of GOGO to be "courageous", the attitudes of the employees reveal insufficiency in their cognitive responses and beliefs in their interactions. The next logical question is what are the practices and how they can help to develop the culture of the employees in their customer service at GOGO?

### 3.1.2  Goals and practices

If practice is defined as the "actual performance or application" or "the usual way of doing something" then it must be considered what the goals of GOGO are. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020.) Goal is defined as "the end toward which effort is directed." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2020.) Understanding the goals of GOGO will help to determine what needs to be examined to find what kind of practices will help the employees in their interactions with customers.

In this case the goals of GOGO can be found in their mission and vision statements. GOGO's mission statement is: "We offer fitness experiences and maintain and improve health and wellness." If the mission of GOGO is to create experiences for their customers but the employees feel unequipped to fulfil the values of GOGO, it must be first understood what an experience consists of.

Then, by applying the attitudes developed by the values of GOGO it will help to describe the practices of GOGO.

GOGO's vision is two-fold: first, "To be the leading fitness club service provider in Finland." Second, that "The customers and employees would be the industry's most satisfied." For an individual to be satisfied it requires that individual to have expectations and that they are met. Therefore, it is important to examine what are some common customer expectations in business today, and then further to equip employees with tools to put into practice.

### 3.1.3 What can be developed?

By cross examining what culture is with the current culture of GOGO there are three conclusions that can be made. First, attitudes reveal values. Second, decided values determine practices. Finally, practices are the deciding factor to reaching goals. Therefore, if one goal of GOGO is to create experiences but the employees' attitudes do not match the values of GOGO, then the practices will remain the same. Furthermore, the values of GOGO "caring" and "courage" are significant factors to achieving the goals in connecting with customers on all levels whether it be emotional, mental, social, or physical to build relationships. Therefore, to develop the three insufficient attitudes the employees have toward the interactions, customer experience will be examined.

Then by use of the new understanding of what customer experience is and the attitudes that can be gained from it the practices will be developed in two different categories. First, by applying the new attitudes with understanding of what experience is, new practices can be determined. Second, by examining the common customer expectations according to the literature, more insight can be gained to better meet expectations, as a result, offering better experiences to customers that will cause both parties to be more satisfied.

## 3.2 Attitudes

This section examines what customer experience is in the context of interactions with employees. There are three considerations discussed when attempting to understand what customer experience that is speak directly to the attitudes of employees. The experiences the customers have are unique, important, and always growing and changing. They describe what attitudes and values can be found by understanding what customer experience is. This section examines by definition what a customer experience is, and then by applying the improved attitudes it provides insight to the practice's employees can use.

### 3.2.1 Customer experience

Customer experience as defined previously is "the totality of an individual's interactions with a brand over time". (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 40.) In this context, the word "individual" represents that every customer has a unique perception or impression of the interaction. Therefore, employees must be prepared to participate in different kinds interactions, depending on the perception of the customer. (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 234.) The practice that employees should take into consideration is to focus on the customers' perception when attempting to engage in successful interactions. Understanding that the customers' perception is the reality of the situation regardless of the objective details will help to guide employees to handle interactions with a proper attitude toward customers. This attitude provides the employees with empathy for the customer which is essential to building healthy relationships. The practice of the employees to prioritize what kind of experiences the customers are having provides the employees with a disposition to listen carefully what the customers are experiencing. Ideally, this would take place before the customers have to actually express what they are experiencing. It also provides insight for possible engagement opportunities with the customers for building relationships with them.

What kind of interactions is this definition referring to? The Interaction is defined here as "a mutual or reciprocal action or influence." These interactions include all

human interaction, interaction with the actual product itself, or facilities, or information the company provides and promotes. (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 47.) Understanding that every kind of engagement with the company is an interaction helps to develop an attitude of significance toward all the interactions. To consider an individual making the decision to engage with the company should help improve the employees' attitudes toward the interactions they have with customers. Through personal observation, in many cases all over the world, employees taken for granted the interactions the company has obtained. Employees must always treat every interaction the customer has with the company as the most important, as a matter of life or death for the company.

