Notre Dame University
Faculty of Business Administration and Economics
Graduate Division

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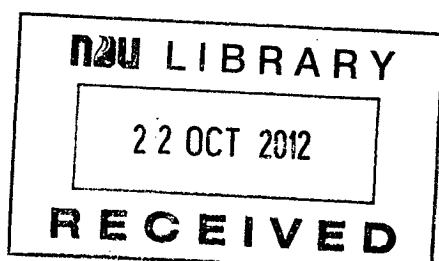## Bordeaux Management School
Institute of International Business

Customer Service and Satisfaction in the Fashion Retail Industry: A Human Resources System to Optimize Big Retailers, Middle East.

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Joint Degree of the Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.) and the Master of Science in International Business (M.I.B.)

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NDU – Lebanon

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Approval Certificate

Customer Service and Satisfaction in the Fashion Retail Industry: A Human Resources System to Optimize Big Retailers, Middle East.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this thesis is entirely my own work and that it has not been submitted as an exercise for a degree at another University.

Joseph Salim Mghames

Full Name and Signature

Abstract:

The fashion retail industry in the Middle East region is drastically expanding in most of the countries of the region with a great variety of international brands opening. The purpose of this thesis is to study the level of customer satisfaction in the region and try to design a complete training system to maximize customer satisfaction by optimizing customer service. Establishing such a system might be hard to design, yet succeeding in such initiative might allow retailers to gain an important competitive edge in times of sever competition and great expansion. The problem is that the customer service trainings are not yielding direct results and the belief is that this is due to the lack of a supporting system. A survey was conducted in order to identify the level of customer satisfaction in fashion retail in the Middle East along with the reasons behind these levels. The surveys allowed us to conclude that satisfaction levels are low due to the absence of certain competencies that are trainable. In addition to that, store visits and interviews with professionals in the field were conducted to understand why trainings aren't yielding the expected results, What is the overall level of satisfaction during a regular fashion shopping experience, what are the major qualities that sales people commonly demonstrate during a shopping experience, and what are the approaches or behaviors that sales people are encouraged to demonstrate during a shopping experience in the country of residence? The outcomes showed that training alone is not yielding results, so it needs to be reinforced by a complete support system. I believe that the proposed system will provide a good solution to the problem mentioned and the satisfaction level will thus be increased.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 - General Background:

1.1.1 – Definition of Customer Service:

While searching to find the definition of "Customer Service", one can end up having multiple findings that might be similar in content or dissimilar. Researchers might see customer service from different points of view depending on the nature of the industry as well as the service objectives or goals that they would like to achieve. According to Turban et Al. (2002): "Customer Service is a series of activities designed to enhance the level of customer satisfaction – that is feeling that a product or service has met the customers' expectations." No matter how we define the term "Customer Service", the end result that any party would like to have is maximized customer satisfaction.

1.1.2 - Brief history:

In the year 1946, the international Organization for Standards in Geneva has set the first standards for customer service. After 25 years, and in the year 1971, Customer service trainings started appearing. One of the pioneers in such trainings was the Service Quality institute. In the 1980s, electronic devices started being used in different customer service initiatives. The early 90s were the years were attention was focused on customer retention and loyalty programs. The term Customer Relations Management became the core in management research. With the beginning of the 21st century, competition among firms across all different industries became fiercer than ever. Technology and social media played the major role in driving change in customer service and customer service programs. Now the customers own all the information they need, and satisfying and retaining them became no easy task. Offering exceptional service became the aim. Monica Woodley, Senior Editor with the Economist intelligent units believes that great challenges will face companies in the coming decades due to changes in customer service needs.

1.1.3 - Importance of Customer Service:

It has been proven that the relation between good customer service and level of sale is direct and strong; however, other importance exists as well. For this reason, we can state that good customer service can optimize customer loyalty and make customers come over and over to the store, and loyal customers input more sales to the stores. This will also enhance Customer satisfaction and that will increase the probability of mouth to mouth recommendation of the brand, the branch and the service. Customer service increases interaction with customers and thus identifying customer needs in order to satisfy these needs and try to exceed expectations if possible. It cuts the time of the sales process, save the customer's valuable time and have additional time to serve additional customers and accordingly increase further the sales.

In addition to that, customer service builds powerful reputation as well as store and brand image that will establish brand credibility. It helps in creating a higher value for the product sold and that will ease up the process of convincing the customer with the product or even convince him with a more expensive product. Also, it builds a relation of mutual trust between the store and the customer, and this will strengthen the bond and the rapport and will make the customer come back. Furthermore; Customer service facilitates communication between the sales person and the customer, and this will allow the salespeople to understand customer needs and act accordingly. Finally, it increases the probability of Cross-Selling and Up-Selling that will increase the store's income.

1.2 – The Objective of the study:

The objective of this thesis is to assess the level of customer satisfaction, study the week points in customer service in the fashion retail sector in the Middle East Area, find out possible causes of customer dissatisfaction and try to come out with a Complete HR system, while focusing on Training and Development, to help solve this problem and improve the business. This thesis will only consider the case of big retailers, those with a total of more than 25 stores per operation. The reason behind that is that it needs a big structure and chain of stores to be able to support the cost of having such a support system.

1.3 – Research Questions:

Research questions help in achieving the main goal of the study and direct the research towards the attainment of the required results. Choosing the appropriate research questions is essential in determining a structured framework for the study.

For this reason, the research administered is based on the below questions/areas:

1) What is the overall level of satisfaction during a regular fashion shopping experience in the country of residence?

2) What are the major qualities that sales people commonly demonstrate during a shopping experience in the country of residence?

3) What are the approaches or behaviors that sales people are encouraged to demonstrate during a shopping experience in the country of residence?

What is the level of satisfaction in different areas or dimensions of the fashion retail service?

1.4 – The Hypothesis:

The relationship between my hypothesis and the research question is clear. It focuses on the link between level of customer satisfaction from one side, and the establishment of a complete training program supported by other HR functions.

The hypothesis that I intend to prove in this research is the following:

H1: The Level of Customer Satisfaction in the Middle Eastern Fashion Retail industry is relatively low.

H2: The Low satisfaction level is due to lack of specific skills and basic customer service knowledge.

H3: Satisfaction level can be maximized through a very well designed training system and well-structured HR practices.

1.5 – The Importance of the Study:

What makes this topic worth considering is the great expansion and growth occurring in the fashion retail industry in the Middle East region. Fashion Retail space is increasing rapidly and competition is aggressive. Big players are fighting for their market share and many small players are entering as barriers are low. Many brands exist in the market with similar products, quality and price levels, but what differentiates those brands from each other is their quality of service as well as the human factor. Despite that competition in the fashion retail industry in the Middle East becoming fiercer than ever, the level and quality of Customer Service are mostly not up to standards. Therefore, this study is important for all the reasons stated above and below.

First; the creation of a solid system would maintain a high level of customer service in a regular Middle Eastern fashion store and this will create stability and steadier continuity for the business. This will also ensure that customer satisfaction is obtained and expectations of clients are at least met if not exceeded.

Second; the system will teach and train on the skills of understanding the requirements of customer service in the region in general and the specific requirements unique to each country. It is worth mentioning that great diversity exists in the region across different countries, and this is something that retailers should pay major attention to.

Third; the system will allow to recognize the importance of training in establishing a service culture in one's fashion store and to realize that ensuring exceptional customer service is strongly related to establishing a complete structured Human Resources system where training is only one element.

Fourth; the system stresses on the significance of Product knowledge and Fashion expertise in the customer service cycle.

Fifth; the system acknowledges that customer service starts with proper recruitment of suitable work force having the proper competencies and figures out simple and doable methods to maintain high levels of motivation among sales people.

Sixth; introducing a system of monitoring and follow up will ensure maintaining the required level of service as well as introducing a proper induction and orientation program for new joining sales people.

Seventh; the system stresses on the importance of creating a Performance Management system to strengthen the bases of evaluations and thus, be able to plan accordingly.

1.6 – International Perspective:

This study focuses on the Middle East Region and covers all the countries constituting it. Surveys, shop visits, interviews and observations were recorded in five different countries that constitute my sample. These countries are: Lebanon, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Sultanate of Oman. The study will provide general solutions relative to the whole region while taking into consideration the specificity of different countries.

1.7 – Brief Overview of all Chapters:

Chapter one is an introductory chapter. It starts by a general background on customer service and describes its history and importance. The chapter then states the need for the study as well as its objectives. The chapter ends by stating the international perspective of this study.

Chapter two is a review of literature. The chapter introduces the countries of the Middle East Region as well as its different economic elements and population. The chapter then describes the fashion retail industry in the region and sheds light on the biggest retailers. At the end, we discuss the growth in leasable areas and describe customer service in the fashion retail industry in the Middle East Region. The chapter also includes some past studies done on retail and retail change as well as a description of the customer service model created by the English Institute of Customer Service.

The third chapter focuses on the procedures and research methodology. The chapter sheds light on the research questions and objectives and states the hypotheses. The source of the primary data will be questionnaires filled in 5 different countries in addition to interviews done with professionals, observations and shop visits.

Chapter four is a statistical chapter. It focuses on the analysis of all primary data collected and displays the main results. At the end of the chapter, we will be able to conclude whether the data collected supports our hypotheses or not.

The fifth chapter starts by describing the weaknesses and limitations of current training systems and tries to introduce a comprehensive training system.

Chapter six compliments chapter five to show that a complete HR system is necessary to support the training system in the accomplishment of a high level of customer service.

Chapter seven is a concluding chapter. It concludes the study and provides general recommendations.

Chapter 2: Review of Literature

2.1 – The Middle East Region

2.1.1 – Introduction:

Although the term "Middle East" was not used before the year 1850 (Wikipedia, 2012), the region that encompasses the western part of Asia existed since the early signs of recorded history. The three Monotheistic Religion, Christianity, Islam and Judaism originated from different part of this region. The region has a strategic geographic location that connects Asia to Europe and Africa. In addition to that, it is worth mentioning that this Area holds the majority of the World's Oil reserves and is very rich in various other resources. Moreover, tourism is a key sector mobilizing the economies of many Middle Eastern Countries.

2.1.2 – Map and Countries:

As shown in the map below, the major countries constituting this region are as follows:

- Armenia
- Azerbaijan
- Bahrain
- Georgia
- Iran
- Iraq
- Jordan
- KSA
- Kuwait
- Lebanon
- Oman
- Qatar
- Syria
- Turkey
- UAE
- Yemen
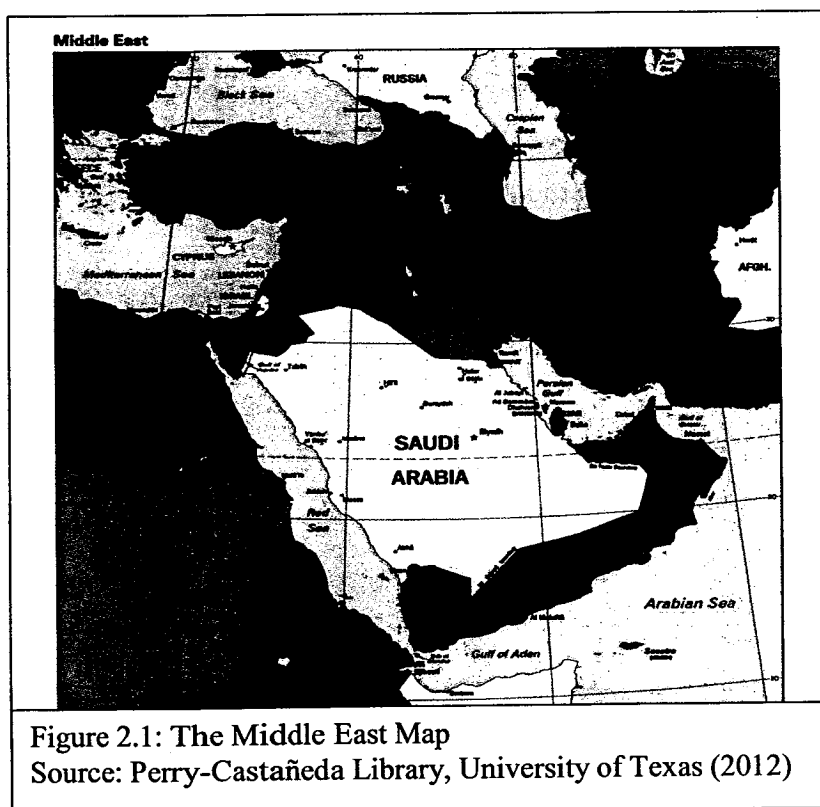
Figure 2.1: The Middle East Map
Source: Perry-Castañeda Library, University of Texas (2012)

2.2 – Key Economic Elements:

2.2.1 – Introduction:

Middle Eastern economies have diversified structures. Although some economies are solely dependent on oil and its export, they have started realizing the importance of liberating themselves from oil dependency and started developing other industries. On the other hand, some of the Middle Eastern economies are more diversified. Some countries are putting major attention on services, especially tourism. Tourism is a major contributor to the growth of the fashion retail industry in the region.

3 sectors are receiving the highest amounts of investments especially those originating from oil money (OC&C strategy consultants (2007). Retail Opportunities in The Middle East). The first sector is that of construction & real estate. This sector is booming especially in the gulf region. Oil revenues are playing a major role in funding this sector. The second sector is that of travel, tourism and transportation. The region's countries are investing more on tourism and transportation since they acknowledged that this will bring good input of revenues to the countries, especially in the post oil era. The third sector is retail. Retail is a great booster of the economy.

2.2.2 – The GDP:

The GDPs of the Middle East Countries range from being very high in most GCC countries, to moderate in other countries to slightly low in few countries. Although some of the countries still have low GDPs, their growth rates are impressive, and with growth come opportunities.

Here below is list of GDPs of Middle East Countries for the years 2008, 2009 and 2010 (The CIA World Fact Book, 2012) with the respective growth rates:

Table 2.1: Middle East GDPs and growth rates (The CIA World Fact book, 2012)

Country	GDP in Billions of Dollars			GDP Growth (2010)
	2008	2009	2010	
Armenia	19.14	16.43	16.86	0.03%
Azerbaijan	79.11	86.47	90.79	0.05%
Bahrain	27.69	28.55	29.71	0.04%
Georgia	21.93	21.1	22.44	6.40%
Iran	809.8	810.3	818.7	1.00%
Iraq	107.9	112.4	113.4	0.80%
Jordan	32.73	33.49	34.53	3.10%
Kuwait	141.2	133.9	136.5	2%
Lebanon	50.9	55.23	59.37	7.50%
Oman	71.98	72.77	75.84	4.20%
Qatar	119.2	129.5	150.6	16.30%
KSA	596	599.5	622	3.70%
Syria	98.13	104	107.4	3.20%
Turkey	931.4	887.7	960.5	8.20%
UAE	246.9	239.1	246.8	3.20%
Yemen	56.51	58.69	63.4	8%

2.3 – Per Capita GDP:

The per capita GDP is an indicator of economic performance and helps showing the relative performance of a country as compared to others (The Business Dictionary, 2012). Any increase in the per capita GDP reflects growth in the economy and increase in productivity.

Here below is list of Per Capita GDPs of Middle East Countries for the year 2010:

Country	GDP per Capita ($) (PPP)
Armenia	5700
Azerbaijan	10,900
Bahrain	40,300
Georgia	4,900
Iran	10,600
Iraq	3,800
Jordan	5400
Kuwait	48,900
Lebanon	14,400
Oman	25,600
Qatar	179,000
KSA	24,200
Syria	4,800
Turkey	12,300
UAE	49,400
Yemen	2,700

Table 2.2: Middle East Per Capita GDP
(The CIA World Factbook, 2012)

As per the numbers shown in the above two tables, it is worth shedding light on 3 main points. First, the **average** GDP for the Middle East Countries is $ 221,802,500,000 which would rank 52 if compared to other countries of the globe (The CIA Word Fact book, 2012).

Second, the **average** Per Capita GDP for the Middle East Countries is $ 27,681, which would rank 50 if compared to other countries of the globe. (The CIA Word Fact book, 2012)

Third, the **average** GDP Growth in the Middle East region is: 4.23% for 2010 as compared to the Global GDP growth for the same year and which is equal to 4.9%. This shows that the growth rate in this region does not lag by far the global growth rate. (The CIA Word Fact book, 2012)

2.2.4 – Gross National Income

The Gross national incomes of these countries are relatively high. Most ME countries are classified by the International Money Fund (2010) as High Income or Upper Middle Income Countries. There classification and per capita income are shown as follows:

Table 2.3: Middle East Per Capita GNIs and Classification, (International Money Fund, 2010)

Country	Income Classification	Per Capita Income ($)
Bahrain	High income	20,475
KSA	High income	16,267
Kuwait	High income	37,009
Oman	High income	19,405
Qatar	High income	74,901
UAE	High income	57,884
Armenia	Lower middle income	2,840
Georgia	Lower middle income	2,629
Iraq	Lower middle income	2,531
Syria	Lower middle income	2,823
Yemen	Lower middle income	1,284
Azerbejian	Upper middle income	6,008
Iran	Upper middle income	5,449
Jordan	Upper middle income	4,326
Lebanon	Upper middle income	10,041
Turkey	Upper middle income	10,301

The figures show that none of the ME countries is classified as a low income countries. Only 31.25% are lower middle income and the remaining 68.75% are either upper middle income or high income countries. This clearly signifies that the overall purchasing power of people is good, and this is a strong indicator of opportunities and growth within the retail sector and especially fashion retail.

Income Status

- ■ High Income Countries
- ■ Upper Middle Income Countries
- ■ Lower Middle Income Countries
- ■ Low Income Countries
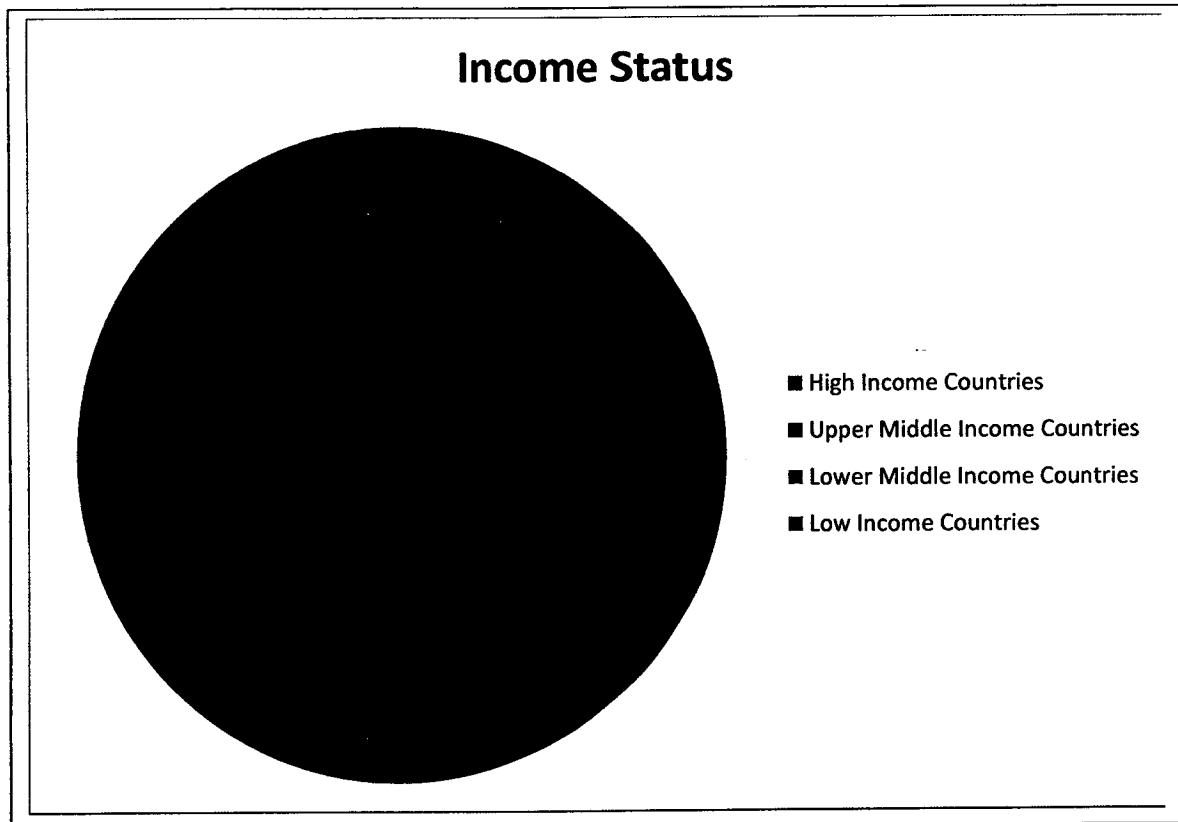
Figure 2.2: Income Status Classification of Middle East countries (International Money Fund, 2010)

2.3 – Population:

The Middle East Region is the home for about 300 million inhabitants. The growth rates in population are relatively high compared to Europe and the United Sates. These Societies are somewhat young societies with an average median age of 27.375 years (the CIA World Fact book, 2012).

Table 2.4: Middle East population figures: (The CIA World Fact book, 2011)

Population figures						
		Age Structure				
Country	Population	0-14	15-64	64 and over	Median age	Population Growth
Armenia	2,967,975	17.60%	72.40%	10.10%	32.2	0.06%
Azerbaijan	8,372,373	23.20%	70.30%	6.40%	28.8	0.85%
Bahrain	1,214,705	20.50%	77%	2.60%	30.9	2.81%
Georgia	4,585,874	15.60%	68.30%	16%	39.1	-0.33%
Iran	77,891,220	24.20%	70.90%	5%	26.8	1.25%
Iraq	30,399,572	38%	58.90%	3.10%	20.9	2.40%
Jordan	6,508,271	35.30%	59.90%	4.80%	22.1	0.98%
Kuwait	2,595,628	25.80%	72.20%	2%	28.5	1.99%
Lebanon	4,143,101	23%	68%	9%	29.8	0.24%
Oman	3,027,959	31.25%	65.70%	3.10%	24.1	2.02%
Qatar	848,016	21.80%	76.70%	1.50%	30.8	0.81%
KSA	26,131,703	29.40%	67.70%	3%	25.3	1.54%
Syria	22,517,750	35.20%	61%	3.80%	21.9	0.91%
Turkey	78,785,548	26.60%	67.10%	6.30%	28.5	1.24%
UAE	5,148,664	20.40%	78.70%	0.90%	30.2	3.28%
Yemen	24,133,492	43%	54.40%	2.60%	18.1	2.65%

The average population growth in the ME arised to almost 1.42% which is greater than the average global growth rate equivalent to 1.1%. More than 82 million individuals are below the age of 14 years and increasingly affected by western traditions, tastes, music and thoughts. All of this makes the Middle East Region a land of opportunities for fashion retailers. More international brands are interested to open outlets in this region to grab market share and to benefit from this young customer base.

2.4 – The Retail Industry:

2.4.1 - Definition of retail:

According to the business dictionary (2012), the term "retail" is defined as: A business or person that sells goods to the consumer, as opposed to a wholesaler or supplier, who normally sell their goods to another business. These goods sold can be of different natures varying from fast moving goods, food, fashion, accessories, home appliances, etc.

2.4.2 - The retail process:

Young Zhen (2006) from the University of Cambridge describes the retail process and its factors as follows: "is the business of delivering goods and/or services to the ultimate customers by sourcing them from suppliers with adding value."

Figure 2.3: the retail process and its main factors
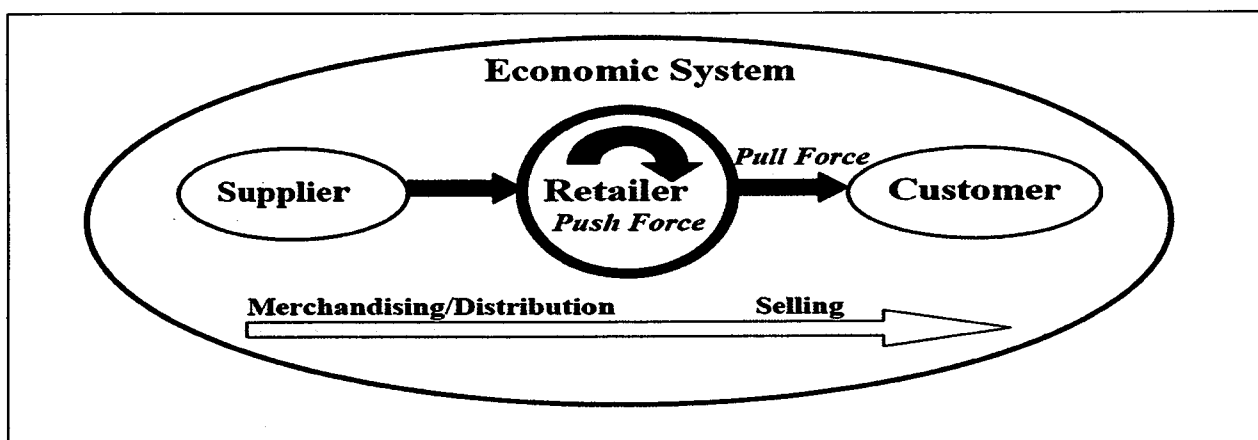
Zhen considers that customer demand is the main trigger of the retail process and that this demand varies with different customer groups. Customer demand is a function of multiple factors such as demography, income, culture, geography, education and others. The retailer on the hand try hard to satisfy customer demand and improve service in order to secure their portion of profit which is necessary to maintain continuity and growth. Mutual dependence exists between suppliers and retailers to ensure the success and efficiency of the retail process. Technology in this case plays a major role in facilitating the supply chain process and providing competitive edge to it. The retail industry is a highly dynamic industry, and as it is highly dependent on consumer demand, its evolution has to be fast. This evolution is referred to as

"retail change". According to Zhen (2006), retail change can be defined as retail revolution / evolution such as the emergence and spreading of new retail formats and processes.

2.4.3 - Past Studies on Retail Change:

The early studies of retail change focused on the change happening in retail institutions which are the basic formats of retail along with their distribution modes. McNair (1958) argues in his study "the wheel of Retailing" that retailers usually enter the market with low prices and margins as well as with average service. Once they settle in the market and start gaining market share, they can then start increasing prices and profit margins and eventually enhancing their service. Izraeli (1973) developed McNair's 'wheel of retailing' to 'three-wheel retailing', that explains the struggle among the three wheels: conventional stores, low order innovators and high order stores; and how this would affect the mode of market penetration. Hollander (1960) develops an Accordion Theory based on McNair's theory. Based on the history of American retailing, he states that retail change varies from offering many merchandise categories with narrow assortments to offering a few categories with a wide range of assortments; the expansion and contraction of the offering acts as an accordion. Many accordions can move at once based on the management of the retail function. Hollander (1966) concludes that Consumers are alternately served predominately by "general" shops, then "speciality" shops and then again by the "general" type of retail establishment. Savitt (1980, 1988), attempts to develop a synthetic approach by marketing models to explain retail change. He focuses on the importance of environmental factors and comparative studies.

In addition to all the studies mentioned, other studies focused on a different approach or perspective. For example, Alchain (1950) advances the theory of natural selection in retailing; Markin and Duncan (1981) develop the theory of environmental determinism based on adaptive Darwinism; Bucklin (1972) provides a model of structural change in retail systems and claims that the level of retail specialization is a function of environmental economics; Bliss (1960) uses Schumpeter's two main types of competition, normal and disruptive, to explain retail changes.

In his paper "Exploring a General Theory of Retail Change" Yong Zhen (2006) develops the "Drive Force Model" that explains that the economic system, consumer demand, competition,

suppliers and technology all work together to cause a retail change. The power of each force varies according to the market in which the retailers operate.

2.4.4 – Fashion Retail in the Middle East:

"The Middle East as a region, as well as recent impressive developments in its retail sector, has been overlooked while almost everybody was focusing on larger potential markets such as India and China." (OC&C Strategy Consultants (2007).Retail Opportunities in the Middle East – How to get into the fast lane in the gulf). Fashion Retail in the Middle East is characterized by a great contrast between state of the art malls and traditional souks, along with street side shops. However, the trend is shifting more towards malls due to all the services and facilitations that they provide the customer with. The future of fashion retail in this region is forecasted to be prosperous and to grow steadily. HE Hamad Bouamin, Director General of Dubai Chamber, States (2011, September 28): "Rising population, expatriate wealth, strong household consumption, modern retail concepts and an evolving tourism sector, have created ideal conditions for growth."

In the report, Retail Opportunities in The Middle East, issued by OC&C Strategy Consultants (2012) some characteristics of the sector were generally described.

The sector is characterized by a modern infrastructure that attracts customers and facilitates their shopping process. This is being displayed by the construction of state of the art malls. Moreover, well-developed trade zones are built to attract and encourage traders and investors. In addition to that, the exemption on individual and corporate taxes in some countries further encourages foreign investments as it will decrease their costs. It is worth mentioning as well that more than $770 billion was spent on projects between 2006-2011and the forecasts for the coming years are very high. 27000 retail outlets were established in the Middle East Region by the year 2011.

2.5 – Fashion Retailers:

2.5.1 – Introduction:

The fashion retail market is evolving and opening up. Big retailers, owning multiple franchise brands, test the market and the success of their brands. Accordingly, more successful brands will be kept and expanded while less successful brands will be closed and probably replaced. (Lowitt,

E, (2012). Smarter Retailing via Unconventional thinking. Harvard Business Review Blog Network). Retailers are constantly working on enriching and diversifying their fashion brand portfolio in order to increase market share and to be able to satisfy all the needs of their customer base. The Middle East region hosts more than 120 different brands of fashion. The vast majority of these brands are western franchises. Local partners act as sponsors or agents. Retailers are taking advantages of the opportunities in emerging markets as compared to mature markets. They are aware of the better positioning possibilities in emerging and virgin markets. Retailers know that competition is becoming fiercer with time, and to survive that, most retailers are focusing on three major things: cutting costs, maintaining a steady revenue growth and accelerating strategic agility. (Lowitt, E, (2012). Smarter Retailing via Unconventional thinking. Harvard Business Review Blog Network).

2.5.2 – Major Fashion Retail Companies:

Many Fashion retail companies were able to turn themselves into multinational multi-brand conglomerates. Most of them started with one store before starting to acquire franchises.