The second phrase that stands out in the definition for customer experience is "over time". It implies that the experience of a customer is always changing through every interaction with the company. There are two thoughts that come to mind. First, that the customers' expectations are always changing because they are having new experiences and new perspectives. Second, that their responses within the interactions are changing. This means there needs to be a growing response of the company to exceed expectations. (Peppers, D. & Rogers M., 2017, 76.) Knowing this should help to improve the attitudes of employees with a desire to identify the expectations of the customers to improve their responses in their interactions.

Experience is defined as "the conscious events that make up an individual life". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) Within this definition it is important to recognize first that the encounter with the customer is merely a part of the "events" that make up their life. This means that the employees should be sensitive to the customers' environment, in other words, the wider context. The fact is that the customers have many other things they face in a day, things to accomplish, and other challenges and opportunities. (Peppers, D. & Rogers M., 2017, 82.) To further add to the argument, one should also take into consideration the customers' "context" which can stimulate a perspective that will benefit the employee to further show they care for the customer. Having an understanding perspective provides the employee with a greater amount of patience when interacting with the customers. Therefore, taking into practice an attitude of

acknowledging that the customers have a bigger "context" that the employees might be unaware of will directly influence the employees' ability to empathize.

### 3.2.2 Summary

The attitudes that can improve the interactions by understanding what customer experience is are; first, by understanding people are individuals and that a specific interaction is unique, it enlightens the significance of the perception of the customer. Thus, when the perceptions of the customers are observed, the employees are able to exhibit empathy. Second, the significance of the interaction is considered when understanding its fragility, creating a sense of urgency. Third, the desire to exceed customer expectations and to improve their responses based on the growth and the changes that the customers experience.

### 3.3 Practices: Experience

For developing practices that the employees can use, it will help to further examine what experience is to help objectify the customers' consciousness providing employees with ways to collect information from the attitudes applied in the interactions. Within the definition of experience is the word "conscious" or "consciousness", which is defined as "the state of being characterized by sensation, emotion, volition, and thought". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) When discussing what a successful customer experience looks like in the context of customer interactions with employees, taking into consideration the customers' sensations, emotions, volitions, and thoughts is the key to successful interactions. Applying the attitudes developed toward the interactions (empathy, urgency, and the desire to improve their responses) will guide the employees in what is required to reach the goals. For employees to be able to enhance the customer experience they must collect as much information about the customers as possible. The only method in this context of human interaction is first to observe it and then inquire or respond. Therefore, it is imperative to know what consciousness is, how to observe it and why.

### 3.3.1  Sensations

Sensations are "a mental process (such as seeing, hearing, or smelling, touching, tasting) resulting from the immediate external stimulation of a sense organ often as distinguished from a conscious awareness of the sensory process". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) Another way to understand this is that sensations are the way our consciousness processes the information that the human body is collecting.

By nature, the employees must use their senses to observe what the customers could possibly be sensing. In the midst of an interaction, the employee should observe what the customer is sensing by asking the following question to oneself: What is the customer seeing, hearing, smelling, feeling and/or tasting? The goal is for the employees to focus on the senses the customers are experiencing which provides insight for the employees to use to enhance the customer experience whether it be to respond or inquire.

An example of how to use the information gained from the sensitivity to the senses for building relationships could be:

- Observation: the customer is drinking a protein shake.

- Ideas for engagement: ask him/her what brand it is, what is the flavour, do they like the taste, or has it helped with his/her recovery? Another approach could be a simple response, stating you like the brand or flavour, to reveal agreement. Similar categorical questions can be asked of the other senses as well.

This type of observation of the senses exhibits all of the learned attitudes mentioned earlier. First, it reveals urgency because there is engagement. It also exhibits the desire to improve their responses because the employees are learning more about the customers as they engage with them. And last, it exhibits empathy because of the nature of the observation which shows that the employees care as they are attempting to build relationships with the customers.

### 3.3.2 Emotions

Emotion is defined as "a conscious mental reaction (such as anger or fear) subjectively experienced as strong feeling usually directed toward a specific object and typically accompanied by physiological and behavioural changes in the body". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) In a similar manner as the senses, the emotions of the customers must be observed for the very same reason. The method in which to observe emotions is described as to first identify the emotions and rate them on a scale. Then, it is useful to rate the emotions as positive or negative. This information helps the employees to respond in an appropriate way in the interactions.

During the author's time working for the Four Seasons Hotel and Resort he was trained to identify the emotional states of the customers and rate them on a scale from -2 to 2:

TABLE 1. Emotion scale (Four Seasons Hotel & Resort 2015)

| -2 | Frustrated, Angry, Tearful |
|----|----------------------------|
| -1 | Anxious, Uncertain, Worried |
| 0  | Pleasant, Calm, Agreeable |
| 1  | Happy, Joyful, Pleased |
| 2  | Celebrating, Elated, Excited |

This scale does not include all the distinct emotions, but it is a useful tool to consider when observing the emotions and considering them on a scale as positive and negative. Positive being defined as a desired state of being where the customer would prefer not to lose the emotion they are having. Negative being defined as an undesired state of being. The training suggested to always do anything to bring the customer's emotional state to the next level or higher. The training also suggested that usually most people would be at a calm and relaxed state and the goal for them is to have them leave at a happy or even ecstatic state by providing them an experience that was unexpected. In that context, it could be accomplished through small but important gestures. For example, using

personalization tactics or telling a small personal joke to make the person laugh and smile.

When considering and handling the circumstances where customers are experiencing emotions that are negative or undesirable, first, it must be understood what purpose do the emotions serve and why do they occur? Emotions carry information that points to important situations in our lives and surroundings. For example, anger communicates that a boundary is being violated, that our person, child, or property is being infringed upon. Whereas sadness usually communicates a loss. These emotions also prepare us for action; "the word means what puts us in move, in motion, what moves us forward." "If as humans, we cannot identify the different kinds of emotions, we are losing valuable information that points us to what we need in our lives." (Collins, R. 2016.)

Better identifying where the emotions are coming from is important to know when an employee is attempting to enhance the customer experience so that they can offer a solution that is beneficial. Specifically, in the case where the negative emotion is a direct result of the employee or company in any way, the goal of the employee would be to accurately identify the customer's emotion and then find out the expectation that is not being met. In occurrence an employee can emotionally connect with a customer and provide a solution that has nothing to do with the company is an unexpected value and experience that could be provided for the customer. The underlying principle being discussed here is the attitude of empathy.

Empathy is defined as "the action of understanding, being aware of, being sensitive to, and vicariously experiencing the feelings, thoughts, and experience of another of either the past or present without having the feelings, thoughts, and experience fully communicated in an objectively explicit manner." (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) The "action of understanding..." is the desire that the employees do something about the emotions of the customers, fulfilling the values and attitudes of the culture of GOGO both "caring" and "courage". The emotional connection built in this significant moment with a customer presents an

opportunity for them to carry positive memories of the company. That kind of interaction provides mutual value between one another and fulfils the goal of GOGO to have the most satisfied customers and employees in the industry. "As a consequence of the emotional intelligence you have shown throughout their journey, the customers continue to use you willingly, as they appreciate your thoughtfulness and perceive that you add value to their life." (Thompson, S. 2019.)

The only way to build a lasting relationship with a customer is by building trust. Trust is defined as "assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) There are four ways in this definition to establish trust. First, employee's words are a category of establishing credibility based on their truthfulness and credentials. Second, employee's actions are a category of establishing reliability based on their dependability and predictability. Third, employee's safety is a category of establishing intimacy based on their reliability in discretion and empathy. Fourth, employee's focus is a category of establishing orientation based on their motives and attention. (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 86.) In conclusion, by taking care of the truthfulness of words, consistency in actions, providing discretion and empathy to secure safety, and having transparent motives and attention, the employees will effectively establish trust.

Another aspect to consider regarding trust is that the interaction is mutual meaning both parties have to actively participate. According to Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. (2017, 47), trust is one the characteristics of a genuine business relationship. This is especially important to realize when attempting to provide emotional support to the customers to better enhance their experience. It is also possible to cross the boundaries of the customer producing a complete opposite result. Therefore, this practice requires the employees to be sharp in their understanding of emotional cues and be aware of their responses in their interactions. Another characteristic of trust is that it is iterative, meaning the relationship will build over time and therefore providing ongoing benefits for both parties. By nature of the established relationship it requires both parties to change behaviour, subsequently making it unique. (Peppers, D. & Rogers M, 2017, 47.)