Here below are the biggest Fashion retail companies in the Middle East Region, this is a classification based on the number of stores. The information below is gathered from the corporate websites of each company in the Month of January, 2012.

i - AlShaya Group:

AlShaya group is the largest regional retailer with more than 2000 stores and 22000 employees. Originating from Kuwait, the company operates in Kuwait, Lebanon, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, KSA, Egypt, Oman, Turkey, Cyprus, Russia, Poland, Slovakia and the Czech Republic. Alshaya operates 2,286,000 m2 of retail space and its main brands are: American Eagles Outfitters, Debenhams, Mother care, Next, Top shop, Top Man, River Island, Miss Selfridge, H&M, Dorothy Perkins, Etc…

ii - Landmark Group:

Landmark group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 1034 stores and 35000 employees. Originating from the United Arab Emirates, the company operates in Lebanon, Egypt, KSA, Sudan, Bahrain, Jordan, Oman, China, India, Kuwait, Qatar and UAE.

Landmark operates 4,206,240 m2 of retail space and its main brands are: Baby shop, Center Point, Splash, Shoe Mart, Lifestyle, Beauty Bay, Iconic, Etc…

iii - Fawaz Al Hokair Group:

AL Hokair group is one of the largest regional retailers and the largest retailer in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with more than 750 stores and 12000 employees. Originating from the KSA, the company operates KSA and few GCC Countries. Al Hokair group operates 1,524,000 m2 of retail space and its main brands are: Bershka, Celio, Jack & Jones, Jennyfer, Miss Selfridge, New Yorker, Pull & Bear, Urban Behavior, Banana Republic, Cortefiel, Desigual, La Senza, Exit, Tap a l'oeil, Nine west, Accesorize, Zara, Massimo Dutti, Etc…

iv - Apparel Group:

Apparel group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 680 stores and 5500 employees. Originating from the United Arab Emirates, the company operates in UAE, Jordan, KSA, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, India, Thailand, Malaysia, Taiwan, Russia and Poland. Apparel group operates the following brands: Aldo, Ann Klein, Jeanswest, Nine west, Shoe Studio, Tommy Hilfiger, Birkenstock, Motivi, Venezia, Etc…

v - Kamal Jamjoom Group:

Jamjoom group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 500 stores and 2500 employees. Originating from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the company operates in Qatar, UAE, KSA, Oman, Bahrain and Kuwait. Jamjoom group operates the following brands: Naomi, Mikyaji, The Body Shop, List Roma, Soiree, bebe and Ulla Popken.

vi - Al Sawani Group:

Al Sawani group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 500 stores and 2000 employees. Originating from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the company operates in Qatar, UAE, KSA, Oman, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Egypt, Morocco, Sudan and Kuwait. AL Sawani group operates the following brands: Marina Rinaldi, Marella, Levi's, Esprit, Penny Black, Maxmara, XOXO, Guess, Betty Barclay, Couri, Max & Co, Etc…

vii - Azadea Group:

Azadea group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 405 stores and 7350 employees. Originating from Lebanon, the company operates in Lebanon, Jordan, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, Oman, KSA, Iraq, Egypt, Turkey and Algeria. Azadea operates 166,355 m2 of retail space and its main brands are: Zara, Mango, Promod, Massimo Dutti, Bershka,Oysho, Uterque, Maxmara, Boggi, Pull & Bear, Gymboree, Penny Black, Stradivarious, Salsa, Jules, Grain de Malice, Punt o Roma, Calzedonia, Tezenis, Etc...

viii - Chalhoub Group:

Chalhoub group is one of the largest regional retailers with more than 400 stores and 7000 employees. Originating from Syria, the company operates in Lebanon, UAE, Kuwait, KSA, Egypt, Qatar, Bahrain, India, Syria, Etc. Chalhoub operates the following brands: Baby Dior, Berluti, Bonpoint, Carolina Herrera, Christian Dior, Celine, Christian Louboutin, Dolce & Gabbana, Ermenegildo Zegna, Fendi, Geox, Lacoste, Longchamp, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs, Paul Smith, Ralph Lauren, Etc...

2.6 Leasable Area:

According to the study done by OC&C consultants (2012): "Retail Opportunities on the Middle East: How to get into the fast lane in the Gulf", the leasing area in shopping centers has grown by an average of 20% in the last 20 years. The growth projection for the coming 5years is estimated to be at least equivalent to that.

Figure 2.4: Gross Leasable Area in GCC shopping centers in million m2 (Source: Retail international, 2011)
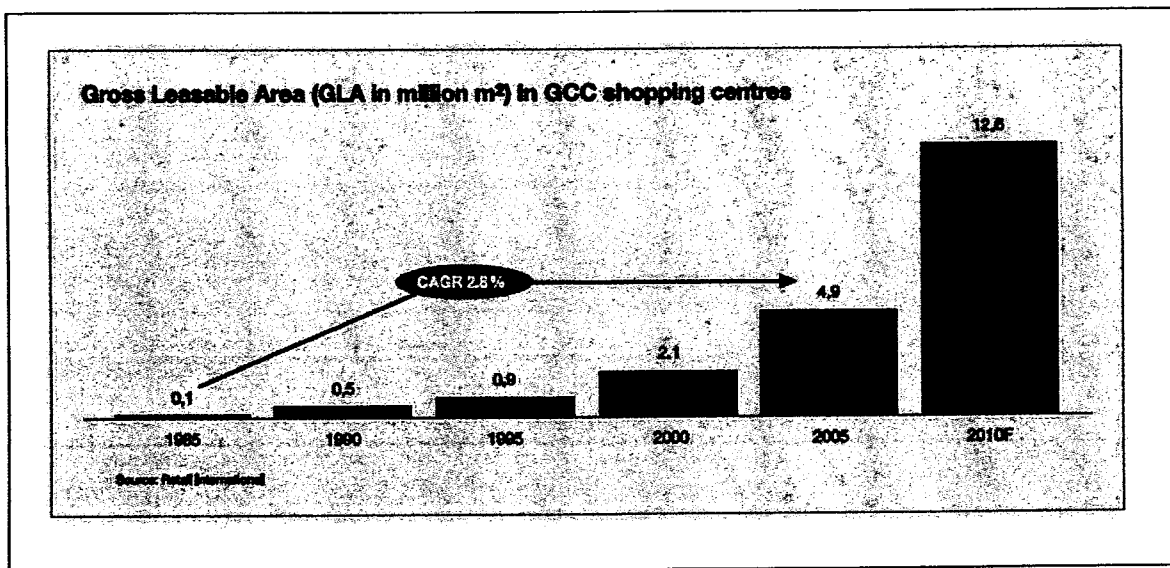
This massive increase in gross leasable area in the GCC shopping centers is not but a clear evidence of the growth of the retail sector, and accordingly fashion retail sector, over the past few years and the potential growth for the years to come.

2.7 – Customer Service

2.7.1 - The Model for World Class Customer Service:

The Institute of Customer Service in England Posted in "Glossary" on the 9th of March 2011, the Model for World Class Service prepared by Leon Paternoster. This model constitutes a framework that every organization, regardless of its size or industry, can use to achieve world class service. The model is based on a review of literature and research conducted by the institute. It identifies three major comprehensive features that an organization should align itself with in order to optimize service levels.

Figure 2.5: The Model for World Class Service (The English Institute of Customer Service, 2012)
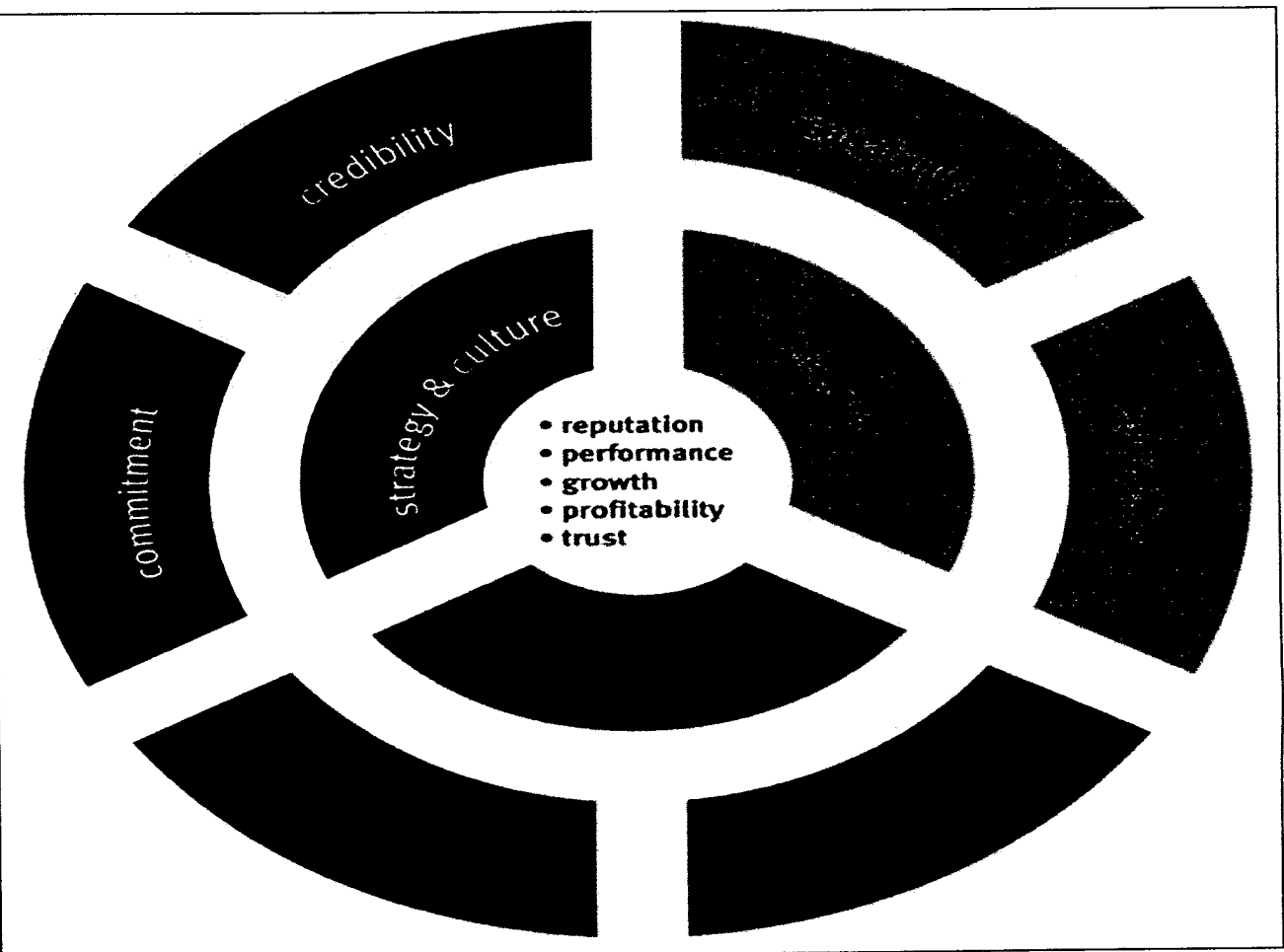
The three aspects that the model is based on are: People, Processes and Strategy and culture.

When it comes to people, the model focuses on two dimensions. The first dimension is people's capabilities and by that they mean acquiring a workforce that is competent and who tolerates further development of their competencies. The workforce as well needs to be customer focused, empathetic and passionate about the field they operate in. the second dimension is continuity. Companies who are able to retain their people, reward them and properly compensate them, will increase their motivation level and loyalty to the company; thus, this will directly impact the service level.

With regards to the second aspect of the Model, which is "Processes", also two dimensions are discussed: Consistency and creativity. Consistency ensures that processes are tailored to meet customer tastes and needs and are consistently delivered; while creativity ensures continuous improvement and innovation to surprise customers and exceed their expectations.

The third aspect of the Model is "Strategy and Culture". The two dimensions of this aspect are commitment and credibility. To maintain high level of customer service, a company needs to have a strategy committed to deliver high quality service and associated with corporate values and goals that are aligned with that commitment. In addition to commitment, credibility is a key dimension. Promises of high service should be kept and service systems need to be set in place.

Having the three aspects of the model well designed and set in place, the company will reap great results in terms of service reputation, performance, growth, profitability and trust.

2.7.2 - Developing a customer service model:

While searching for customer service models in various industries or even within various types of retail, no common model was found to be used across all. Even in the case of fashion retail, each company tailors its customer service approach according to its needs and resources. Some approaches proved to be successful while others did not. To develop a customer service approach aligned with needs and resources, a company needs to pay attention to certain criteria. Each company has to have a clear definition of what customer service means to it and what are the aspects of service that are important to it. Based on that, the strategy, goals, objectives, mission and vision should be aligned and clearly set. HR systems should be set in place to assist in the

implementation of the strategies and the achievement of the required level of service. In addition to that, the corporate culture and environment has to have a service spirit to ensure complete employee involvement in the process. Furthermore, channels of communication are mandatory to ensure the efficiency of external and internal communication. This will allow the detection of any gap or weakness in the system in order to correct it. Finally, the establishment of an efficient system requires the presence of preset policies and procedures as well as development of a clear method of handling customer complaints.

Once taking all the above into consideration, each company can build the system that suits its needs and resources. Once the system \ model is built, continuous reviews need to be done in order to perform all the amendments needed to cope with the fast changes in customer behaviors and needs.

2.7.3 – Customer Service in the fashion retail industry:

Jo Causon (2011, September 27), Chief Executive of the Institute of customer Service Shares a view on the importance of service and says: "Ultimately, service is the only differentiator. Organizations that recognize this crucial and distinctive element are the ones that will not just sustain their position – they will grow."

The market of fashion retailers has become more than saturated with a wide range of brands covering different styles and price ranges. As numbers of brands increase, some become stronger and gain market share while other brands weaken and lose their share of the market. Customers are overwhelmed with the variety of brands, and they possess now all the information they need to compare products and maximize the utility of their purchases. To sustain their continuity, companies are acknowledging that creating an exceptional service culture is a must. Some companies are investing big amounts of money in customer service training, but the question that poses itself is: Is a customer service training alone sufficient to maintain customer satisfaction, loyalty and retention?

2.7.4 – Customer Service in the Middle Eastern fashion retail industry:

It is really difficult to make a general description of Customer Service in the Fashion retail industry all over the different countries of the region. The level of service differs from one country to other so do customers' expectations. These differences are based on cultural, environmental, economic, religious and other factors.

In countries such as Lebanon, Turkey and UAE, the expectations of customers are high. For this reason, the level of service needs to be high as well in order to meet and if possible exceed customers' expectations. Some of the GCC countries, such as Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, are putting extensive efforts to improve their service levels. The reason behind that is that such countries are opening up more to western cultures and the number of expatriates working there is increasing. For the reasons mentioned, the local customer is being affected by the taste and expectation of foreigners. The Sultanate of Oman is a special case. Although citizens benefit from a certain range of freedom, the locals still abide to their traditional dress codes. For this reason, Fashion retail is still an immature industry, and the service level expected in this industry in not that high. The real difficulties in terms of service are faced in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many restrictions are in place when it comes to communicating with customers, especially female customers. This restrains the mobility and freedom of sales associates in the stores, not to mention that some service related approaches might be considered offensive. The expectations of Saudis regarding customer service are very low, yet the market has seen some progress in the past few years and this progress is expected to continue. Moreover, Iraq is one of the most controversial markets. Although many predict huge growth after the war, the security factor still poses great concerns for investors. Retailers are still attentively testing the Market. Some of them are planning to open stores in Baghdad, while others have already opened their first stores in Baghdad and Erbil. In all cases, it is still early to measure the level of customer service in the country as there is still more basic service that still does not exist in some parts of the country.

2.8 - Conclusion:

In conclusion, the Middle East region is located in a strategic location that links Asia to Europe and Africa, The region is rich in Oil and mineral resources, and Tourism is a key service in some of the region's countries. For all of these reasons, the region is lucrative and appealing to different types of international investments. In addition to all of that, it is worth mentioning that the economic growth that the ME region is achieving provides multiple opportunities to various sectors, especially the retail sector.

No Middle Eastern country is classified as a low income country. This shows that citizens and residents have relatively good purchasing power, and this is an extremely important factor for the growth of any retail sector.

Moreover, with its approximately 300 Million inhabitants, the region constitutes huge markets with many investment opportunities. A huge percentage of the inhabitants are younger than 14 years old, and this on its own is an appealing market share.

Although still considered somehow a conservative and closed area of the world, the region is gradually opening up to western tastes, products, services, etc. Competition amongst retailers is becoming fiercer with time as new brands and concepts are being introduced quickly into the market. For this reason, the need for exceptional customer service in the fashion retail industry in rising due to great competition.

Chapter 3: Procedures and Methodology

3.1 – Introduction:

The collection of both primary and secondary data on the topic of customer service in the fashion retail industry in the Middle East was not an easy task. Many challenges were faced in some markets when it came to filling surveys, interviewing professionals or performing shop visits. Despite all cultural, legal and religious challenges, a good representative sample was collected and results were successfully extracted and analyzed.

This Chapter will clearly describe the methodology used and the research procedures followed. The Primary data collected through surveys, interviews, and fashion store visits provide critical information needed. In addition to that, the secondary data will also complement the data required. Moreover; the research questions helped in achieving the main goal of the study and direct the research towards the attainment of the required results. Choosing the appropriate research questions is essential in determining a structured framework for the study.

The objective of this thesis is to assess the level of satisfaction, study the week points in customer service in the case of big retailers within the fashion retail sector in the Middle East Area, find out possible causes of customer dissatisfaction and try to come out with a Complete HR system, while focusing on Training and Development, to help solve this problem and improve the business.

3.2 – Research methodology

According to Merriam Webster's dictionary (2012), A research is defined as:" studious inquiry or examination; *especially*: investigation or experimentation aimed at the discovery and interpretation of facts, revision of accepted theories or laws in the light of new facts, or practical application of such new or revised theories or laws".

The Research components are identified as follows:

Figure 3.1: Research Components
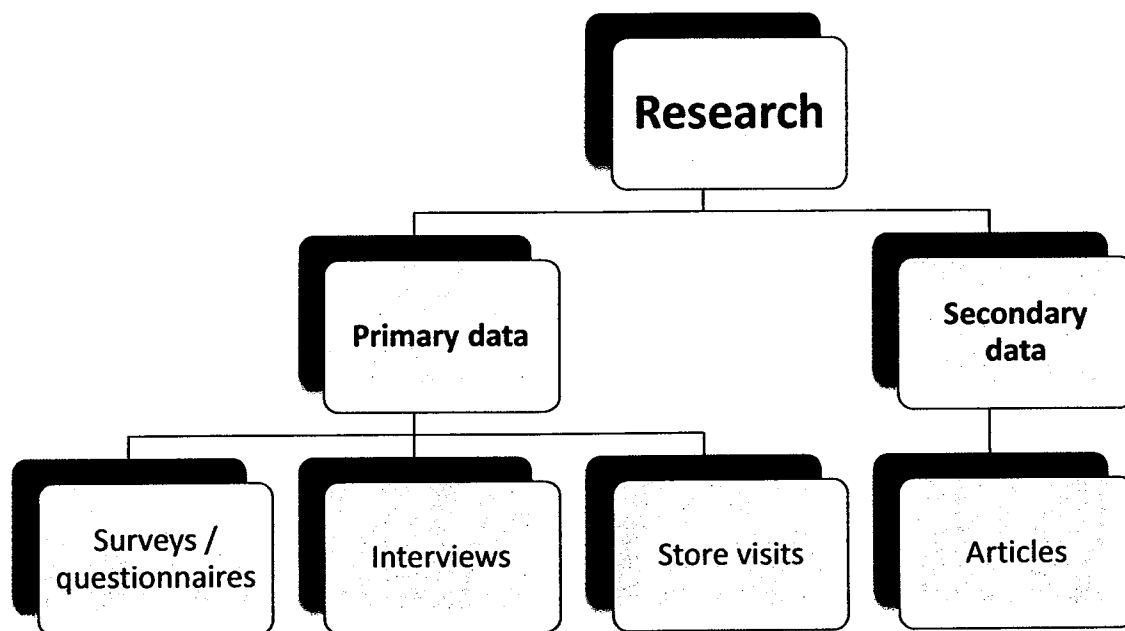
3.2.1 – Primary data:

According to Venture Line, (2012), primary data is defined as:" Data that has not been previously published, i.e. the data is derived from a new or original research study and collected at the source."

For the sake of this research, 3 sources of primary data were identified as follow:

i – Survey

ii – Shop Visits and shop immersion

iii – Interviews

i – Survey:

According the Business Dictionary (2012), a survey is defined as: "A detailed study to gather data on attitudes, impressions, opinions, satisfaction level, etc., by polling a section of the population." The survey done for this research was conducted in the form of questionnaires. The population understudy was the shoppers living in the Middle East Region whether locals or only residents. The sample was that of five hundred shoppers. These shoppers filled questionnaires in

5 different countries in the region. One hundred questionnaires were filled per country. The countries involved in the survey are:

- o Lebanon
- o Qatar
- o United Arab Emirates
- o Sultanate of Oman
- o Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The results of the survey are to be shown and analyzed in the coming chapter.

The questionnaires poll shoppers to identify their opinions on the below areas:

- o Level of customer satisfaction
- o Qualities or characteristics of sales people
- o Approaches and behaviors expected by sales people
- o level of satisfaction in different areas or dimensions of the fashion retail experience

ii – Shop Visits and shop immersion:

For the sake of deeply understanding the fashion retail store environment, I spent a complete month (September 2011) as a trainee in several fashion stores in Lebanon. The reason behind this immersion is to be able to observe behavioral patterns within the stores and try to build a link between various factors and understand how they affect customer service and customer satisfaction.

The brands and branches visited are as follows:

- Zara – Kaslik
- Bershka – Kaslik
- Mango – Kaslik
- Tezenis – Kaslik
- Stradivarious - Kaslik
- Pull and Bear – Kaslik
- Massimo Dutti – Beirut Souks

- Oysho – Beirut Souks
- Boggi – Beirut Souks
- Uterque – Beirut Souks
- Mango Touch – Beirut Souks
- Promod – Verdun
- Salsa - Verdun

iii – Interviews:

Multiple interviews have been made with many professionals such as:

- Brand Managers
- Senior Brand Managers
- Shop Managers
- Retail recruiters
- Retail trainers

The objectives of such interviews were numerous. First is to benefit from the knowhow and skills of such professionals in their own area of expertise and gather information on the below subjects:

1. Recruitment for fashion retail
2. Skills and competencies required in fashion retail
3. Efficiency and effectiveness of customer service training in maximizing customer satisfaction
4. Employees' motivation and their effect on maximizing customer satisfaction
5. Major problems faced in the stores

3.2.2 – Secondary data:

According to the Management Study Guide (2012), Secondary data is defined as:" The data that have been already collected by and readily available from other sources. Such data are cheaper and more quickly obtainable than the primary data and also may be available when primary data cannot be obtained at all."

Very little research have been conducted before in the Middle East Region to measure the level of customer satisfaction in the fashion retail industry, and accordingly not enough data can be found on the subject nor on possible solutions for it. For this reason, the main sources of secondary data used are as follows:

- Articles
- Papers
- Studies
- Business Blogs

3.3 - Conclusion:

The research conducted will aid in reflecting the nature of the market and will clearly show the levels of customer satisfaction. The raw facts and figures of data collected shall be analyzed objectively and scientifically to insure that outcomes are correct and precise.

It is important to use primary and secondary findings in a complementary way in order to be able to provide a complete framework. This frame work will us help understand the true nature of the problem and accordingly provide the most suitable solutions to optimize results.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1 – Introduction:

In this chapter, all the data collected will be sorted, analyzed and graphically displayed in an attempt to use the result in building a clear understanding of the topic and figure out whether the hypotheses were refuted or verified.

The content of the 500 questionnaires equally filled in 5 different countries in the Middle East region (Lebanon – United Arab Emirates – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia – Qatar – Sultanate of Oman) will be displayed in the coming section. After that, we will display the results of the interviews and the observations of the store visits. The surveys were written in English and translated to **Arabic** as some citizens or residents in the countries that I visited were only Arabic speakers.

4.2 – Descriptive statistics and main results:

As mentioned in chapter 3, the primary data was collected from three different sources:
1) Survey / Questionnaires
2) Interviews with professionals
3) Shop visits

4.2.1 – Survey / Questionnaires:

The questionnaire is designed to gather data based on four different dimensions. The first dimension is the overall level of customer satisfaction during a fashion shopping experience in the country of residence. The Second dimension is the qualities or characteristics of sales people in the fashion retail industry of the country of residence. The third dimension is the style of approach of sales people during a fashion shopping experience. Finally, the fourth dimension is the level of satisfaction during different stages of the fashion shopping experience in the country of residence. In the coming sections, we will check the detailed results of the survey by country, and then the overall results.

i – Lebanon:

The sample surveyed in Lebanon is constituted of 100 shoppers in different shopping areas such as: Kaslik, Beirut Souks, Verdun Souks, Le Mall Habtour and City Mall.

Here below are some specifications of the surveyed sample:

Percentage	42.00%	58.00%	100%

Table 4.1: Gender distribution of the surveyed sample in Lebanon

						Total
Percentage	0.00%	29.00%	63.00%	8.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Table 4.2: Age distribution of the surveyed sample in Lebanon

Table 4.1 shows that females constituted 58.33% of the sample while males constituted a minority of 42%. The majority of the shoppers surveyed have ages that range between 18 and 34 years of age. No one was surveyed in Lebanon below the age of 18. 29% of the sample have ages that range between 18 and 24, 63% of the Lebanese sample have age ranges between 24 and 34 while only 8% had ages that ranged between 34 and 64. No surveyed shopper exceeded the age of 64. This shows that the majority of shoppers met are relatively young people, and this is a normal result noting that young people have higher tendencies for shopping

The average level of customer satisfaction scored by fashion shoppers in Lebanon is:

Figure 4.1: the overall percentage of satisfaction of customer shoppers

With all the competition prevailing in the Lebanese fashion retail market, achieving a 66.25 % level of satisfaction is not an impressive result. As per GWR (Standards of Mystery Shopping Reports, 2012), which administers mystery shopping waves for regional retailers, the anticipated level of satisfaction should rise up to at least 75% to be on average. This result shows that fashion retailers in Lebanon are still lagging behind the required level of satisfaction.

The Lebanese shoppers described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 31.43%, "Respectful" comes second for 20% while "Indifferent" comes third with 17.14%. All results are displayed as follows:

Figure 4.2: Ratings of Sales people characteristics in Lebanon

The Pie chart below show how Lebanese shoppers prefer sales people to approach them during their shopping experience. Although the results were diverse, 56% still preferred to be only helped upon request, 35% likes to be greeted and then left alone and the remaining 9% likes to be greeted and then directly approached.
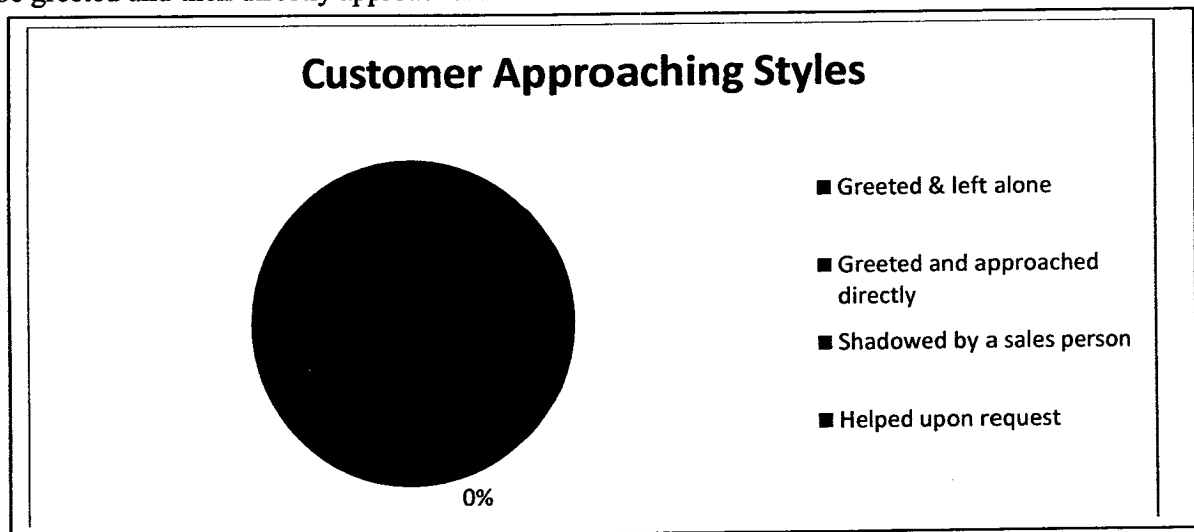
Figure 4.3: Ratings of different customer approaching styles in Lebanon

The below bar chart shows that Lebanese shoppers were mostly satisfied with stores' atmospheres and décor. More retailers are focusing a lot on the shopping environment making it as luxurious and comfortable as possible. Merchandising and displays were rated second with 66.67% also showing the importance and impact of the shopping environment. On the other hand, Lebanese sales people scored only 48.61% on their ability to handle customer complaints. This might be caused by their inability to properly handle complaints or caused by the demanding and knowledgeable nature of Lebanese customers. The satisfaction rate for product selection and product knowledge is relatively low as well, 60.42% and 53.47% respectively, so this shows that these are major areas for improvement. All in all, the general satisfaction rate in different areas and stages of the fashion shopping experience in Lebanon is not high and improvements are required to protect business from fierce competition.