In conclusion, three practices can be gained when attempting to observe the emotions of the customer. First, to identify the emotions and rate them on a scale. To succeed in this practice, it requires the attitude to grow and learn both about the customer and the skill of identifying emotions. Second, an attitude of empathy displays both "care" and "courage" for the customer further establishing trust. Finally, understanding how to build trust by practicing truthfulness in words, consistency in actions, providing discretion and empathy to secure safety, and having transparent in motives and attention.

### 3.3.3 Thoughts

Thought has multiple definitions associated with it, all of which can be used in the context of human experience. Thought is practically used and defined in two ways. First, it is defined as "the action or process of thinking; serious consideration; reasoning power; the power to imagine". Second, it is defined as "an individual act or product of thinking; development of an intention or plan, an opinion or belief in the mind; the intellectual product or the organized views and principles of a period, place, group, or individual". (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) It is important to make the distinction that the word "thought" is used to describe two different things. First, it describes the process of the consideration of ideas unto the purpose to formulate an opinion, a belief or idea. Second, is the fact that a thought can be a complete state (regardless if it is actually in a complete state) in which a person is able to use and/or hold as foundation to make decisions on a particular topic.

It is understandable to think that observing "thoughts" would be impossible. In many cases it is, but one practice to gain understanding in is that observing thoughts can be used to define and determine what state of "thought" the customer is in whether it be about a particular topic or their overall approach to thinking itself. It can be very informative for an accurate response for a particular customer to identify whether they create opinions or beliefs quickly or if they continuously hold their view in the consideration stage of thinking. It is important to understand when considering how to care for a customer and how to build

relationships with them, and to know whether they would rather be challenged in their thinking, be in a place of continual consideration of their ideas or would rather be agreed with in their thinking. This is important to find out because the one who is in constant consideration of ideas reveals, generally speaking, a high invitation of new perspectives and is unable to build relationships otherwise. On the other hand, the one who is firm in their views is more susceptible to offense, thus, causing contention in the relationship.

In this case, a practice to consider is to clarify one's stance on certain things. Having clarity on one's predisposition whether "open" or "stubborn", and what specific area one is in. This clarity offers an increased ability to communicate one's thoughts as well as to identify and classify the customers accurately. This way employees are able to respond in way that either provides depth or "keeps things light" and have the wisdom to know when to respond. Then by listening carefully to what the customers say and how they say it, the employees will have the ability to easily identify the customers' predisposition to respond accordingly. This helps to keep the focus on the customers' perspective, resulting in a customer that feels cared for.

### 3.3.4 Volitions

Volition: an act of making a choice or decision. (Merriam-Webster Dictionary 2019.) Continuing with the previous model, the goal is to observe the customers' decisions. Humans make decisions every second of everyday. The amount of information that can be learned by observing a person's decisions is truly remarkable. American psychologist Wayne Dyer (2019) said, "Our lives are a sum total of the choices we have made." In other words, we are who we are by what we choose. This is significant when observing someone's decisions you see a "glimpse" of who that person is, revealing their character. Although, in most cases it is not beneficial to make broad generalization from one encounter, it still gives insight for the employee to use a specific question that can be posed to the customer to gain more understanding.

Due to the fact that humans make decisions based on their experiences, their decisions provide a revelation of a person's motivations based on the balance of their dependency on knowledge or logical thought and their dependency on positive sensations and emotions. These factors, which influence human movement and decisions, ultimately provide the employee with insight of the motivation that guide the customers' decisions, further understanding the customer. Observing a person's decisions by nature reveals the knowledge and understanding a person has about a particular subject. Understanding the biasness of the customers and designing an interaction based on that knowledge provides tremendous insight to put into practice.

### 3.3.5  Summary

There is one main method and six practices for employees to consider using in their customer interactions. The main method to use in interactions is to collect the most amount of information about the customer based on the understanding what experience is. The six practices to use are: first, to identify the possible sensations the customer is experiencing and to use that information for engagement opportunities. Second, to identify the emotions and rate them on a scale. Third, to practice an attitude of empathy which displays both "care" and "courage" for the customer further establishing trust. Fourth, to build trust by practicing truthfulness in words, consistency in actions, providing discretion and empathy to secure safety, and having transparent in motives and attention. Fifth, to identify and clarify the state of thought regarding various topics to help determine the customers' perspective to be able to respond accordingly. Finally, to identify the motivation bias the customer has based on the decisions they make to tailor the experience for the customer accordingly.