Figure 4.4: Rating satisfaction in various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in Lebanon
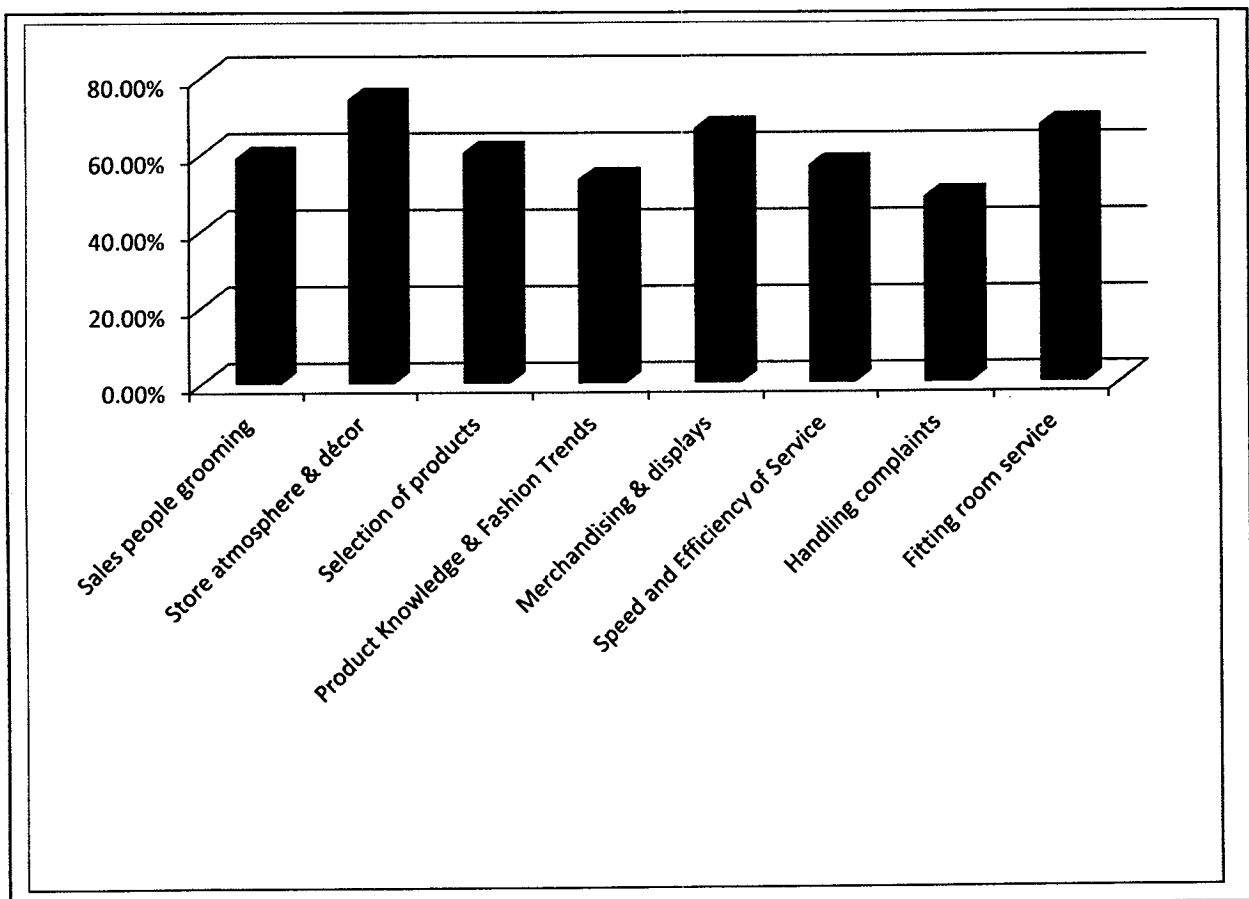
ii– Qatar:

The sample surveyed in Qatar is constituted of 100 shoppers in two different shopping areas which are: Villagio Mall and Landmark Mark Mall.

Here below are some specifications of the surveyed sample:

Gender Distribution	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	53.00%	47.00%	100%

Table 4.3: Gender distribution of the surveyed sample in Qatar

Age Groups	<18	18 - 24	24 - 34	34 - 64	>64	Total
Frequency	0	6	21	9	0	36
Percentage	0.00%	17.00%	58.00%	25.00%	0.00%	100.00%

Table 4.4: Age distribution of the surveyed sample in Qatar

The above tables show that females constituted 47% of the sample while the remaining 53% were all males. The majority of the shoppers belonged to age groups ranging between 18 and 34 years of age. 17% of them belonged to the range 18 till 24, 58% belonged the range 24 till 34 and 25% belonged to the range 34 till 64. This shows that the majority of shoppers met are relatively young people.

The average level of customer satisfaction scored by fashion shoppers in Qatar is:
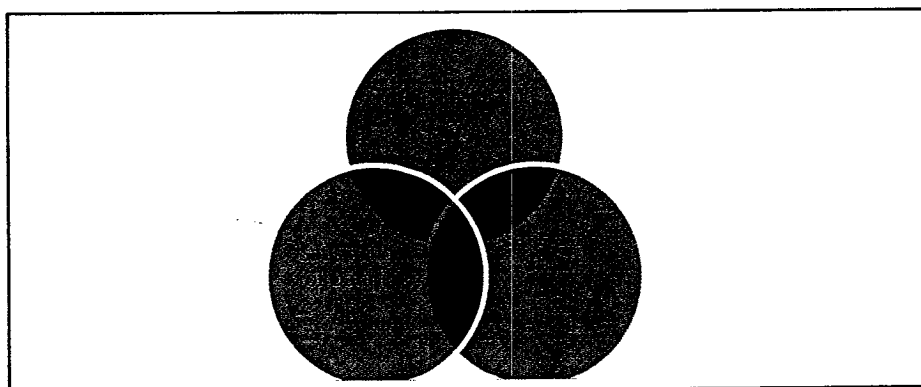
Figure 4.5: the overall percentage of satisfaction of shoppers in Qatar

Scoring a level of 57.78% customer satisfaction is low especially in Qatar where competition is on the rise, Malls are under construction, world cup preparation already started and the country is opening up more and more. The satisfaction level of Qatari's is 68% which is 11.88% higher than that of non-locals. This is mainly caused by the difference in expectations of the two groups.

The shoppers in Qatar described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 34.09%, "Respectful" comes second for 31.82% while "Indifferent" comes third with 13.64%. All results are displayed as follows:

Figure 4.6: Ratings of Sales people characteristics Qatar

The Pie chart below shows how shoppers in Qatar prefer sales people to approach them during their shopping experience. Although the results were diverse, 50% still preferred to be only helped upon request, 25% likes to be greeted and approached directly, 19% prefer being helped upon request and only 6% wish to be shadowed by a sales person during their shopping.

Figure 4.7: Ratings of different customer approaching styles in Qatar

The below bar chart shows that shoppers in Qatar were the most satisfied with stores' atmospheres and décor as well as selection of products. More retailers are focusing a lot on the shopping environment making it as luxurious and comfortable as possible. Sales people grooming was rated third and this shows that the image of sales people is somehow maintained. On the other hand, sales people in Qatar scored 63.05% on their ability to handle customer complaints. This is a critical area that should be focused on in order to improve, since handling a complaint properly can lead to maximizing customer loyalty. The Lowest satisfaction rate was on the fitting room service which scored 59.93%. Knowing that the fitting room is highest selling area in the store (selling, cross selling and upselling), such a low rating might directly affect the sales of the store.

Figure 4.8: Rating satisfaction in various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in Qatar
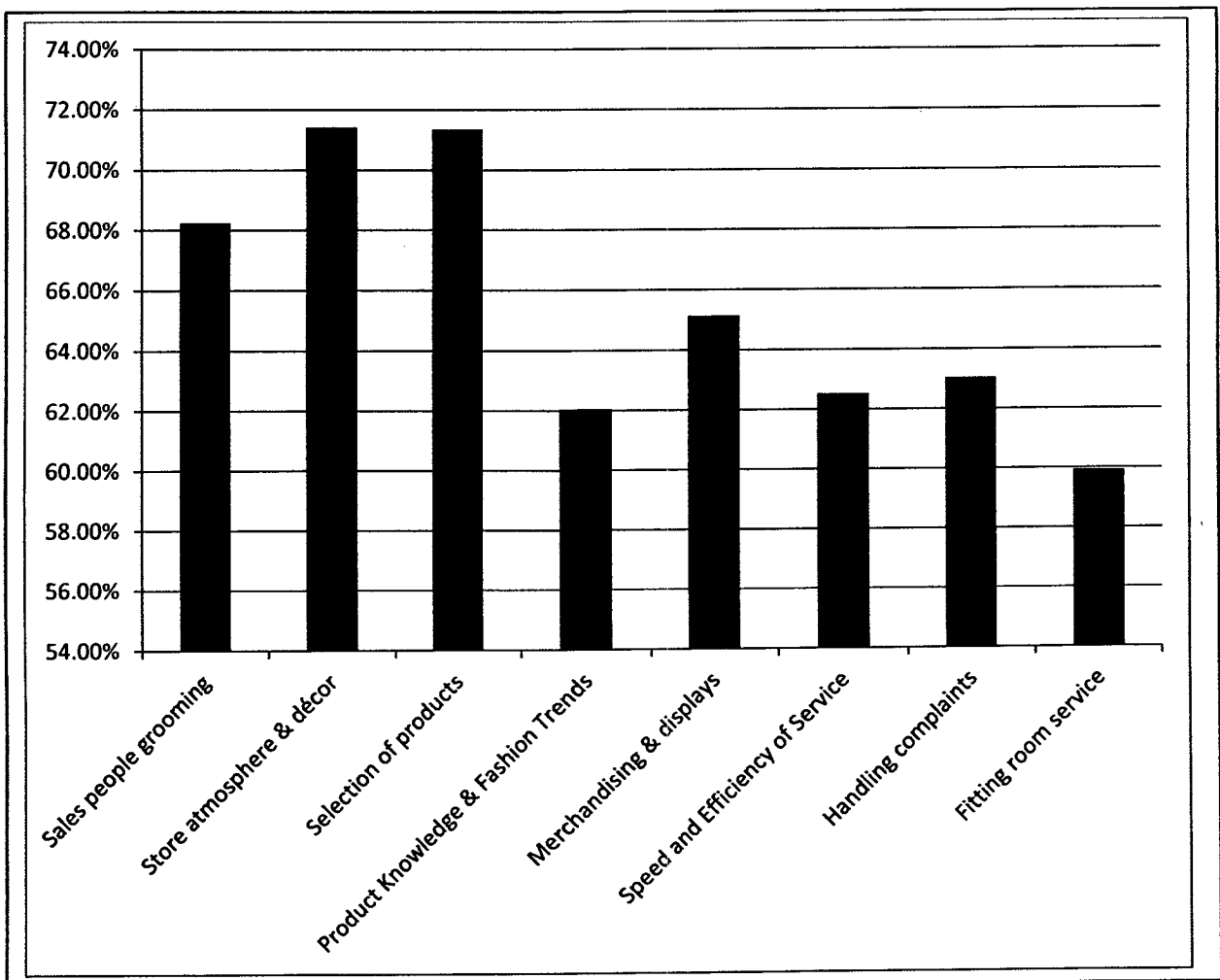
iii – Sultanate of Oman:

The sample surveyed in the Sultanate of Oman is constituted of 100 shoppers in one shopping area which is Muscat City Center also known as Seeb Mall.

Here below are some specifications of the surveyed sample:

Gender Distribution	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	39.00%	61.00%	100%

Table 4.5: Gender distribution of the surveyed sample in Oman

Age Groups	<18	18 - 24	24 - 34	34 - 64	>64	Total
Percentage	3%	47%	45%	5%	0.00%	100.00%

Table 4.6: Age distribution of the surveyed sample in Oman

The above tables show that females constituted 61% of the sample and males constituted only 39%. The majority of ages range between 18 and 34 years of age. 3% belonged to the age group who is under 18, 47% belonged to the age group 18 till 24, 45% belonged to the age group 24 to 34, and the final 5% belonged to the age group 34 to 64. This shows that the majority of shoppers met are relatively young people.

The average level of customer satisfaction scored by fashion shoppers in Oman is:
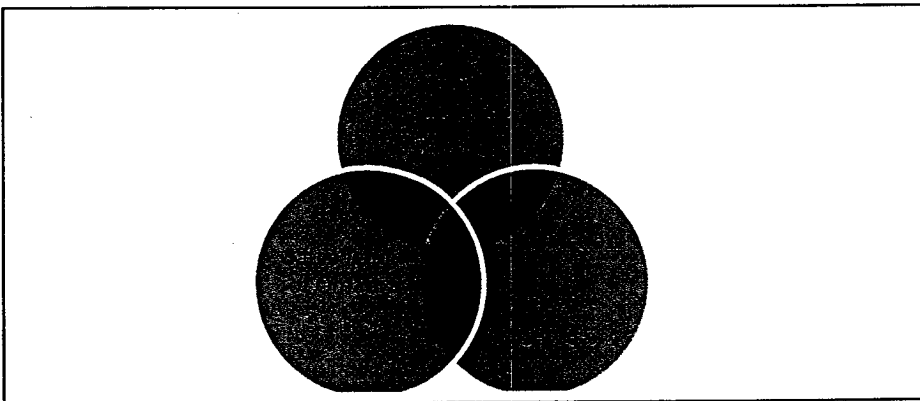
Figure 4.9: the overall percentage of satisfaction of shoppers in Oman

Scoring a level of 54.77% customer satisfaction is relatively low; however, Oman is a unique and special country in term of fashion retail. The majority of the population still wears the traditional "Abaya" even with the young generation. The country is opening up more to western tradition, but the evolvement is slow. More malls are opening and more tourists and expatriates are slowly heading to this country. The future of fashion retail seems bright, yet retailers need to be patient as the progress is slower than all of their neighboring countries.

The shoppers in Oman described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Respectful" the most frequent description with 33.82%, "Helpful" comes second with 27.94% while "Indifferent" comes third with 17.65%. All results are displayed as follows:
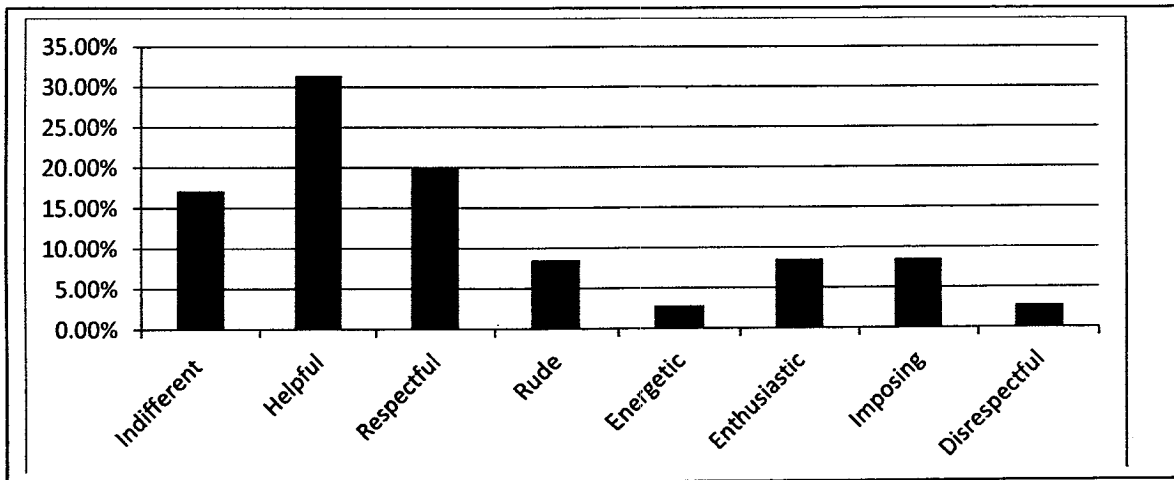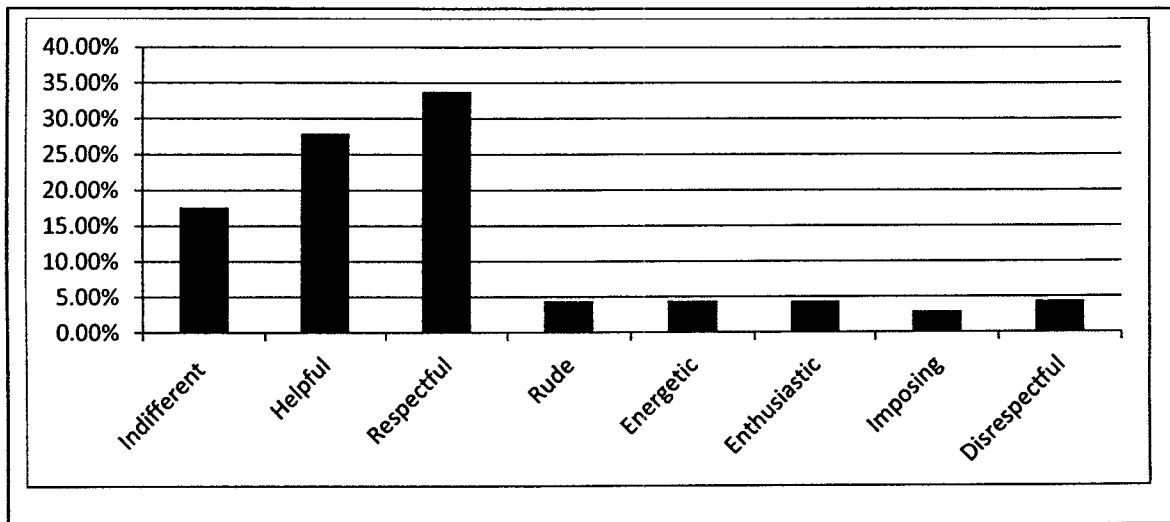

Figure 4.10: Ratings of Sales people characteristics in Oman

The Pie chart below shows how shoppers in Oman prefer sales people to approach them during their shopping experience. Although the results were diverse, 34% still preferred to be only helped upon request, 32% likes to be greeted then approached directly, 18% prefers to be shadowed during their shopping and the remaining 16% wishes to be greeted and then left alone.
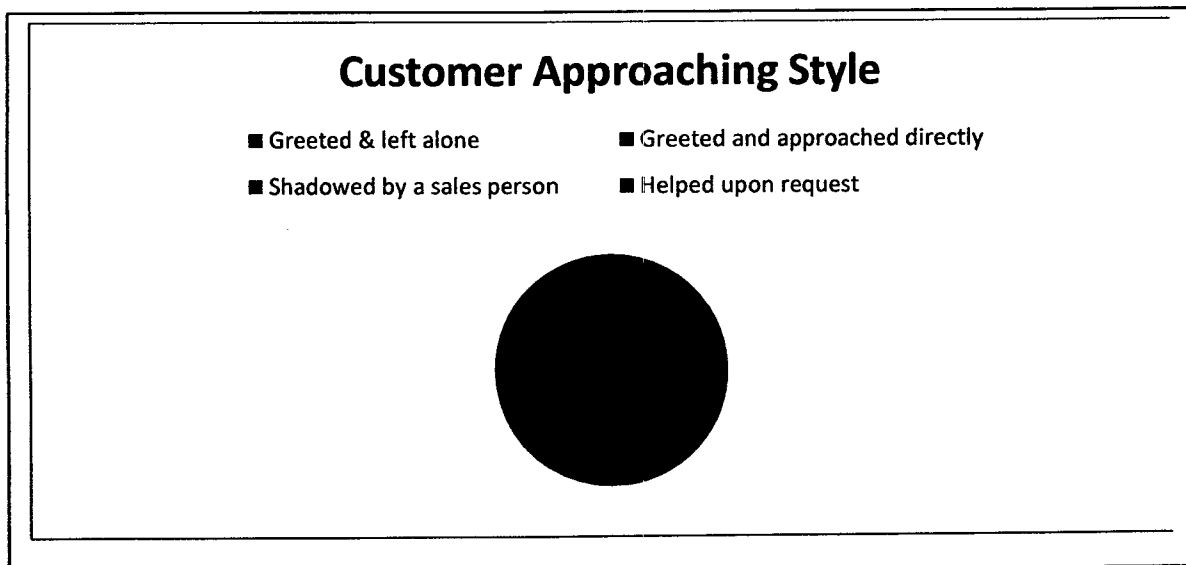
Figure 4.11: Ratings of different customer approaching styles in Oman

The below bar chart shows that shoppers in Oman were the mostly satisfied with the selection of products as well as the stores' atmospheres and décor. Retailers are trying to tailor collections to local tastes, as difficult as that might be, while focusing more on the shopping environment making it as luxurious and comfortable as possible. Sales people grooming was rated third and this shows that the image of sales people is somehow maintained. On the other hand, sales people in Oman scored 65.53% on their ability to handle customer complaints. This is a critical area that should be focused on in order to improve, since handling a complaint properly can lead to maximizing customer loyalty. The Lowest satisfaction rate was on the Product knowledge and fashion trends and it was equal to 60.23%. Product knowledge is essential in the processes of cross selling and up selling; thus, increasing sales.

Figure 4.12: Rating satisfaction in various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in Oman
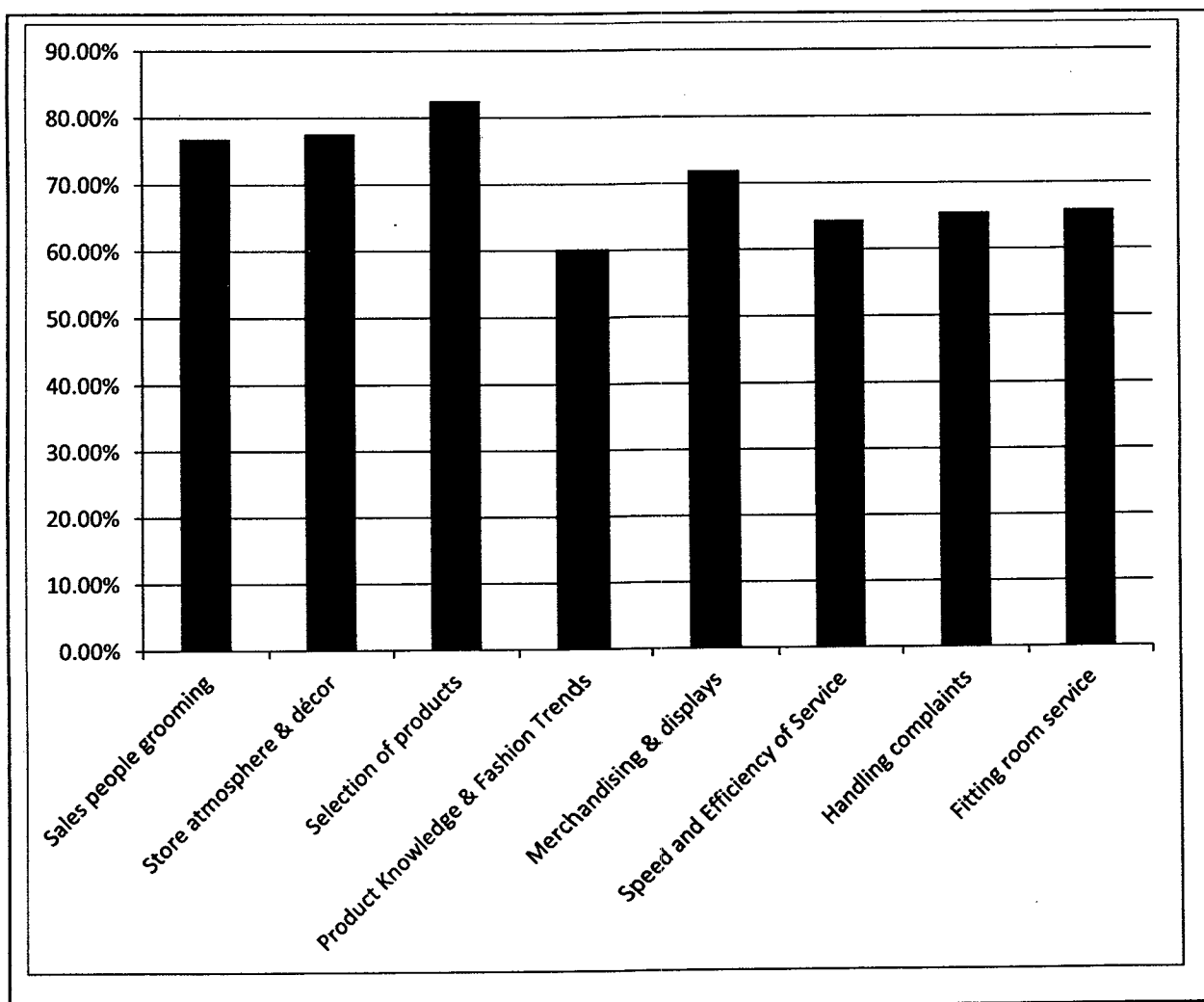
iv – United Arab Emirates:

The sample surveyed in the United Arab Emirates is constituted of 100 shoppers in different shopping areas such as: Mall of Emirates, Dubai Mall and Mall of Arabia

Here below are some specifications of the surveyed sample:

Gender Distribution	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	42.00%	58.00%	100%

Table 4.7: Gender distribution of the surveyed sample in UAE

Age Groups	<18	18 - 24	24 - 34	34 - 64	>64	Total
Percentage	8 %	29%	50.00%	13%	0.00%	100.00%

Table 4.8: Age distribution of the surveyed sample in UAE

The above tables show that females constituted 58.00% of the sample while males constitute 42%. The majority of them ranged between 18 and 34 years of age. 8% of the surveyed sample are less than 18 years, 29% belong to the age group 18 to 24, 50% belong to the age group 24 to 34 and the remaining 13 % belong to the age group 34 to 64. This shows that the majority of shoppers met are relatively young people.

The average level of customer satisfaction scored by fashion shoppers in the United Arab Emirates is:
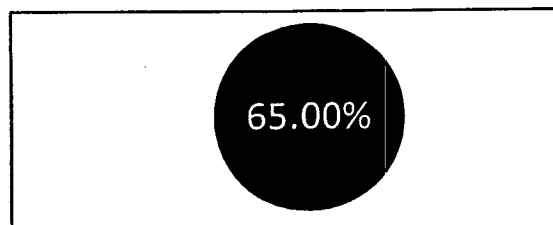
65.00%

Figure 4.13: the overall percentage of satisfaction of shoppers in UAE

With all the competition prevailing in the fashion retail market in UAE, achieving a 65.00 % level of satisfaction is relatively a low score. Dubai in Particular, being a cosmopolitan city, is attracting a wide variety of international brands from all levels. The competition is quite fierce especially that retail sales is high. Every major fashion retailer is trying to grab a bigger bite of the pie. Focusing on good customer service seems to be a good strategy to increase sales and market share.

The shoppers in UAE described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 27.50%, "Indifferent" comes second for 20% while "Respectful" comes third with 17.50%. All results are displayed as follows:
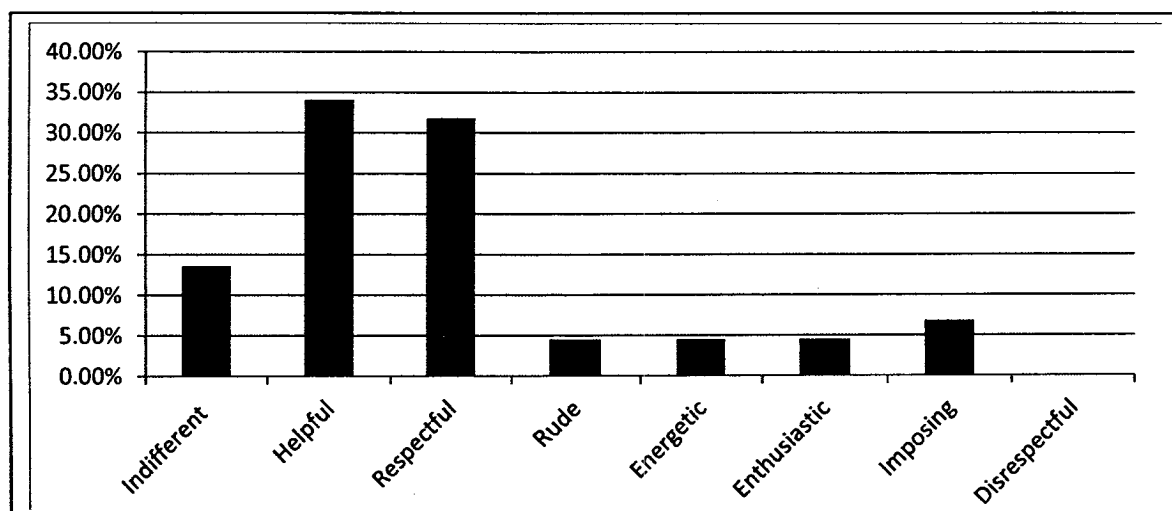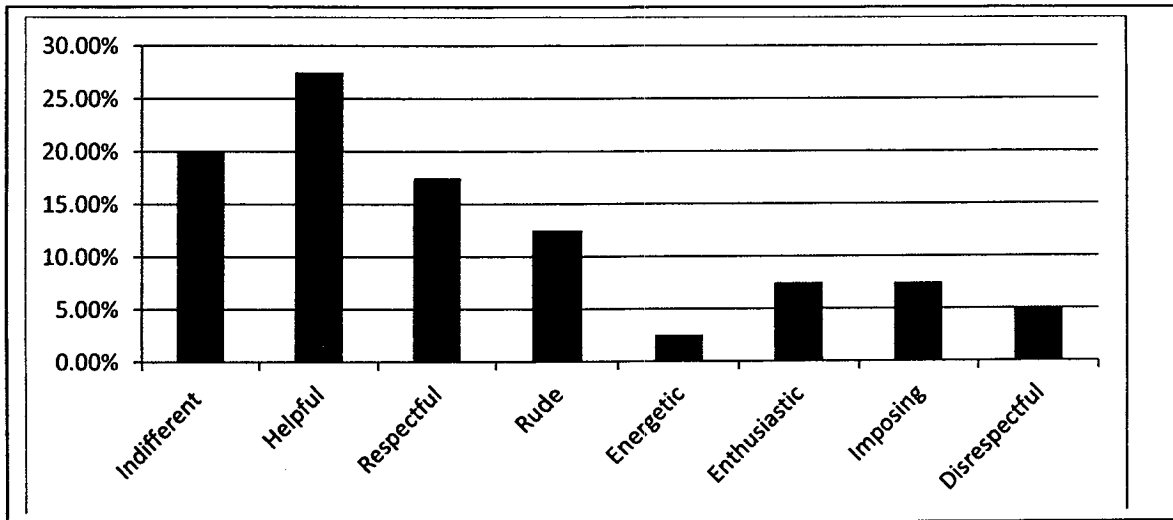

Figure 4.14: Ratings of Sales people characteristics in UAE

The Pie chart below shows how shoppers in UAE prefer sales people to approach them during their shopping experience. Although the results were diverse, 43% still preferred to be only helped upon request, 35% likes to be greeted and then left alone, 13% wish to be shadowed during their shopping and only 9% prefer to be greeted and then left alone directly.
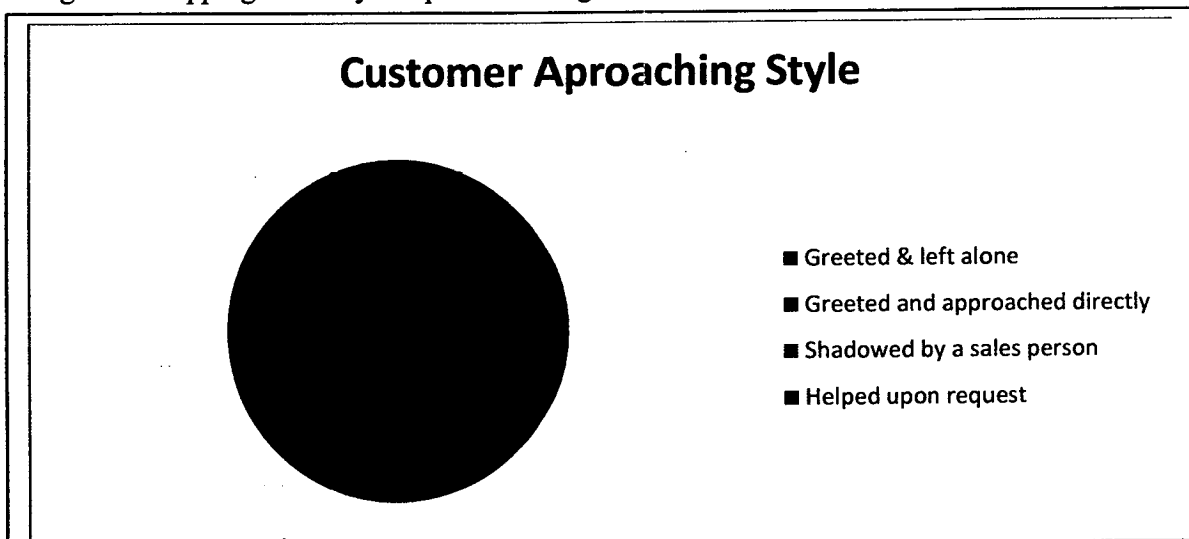
Figure 4.15: Ratings of different customer approaching styles in UAE

The below bar chart shows that shoppers in UAE were the most satisfied with stores' atmospheres and décor. More retailers are focusing a lot on the shopping environment making it as luxurious and comfortable as possible. Fitting room service was rated second with 63.19%. Although this is higher than the others, yet it needs to be improved further. On the other hand, the lowest score was on their ability to handle customer complaints. They scored 48.61% on that area and this is very low. This might be caused by their inability to properly handle complaints or caused by the demanding and knowledgeable nature of resident customers. All in all, the general satisfaction rate in different areas and stages of the fashion shopping experience in UAE is not high and improvements are required to protect business from fierce competition.

Figure 4.16: Rating satisfaction in various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in UAE
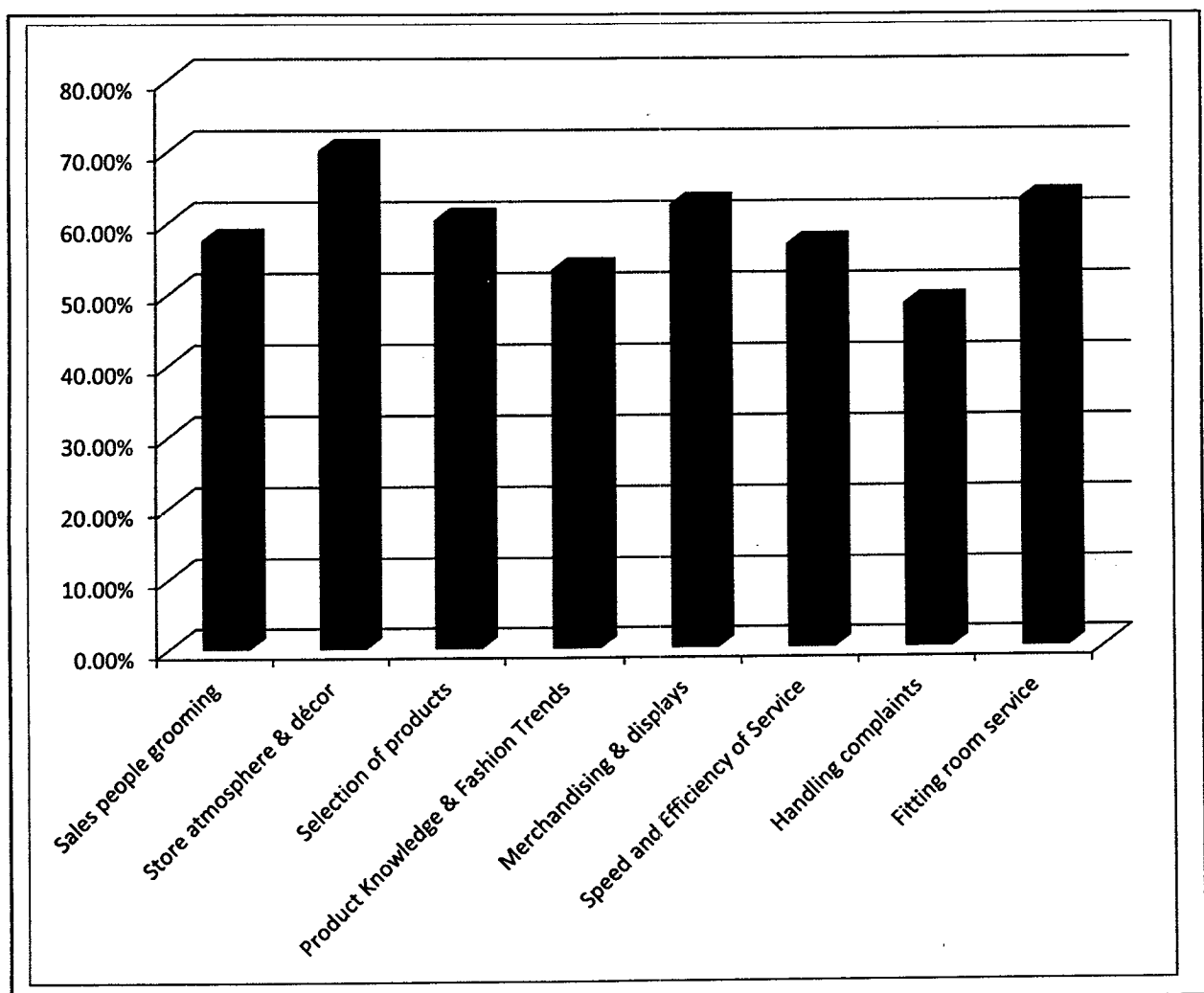
V – Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:

The sample surveyed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is constituted of 100 shoppers in multiple

shopping areas in Riyadh as follows: Granada Mall, Hayat Mall and Panorama Mall

Here below are some specifications of the surveyed sample:

Gender Distribution	Male	Female	Total
Percentage	100.00%	0.00%	100%

Table 4.9: Gender distribution of the surveyed sample in KSA

Age Groups	<18	18 - 24	24 - 34	34 - 64	>64	Total
Percentage	0.00%	19%	77%	4%	0.00%	100.00%

Table 4.10: Age distribution of the surveyed sample in KSA

The above tables show that males constitute 100% of the sample while females constitute 0.00%, and this is due the special conditions of the Kingdom. The majority of ages range between 18 and 34 years of age. No shoppers under the age of 18 were surveyed. 19% of the sample belonged to the age group 18 to 24, 77% belonged to the age group 24 to 34 and the last 4% belonged to the age group 34 to 64. This shows that the majority of shoppers met are relatively young people.

The average level of customer satisfaction scored by fashion shoppers in Lebanon is:
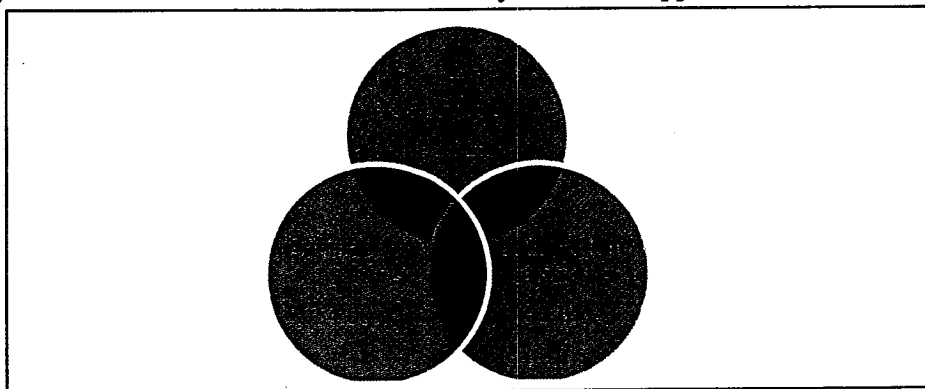
Figure 4.17: the overall percentage of satisfaction of shoppers in KSA

The customer satisfaction level in the kingdom is very low averaging 52.22%. This low rating is

based on 2 main reasons. The first reason is that the Saudi culture puts a lot of restrictions on the

freedom of women and thus limits sales people's ability to provide customer service. While the

second reason is the fact that Saudi citizens are vacationing in various parts of the world and

experiencing the difference in customer satisfaction; thus, expectations are evolving with time.

Although the progress is very slow, the fashion retail environment in becoming modern with time. Saudi's spend a lot of money on fashion shopping as it is one of the few activities allowed in the kingdom, and this is attracting a huge variety of brands especially high end brands.

The shoppers in KSA described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 41.67%, "Indifferent" comes second with 22.22% while "Respectful" comes third with 13.89%. All results are displayed as follows:
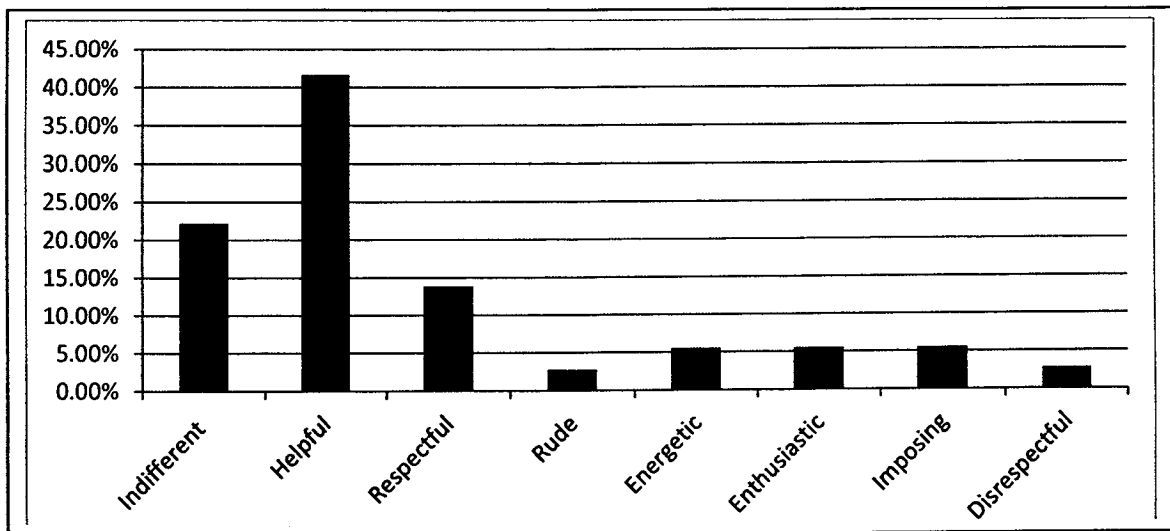
Figure 4.18: Ratings of Sales people characteristics KSA

The Pie chart below show how shoppers in KSA prefer sales people to approach them during their shopping experience. Although the results were diverse, 41% still preferred to be only helped upon request, 33% like shadowed by a salesperson during shopping, 15% wish to be greeted and left alone and 11% prefer to be greeted and approached directly.
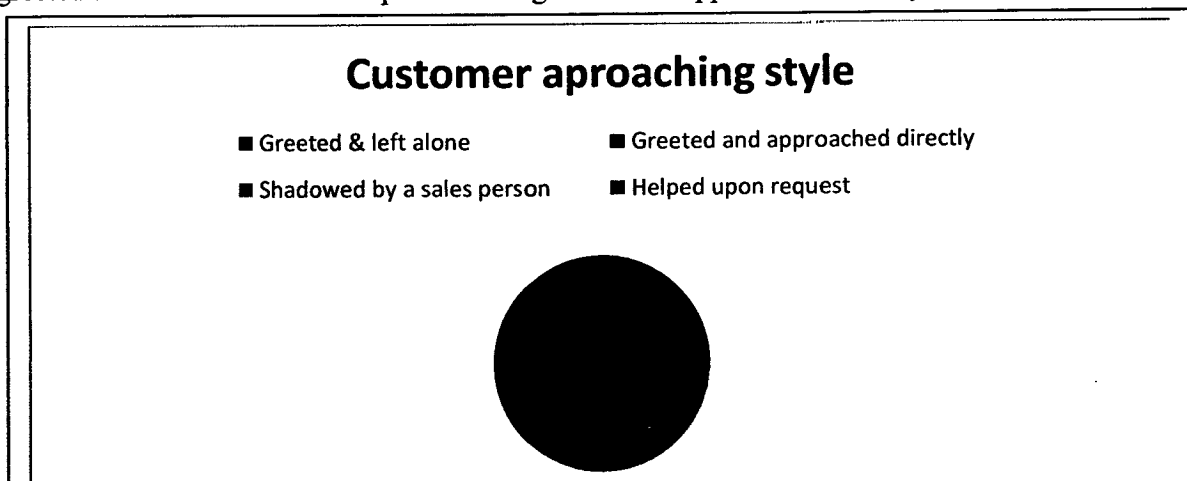
Figure 4.19: Ratings of different customer approaching styles in KSA

The below bar chart shows that shoppers in KSA were the most satisfied with the selection of products as well as the stores' atmospheres and décor. Retailers are trying to tailor collections to local tastes, as difficult as that might be, while focusing more on the shopping environment making it as luxurious and comfortable as possible. Sales people grooming was rated third and this shows that the image of sales people is somehow maintained according to local standards. On the other hand, sales people in KSA scored 50.62% on their ability to handle customer complaints. This is a critical area that should be focused on in order to improve, since handling a complaint properly can lead to maximizing customer loyalty.

Figure 4.20: Rating satisfaction in various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in KSA
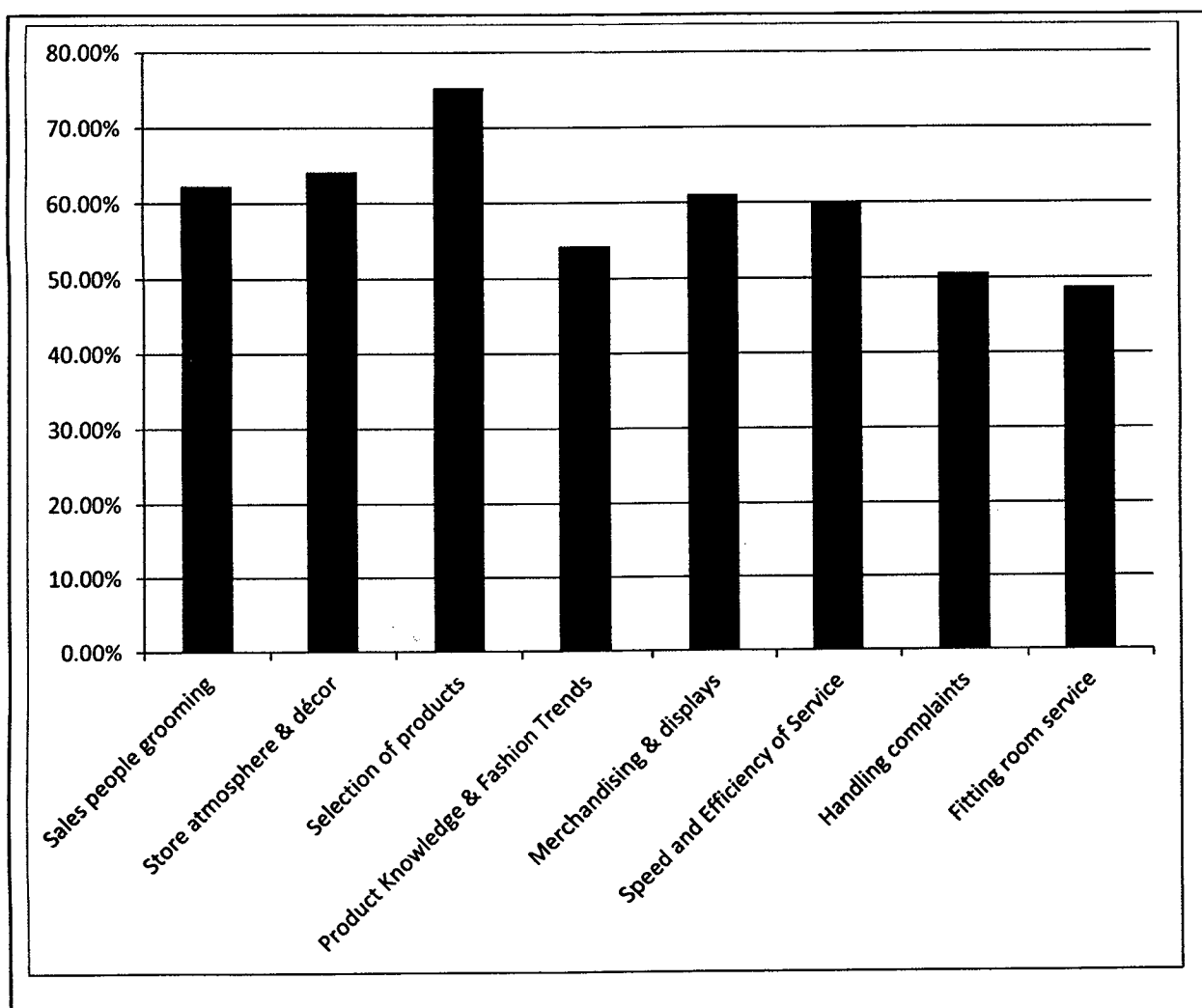
VI – Combined results and Middle East Averages:

After sorting and analyzing the results of the surveys conducted in five different countries of the Middle East Region, all numbers were gathered and combined to come out with an average for the whole region. The five countries constituted the sample to represent the whole population of the region, and accordingly all conclusions were derived.
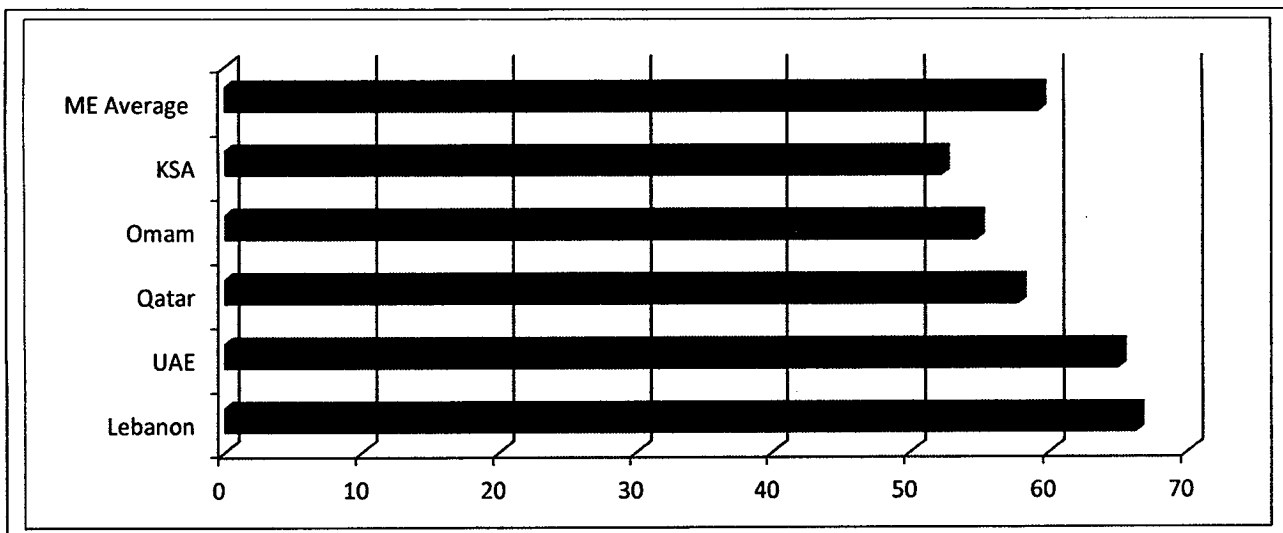
Figure 4.21: the overall percentage of satisfaction of shoppers in the Middle East Region compared to the countries that constituted the sample.

The overall percentage of customer satisfaction across the region is equal to 59.20%, a score that is relatively low. The satisfaction levels in countries surveyed varied between 52.22% in KSA and 66.25% in Lebanon. Referring to GWR (2012), a consulting company that administers mystery shopping reports, for a fashion store to have an average rating on its customer service level, it should score a minimum of 75% as an overall level of customer satisfaction. Scoring below 75% is considered poor and scoring below 70% is considered very poor. Other companies that administer such reports like Ritcom, In-touch and NBTS might have different ratings, yet the ranges are very similar. . Retailers in the region are shifting further towards improving their customer service systems and analyzing the main barriers in front of the achievement of such high levels.

The above stated results support my first Hypothesis (H1) which says:

H1: The Level of Customer Satisfaction in the Middle Eastern Fashion Retail industry is relatively low

The shoppers in the Middle East Region described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 31.84%, "Respectful" comes second for 25.11% while "indifferent" comes third with 17.94%. All results are displayed as follows:
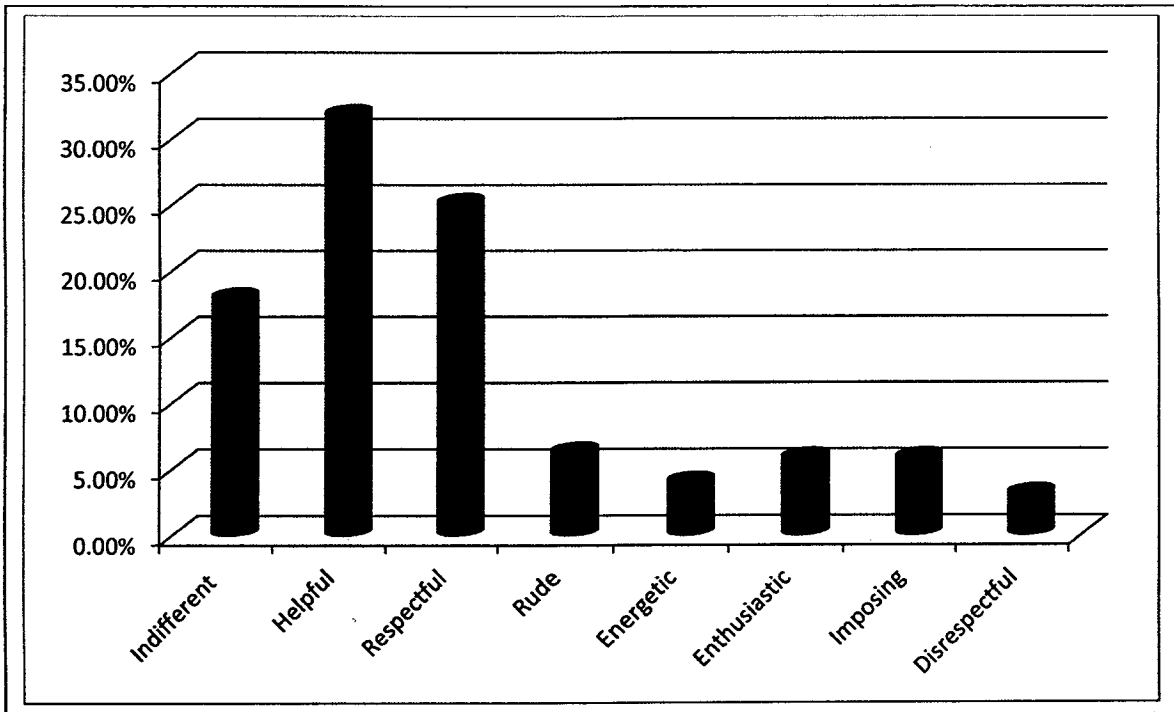
Figure 4.22: Overall Ratings of Sales people characteristics in the Middle East Region

Looking at the above results, it is important to shed light on the below points:

The above mentioned words are not but traits that generally describe sales people in the region. Having Helpful and Respectful Sales people in the stores play a major role in maximizing customer satisfaction, yet it is one of many contributors. The above mentioned traits do not verify whether or not Sales people have the required skills or demonstrate the needed behaviors to provide customers with an outstanding shopping experience. Saying that, it is clear now that providing exceptional customer service requires specific skills, know how, abilities and the display of some behaviors.

The above stated results support my second Hypothesis (H2) which says:

H2: The Low satisfaction level is due to lack of specific skills and basic customer service knowledge.

The Pie chart below shows how customers in the region prefer to be approached once they enter the store to initiate a shopping experience. The results are as follows:

➤ 44% prefer being helped and approached only upon request
➤ 22% prefer being greeted and then left alone
➤ 20% like to be greeted and then directly approached
➤ 14% prefer being shadowed by a sales person
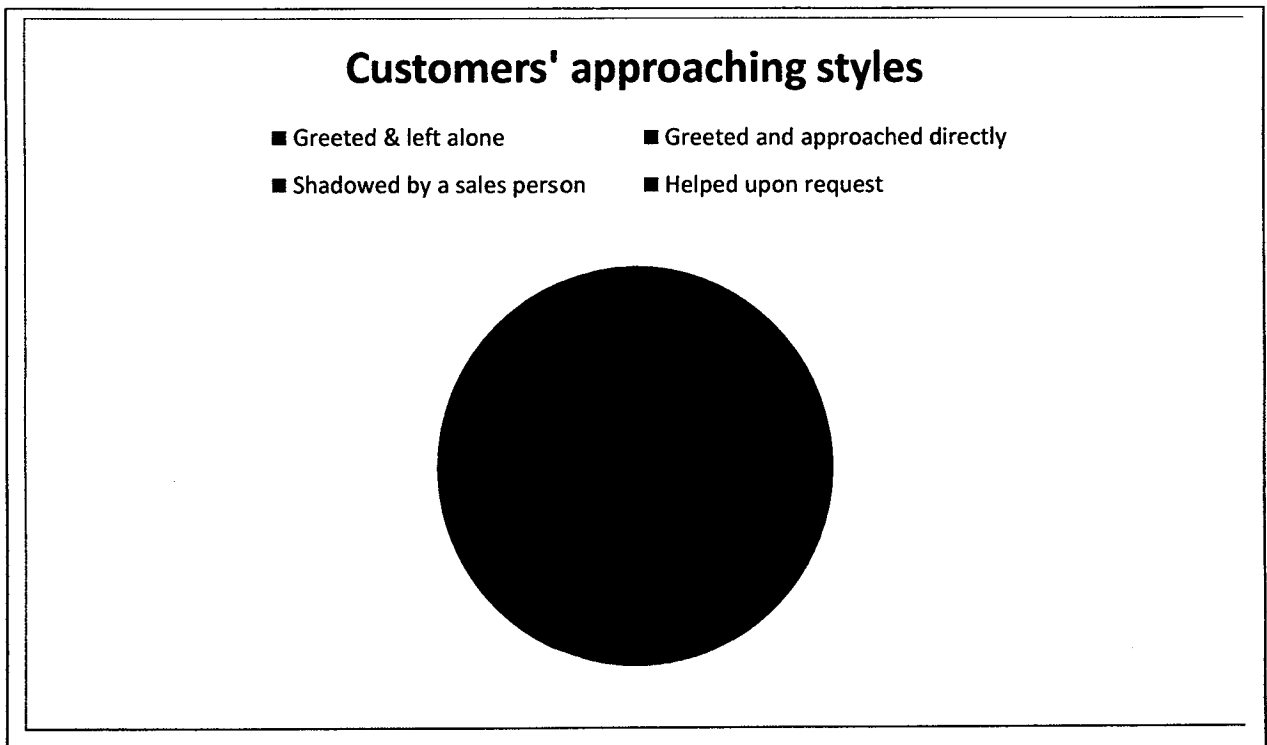
Figure 4.23: Overall ratings of different customer approaching styles in the Middle East Region

The above results are vital and from them we can conclude that Customers come with different tastes and preferences, and to serve the customer well, shop employees need to be able to identify his type, need and preference. Although 44% of the population prefers to be helped upon request, the greeting stays essential as it makes the customer feels welcomes, noticed and important to the store. Greeting helps the sales person to bond with the customer, and this might facilitate the communication process. One important thing to shed light on at this stage is the importance of informing the customer that the sales people are available for help at any time needed, even if the customer prefers to be left alone at the beginning.

If we look at the below ratings, we can clearly see that the highest score (71.98%) went to store atmosphere and décor. This is only normal considering Middle Eastern preference to luxury items in particularly in the Gulf area. Retailers are paying a lot of money to fully equip their stores and render the shopping environment as comfortable and luxurious as much as possible. The lowest rating (55.45%) went to the ability to handle customer complaints. This is a trainable skill that retailers need to pay attention to as it might hinder customer loyalty if not mastered. The overall rating for all the below mentioned areas is not a high rating. All the areas below need to be focused on so that retailers upgrade the overall level of their services and thus maximize customer satisfaction. An exceptional customer service experience requires that all areas and details be fully attended too.
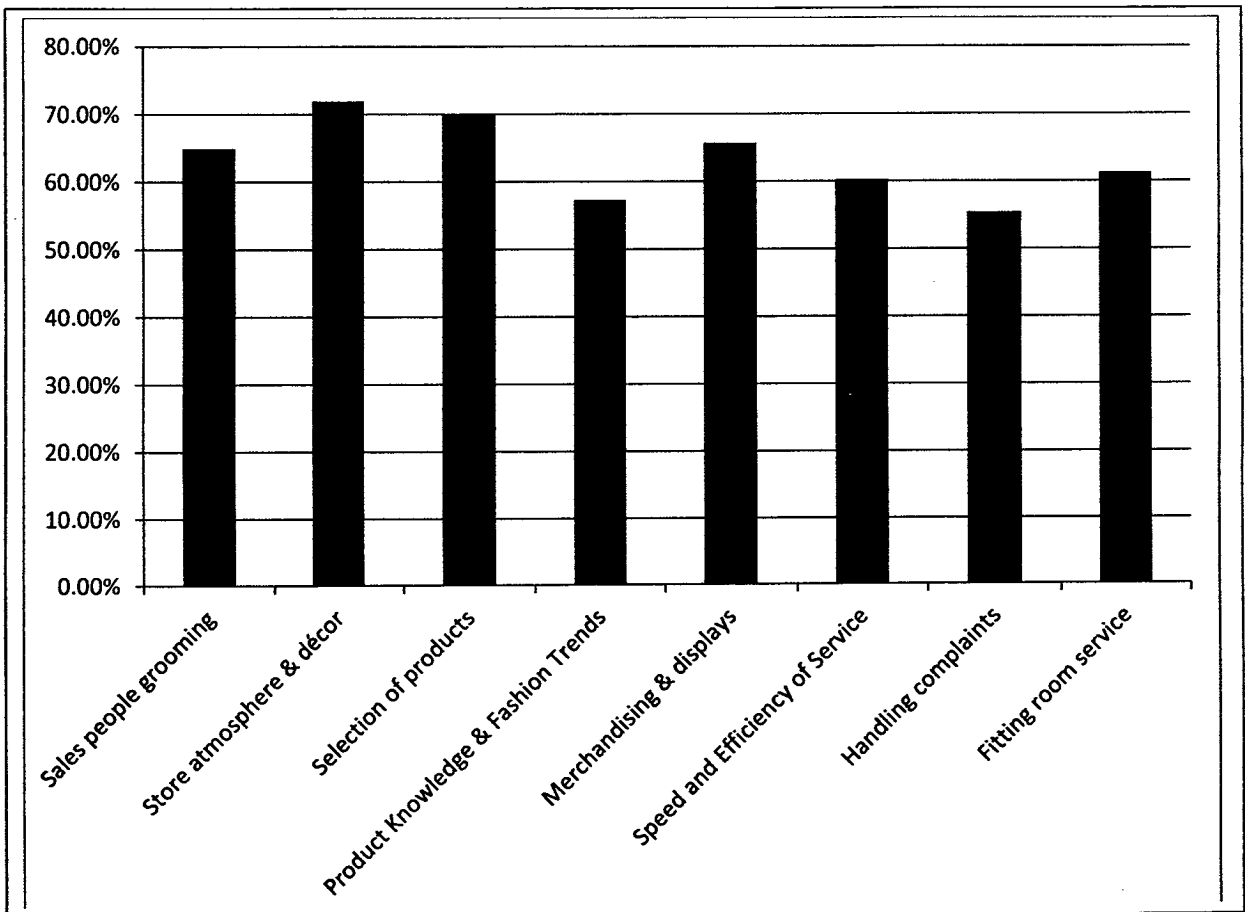
Figure 4.24: Overall ratings of various dimensions of the fashion retail industry in the Middle East Region

4.2.2 - Shop Visits and shop immersion:

The month spent in various fashion stores in Lebanon during the month of September 2011 was insightful. Being physically present in a store environment allowed me to observe the behaviors sales people display and to try to figure out and analyze the reasons behind it.