### 3.4  Practices: Expectations

According to Isabella Villani's (2018) research, customer expectations are constantly changing, but the factors that are common whenever asked include personalization, sociability, self-care, ease, consistency, timeliness, empowerment, empathy and complaints. This is an excellent list to consider for

employees to better understand customer expectations as well as practices to use in their interactions with customers.

### 3.4.1 Timeliness

As an employee the definition of customer service is making all actions of the customers easier. "I shouldn't have to spend time trying to work out what you need me to do. Make it easy for me to do business with you." (Villani, I. 2018.) It is important for employees to always keep this in mind and to grow in ways of how to make all processes more simple and easier for the customers. Under no circumstance, when attempting to deliver an experience that exceed expectations, should employees ask for the customer to do something for them. The mentality should be to look for ways to offer services the customer would think of asking the employee to do. It has been stated in common knowledge here in Finland that people want to do things on their own. Although this may be true, offering to help a customer is a way to show them the employee cares and is willing to help, further establishing trust. (Villani, I. 2018.)

### 3.4.2 Help

When the customer asks an employee a question it reveals that the customer expects him/her to know the answer or at the very least to find out the answer immediately. Considering the expectations the customer has regarding timeliness it is important that when they ask the question it should be answered quickly. If the situation arises where the customer does not want to know the answer anymore because it is taking too long to answer, it is considered a failure. The customers' expectations were not met let alone exceeded. (Villani, I. 2018.)

### 3.4.3 Empowerment

Human beings have a capacity of volition. The fact that human beings can make a decision for themselves, reveals its importance to us. Anytime this natural phenomenon is threatened, the response is immediately seen with opposition. This is seen throughout the history. The value that an employee should hold is

that of a humble servant. The ability to provide customers with knowledge to make the best choices for them can be accomplished through the application of the principles that have been discussed in this thesis. Beginning with the desire to create an experience that exceeds expectations, utilizing observations of the customers' consciousness, asking the right questions to gather information that personalize their experience and delivering the best possible knowledge of the services provided by the company to the customer. This is empowerment. (Villani, I. 2018.) Peppers D. & Rogers M. (2017, 108) uses the terms: identify, differentiate, interact, and customize as the strategy for empowerment.

### 3.4.4  Personalization

Personalization in the realm of interactions with customers is the idea that through categorization of information employees can better understand the customers, and therefore, better serve the customers. The table below shows a list of categories of customer personas. (Villani, I. 2018.)

TABLE 2. Customer personas

| Biographical information | | Behavioural information |
|---|---|---|
| - Name<br>- Age<br>- Occupation<br>- Background<br>- Heritage<br>- Marital status<br>- Children | - Location<br>- Living situation<br>- Employment<br>- Income<br>- Education<br>- Religion | - Personal motivations<br>- Needs<br>- Goals<br>- Likes and dislikes<br>- Values<br>- Preferred communication methods<br>- History of loyalty<br>- Personality traits<br>- Hobbies and interests<br>- Pets |

(Villani, I. 2018)

When considering personalizing a customer experience it must be identified what the customers identify with. Considering the recent laws in in data protection (EUR-Lex. 2016) customers are now much more concerned of their privacy than ever. Keeping the customers privacy in mind, the goal is to establish trust so that they freely give personal information. In this case trust is established by effectively using the little data that is given to personalize their experience, where the value gained by freely offering their information is greater than the possible risk. By merely thinking of these categories it provides ideas for employees to engage in conversation by asking questions with genuine curiosity to build relationships with customers. "Treating someone in a way that is unique to them is a powerful way to make that person feel important." (McGee, P. 2013.) Personalization also promotes customer loyalty as the more the customer feels understood and feels the service has been personalized for them, it will be challenging for the customer to build that type of relationship anywhere else.