To start with, let me provide a brief description of a fashion store's physical environment. Working in a fashion store is a fun and exciting experience. It is dynamic and interactive and does not require sitting behind a desk for long periods of time. The environment is often fancy and very well decorated, ventilated and lit with an ambiance that reflect the real taste and image of the brand. On the other hand, working in the retail industry, requires that one exerts physical efforts not required from people in back office positions.

When it comes to sales people, it was noticed that the vast majority of shop employees are young people not more than 30 years old. This is an anticipated phenomenon since such types of work requires some physical effort that can be more easily handled by younger individuals, and since shop employees are required to be fit and energetic. Physical exhaustion and tiredness can be a major source of demotivation and a contributing cause to a low level of customer service.

Shop employees are mostly fashionable and trendy in countries where this can be observed. This passion for fashion is necessary as it might be a major source of motivation in their job. The work schedules in the stores are very demanding and employees are required to work on weekends and holidays. Accordingly, they will have to re-plan their lives to adapt to this new lifestyle.

Some employees in the stores are not trained well or lack the basic skills and knowledge that will allow them to provide a high level of service and thus obtain a high level of customer satisfaction. For this reason, trainings and developmental initiatives are necessary. In addition to that, shop managers play a vital role in motivating, coaching, following up and ensuring that all standards are abided to.

4.2.3 – Interviews:

To understand deeply the true essence of customer service on the floor along with barriers and difficulties of supplying customers with exceptional service, interviews with store managers and brand managers were conducted. These interviews provided realistic preview of the store environment, sales people and customer service.

It was concluded from these interviews that shop employees are usually hands on individuals. They mainly learn by doing and practicing and not by sitting and listing to theories as they will lose interest easily and learning will not fully take place. Usually, after a training session, few are the behaviors that will be actually displayed in the store since it is not always clear how to transform theories into real practices and behaviors displayed in the stores. One of the major week points in trainings provided to retail employees is the absence of follow up. It takes time and practice to break old habits and build new habits. For this reason, lack of follow up after a training session might prevent the display of desired behaviors during the provision of customer service.

One of the major problems faced in fashion stores is that sales employees lack the essential and basic knowledge in products, fashion and trends. This is depriving them from the ability to convince customers, cross sell them or even up-sell them. Moreover; the motivation barrier plays a major role in displaying enthusiasm and energy while serving the customers. For this reason, retailers need to plan initiatives to keep employees motivated, and thus willingly provide exceptional customer service. Some of the initiatives can be employee of the month, career planning and promotion, succession planning, recognition certificates, thank you letters for specific achievements, week end days off for top performers, and others.

The above stated results clearly support the third hypothesis. It is not about providing training, it is about the design of a complete and well structures training system supported by all other complementary HR functions.

H3: Satisfaction level can be maximized through a very well designed training system and well-structured HR practices.

4.3 – Discussion of the hypothesis:

The afore mentioned results, and as specified in previous sections, support all three hypothesis of the research.

The hypothesis required to prove were as follows:

H1: The Level of Customer Satisfaction in the Middle Eastern Fashion Retail industry is relatively low.

H2: The Low satisfaction level is due to lack of specific skills and basic customer service knowledge.

H3: Satisfaction level can be maximized through a very well designed training system and well-structured HR practices.

The overall customer satisfaction rate scored in the Middle East area and equal to 59.2%, as compared to the minimum 75% required by mystery shoppers to consider the service "average", supports the validity of the first hypothesis **H1**.

The sales people in the region were mainly described as helpful and respectful. This shows that low customer satisfaction is not due to the nature and characteristics of the sales people, yet to the absence of certain required skills. This supports the validity of the second hypothesis **H2**.

The interviews conducted with shop managers and brand managers showed that trainings were not giving the return and results anticipated. This led us to the conclusion that Customer service training alone will fail to yield complete learning. For this reason, we believe that the customer service trainings should be supported by complete training and HR systems. This supports the validity of the third hypothesis **H3**.

4.4 – Conclusion:

In conclusion, the research was conducted to generate results and support the hypothesis stated on customer service in the Middle East Region, so we can say that the research was able to meet its original objectives as all three hypotheses stated were supported and validated by the results of the research conducted as well as the interviews. The results of the research will be used in order to build in the next chapters a well-structured program and practices that will allow any big retailer to maximize customer satisfaction and provide exceptional customer service.

Chapter 5: The Training System

5.1 - Introduction:

The previous chapter showed that customer service levels in the region are relatively low and that one reason behind that is that sales associates lack some basic skills that are necessary in maximizing customer satisfaction. The purpose of this chapter is to propose a complete training and development system that aims at bridging the gaps in customer service in fashion retail, especially when it comes to huge retailers. This training system will try to target all the needed skills that are missing. The new system is complete, comprehensive and continuous as compared to old systems.

5.1.1 – Definition of training:

According to the Business Dictionary (2011), the term training is defined as: "Organized activity aimed at imparting information and/or instructions to improve the recipient's performance or to help him or her attain a required level of knowledge or skill."

5.1.2 – Definition of development:

According to Merriam-Webster (2012), the term development is defined as: "An ongoing act or process of growing or causing something to grow or become larger or more advanced."

Training is a developmental tool that aims at upgrading the level of competencies; those are observable and/or measurable knowledge, skills, abilities or behaviors that contribute to successful job performance.

5.2 – The current system:

5.2.1 – Brief description:

Based on my shop visits in multiple countries of the Middle East and on the interviews I conducted with shop employees and retail trainers, I can say that most fashion retailers in the region have similar training practices when it comes to customer service and customer relationship management. The current trend is to have off the job training sessions that cover

diverse topics related to customer service. The majority of such trainings happen in corporate premises or company designated training rooms. Although retailers are having hard times and facing aggressive competition, few have taken the initiative to find alternative means of trainings to strengthen their service and customer satisfaction, and the majority of retailers are still reluctant about investing additional money on this issue.

5.2.2 – Weaknesses of the current system:

The current system or as I would like to call it: "The one time training system" or "the off the job training system" has some major weaknesses. The first weakness is that the majority of such trainings are generic trainings not customized to specific countries, brands, cultures, etc. this hinders the efficiency of these trainings as well as the amount of learning. Secondly, such trainings are mostly done in an off the job setting, so no link between theories and on the job practices is being done. The third weakness is that these trainings lack follow up. Once the training ends, no reminders take place. For this reason, the level of information retention is relatively low. Moreover, many theories covered in such trainings are vague and inapplicable in a store environment, especially in big commercial stores. Not all theoretical practices in customer service can be applicable in real life fashion stores. Furthermore, such trainings might not focus on some basic behaviors that are essential to be displayed in a store like environment. Customer service trainings usually do not take into consideration the fact that other elements might directly affect customer service and levels of customer satisfaction, so they disregard such elements although they might be trainable as well, so the system might not yield the return on investment intended from it.

5.2.3 – Advantages of the current system:

Although the current system has all the above mentioned weaknesses, it does have some advantages as well. First, the system is simple, and it is easily managed and monitored. The second advantage is that the system is not time consuming and does not require a lot of follow up. Also, the cost of administering such a system is lower than having a comprehensive and elaborated system. In addition to all of that, it is worth stressing on the fact that such systems require less administrative work and coordination effort.

5.3 – Insights into the proposed system:

The proposed system as mentioned before is a comprehensive system. It is based on training yet it depends on other practices that play a vital role in ensuring the highest level possible of customer satisfaction. Discussed below are the different elements that constitute the new system.

1) Off the job trainings ensure the transfer of all relevant knowledge.
2) On the Job Trainings ensure the mastering of specific behaviors and skills as well as ensure making the link between theory and practice.
3) Other contributing practices that the support the efficiency of the trainings in yielding the required results.

5.4 – Off the job trainings:

The role of the off the job trainings is to transmit chunks of needed knowledge. This knowledge is essential for ensuring that sales associates are equipped with what is needed to secure customer needs are understood and hence satisfied. It also arms them with the basic communication skills needed to effectively and efficiently communicate with customers and with each other, and it enables them to become able to display all behaviors essential to optimize satisfaction and ensure proper service. Moreover; the training also strengthens interpersonal bonds and team work to ensure synergy and proper flow of work.

Since managers play as well a major role that directly affect Customer service and customer satisfaction, some major trainings are needed on managerial level to ensure that managers are able to properly manage their teams and their stores and are armed with the proper leadership and communication skills to ensure employee satisfaction, motivation, high levels of productivity as well as other issues. These trainings also allow managers to be able to manage their time and other resources in the most efficient way, and arm them with all the technical skills that enable them to run their stores while minimizing costs and maximizing earnings.

5.4.1 – Characteristics considered in off the job trainings:

Whenever delivering an off the job training session to commercial people working in fashion stores, the designer of the session as well as the facilitator / trainer should be aware of multiple factors.

People working in retail are not used to sitting in the same place for long periods of time as their level of concentration drops quickly as time passes. Such learners have a Tactile/kinesthetic learning style. They learn usually by experimenting, moving, touching and doing. They are not very receptive to theories. People working in retail are "street smart" individuals and have extensive knowledge in retail and fashion. They are energetic and endure physical effort.

For the above reasons, it is essential to follow a specific methodology when designing a training session/workshop for shop employees. While doing so, one should be able to pay major attention. The session needs to be interactive and stimulating. Trainers should use role plays and exercises to ensure behavioral learning took place. They need to make sure to allow them to talk. Listening for a long time is not something they enjoy. The trainers must involve movies, games and group brainstorming to strengthen the learning process, and they need to make sure to use a lot of visuals to ensure maximum retention of knowledge. The language can be a major barrier of understanding, so trainers must speak in a language understood by everyone. In addition to that, one must ensure that the training venue is a friendly and relaxing environment that contributes to learning.

5.5 – Basic off the job trainings needed: Topics, descriptions and outlines

Discussed in this section are the different topics of off the job trainings needed to ensure an easy flow of customer service. Find below the topics, descriptions and outlines of such trainings.

5.5.1 - Exceptional customer service:

This one day training session highlights the basic knowledge, skills and behaviors required by a sales associate to ensure the implementation of exceptional customer service and thus drive customers closer to ultimate satisfaction. Below are the major recommended learning objectives that this training is based on:
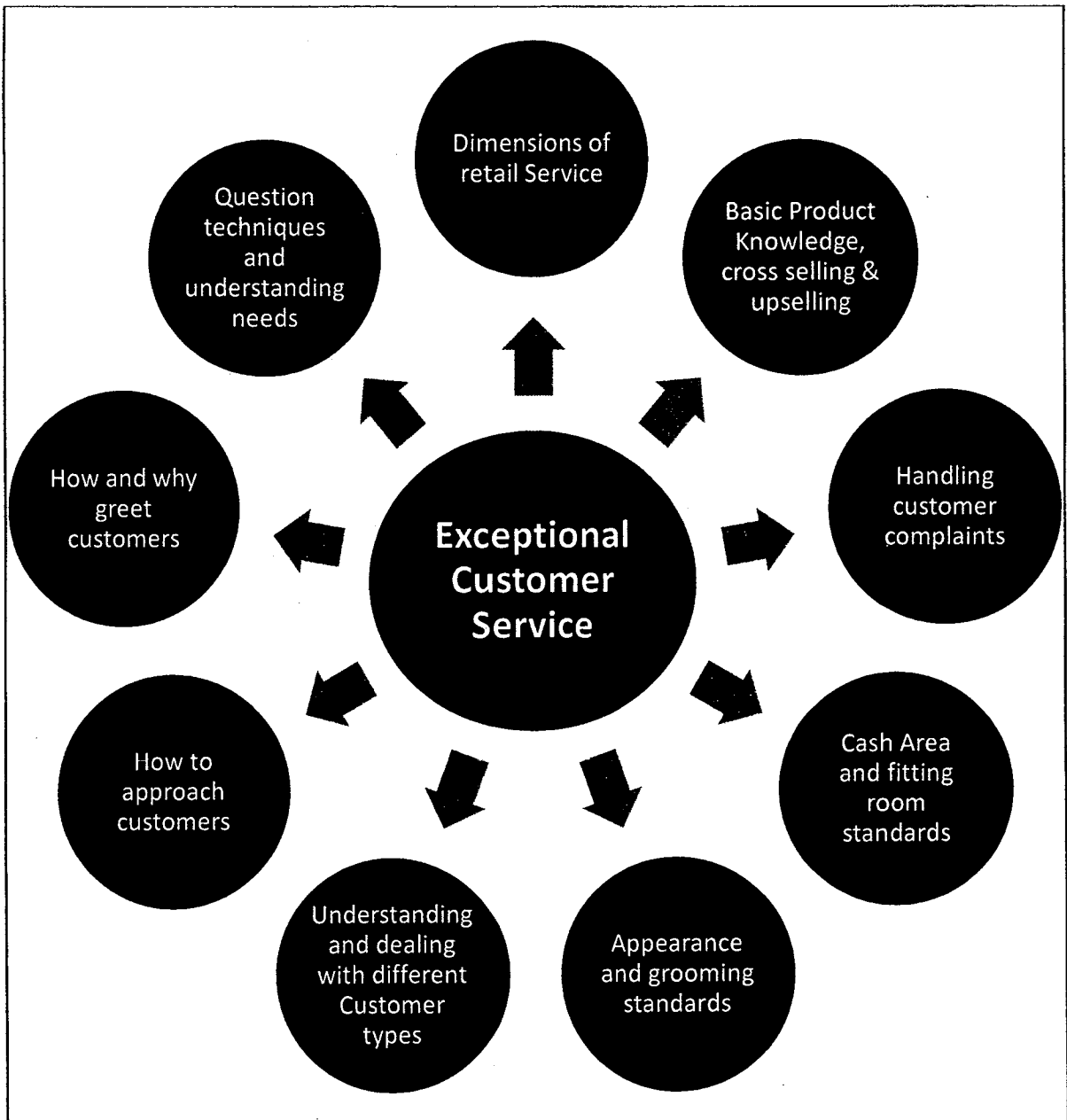
Figure 5.1: Learning objectives of the exceptional customer service training

5.5.2 – Basics of Communication:

This is a one day training session that equips the trainees with the basic tools necessary to undergo effective communication while fully understanding all components of the communication process. Below are the major recommended learning needs that this training is based on:
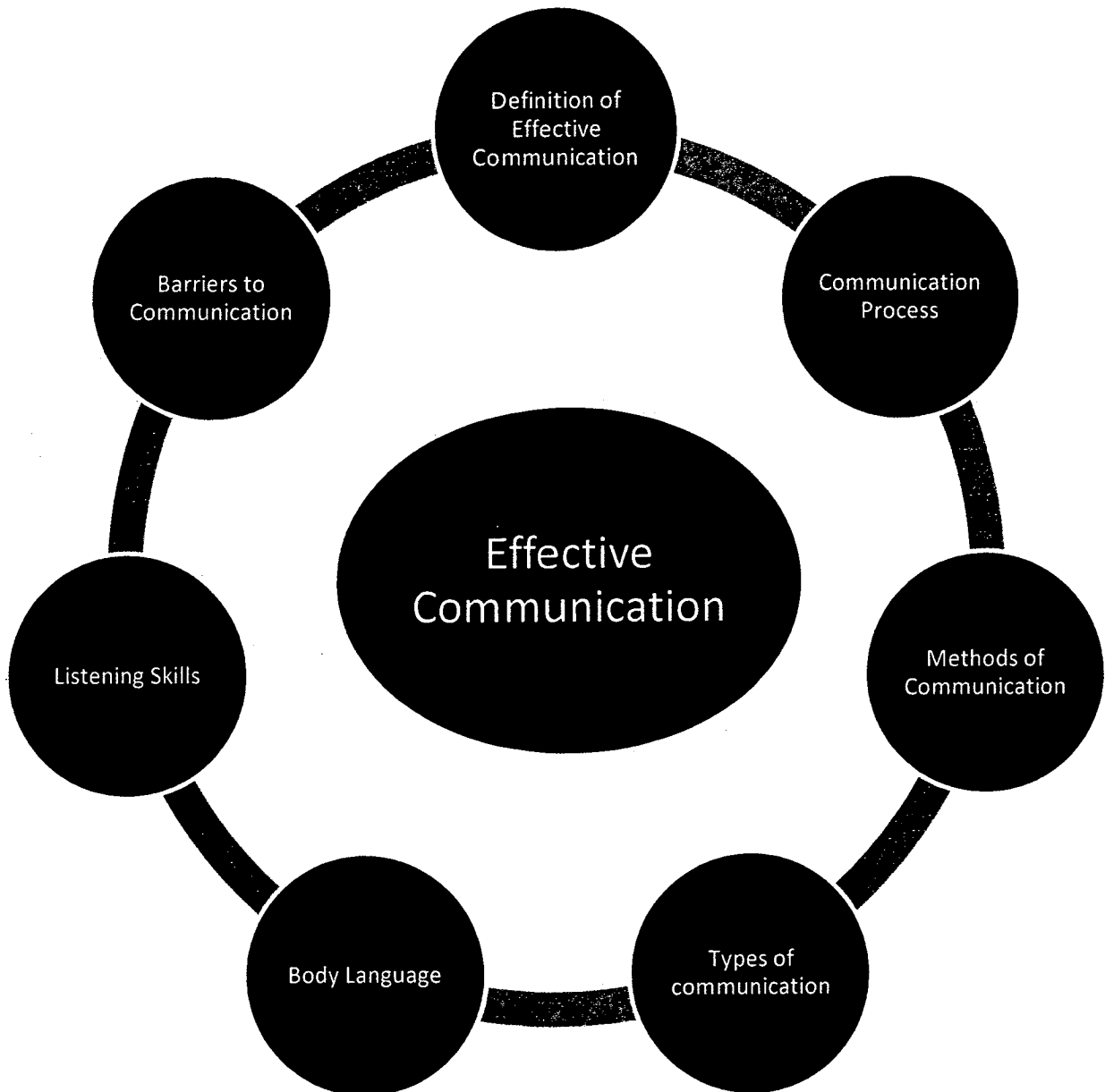
Figure 5.2: Learning objectives of the effective communication skills training.

5.5.3 – Team Building:

This is a one day training session that strengthens the bonds of trust and respect within a team thus facilitating communication and coordination and enhancing team spirit, cooperation and synergy. Below are the major recommended learning needs that this training is based on:
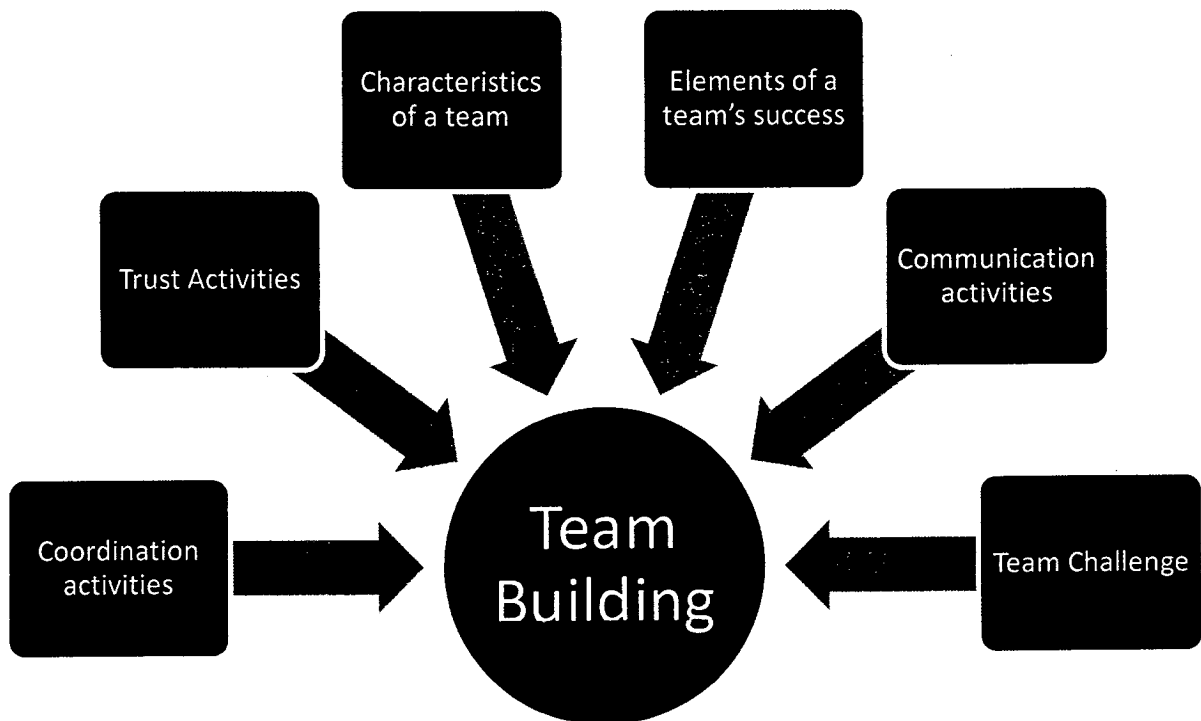
Figure 5.3: Learning objectives of the team building training

5.5.4 – Fundamentals of Leadership and Management:

This is a two day training session that prepares individuals to reach managerial positions in the store. It equips trainees with basic managerial and leadership skills to enable them to perform their roles efficiently and effectively. Below are the major recommended learning needs that this training is based on:
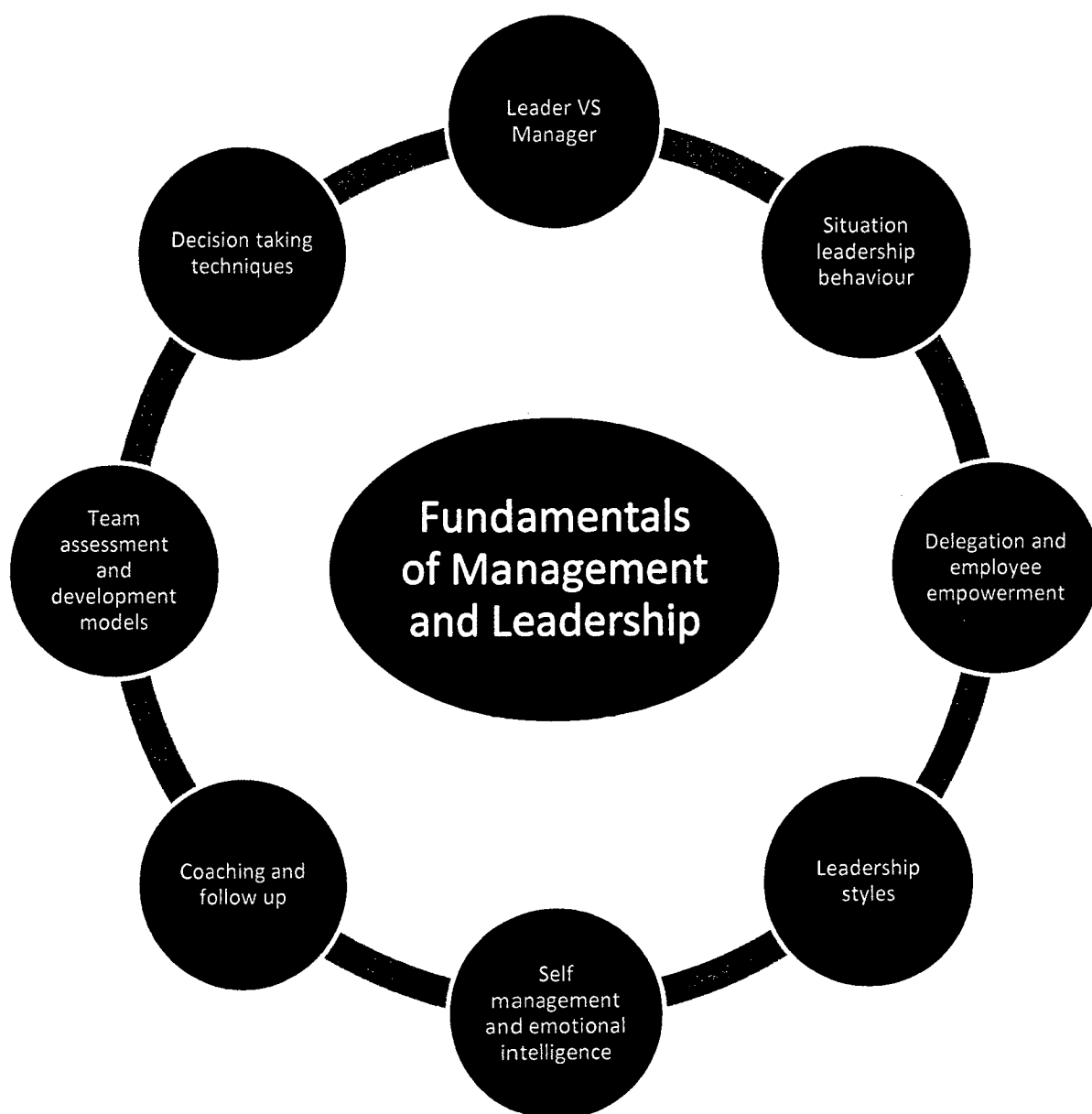
Figure 5.4: Learning objectives of the Fundamentals of management and leadership training

5.5.5 – Advanced Communication for managers:

This is a one day training session that equips managerial employees with the advanced communication tools necessary to undergo effective communication with their subordinates and all other external parties while fully understanding all components of the communication process. Below are the major recommended learning needs that this training is based on:
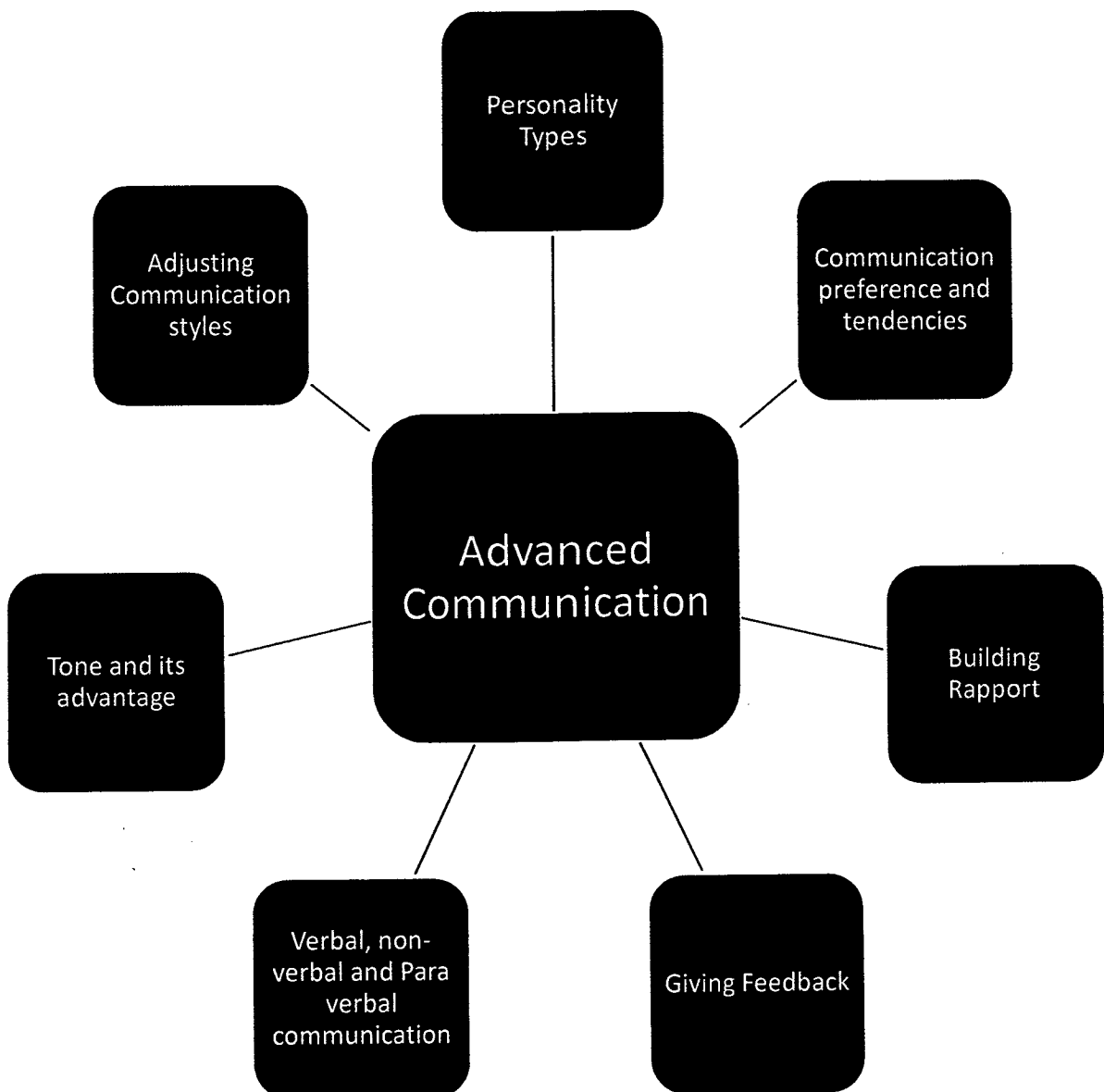
Figure 5.5: Learning Objectives for the advanced communication skills training