### 3.4.5 Complaints

When do people complain? By definition it is the expression of dissatisfaction or annoyance. Why is a customer dissatisfied or annoyed? It is due to the fact their expectations were not met thus causing the residual negative feelings. When people feel this, they complain. (Villani, I 2018.) "As an employee a way to combat unmet expectations is to under promise and over deliver." (Cook, S. 2008, 13-14.) "To build genuine, emotion-based relationship's we must do the unexpected to create a customer surprise." (Peppers, D. & Rogers, M. 2017, 56.) For example, even when the employee knows something will take one minute, it is better to say it will take five minutes. When the customer adjusts their expectations to five minutes and the answer is in one minute, in a small way a scenario was created to exceed the customer's expectations. When attempting to use this tactic, no matter the scenario, it is important that the employee does not lose the interest of the customer. The reality is that if the customers' expectations are unmet, they will share it with others and if the expectations are exceeded, they might share it. (Villani, I 2018.)

### 3.4.6 Summary

There are three practices for employees to consider when attempting to exceed customer expectations. First, to focus on getting the service right the first time by managing time wisely and being attentive to offer any services necessary to the customers. Second, to focus on understanding the customer right by utilizing the attitudes and values of GOGO in the interaction, by empowering the customers to be free in their decisions, and by collecting as much information about them as possible to personalize their experience. Finally, to focus on designing the experience of the customer by utilizing all the discussed practices. It is important to always under promise and over deliver. By surprising the customers by definition, the employees are able to exceed their expectations.

# 4 CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, to enhance the service culture of GOGO by improving the employee interaction with customers, it was discovered that the employees require further training in their attitudes and practices. By means of literature review of the topic "customer experience", three attitudes were discovered employees should exhibit to improve the service culture. First, an attitude of empathy toward the customers. Second, a sense of urgency regarding every interaction important. Third, the desire to exceed the customer expectations and improve their responses based on the growth and the changes that the customers experience.

By means of literature review of the topic of what "experience" is, it was discovered that the ability of the employees to collect information about the customer in the interactions is foundational to delivering successful experiences. Therefore, the topic was further reviewed and by examining how to observe consciousness and why. It was discovered that by applying the practice of identifying the forms of consciousness, for example, senses, emotions, thoughts and volitions, employees will collect valuable information about the customers. By applying these new attitudes employees will respond to the customers in a way that will exceed their expectations.

By means of literature review of the topic of "common expectations", it was discovered that by practicing basic principles such as being on time, being helpful, empowering the customer, personalizing the experience, and handling complaints well, it will enhance the service culture by accomplishing three practices. First, get the service right the first time. Second, understand the customer. Third, design the experience of the customer.

# 5 DISCUSSION

The research regarding the topic of employee interaction with customers could be studied indefinitely. The topic is rooted in psychology and philosophy and could be further cross examined by other scholars in the field which was outside of the needed resources for this application.

With that said, future work on the topic could include developing an organized training program that would be laid out for a series of months of training and review for employees outlining the specific topics examined in the thesis. Then using methods such as interviews with customers on specific employees regarding specific questions and answers to prove the impact the training may have had on the employees. There should be two rounds of interviews with the same customers at the beginning and after six months to a year of training to mark the progress. Possible questions to ask are found in the appendix 2.

The results of this thesis have profound impact and meaning not only to GOGO but to human interaction as a whole. The ability to identify attitudes based on behaviour to reveal the belief systems that determine our values. Furthermore, that empathy can be developed by identifying the experiences of others through application of the correct perspectives and attitudes. The results have a significant personal impact on to how to engage others.

Some limitations of this research are that there is so much more to study that could not be included in this thesis writing process. The nature of this study was theorical, and therefore the testing of this observation method developed could not be included in this study. Therefore, it provides no such data that would prove if the application of this method between different individuals would work or not.

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**APPENDICES**

Appendix 1. Questionnaire interview to customers

1. Do you know GOGO's values?
2. In what ways does employee (X) show you they care?
3. What is your relationship like with (X) employee?
4. Do you feel considered and treated as "family" by (X) employee?
5. Does (X) employee exceed your expectations?
6. Do they exceed your expectations in their ability to communicate?
7. Do they exceed your expectations in their ability to engage conversation or not in correct circumstances?
8. Do they seem considerate of your surroundings… emotions… time… previous encounters… complaints… and needs for help?
9. How consistently do they provide useful knowledge and information (both relevant to GOGO or in general)?