5.5.6 – Time Management:

This is a two day training session that helps managers efficiently manage time and tasks and consequently coach their employees in order to ensure the achievement of results. Below are the major recommended learning needs that this training is based on:
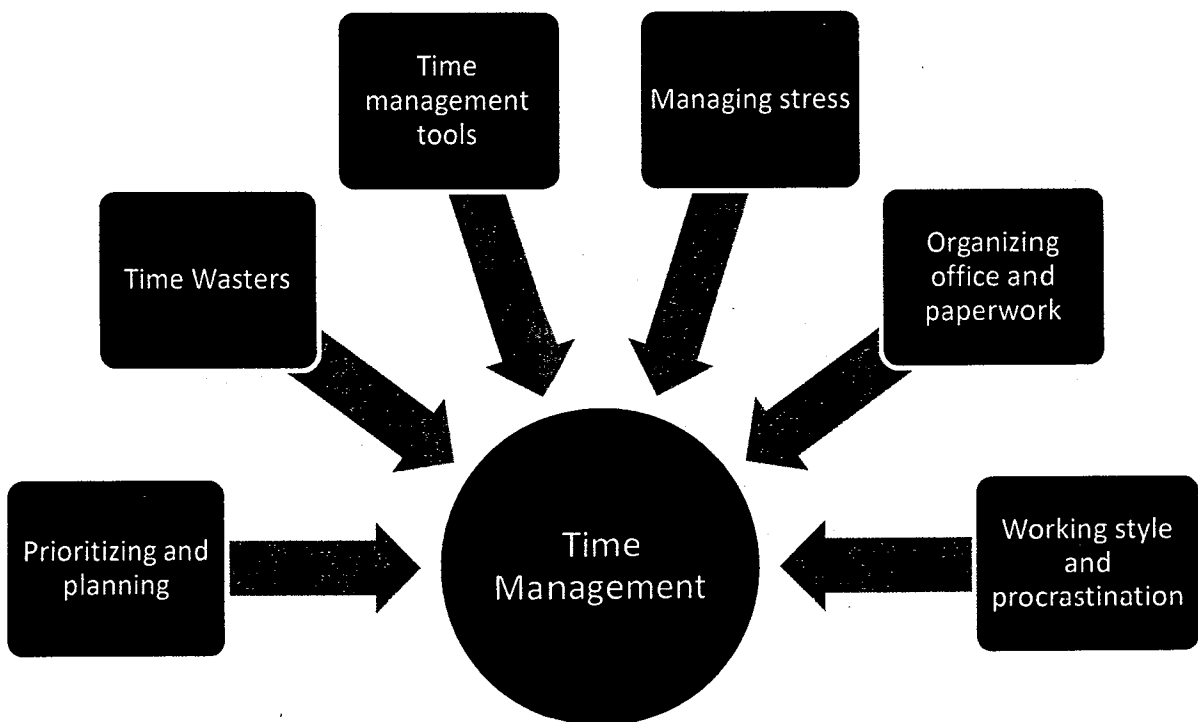
Figure 5.6: Learning objectives of time management training

5.5.6 – Technical off the job trainings:

To ensure a perfect and systematic flow of operation, a range of technical trainings is required. The purpose of these trainings is to ensure that employees (Managerial / Non-managerial) are equipped with all necessary tools that ensure that operating procedures are covered. These trainings shall be diverse and cover multiple topics as follow:
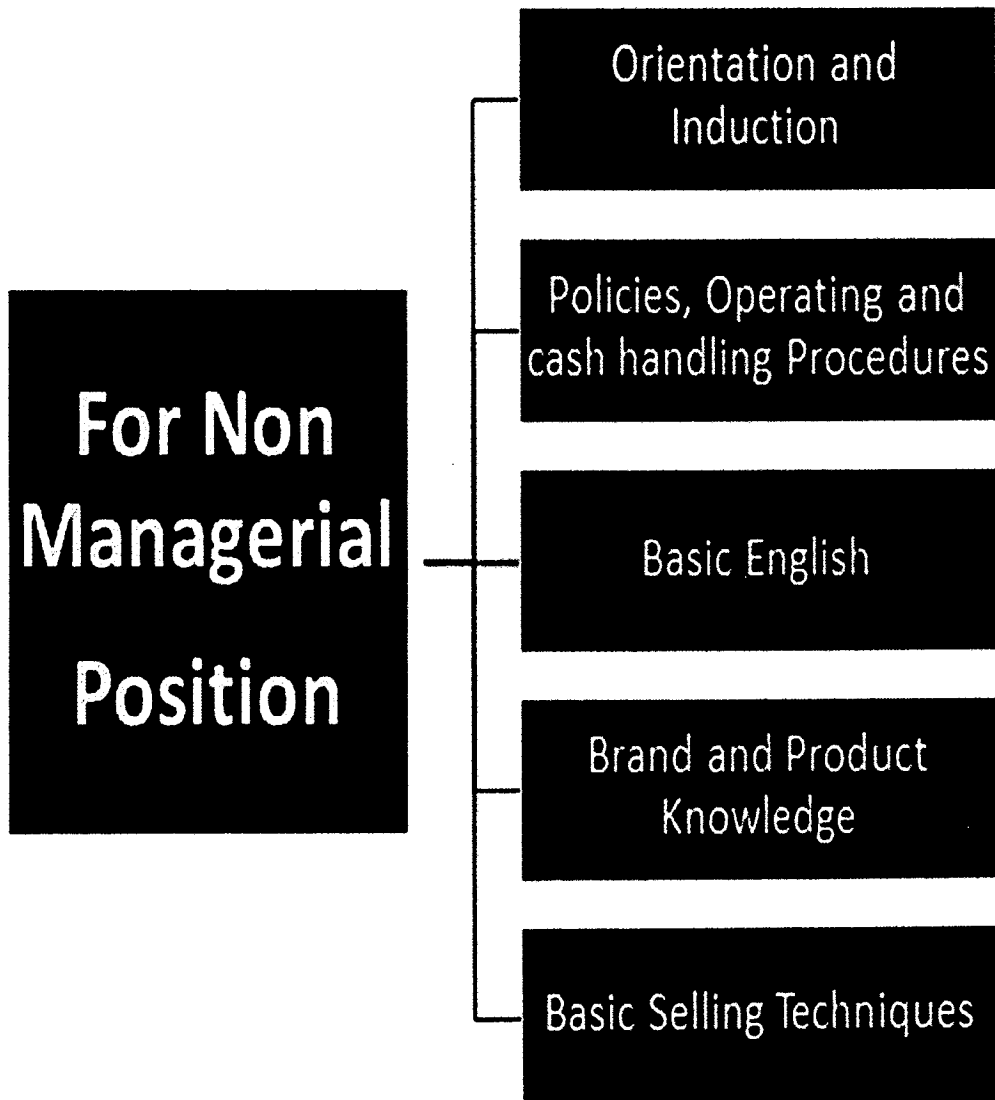
Figure 5.7: Technical off the job training titles for non-managerial positions

For Managerial Positions

Orientation and Induction

Policies, Operating and cash handling Procedures

Advanced and business English

Brand and Product Knowledge

Basics of Finance and Financial Reports
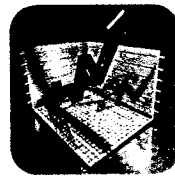
Retail & Inventory Analysis
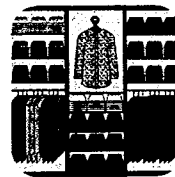
Merchandising Knowledge

Figure 5.8: Technical off the job training titles for managerial trainings

5.5.7 – Shop Pre-opening training:

A shop preopening training is a training program designed for the opening of new stores. It allows new joiners to receive the basic knowledge and skills needed to start working in a fashion retail store and it allows old employees to bond to their new colleagues and ensure they are familiar with the new brand they now work in. In the case of big retailers, it is very common to promote existing employees by transferring them to a different brand. This is how shop employees grow within the company. They benefit from new opportunities and responsibilities in new brands within the same company.

The shop preopening training can be a 3day training program done in an off the job or on the job setting, as follows:

Day 1
• Basic Team Building and Communication skills

Day 2
• Exceptional Customer Service Training

Day 3
• Brand Awareness, collection and product knowledge
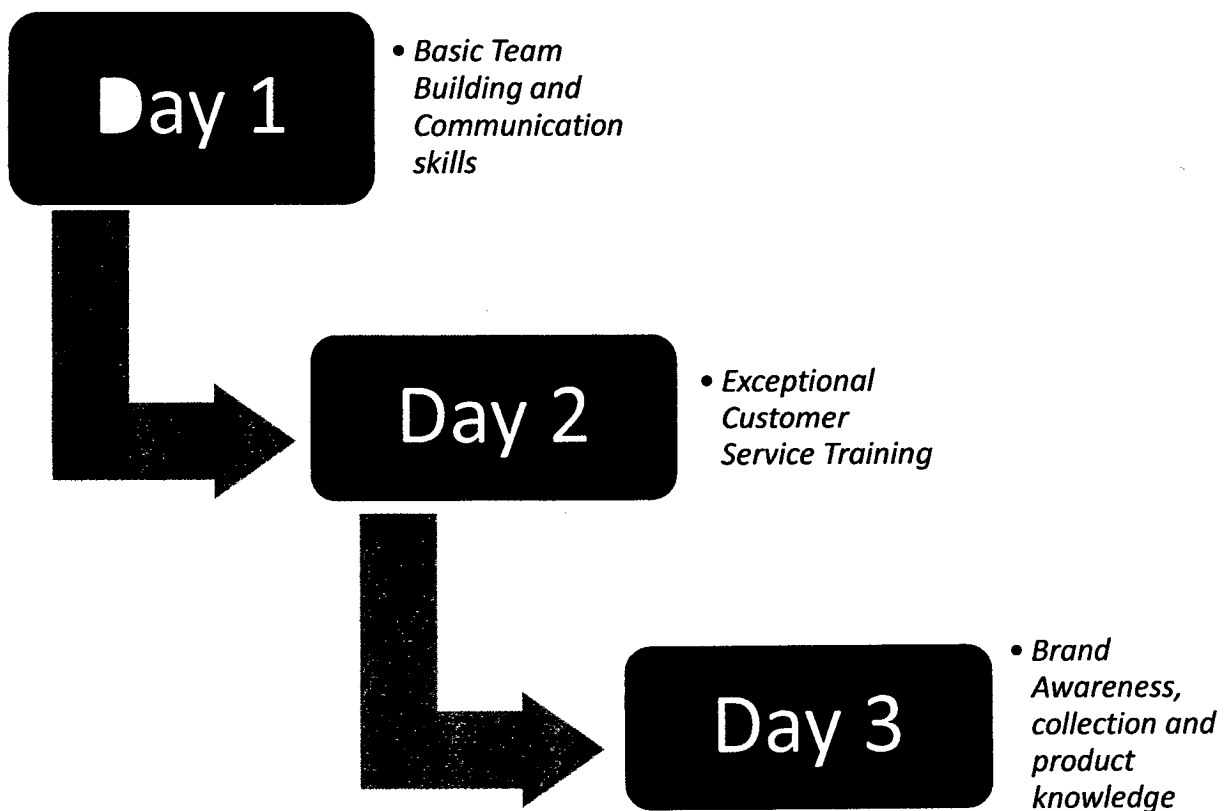
Figure 5.9: outline for shop pre-opening training

5.6 – On the Job trainings:

After consulting with professionals, brand managers, shop managers and HR Specialists, it became clear that Customer service trainings lose their credibility and efficiency if not followed up on. Shop employees are described to be hands on individuals who learn best by doing and practicing. For this reason, these people might lose interest easily in an off the job training set up. Although an off the job training is essential to transmit basic theories, the most effective learning environment remains the store itself. In the store, the trainee is able to put theory to practice and build rapport to all the ideas she\he acquired.

On the job trainings will be delivered as follows:
- Venue: In the store itself
- Time: Before store opening – On a monthly or bimonthly basis
- Duration: 30 – 60 minute per session
- Trainers: Shop managers

This type of training will allow shop managers to observe the behavior of employees in the store and make sure that learning took place. Second; they will be able to coach employees whenever necessary to improve their skills and knowledge and rectify their behavior. Third; they will be able to follow up on learning gaps.

The training topics will be set by the company's training department based on the weaknesses and gaps identified by the Mystery shopping reports and by the performance appraisals done at the level if each store. Based on these identified topics, the training and development team will design the sessions. The role of shop managers is just to deliver these sessions and follow up on their results.

Recommended topics for on-the-job customer service training calendar would be as follows:
1. Greeting and approaching customers
2. Corporate image and dress codes
3. Cross selling techniques
4. Up-selling techniques

5. Handling customers' complaints

6. Store operating procedures

7. Cash counter operation

8. Management of the fitting room.

9. Identifying different customer types

10. Dealing with different types of customers

11. Mastering positive body language

12. Product knowledge

13. Fashion trends

14. Others upon need.

5.7 – Orientation and induction

Orientation and induction programs usually target new joining employees to assimilate them and speed up their integration process. In this case, new joiners will fully understand their job roles, responsibilities and performance expectations. In addition to that, new joiners will be given chance to understand the operation they work in as well as the culture and basic information of the company.

5.7.1. – Orientation:

The orientation session is given to groups of new joiners to introduce them to all necessary information pertaining to the company. These sessions are collective and scheduled in advance. Orientation will help new joiners familiarize themselves with the company by getting introduced to all different components of it. It helps new joiners as well to form a bond with the company and their working environment. Some of the main areas covered in the orientation sessions are as follows:
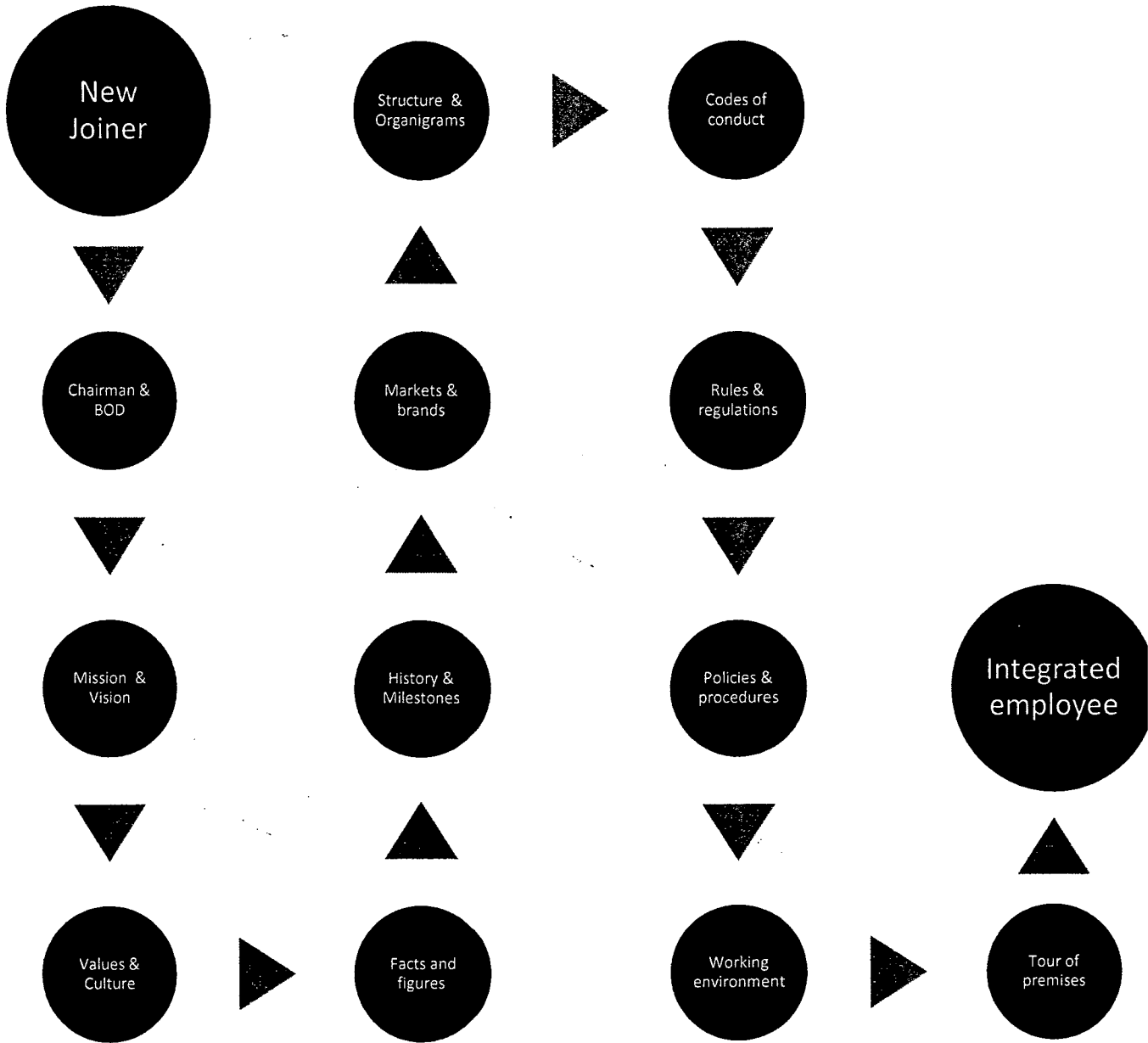
Figure 5.10: Orientation outline

5.7.2. – Shop Employee Induction:

The shop induction process ensures that new joiners in the store are armed with the essential knowledge of basic responsibilities and job duties within their new job environment.

The Induction process is administered as follows:

- Shop Manager / Assistant Manager administer the induction of new Sales Associates, Cashiers, Merchandisers and Coordinators.
- Shop Manager administers the induction of new Assistant Managers.
- A Senior Shop Manager (someone who has been a performing Shop Manager in the company for a certain period of time) administers the induction of a new shop manager.

To ensure that all the required knowledge is transferred, it is important to find a structured way that is inclusive of all essential information. For this reason, an induction checklist is prepared by position and includes all the learning topics that should be covered. Some topics are generic and common for all positions; others are specific for each position. Below are the topics covered by the shop induction checklists:

Store Information
- Information
- Store Hours
- work schedule
- Employee phone list
- Breaks/meals periods
- Employee parking
- Personal lockers
- Image & Wardrobe Guidelines
- Dress code
- Review selling goals
- Commission structure
- Store policies and procedures

Brand Information
- History of the brand
- Origin
- Global locations
- Style
- Characteristics
- Customer types
- Quality standards

Job Responsibilities
- Job duties
- Job Responsibilities
- Job requirements
- Accountabilities
- Job competencies

Product Knowledge
- Season concept
- Fabrics
- Cuts
- References
- Colors
- Sizes
- Equivalence sizes
- Tendency
- Trends
- Product Features
- Product Benefits
- Alternatives

Figure 5.11: Shop employees' induction checklists

5.8 – Conclusion:

While looking to establish a comprehensive Training system, it is essential to pay great attention to multiple aspects. First of all, a training system should be based on training needs and competency gaps, and since these needs and gaps are dynamic, so should the system be. Changes and amendments should occur as training needs change. Moreover, the system should be reviewed on continuous basis to ensure it is regularly updated and upgraded.

A well structures system / database should be set in place to track and archive all trainings attended by each person within the organization. This will help well in planning training calendars.

Training sessions should be scheduled taking into consideration the sales trends and peak times in the stores. In this case, the company makes sure not to schedule trainings in times when the employee is needed in the store.

Finally, training sessions alone might not result in the expected return on investment. This is why, it is essential to have proper follow-up on these trainings to ensure that learning took place and that the required behaviors are being displayed when necessary.

Chapter 6: Complementary HR practice

6.1 Introduction:

In earlier chapters, the research done supported the hypothesis that the level of customer satisfaction in the Middle East region is low and that customer service needs to be improved. In addition to that, it was also proven that what sales people lack are some trainable skills. I was able to conclude from the interviews I conducted with various brand managers and shop mangers that a-one-time customer service training was not efficient since the supposedly learned behaviors weren't being displayed in the store. This was thought to be caused mainly by lack of follow up. To solve this problem, I introduced in chapter 5 a complete training program that covers customer service and all other skills that directly affects it on managerial and non-managerial levels. I believe that the training program will reach the desired results and later testing will prove that and shows the areas that might need to be improved.

To ensure that the training program yields the expected results, all the needed support should be provided. On an HR level, I believe that the different functions of HR should work harmoniously and in complementarity in order to achieve the desired results. In addition to that, some other non HR activities should be considered as well to strengthen the system and maximize its efficiency.

For this reason, attention must be paid to specific areas. The first thing to focus on is the recruitment for fashion retail. The recruitment and selection process that results in staffing the stores is of major importance. It is critical to find qualified, skilled, competent and fit employees to work in such tiring environment.

The second area to focus on is the performance management system used. This system should be able to objectively identify the areas of strength as well as the areas that require improvement. This system should as well shed light on the skills and competencies that need further development in order to upgrade it. Career planning and succession planning is of major importance as well. It ensures motivation, commitment and loyalty to the company from one hand and the proper continuity of the system especially in times of great expansion.

In addition to all the points discussed, mystery shopping provides a great assessment tool that can evaluate each store on its own and then show points of strength and areas of improvement. It might be the only measurable tool that allows retailers to measure their customer service level.

6.2 Retail Recruitment:

6.2.1 Definition and fundamentals:

According to the HR Management Guide (2012), Recruitment is defined as :" Attracting, interviewing and hiring new employees. The perfect recruitment includes the adaption of the new hire. It is about the definition of the job vacancy, designing the appealing recruitment text and offering the competitive package to the winning candidate." Recruitment and selection plays a vital role in properly staffing any organization. It is important that any employee and every new recruit fit the culture and the industry type. Moreover, it is important that the new recruits are aware of all the challenges and physical efforts required from them in the stores. the third thing to pay attention to whenever recruiting for the stores is ensuring motivational fit between the employee or the new hire with the position she/he is being recruited for. People working in fashion retail should be fashionable, trendy and fond of fashion.

For the purpose of building an efficient and structured recruitment cycle suitable for fashion stores, multiple interviews were conducted with experienced recruiters in the fields to benefit from their knowledge and experience and to gather data on recruitment for fashion stores. This data will be used to try to come up with a proposed cycle. The recruiters I met all work with the same company, Azadea Group; however, they are from different countries within the group. These are as follows:

1. Tracey Chemaly, Group Recruitment Manager
2. Paul Massaad, Group Recruitment Team Leader
3. Cynthia Hermes, Senior Regional Recruitment Specialist
4. Farah Kalot, Senior Regional Recruitment Specialist
5. Mayssam Ghanem, Regional Recruitment Specialist
6. Abdullatif Safieddin, Recruitment Specialist, Lebanon
7. Layal Awwad, Recruitment Specialist, Lebanon

8. Mariam George, Senior Recruitment Specialist, Egypt

9. Rana Beaini, Recruitment Specialist, Kuwait

10. Catherine Atienze, Recruitment Specialist, Qatar

6.2.2 The recruitment cycle:

The below figure shows the recruitment cycle that I propose, based on my store observation and based on my interviews with retail recruiters, whenever recruiting for a fashion store.
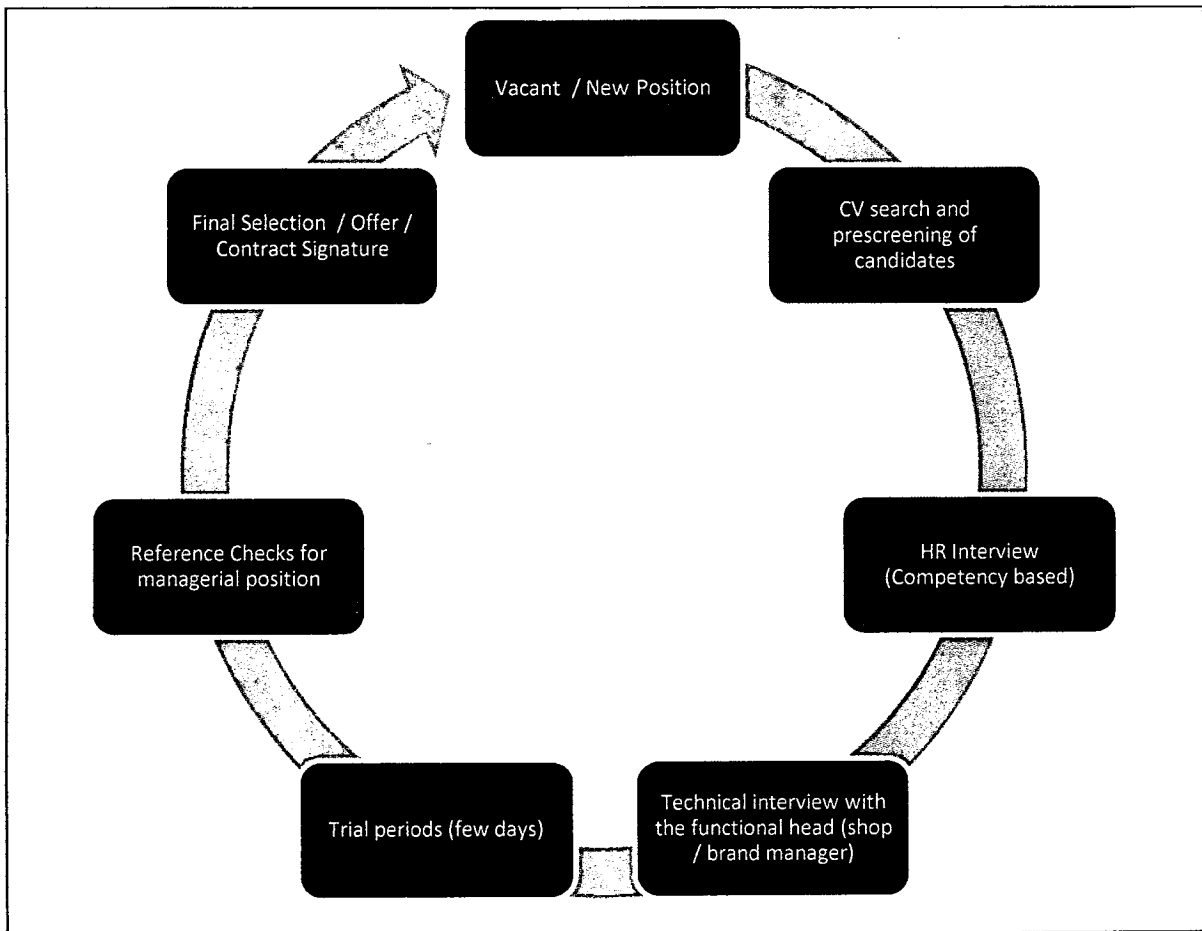
Figure 6.1: the Recruitment Cycle

The recruitment cycle has to be initiated with a vacancy. This vacancy can either be in an already existing position or in a new position. Once the recruitment department is notified about the new position, the process is initiated.

The first step starts by sourcing candidates mainly through CV Search, although other sources might be helpful as well. Once CVs are found to be suitable, the prescreening process occurs. During prescreening, the recruiter makes sure over the phone that the candidate meets the minimum requirements for the position, and if this is the case, then the candidate will be invited to attend an interview.

The second step is the HR interview itself. I believe, so do the recruiters I met, that competency based interviewing techniques are the most efficient in this type of industry. Due to the importance of this step, I will be detailing it in a coming section.

Once the candidate passes the competency based interview, a technical interview takes place. Recruitment will coordinate for a non-managerial candidate to be interviewed by the shop manager and for a managerial candidate to be interviewed by the brand and/or district manager. The technical interview will assess the candidate's knowledge and expertise in the domain of fashion and fashion retail; thus, will check the technical and commercial fit of the candidate.

The forth step is a trial period. If the candidate passes both HR and Technical interviews, then a trial period is requested where the candidate will have to spend few days (2-3 days) in one store of the brand that he will be assigned to. This trial has a double benefit. The first benefit lies in enabling the company to observe the work of that candidate on the floor and assess accordingly, whereas the second benefit lies in enabling the candidate to get a realistic job preview and thus decide whether or not the conditions suit him or not.

In case the candidate is being considered for a managerial position and she/he has been working in a similar job before, then a reference check is done. This reference check will provide the company with a clear understanding on the candidate's performance in his previous job. Past behavior can be a major indication for future behavior. However the thing with reference checks is that not all references can be entirely objective when it comes to assessing their previous employees.

If the interviews, trial, and reference check are all positive, then the recruiter can proceed offering the candidate the position. Once the candidate accepts the offer, the contract can be signed and induction can be initiated. Although the process seems long, however it minimizes the risk of wrong recruitment. This is very important in an industry as fast as fashion retail where turnover rates are very high. It is always more costly to recruit a new employee that to retain an existing one. For this reason, companies have to pay a major attention to their recruitment and selection processes in order to minimize the risk of losing their new recruits shortly after hiring them.

6.2.3 Competencies:

According to the Business Dictionary (2012), a competency is defined as:" A cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge, and skills that enable a person (or an organization) to act effectively in a job or situation." Competencies and competency awareness is a trend of the modern business world. Management gurus consider it to be the base on which any organization should build its competitive advantage. Having a workforce with well-developed competencies and skills is essential to ensure continuity and prosperity of each and every fashion retailer, especially in midst of the fierce competition that we are currently witnessing in the Middle East Region.

Based on all the observations during my shop visits and based on the results of the interviews conducted with retail recruiters and fashion experts, I was able to identify a set of basic competencies essential for every sales person or store employee to acquire. These competencies are: Customer Focus, Initiative, team work, Change and adaptability, communication and cultural awareness. Other additional competencies might be beneficial in a fashion retail environment; however, the mentioned ones are basic and essential.

Customer focus is about identifying the need of both internal and external customers and putting effort to satisfy this need or even exceed it through different types of actions and decisions. Customer focus is the main driver to achieving high customer satisfaction. It is important to provide customers with an exciting shopping experience that makes them loyal and accordingly increase sales.

Initiative is about walking that extra mile especially when serving the customer. This is when shop employees are expected to de more than what is required of them. Eventually this will enhance service and avoid problems and customer dissatisfaction.

Teamwork is extremely important in the fashion retail industry. The store's operation necessitates that sales people as well as managers on the floor cooperate together, each through his/ her particular role, to secure customer satisfaction. Sales people need to be good team players, in an environment of respect and trust, to achieve the different goals, objectives and targets set for the store.

Shop employees face a lot of changes on regular basis. Changes in customer types, communication styles, trends, collections, sales ...etc. in order for them to coop with these changes, they need first to anticipate them and accept them as they happen. Once they accept the change, employees can adapt to it.

To be able to close a sales deal, shop employees should be able to communicate with customers confidently and effectively. Sales people might be required to share thoughts, ideas and information about current trends, products, collections as well as how the product fits the customer trying it. To be able to do that, employees should be good listeners to understand specific needs of customers, and then speak up to be able to satisfy these needs.

Employees within each fashion store encounter customers from different nationalities, backgrounds, ethnicities, cultures, beliefs ...etc. to be able to effectively serve them, communicate to them and eventually satisfy them, sales people should have a good knowledge of these differences.

6.2.4 Competency based interviewing:
According to the United Nations' Special (Issue May, 2002): "The competency-based interview is built on the idea that past behavior/performance is the best predictor of future behavior/performance. The interview will focus on the competencies that are most important for the particular job. Some of the questions may also include knowledge based essential criteria

such as the in depth knowledge of a particular area or expertise in working in a similar role previously. The competency based interview questions are slightly different in style than the traditional interview questions. There is usually a repetitive pattern to each question followed by probes that tend to focus on past situations and on behaviors in these situations."

Competency based interviewing techniques are a beneficial tool that fashion retail recruiters can use to identify whether new recruits have the basic competencies discussed earlier and which are essential for this type of industry. Once these competencies are identified, the new recruit can then pass by the technical interview usually done by the store manager for non-managerial employees and by the brand manager for managerial employees. Once the employee passes both interviews with a positive feedback, the last phase of the selection process starts, and that is the trial phase.

6.2.5 The Trial:

The trial phase should come to verify that all the competencies and sets of acquired skills are present. The store manager or assistant manager plays a vital role in the observation process to be able at the end of the trial period to either recommend the candidate or to reject him. It is not sufficient to only assess the skills, knowledge and ability, the assessor's role is vital to determine whether or not the candidate has motivational fit. The presence of motivational fit is indispensable for the display of various behaviors and skills that the candidate has. Moreover, the trial period provides the candidates with a realistic job preview that enables them to assess whether this job suits them and whether it is aligned with their original perception of it.

6.2.6 Internal Recruitment:

An important recruitment tactic to use is focusing on internal recruitment that is recruiting current employees in the company for different or more advanced roles. This is very important and efficient in the fashion retail industry, especially in the case big retails that are regularly expanding. Internal recruitment has a lot of advantages to the company.

This process will provide the company with a big pool of potential successors to managerial and key position in the store at different times of the year, especially in times of new openings and rapid expansion. The cost of recruitment as well as the time needed to fill the vacancies will decrease thus improving the efficiency of the recruitment and selection process. People recruited internally will more rapidly and easily integrate themselves into their new role as they already know the company's policies, procedures, management style, communication channels, brands and corporate culture. This will ensure a safer expansion for the company and a faster integration of employees. The operations of the new shops will be directly established and initiated with fewer errors. Internal recruitment results as well in faster career paths for current employees within the company especially in times of expansion or high turnover. This will be a major source of employee motivation and commitment. In addition to that, this will directly affect the level of turnover within the company as employees will start perceiving the companies as an environment where they can grow and develop their skills.

Multiple things should be taken into consideration when focusing on internal recruitment. First, the internal pool of employees might not always be ready and skilled enough to be granted promotions or certain career moves. In this case, recruiting from the market becomes essential. Moreover, the pool of internal candidate might not be big enough to cover all staffing needs of the company at certain times. Furthermore, it is sometimes beneficial to bring new blood to the company as it will provide new ideas, thoughts, practices as well as some new market insights.

6.3 Performance Management:

Having a well-structured performance management system is essential to support all HR functions and complement all HR practices. Being a continuous process of communication, the Performance management provides the company with valuable data that the company can build on. Based on that, the employees will have clear job responsibilities, well set priorities and mutual understanding with management on roles and responsibilities. On the other hand, management will acquire data that can be used as the base for career planning, promotions and succession planning.

We suggest that employee appraisals take place on seasonal basis which means twice a year. This would allow the company to keep better track of employee performance, so that appropriate actions can be taken accordingly. However, it is of major importance that communication and feedback between each employee and her/his manager take place on regular basis and not only during the appraisal session. Companies are advised to promote feedback and an open communication culture.
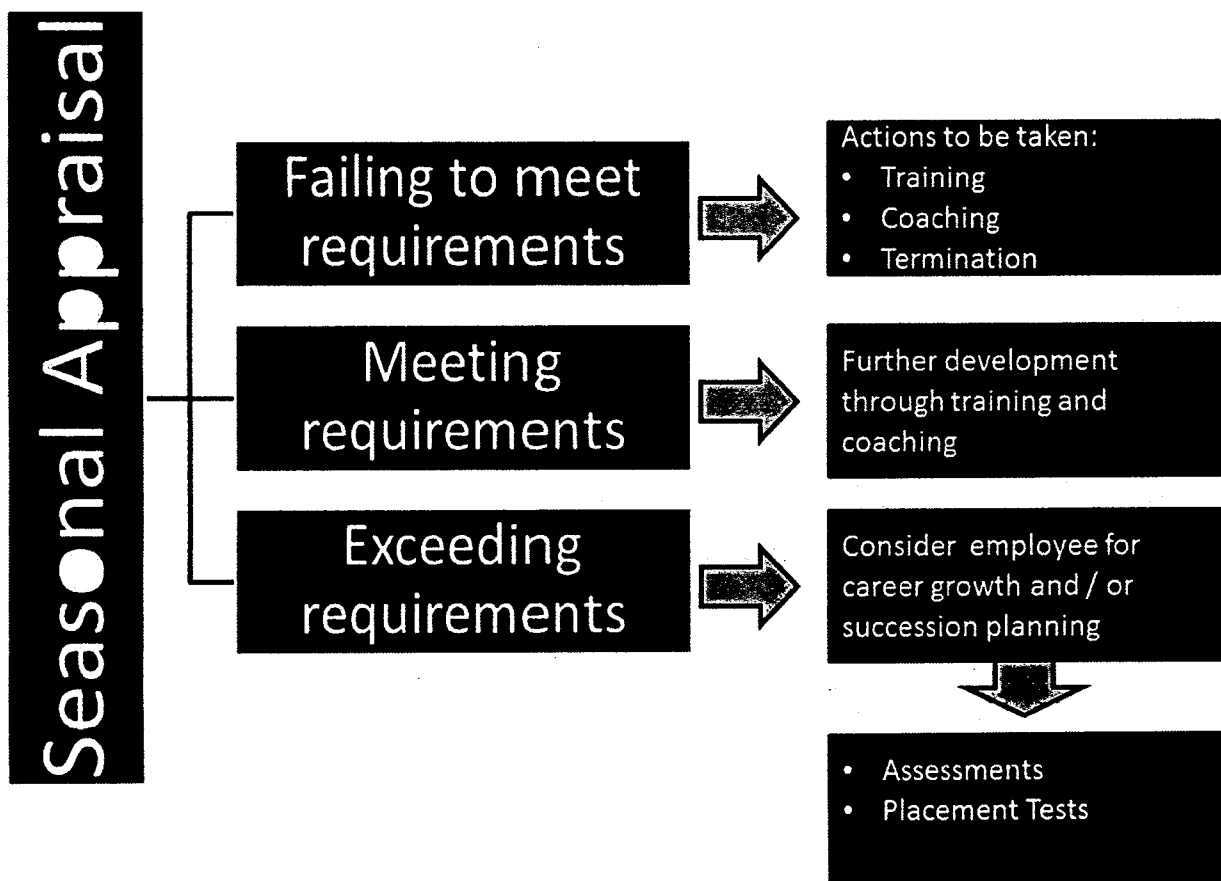
Figure 6.2: Results and actions of Seasonal appraisals

As mentioned before, the appraisal sessions will take place twice a year at the beginning of each season; this means in February (Beginning of the spring / summer season) and August (Beginning of the fall / winter season). Each employee will be appraised based on his specific job roles and objectives and the results shall be divided into three categories as follows:

1. Failing to meet requirements
2. Meeting requirements
3. Exceeding requirements

If the employee fails to meet the requirements of the job, in other words she/ he are underachieving, and then a clear action shall be taken. If the underachieving employee is a good potential but currently lack the required skills and knowledge, then the best solution in this case is to provide this specific employee with the needed trainings and coach him so that she\he becomes able to perform better before the next appraisal session. In case the underachieving employee does not show potential or willingness to learn, then, the best solution is to terminate such a profile because her/ his presence might hinder the quality of customer service in the store and accordingly make a negative impact on the image of the brand.

If the employee is meeting the minimum requirements of his/ her job role, then this is a good base to build on. However, the objective is always arming them with the necessary skills and knowledge in order for them to exceed the requirements of their current roles. For this reason, such profiles need to be further trained and coached so that they move from being average performance to exceptional or outstanding performers.

Whenever the employees are rated as exceeding the requirements of their current job roles, then this needs to draw the interest of management. High performing employees should be equipped and prepared for career growth through a promotion or for succession planning. Specific trainings might be required in addition to extensive coaching. Once these high performers become ready and in case of a business need, they need to undergo assessments or specific placement tests to make sure that they are fully ready to hold this new responsibility. Only by passing these assessments that the employee becomes eligible for the waited promotion. In case the employee fails the assessment, then additional preparation needs to take place and the employee will be reassessed once she/ he becomes ready. The assessments can be of different types based on the business needs, yet they must be extremely relevant to the job profile that the employee is going to be promoted to.

6.4 Mystery Shopping:

In order to identify the efficiency of the proposed system, a scientific and structured method to measure the level of customer service should be set in place. A way to do so is through mystery shopping. Mystery shopping is an effective tool to measure the quality and level of customer service as well as the compliance to regulations and policies of the company. It helps identify the week points in the entire system as well as the weaknesses of each and every store on its own. Based on that, each store can put an action plan to strengthen these weaknesses and improve the level of customer service and thus customer satisfaction. Moreover, such reports shed light on stores with high levels of customer service as stores to be looked up to as role models. This type of recognition is essential to maximize motivation and morale of high performers as well as drive poor performers to exert additional effort to improve the level of service.

When using mystery shoppers, especially those who are outsourced, one should be attentive to some of the following details. First of all, the company should make sure that the outsourced mystery shoppers are professional and knowledgeable specifically in the field of Fashion retail. The second thing to pay attention to is the mere fact that there exist major differences between countries, brands within countries as well as between branches within the same brand within the same country. For this reason, the mystery shopper should be briefed on all the specificities of the store he is visiting, and the shopper needs to keep in mind all the information he knows about that store and use it to support his/ her ratings. Cultural differences and market differences as well as local values and norms should be taken into consideration when the mystery shopper is rating a specific store. For example a brand existing in Riyadh cannot be assessed based on the same standards compared to the same brand open in Beirut or Dubai, as customer expectations vary as well between country and another. The third thing to take into consideration is that the content of the mystery shopping report should be reviewed regularly between different waves as requirements might change. These requirements might be affected by the company strategy and goals, the level of service that the company desires to have, the variety and nature of competitors in the market, the changes in consumer tastes as well as the changes in customer's expectations. In addition to that, the company should clearly specify what are the dimensions that they need the mystery shopper to focus on so that the shopper remains aligned in all times with the company's objectives.
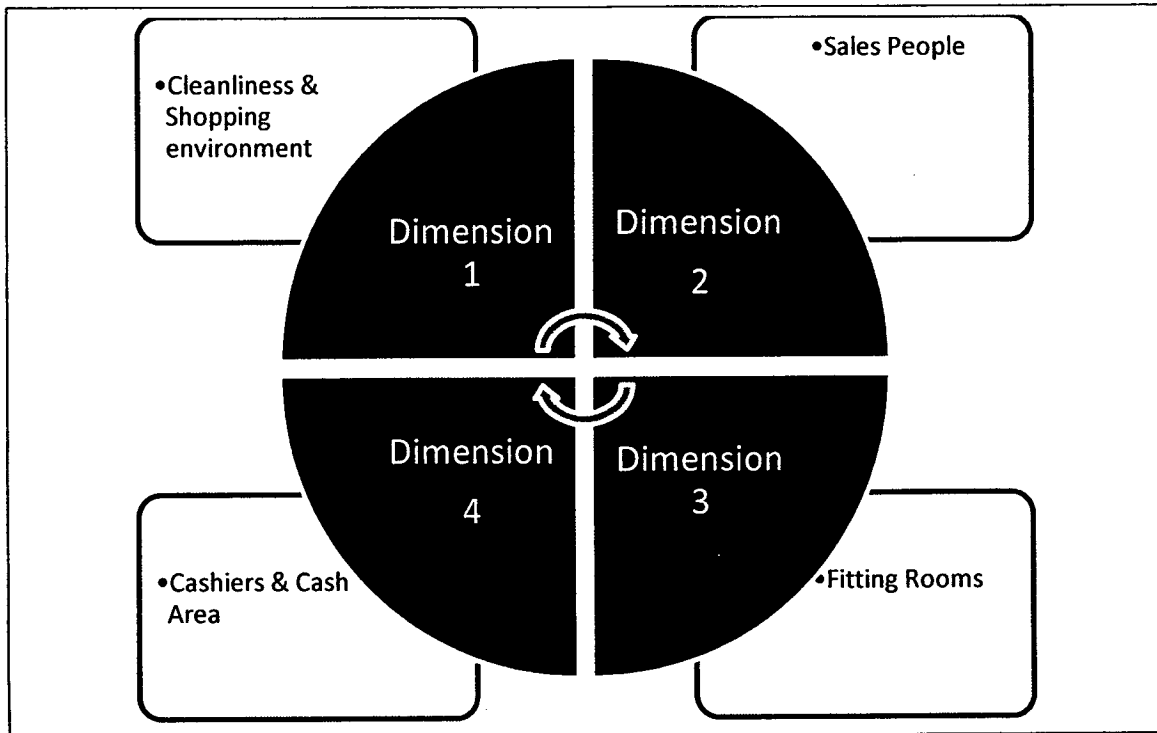
Figure 6.3: Dimensions of the mystery shopping reports

Based on my shop visits, observations and professional interviews, I recommend basing the mystery shopping report on four different dimensions to make sure to assess all the areas that help in providing the customers with a unique shopping experience. The report is divided on four major dimensions.

Dimension 1 is the cleanliness and shopping environment. This adds a lot to the customers' shopping experience and works indirectly on the customers' psychology and perception of the store's image. The cleanliness of the store is assessed based on the following areas. First thing that the customer sees is the window which reflects that image of the store and the first interaction with the customer. This is why the window should be organized, fashionable and clean. The manager needs to make sure that the scent of the floor is pleasant. The floor should be clean and mopped and the shelves need to be clean and dusted. Clothes are to be always folded and properly placed and displayed. In addition to that, the lighting of the store has to be leveled to relax the customer's vision, and the same goes for the music.

Dimension 2 is the sales people present on the floor. The sales people make all the difference for the customer. They are the key element in the delivery of great customer service. The sales persons have to be pleasant, polite, positive and full of energy. It is very important for the sales people to constantly be available and ready to serve on the floor. They need to greet the customers and always show enthusiasm in offering alternatives, sizes as well as opinions. Moreover, sales people need to be properly groomed, wear a name tag and wear the uniform to reflect the brand image. The uniform should be clean and tidy. The sales person needs to be fast and efficient and follow up on customers request till the end. In addition to that, people working in the store are asked to know the products available in the store and in the stockroom as this will help them while serving the customer.

Dimension 3 is that of the fitting room. As it is the highest selling area in any fashion retail store, the fitting room is an important step of the shopping experience. It is of outmost importance to have a sales person present in the fitting room to provide alternatives and sizes and propose new products to the customers in an attempt to cross sell and up sell. The fitting room should be emptied from clothes at all times and it should be cleaned constantly. Furthermore, the fitting area should be well ventilated and well lit to make the customer feel at ease while trying on clothes. The promptness of sales people while serving in the fitting room is very much appreciated since keeping the customer waiting at this level is not recommended.

Dimension 4 is the cashier and the cash area. This is the last and most critical step in the shopping experience. It is critical because this is where the customer is at his/her weakest point as he/she is paying money. It is critical as well since this is the step that the customer will remember the most. It is very important that the cashier greets the customer and maintains a smile to make the customer feel at ease. Greeting re-establishes a strong bond with the customer and makes him feel important and welcomed. The cash register should be clean and tidy with all the policies and procedures displayed on it. The cashier needs to be properly groomed, wearing a name tag and wearing the uniform to reflect the brand image. The uniform should be clean and tidy. He or she should be fast and efficient, fold the clothes and present them well and seal the process with a positive closing statement. In case of high traffic on the cash area, multiple registers must be opened to speed up the process.

The above mentioned four dimensions with all the details related to them should be tackled in the mystery shopper report in order to make sure that the standards set by the company at each level are well maintained. Such reports, as they are very detailed, will highlight the specific areas that need to be worked on and thus guides the shop managers on how to improve on customer service.

6.5 Compensation, Rewards and benefits:

Customer service is deeply related to the motivation level of the store's staff. In its turn, motivation level is deeply affected by compensation, benefits and rewards. It is extremely important to fairly compensate shop employees in return for all the physical effort and stress they have to bear during their working hours. Motivation is not solely dependent on compensation, yet they are interrelated. The compensation and benefits system supports directly all HR initiatives that aim at securing a high level of customer service within fashion retail stores. This is detailed as follows:

6.5.1 Fixed Salary:

The fixed salary is of major importance as it is the most secured part of the total package. Employee depends mostly on their fixed pay to plan their lives accordingly. In fashion retail, especially in the Middle East Region, competition is fierce and sometimes it is very difficult to attract and retain skilled employees. For this reason, many companies lose a lot of their potential talents to competitors due to their below market average pay rates. For this reason, retailers are advised to do their homework and ensure that their basic / fixed salaries at least match or exceed the market rates.

6.5.2 Commission:

Some retailers do not believe in the benefit of paying commission and describe it as a waste of money. On the other hand, others believe that this totally not true. After consulting with many sales people in the stores that I have visited, I came to a conclusion that supports paying commission to sales people. Commission basically motivates the employee to exert additional effort during the process of customer service in an attempt to maximize sale as she/he acknowledges the direct link that exists between sales and the commission that they will cash as

a result of that. For this reason, I suggest that retailers do pay commission as it will directly impact their sales level and indirectly impact their level of customer service and customer satisfaction.

6.5.3 Seasonal Bonus:

Retailers usually set seasonal sales targets for their stores to achieve. The new seasonal targets include percentage increases over the targets of the season before. In this way, they insure that shop managers and shop employees stretch themselves to ensure sales growth over the years. To make sure that shop employees exert all the effort needed to reach these targets, a certain incentive needs to be established. The proposed incentive in this case is the seasonal bonus. In case the employees reach their seasonal targets, they will cash their bonuses, if not, then they need to make sure to exert bigger effort for the coming season.

6.5.4 Other benefits:

In addition to all what is discussed before, other benefits can be offered to the employee in an attempt to maximize motivation, optimize loyalty and ensure proper retention of employees, especially high potential employees. A good benefit package will attract high caliber employees, differentiate the employer in the market and give the employer an advantage over competitors. Many types of benefits can be provided to the employees depending on the choice or the ability of the company. These benefits can range from discounts to free uniforms to corporate deals to gift cards to others. No matter what the benefit is, the employer should try to provide the employee with the most suitable benefit as long as it is aligned with company's financial standards.

6.6 Coordination with the support functions:

In the fashion retail industry, the store is the most strategic unit in the company as it is the unit that generates the cash; however, this unit cannot exist and operate on its own. For the store to function well and efficiently it needs support from various back office functions. Coordination and proper communication between the store and the back office is indispensable for proper operation. Each back office function plays a specific role contributing to the success of the stores' operation.

The human resources department provides support on four main different levels. Recruitment ensures proper people are selected to work for the company. Staffing strategies should be set to ensure that headcounts are up to the required levels. The training and development team works hard to fully integrate new joiners as well as train employees, develop their skills and competencies and equip them with all the tools needed to perform and grow within the company. In addition to that, the training and development team monitors the performance of employees and use this data and builds on it. The compensation and benefits team handles all issues related to salaries, bonuses, commissions, attendance, market studies, etc... The employee relations team makes sure to solve all types of employee problems and conflicts, ensure proper retention and loyalty and make certain that communication channels are well set between the store and the back office.

The commercial team handles all communication with the suppliers to make sure that the stores are fully stacked with clothes. The brand managers choose the collections, sizes, colors and styles that match the tastes of local markets.

The procurement team handles the purchases of all items needed for the stores. They make sure to negotiate best deals in order to minimize the costs of purchases in various stores of the company.

The logistics team is the team that works on shipments of clothes and accessories from the country of origin (supplier / franchisor) to the destination countries. They make sure that all products reach destination at the expected time. They try to avoid delays. They make studies on the most efficient routing and carrier type and base their strategies accordingly.

The inventory team work directly with the shops to handle all issues related to inventory. They make sure to avoid losses and to track items. They figure out trends between fast moving items and other items and advise the shop manager accordingly.

The finance team identifies past sales trends and accordingly set forecasts for each new season. They specify sales targets for the stores to achieve and provide the store employees with all kinds of financial advice and tips to minimize costs and maximize earnings.

The IT team plays a vital role in the automation of the store's operation. All points of sale are computerized and linked to central servers in the back office. The slightest error or break down in the system can cause the store's operation to be stopped or at least delayed. The presence and support of IT is essential.

Maintenance also plays an important role to fix all kinds of malfunctions that happen in the store. Speed is a major thing as failing to fix the malfunctions quickly might hinder the image of the store.

The marketing team raises brand and store awareness in the minds of the customers and eventually increases traffic in the store.

This complete cycle of different functions and departments plays a holistic and complementary role that have a major and direct impact on the store, its operation, level of customer service and customer satisfaction, products and many other things. For this reason, we can say that the store hides behind it a network of support teams. The combined effort of all these teams enables store based employees to deliver good customer service and accordingly maximizes the level of customer satisfaction.

6.7 Conclusion:

The main aim of chapters 5 and 6 is to propose a complete system that will allow a big fashion retailer to improve on customer service and maximize customer satisfaction. The core of this system is training and development; however, the system is based on a wide variety of functions that together build this complete and comprehensive approach and customer service culture. Although the main focus of fashion retailers is always based on the shops that are the cash generating unite, it became clear that the back office functions are of major importance when it comes to support, without which high level of service cannot be achieved.

The collection of all HR functions adds on the efficiency and reliability of the training department in addition to that of training programs, sessions and workshops. It all starts from recruitment that ensures the staffing of skilled and potential employees at the level of the store. These employees will be later trained and developed to become skilled customer service professionals. The contribution of the compensation and benefits department ensures that employees are properly compensated. This will ensure the motivation required in the delivery of an exceptional service to the customers. The Employee relations department will ensure that all conflicts are solved on time not to affect the level of service.

In addition the different HR units, other departments in the company contribute in a particular way to support the stores accordingly. As mentioned in the previous section, all other department compliment in a unique way the customer service function by maintaining a smooth and systematic shop operation.

To conclude, it is important to mention that the success of the system depends on all the pillars that support it, and this proves that every employee in the company contributes directly or indirectly to serving the customers in the stores. Training is of outmost importance, but without proper support and follow up, the efficiency of these trainings might be hindered and learning might not take place or might be minimal. For this reason, retailers are advised to work on the establishment of new corporate cultures built around the culture of service and customer satisfaction.

Chapter 7: Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction:

Although people around the globe might still consider the Middle East region as a war zone, no one can ignore the fact that tremendous opportunities lie in this area of the world. The markets in some segments of the region are still not saturated. For this reason, a craving for new products and concepts exists. Moreover, the consumers in this part of the world are progressively opening up to the west. Although the shift is very slow in some areas, yet it is steady. Consumers are not only searching for unique products or services, but they looking to live a certain experience through the purchase of these products and services.

Customer service remains the major challenge in the fashion retail industry. This is a result of multiple causes that are linked to each other. The first cause is that customers' expectations in some the countries are very basic, and for this reason, retailers do not feel the need to exert the additional effort required to maintain a high level of service. The second reason is the workforce. People working in Middle Eastern fashion retail, especially in sales or non-managerial positions, are mostly people of lower educational levels or expatriates form Asian developing countries. The training of such audiences on customer service is very difficult and with minimal effectiveness if not continuously followed up on. The third reason would be the difficult nature of working in such industry with all the physical effort that it requires. It is very challenging to make someone, who has been standing in the store for several hours, smile and greet or even to be energetic enough to serve, offer alternatives, check size availability, etc.

The ultimate focus for Middle Eastern retailers is to concentrate on the improvement of customer service and maximization of customer satisfaction. Many programs and initiatives are being launched, but the secret lies in the ability to follow up on the actual service in the store and accordingly coach to make sure that the needed skills have been learned and mastered. Some initiatives will be successful and yield improvement in the levels of service and satisfaction while others will not. Eventually, this is what will differentiate retailers from one another.

7.2 Main findings, analysis of main results and comparisons:

Franklin Covey once said: "They asked us what if we train employees and they leave, we said what if we don't and they stay." This is the perception that retailers across the region used to have especially that the turnover rate in the retail industry is very high and can amount to 20% in some countries. The market reflects, as discussed before, a state of unprecedented competition in the region. A huge diversity of fashion brands are opening and the customers now have a wide variety of choices to make even within brands that fall within the same price range, category or style. Retailers are in great need to diversify themselves in a way or another. I believe, and based on my observations in multiple countries, that the most realistic and appropriate aspect of differentiation is "Service". Based on the survey conducted in five different countries of the region, we were able to come out with an average percentage of customer satisfaction for the Middle East region equivalent to 59.20%. The satisfaction levels in countries surveyed varied between 52.22% in KSA (being the lowest) and 66.25% in Lebanon (being the highest). Looking at the amount of international brands opening and the level of competition arising between big retailers, this level of satisfaction is insufficient, and this verified our first Hypothesis.

When it came to sales people, results did not show any major problems in the attitude of sales people such as rudeness, disrespect or lack of energy or enthusiasm. The shoppers in the Middle East region described local sales people differently. The descriptions varied making "Helpful" the most frequent description with 31.84%, "Respectful" comes second for 25.11% while "indifferent" comes third with 17.94%. These results show that lack of service is not directly linked to attitude problems of employees, but the problem apparently lies in the absence of required skills. If this is the case, then this is an issue that can be primarily solved through training that can equip sales people with the desired skills and knowledge. Accordingly, these results verify the second hypothesis.

The research as well tried to identify other aspects related to the store or the shopping experience and that directly or indirectly affect the level of satisfaction and customer service. These aspects are many and identified in the following section.

In the matter of grooming the rating was equal to 64.98%. No major issues were noted in this area especially in companies with clear and well stated dress codes. However, this percentage should be enhanced. Since this not a trainable issue, minimum coaching should be sufficient to avoid any dress code violations.

The stores' atmospheres and decors were given the rating of 71.98%. This is a good rating. Retailers are paying big amounts of money to make the store and the shopping environment, as comfortable as possible because they wish the customer to stay as long as possible wandering in the store. This will give the customer more time to check items and fulfill their needs. For this reason, you find most fashion stores to have elegant decoration, good ventilation, clear lighting, pleasant smell and cleanliness.

Some retailers and brand managers select the same products for all their branches across the region while other customize the collections according to the local tastes and preferences of the country they operate in. In some cases, the franchisor sets the collection and does not allow the franchisee to have a saying in that. Despite all that, Middle Eastern shoppers had 70.00% satisfaction level on the selection of products which is relatively a satisfactory rating.

One of the lowest ratings were given to salespeople's product knowledge and knowledge in fashion trends. The rating was equivalent to 57.26%. This is an area that retailers need to study well because fashion and product knowledge is essential in the fashion retail industry. The presence of such know how will allow sales people to convince customers with products, to create value to the products, to cross sell and eventually to upsell whatever products are available in the stores.

Another important aspect of fashion retailing is product displays and merchandising. This aspect received 65.69% satisfaction level. Retailers are advised to improve on this area because it will reflect directly on sales. Whenever products are displayed properly, they will grab the attention of customers to consider buying them or at least trying them. Moreover, whenever products are displayed with matching items, the probability of people buying complete outfits increases.

Middle Eastern shoppers gave 60.32% level of satisfaction for the speed and efficiency of service in the stores. Lack of speed and efficiency might be mainly caused by the unavailability of proper headcounts in the stores. Retailers usually try to keep costs low by keeping headcounts low and this might directly affect speed and accordingly service and sales.

The lowest satisfaction level was recorded on the ability of handling customer complaints. This was equivalent to 55.45%. Proper handling of customer complaints is a trainable skill. Complaining customers can be transformed to loyal customers to the stores if their complaint was taken seriously and a solution was found. For this reason, retailers are advised to train their employees on this aspect in order to avoid losing customers and to have the opportunity to transform complaining customers to loyal customers.

The fitting room service received 61.27% level of customer satisfaction. Being the highest selling area in any fashion store, the fitting room should receive outmost importance. At least one sales person should be constantly available in the fitting room to provide sizes, provide alternatives, cross sell and minimize the risk of shoplifting.

All the above mentioned aspects of service directly affect the overall level of customer service and customer satisfaction.

7.3 Recommendations

A set of recommendations is necessary to ensure, on multiple levels, the proper functioning of the system and to improve the level of the service and accordingly maximize the level of customer satisfaction.

7.3.1 Recommendations for retailers:

For fashion retailors across the Middle Regions, my recommendations for better service are as follows:

First; Customer service is not a luxury that fashion retailors choose to have or not to have. Customer service is a necessity that sustains the business and provides a competitive edge. For

this reason, retailors are advised to focus on their customer service programs and allocate budgets for it before they end up lagging behind their competitors.

Second; retailers are advised to think outside the box when it comes to customer service and come up with new initiatives and ideas that would exceed customers' expectations and thus strengthen customer loyalty.

Third; retailors are advised to properly staff their stores and to make sure that the actual headcounts are sufficient to provide the required level of service.

Fourth; Retailers need to exert all the effort needed to maintain a high level of motivation among their staff to ensure that their sales people are motivated enough to serve well. This can be done through rewards, recognition, benefits, incentives, etc.

Fifth; retailers need not to overload their staff with very long working hours as this might cause physical stress that will eventually affect the staffs' availability and willingness to serve the customers on the floor.

Sixth; Retailers are advised to make sure to recruit competent people suitable to work in such an industry, and once done, current employees should be properly trained and coached to master their roles and serve customers well.

Seventh; Retailers are recommended to maintain open communication channels with customers and sales people to be able to always evaluate how well they are doing, identify weak points in the system and see things from the point of view of others in order to improve and regularly upgrade the system.

7.3.2 Recommendations for Sales People:

For sales people across the Middle East Region, my recommendations for better service are as follows:

First; Sales people need to be passionate about fashion in order for them to be able to excel in such tiring environment. Whenever they have this passion, they will be motivated enough to educate themselves and improve their customer service techniques despite all the physical effort required.

Second; Sales people needs to be able to clearly identify the type and the need of each customer to be able to fully satisfy this need, for customer service is all about the satisfaction of customer needs.

Third; Sales people are requested to always be available on the floor and to show enthusiasm and willingness to serve the customers. They should be friendly and respectful while maintaining a smile along the process.

Forth; every employee in fashion retail should be fashionable, presentable, well groomed and reflects the brand image

7.3.3 Recommendations for Customer Service Trainers:

For Customer Service Trainers across the Middle East Region, my recommendations for better service are as follows:

First; Trainers need to have extensive knowledge in fashion retail and customer service for them to be able to transfer the knowledge and not fall in the trap of teaching what cannot be implemented in reality. This way they gain credibility in front of their audience.

Second; Trainers need to know the capacities and learning styles of their audience, and they should understand that shop based employees have a hands on learning styles. They enjoy exercises, games, role plays and not theories.

Third; Trainers need to create a system of follow-up on the training sessions or else the efficiency of the training will be minimal. Proper Follow-up keeps the knowledge fresh in the minds of the trainees and help them gradually in building good customer service habits on the shop floor.

7.4 Limitations of the research:

The research conducted sampled 5 Middle Eastern countries as such: Lebanon – United Arab Emirates – Sultanate of Oman – Kingdome of Saudi Arabia – Qatar. One Hundred shoppers were surveyed in each of the above mentioned countries through questionnaires distributed in shopping malls or shopping stores. The objective of this survey was to find out the level of customer satisfaction in Fashion stores across the region and try to figure out where are the gaps in customer service located. As a result, we aimed at designing a complete and structured program to improve on customer service and maximize customer satisfaction. Although the research was very beneficial and yielded impressive results and figures, some limitations existed and these are as such:

First, the sample surveyed only took into consideration 5 countries of the region to support hypothesis that were set for the whole Middle East region. This might question the reliability and validity of the representativeness of the sample; however, it would have been very costly to cover more countries and the financial resources were scarce. In addition to that, the time factor is crucial. It would have taken a lot of time to collect data from additional country, and this is a resource that I did not have at the time.

Moreover, the shoppers surveyed in each country were located in specific areas such as shopping malls and fashion stores. Some would consider that there is a big part of the population that might not be present often in such places.

In addition to the above, the individuals surveyed in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia were all males, for it is impossible to approach women in shopping areas to survey them. For this reason, our Saudi sample lacks any female participants.

Furthermore, about 88% of the sampled individuals fell in the age groups between 18 – 34 years. About 28% aged between 18 – 24 years and about 59 % aged more than 24. Only about 11% of the surveyed population exceeded 34 years of age. Noting that younger age groups have bigger tendencies for shopping, some people might question the fact that the majority of the surveyed individuals are in the lower age groups.

Finally, I was not able to source any studies made on customer service in fashion retail. This was a challenge as it deprived me of benchmark measures. To overcome that, I benchmarked my results against the standards of mystery shopping administrators.

7.5 Ending Note:

Based on the research done and the results received, and after the analysis of these results, a complete process was proposed to enhance customer service in the Middle Eastern fashion retail industry and to maximize satisfaction levels of customers. In addition to the research done, the system proposed was thought of and designed based on deep observations recorded during store visits in addition to feedback received from fashion and HR professionals interviewed. Those professionals met and interviewed are Brands managers, shop managers, retail recruiters and trainers. I do believe that the proposed system will yield good results and will be able to boost levels of customer satisfaction and improve massively on customer service in fashion retail. The important thing to note when implementing the system is that its success depends on the degree of follow up on proper implementation as well as feedback on results. The continuous feedback will allow us to identify loop wholes and potential gaps in the system, so accordingly we are able to bridge these gaps, amend the system if needed, or upgrade and improve the current practices. In all cases, the process is never ending. It has to be a flexible and dynamic process able to change with the changes and variations that happen to customers' tastes and preferences.

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Appendices

Appendix A: the Questionnaire

Appendix B: Sample On-job store orientation checklist

Appendix C: Sample mystery shopping report

Appendix A: the Questionnaire
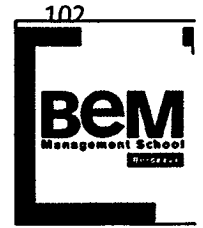
Customer Service Questionnaire:

The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather data from customers of fashion stores across the Middle East Region on the topic of customer service. This questionnaire aims at studying the level of service delivered by Middle Eastern Retailers as well as the quality of the service. For some questions, you are able to select multiple answers if applicable.

Age Group:

☐<18   ☐ 18 – 24   ☐24 – 34

☐34 – 64   ☐>64

Nationality: -----------------------------------

Location:

☐ Lebanon   ☐Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

☐Qatar

☐ Sultanate of Oman   ☐Dubai

Gender:
Male: ----------   Female: ----------

On a scale of 1 to 10 (10 being the most satisfied) how do you rate the services you receive during your shopping experiences in general:

  1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

How can you generally describe fashion sales people in your country:

☐ Indifferent   ☐ Helpful   ☐ Respectful   ☐ Rude

☐Energetic   ☐ Enthusiastic   ☐ Imposing   ☐disrespectful

Others: ---

During your shopping experience, you prefer to be:

☐ Greeted and then left alone

☐Greeted and approached directly

☐ Shadowed by a sales person throughout your stay in the shop

☐Helped upon request

Please indicate your opinions about each of the following statements:

	Strongly Disagree					Strongly agree
Sales people are properly groomed at all times.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Store atmosphere and decor are appealing.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
A good selection of products is present.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Sales people have full knowledge on products and fashion trends.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Merchandise displays are attractive.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Service is always fast and efficient.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Complaints are always taken seriously and solved on the spot.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
I expect help to be available in the fitting room at all times.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

What are the things that you expect so that you consider your shopping experience and customer service exceptional?

استبيان حول خدمة العملاء

إنّ الغرض من هذا الاستبيان هو جمع البيانات من زبائن متاجر الملابس في جميع أنحاء منطقة الشرق الأوسط حول موضوع خدمة الزّبائن. يهدف هذا الاستبيان الى دراسة مستوى الخدمة التي تقدمها المتاجر في الشرق الاوسط فضلا عن نوعية هذه الخدمة. بالنسبة لبعض الأسئلة ، بامكانك اختيار عدّة اجابات إن أمكن.

الفئة العمرية:

☐ 18>   ☐ 18-24   ☐ 24-34

☐ 64 <   ☐ 34-64

الجنسية:--

الموقع:

☐ لبنان   ☐ المملكة العربية السعودية

☐ قطر   ☐ سلطنة عمان   ☐ دبي

الجنس:

ذكر : ---------- **أنثى**---------- :

على مقياس من 1 إلى 10 (10 هي أعلى نسبة رضا) كيف تصنّف هذه الخدمة الّتي تلقّيتها خلال التسوق بشكل عام:

10   9   8   7   6   5   4   3   2   1

كيف تصف تصرّف البائع في متاجر الملابس في بلدك بشكلٍ عام،

☐ وقح   ☐ محترم   ☐ مستعدّ للمساعدة   ☐ غير مبالٍ

☐ غير محترم   ☐ يفرض نفسه   ☐ متحمس   ☐ نشيط

صفات أخرى: --

خلال تجربة التسوق الخاصّة بك ، تفضّل أنّ:

☐ يستقبلك البائع ثم يتركك وحيدا

☐ يستقبلك البائع و يبقى معك

☐ يبقى البائع بقربك، طيلة فترة وجودك في المتجر

☐ يساعدك أحدهم فقط عندما تطلب المساعدة

يرجى توضيح آرائكم حول كل من العبارات التالية

لا أوافق					أوافق	
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	يظهر البائعون دوماً بصورة مرتّبة و أنيقة
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	إنّ المتاجر تبدو مرتّبة و نظيفة في كلّ الأوقات
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	تكون البضائع المعروضة متنوّعة
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	يمتلك البائعون كلّ المعلومات المتعلّقة بالمنتجات و صيحات الموضة
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	تكون المنتجات دائماً معروضة بطريقة جذّابة
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	الخدمة دائماً سريعة و فعّالة
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	تؤخذ الشكاوى دوماً على محمل الجدّ و تحلّ على الفور
☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	أتوقّع الحصول على المساعدة في غرفة القياس في كلّ الأوقات

ما هي الأمور الّتي تتوقّعها، حتّى تَعتبر خبرة التّسوّق و خدمة الزّبائن استثنائيّة؟

Appendix B: Sample On-job store orientation checklist

ON-JOB STORE ORIENTATION CHECKLIST

Employee Name:	Store:
Position:	Store Manager Name:
Starting Date:	Country:

Section A:

Brand orientation

- ☐ Debrief about the brand
- ☐ History of the brand
- ☐ Review of Global locations

Store Specifics

Review & Explain the following:

Store Information

- ☐ Store Hours
- ☐ Work schedule-Employee availability and status (Full timer \ Part timer)
- ☐ Image & Wardrobe Guidelines
- ☐ Dress code policy
- ☐ Cash area
- ☐ Cashiers Policies and procedures
- ☐ Folding Specifics
- ☐ Inventory Plan
- ☐ Daily Stock level
- ☐ Organize the stockroom according to brand policy
- ☐ Visual merchandising & window dressing
- ☐ Shop operating procedures

Tour:

- ☐ Selling floor
- ☐ Backroom
- ☐ Review and discuss any current corporate memos

Section B:

Product Knowledge Specifications

☐ Season concept

☐ Fabrics

☐ Cuts

☐ References

☐ Colors

☐ Sizes

☐ Equivalence sizes

☐ Tendency

☐ Trends

Selling and wardrobe

☐ Review and Define:

    ☐ Product Features

    ☐ Product Benefits

    ☐ Alternatives

☐ Review Floor Supervision Checklist

Section C: (Done per store position)

Cash Procedures

General tasks

☐ Review cashier daily tasks

☐ Cashiers Policies and Procedures

☐ Reports

☐ Transfers

☐ Reservation

☐ Alteration

☐ Attendance

☐ Laundry

☐ Damaged items

Store Keeper:

☐ Organize the stockroom according to brand policy

☐ Check the return from the selling area

☐ Filling the store after the reposition is done

☐ Prepare the stock of any reception of shipment

☐ When receiving shipments check damaged boxes if any and then informs manager

☐ Make sure all garments are well distributed

☐ Return items are separated from other articles

☐ Do final replenishment one hour before closing

Visual Merchandising/Coordination

- [ ] General Standards and Guidelines
- [ ] Organization: Define the process for set up
- [ ] Folding Specifics
- [ ] Use of Pictures
- [ ] Tendencies and trends
- [ ] Coordination in sale period
- [ ] Use of fixtures
- [ ] Matching Materials
- [ ] When and why we do coordination
- [ ] Participation in coordination sessions
- [ ] Use of Coordination Checklist

Coordination Checklist

1. The shop is done according to pictures provided by supplier \ franchisor?
2. The clothes are merchandised according to tendency
3. All frontals are ironed
4. All shoes are matching with collection
5. Accessories are displayed according to the walls collection
6. All products are by color
7. Store is fixed by size
8. All new articles are in the store
9. Perfect Folding

Shop Manager / Assistant Manager

Manager Activity

☐ Schedule

☐ Rotation and orders

☐ Evaluations

☐ Agenda for visits (brand managers, commercials)

☐ Managing performance/Staff development

☐ Staff turnover

☐ Forecasts

☐ Budgets

☐ Expenses

☐ Headcount

☐ Delegation of tasks

Managers Stock and Inventory Control

☐ Inventory Plan

☐ Organize whole inventory procedure

☐ Preparation of whole materials

☐ Update Machines and ensure stock is ready

☐ Transfers between branches

☐ Extra order

☐ Daily Stock level

Commercial Climate

☐ Discuss current market trends (assume that the tendency differ from season to season)

☐ Discuss current Holiday and events

☐ Seasonal Calendar (holidays, rush days, Sale)

☐ Intensive research on competitors' brands

☐ Comments on products

Sale Periods

☐ Customer Data Base

☐ Planning: Staff, Product, Structure

☐ Scheduling

☐ Merchandising

☐ Stock Rotation

☐ New Collection Orders

☐ Supplies from Warehouse

☐ Signs

☐ Prices

☐ Window Banner

Sales associate:

☐ Daily reposition \ replenishment

☐ Checking the missing sizes

☐ Checking the shoes display

☐ Checking the accessories display

☐ Review Customer Service Standards

☐ Closing of garments by size

☐ Clear fitting room

☐ Send return to stock room

☐ Fix accessories and shoes displays

☐ Exchange and refund policies

☐ Alteration policy

☐ Fitting room procedure

Window Procedure

☐ Use of Photographs (apply photos sent from supplier \ Franchisor)

☐ Training Windows (Utilize Window Checklist)

☐ Prices in Windows

☐ Clothes Well Ironed

☐ Lights timing

☐ Make sure to keep the window clean

Window Dresser Checklist

1. Are clothes well ironed?
2. Is the window clean?
3. Is the window priced?
4. Spot lights are well directed on mannequins?
5. All spot lights are on?
6. Clothes are well displayed?
7. Are clothes displayed according to pictures?

Appendix C: Sample mystery shopping report

(Generated by GWR (2012, March), For Zara, Kids Section)

N.B.: Neither the branch nor the country shall be disclosed for confidentiality purposes

Zara - Exchange (Kids' section) V1.0

ZARA

Service Excellence Report

Your Performance:
Excellent

Report Generated: 2012-03-11 20:07
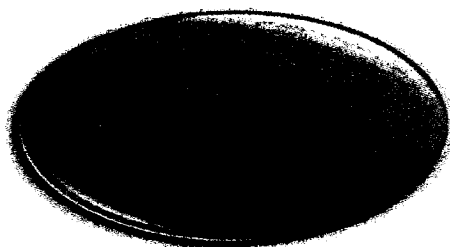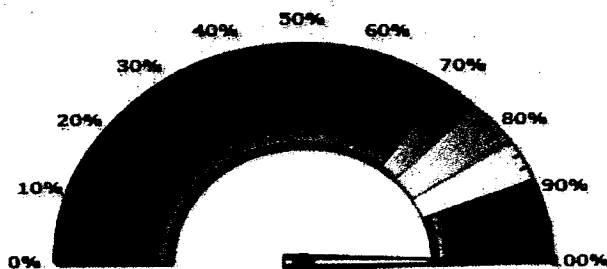
Survey Score

Excellent

Section Summary

	Current	Previous	Diff.
Cleanliness	100.00%	-	-
Sales Person	100.00%	-	-
Fitting Room	100.00%	-	-
Cashier	100.00%	-	-
TOTAL	100.00%	-	-

Scored | Missing | Previous: Previous Survey

Date: 2012-3-3   Survey Total: 100.00% (112 / 112)
Time In: 14:38
Time Out: 15:20

Name of the Staff member

Samer - Ramy

Name of the cashier

Jessica

Approximate number of customers

3

Approximate number of employees

2

Cleanliness	100.00% (12 / 12)

Cleanliness (9.45%)	100.00% (12 / 12)

External Display Window	100.00% (3 / 3)

1. Was the exterior display window arranged properly?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
2. Was it clean and well lit?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
3. Were the prices in the display window clear and the spelling correct?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1

Additional Comments

The exterior display was clean and well arranged.

Interior Presentation	100.00% (9 / 9)

4. Was the store clean and tidy?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	2/2
5. Was the sales area free of disturbing odor? If no specify what.	⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1

N/A

6. Was the product presentation attractive?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
7. Was it easy to find your way around the shop?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
8. Were the prices marked in local currency?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
9. Was the music playing at an appropriate level of volume ?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
10. Was the music appropriate to the brand?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1
11. What was the type of music that was playing?		

Young Music

12. Was the air condition working properly?	☐ N/A ⦿ Yes ◯ No	1/1

Additional Comments

The clothes were properly arranged. The shelves were tidy and the ambiance was comfortable. It was easy to find the requested items because the clothes were divided as per age and gender.

Sales person (29.13%)	100.00% (33 / 33)

Sales person Service	100.00% (30 / 30)

13. Did any of staff member notice you and greet you upon your entrance within 20 sec? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

14. Were ALL the staff members wearing their name tags? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

15. Were the staff members wearing their uniform ? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

16. Were the staff members well groomed and presentable? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

17. Were the staff members acting in a professional manner? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

18. Was a staff member attentive in case you needed assistance? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

19. Was he/she friendly when you asked for help? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 2/2

20. In case you asked for another size, did the staff member provide you with your size within 2 minutes? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 2/2
(If not, please state the exact time)

21. Was the staff member aware of the place of each product? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 2/2

22. Did the staff member have adequate product knowledge? ☑N/A

23. Was the Staff Member asking the right questions to the customers and ensuring they match the right ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3
products to each customer's individual needs?

24. Did the staff member try to sell you an additional item? (Suggesting any other item that might go well ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3
with what you're trying (accessories, belt, skirt, top,.....).

Additional Comments

Dominique who was standing by the entrance door greeted us. When we walked in the kid's section, no staff member greeted us. I informed Ramy that I was looking for clothes for my 1 year old baby boy. He showed me the available sets of clothes and went to help another customer. I checked the babies items for a few minutes and then I moved to the 4 year old boys items. Samer was attentive and ready to help. He was folding the clothes on the shelves. I asked him for a pair of pants for my 4 years old son. He show me some options and suggested to make him try a brown suit that might fit. He also picked up a shirt suitable that went well with the suit and suggested to try it too. Samer was friendly and very helpful.

Service Excellence	100.00% (3 / 3)

25. What kind of help were you offered when asking about an item? ☐ N/A 3/3
◯ The staff member checked the stock
◯ The staff member checked if the item is available in another branch
◯ The staff member suggested alternative, another item similar to the one that you picked
⊙ The staff member helped you to pick up the right item for you, and mentioned the availability of the item in the store
◯ The staff member didn't do anything

26. In case of a complaint, did the Staff Member whom you complained to, solve the issue in a ☑N/A
professional manner

27. Were you satisfied with the action taken to solve the complaint? ☑N/A

Additional Comments

Fitting Room	100.00% (19 / 19)

Fitting Room (22.83%)	100.00% (19 / 19)

Sales person Service - Fitting Room	100.00% (16 / 16)

28. Were there any of the staff members available to assist you in the fitting rooms' section ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 3/3

29. Did the staff member greet you? ☑N/A

30. Was the staff member wearing a name tag? ☑N/A

31. Did the staff member count the clothes with you and hand you a number? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 2/2

32. Was the fitting room clean? ☐N/A ⊙Yes ◯No 2/2

33. Were the lights in the fitting room well maintained? 1/1

	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	
34. Was the fitting room free of bad odor?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	1/1
35. Was the policy of the fitting room available inside the fitting room?	Yes	1/1
36. Was the fitting room free from already tried clothes from previous customers?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	2/2
37. Did the staff member help you with sizes ?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	2/2
38. Did they get you the new item size promptly and within 2 minutes? (If not, please state the exact time)	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	2/2
39. Did the staff member try to sell you an additional item? In case he/she suggested any other item that might go well with what you're trying (accessories, belt, skirt, top,......).	☑N/A	

Additional Comments

Samer was also the staff member who assisted me in the fitting room. He was standing outside the fitting room and attentive in case I needed help. When my son tried the suit, I was not convinced so Samer immediately tried to find an alternative. He explained that the current trend is now a cotton jacket like the ones available in the men's section, and that it can be worn with a t-shirt, jeans and tennis shoes. I agreed to let my son try the jacket he proposed. He checked on the shelves and since the jacket was not available, he brought me the appropriate size from the stock room within a minute. He also brought me a t-shirt that might go well with the jacket and suggested my son try them both. After my son tried it, he suggested a hat with the same colors. Then he escorted me to pick up suitable shoes. Meanwhile, Ramy was playing with my 10 month old son. The fitting room was clean and the policy was available. The 2 staff members Ramy and Samer were arranging the shelves after customer's departure.

Service Excellence - Fitting Room	100.00% (3 / 3)

		3/3
40. What kind of help were you offered when asking about an item ? ☐ N/A		
⦿ The staff member checked the stock		
◯ The staff member checked if the item is available in another branch		
◯ The staff member suggested alternative, another item similar to the one that you picked		
◯ The staff member helped you to pick up the right item for you, and mentioned the availability of the item in the store		
◯ The staff member didn't do anything		
41. In case of a complaint, did the staff member whom you complained to, solve the issue in a professional manner ?	☑N/A	
42. Were you satisfied with the action taken to solve the complaint ?	☑N/A	

Additional Comments

Samer was very helpful and tried to promote and up sell many items.

Cashier	100.00% (48 / 48)
Cashier (38.58%)	100.00% (48 / 48)
Experience at the cash desk	100.00% (25 / 25)

43. How many cash registers were available?		
2		
44. What were the number of cash register operating at the time of purchase?		
1		
45. Was the cashier's desk clean and tidy?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	1/1
46. Was the "Feedback Card" available at the cashier's counter?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	1/1
47. Was the Refund and Exchange policy available at the cash counter?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	1/1
48. Was the cashier wearing a name tag?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	3/3
49. Was the cashier smiling?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	3/3
50. In case there was a queue, how many customers were before you?		
1		
51. Was the cashier fast in processing your transaction? (1 minute in case there was no queue; 3 minutes in case there was a queue)	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	2/2
52. Was the Quanz Card available?	☐N/A ⦿Yes ◯No	2/2
53. When asking about the Quanz Card, were you well informed?		2/2

54. Were you handed a Feedback Card with your purchase? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

55. Did you receive the exact change? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 1/1

56. When the cashier handed you your purchased item, did he/she fold it properly and put it in the bag in a proper manner? Yes 3/3

57. In case you asked to have the purchased item taken as a gift, did the employee cut the label, fold it □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 1/1
properly and place it in a proper manner in a bag?

58. Did any of the staff members mention a closing line while leaving the store? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 2/2

59. What was the closing statement?

"Mabrouk and Thank you"

60. In case the alarm went OFF while you were leaving the store, did the staff member approach you, ☑ N/A
and take a look at the bag in a professional way?

Additional Comments

Jessica was the cashier who helped me. She was smiling and welcoming. When my turn arrived, she scanned the prices and stated the total amount of 45 000 L.L. I paid 50 000 L.L and she returned the exact change. She stapled the receipt along with the feedback card on the bag. She handed me the bag and said "mabrouk" and thank you. My transaction at the cash desk took 2 minutes.

Service at the cash desk	100.00% (23 / 23)
Exchange transaction	100.00% (23 / 23)
Exchange transaction (18.11%)	100.00% (23 / 23)

61. Date of the Exchange visit

04/03/2012

62. Time of the Exchange visit

12:22:00

63. Was the cashier wearing his/her uniform? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 1/1

64. Was the cashier well groomed and presentable? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

65. Was the cashier wearing a name tag? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

66. Name of the cashier?

Jessica

67. Did the cashier assist you in the exchange process? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 2/2

68. Was the cashier friendly and welcoming while processing the exchange? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

69. Was the staff member friendly and welcoming? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

70. Did the cashier consult his manager before proceeding? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 2/2

71. What was the name of the staff member who assisted you?

Comment: Rock

72. Did the staff member suggest alternatives? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

73. Did the cashier finish your transaction within 2.5 minutes? □ N/A ⊙ Yes ○ No 3/3

Additional Comments:

I headed straight to the counter. Nicole was available at that moment and Jessica was standing behind the cash register. I approached Nicole and informed her that I needed to exchange the item I brought. She asked me to keep the bag with me while choosing something else. I went to the kids section, Rock was available there. I asked him for a jacket, he escorted me to the shelves to pick up the right size. I asked him if there is any t-shirt that goes well with the jacket. He went to another shelve and brought me a nice t-shirt. I thanked him and went back to the counter. Jessica was the only cashier available at that moment. She welcomed me and remembered me from last visit. She checked the items I chose and mentioned that I did a good choice and that the items match nicely together. She played with my son and asked me about his name. I didn't present the receipt at that moment, so she asked me if I had the receipt and so I handed it to her. She was smiling and very friendly this day a well. She informed me that the difference is L.L 65000, I paid via visa card. She thanked me for the visit. The manager Nicole, was near the cash counter helping Jessica since there was a queue of customers at the cash counter.

Personal opinion

74. Did the overall transaction go well?   ⊙ Yes ○ No

75. Did you enjoy your visit?   ⊙ Yes ○ No

76. Will you come back?   ⊙ Yes ○ No

77. Will you recommend this store to a friend or family?   ⊙ Yes ○ No

Additional Comments

It was a good experience and the staff members were very friendly and helpful.
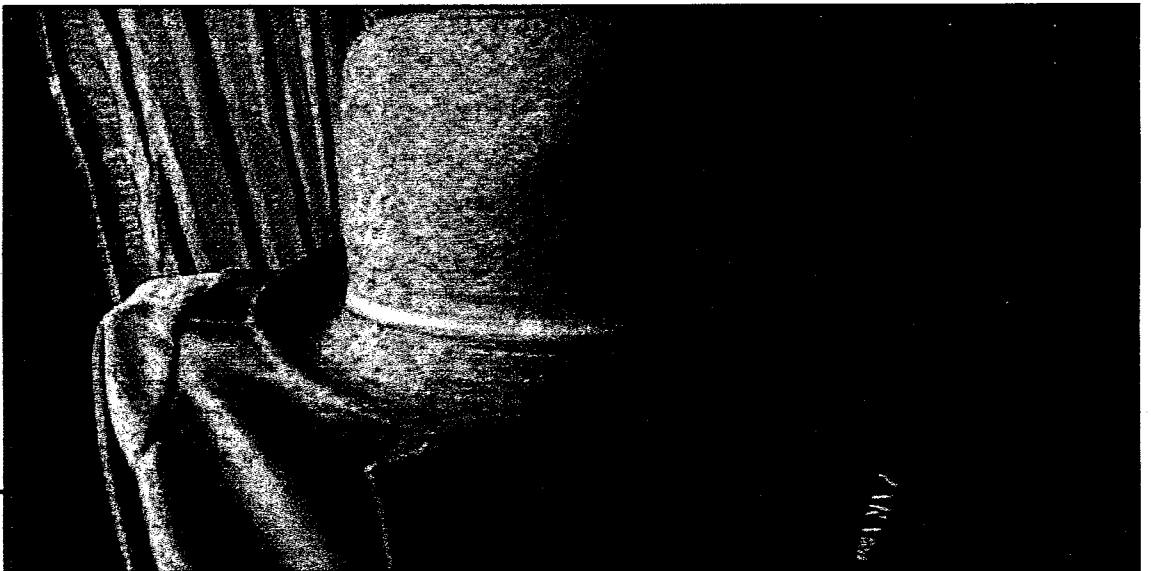
78. Total amount paid:

109000

Survey Total: 100.00% (112 / 112)

Date: 2012-03-03
Ref: 129843
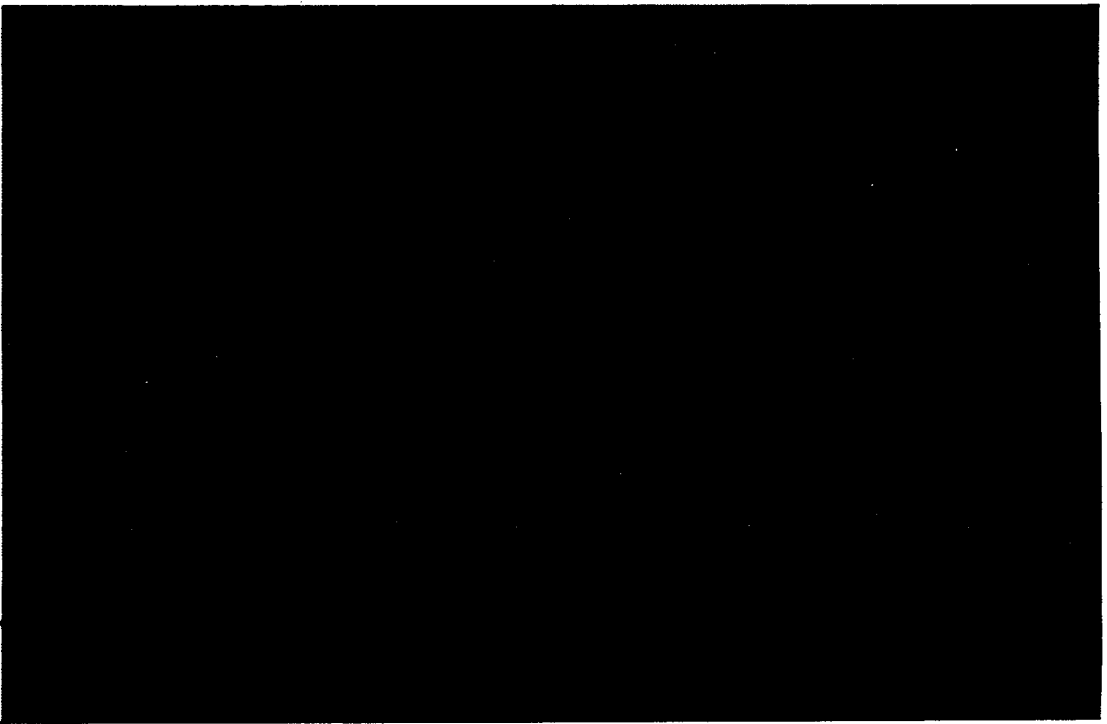G.W.R

Date: 2012-03-03
Ref: 129844
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Date:
2012-03-03

Ref: 129846
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Date:
2012-03-03

Ref: 129847
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