


2015

Employee Perception of the Value of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation

Michael L. Dawkins
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2015

Abstract

Employee Perception of the Value of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation

by

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MBA, Rosemont College, 2002

BA, Eastern University, 2000

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

May 2015

Abstract

The number of service-oriented jobs has increased locally and nationally, and organizations are spending millions of dollars to train front-line employees to maintain customer satisfaction and compete in the service industry. Despite the financial investments of these training programs, little research has investigated the holistic effectiveness of customer-focused training (CFT) programs. Researchers found positive relationships between the constructs under investigation and reported that when CFT programs are delivered on a consistent basis with leadership support, they help build a service-oriented culture. The purpose of this case study was to investigate employee perceptions of CFT and relationships between performance, engagement, and building a service-oriented culture, where the questions were designed to address front-line employees in the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania. The conceptual framework for this study was by Service Quality, where the concepts for the framework support organizational culture and social exchange. The total number of participants was 36 with 27 for interviews and 9 for a focus group. The participants were selected using a purposeful sampling approach. The data were analyzed by coding for categories, themes, and patterns to reflect in-depth understanding and reporting of CFT among front-line employees. The participants felt that CFT programs were beneficial for them and could help improve customer service. Given these findings, similarly-situated employees may view training in a positive light and may be willing to engage in more training to improve customer service. Human resource personnel may be encouraged from the positive results of this study to develop and implement more training, which may help employees and leaders build a credible service-oriented culture.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this work to the people who made it possible for me to complete this amazing educational journey. First, I want to thank my mother, Phyllis Dawkins for encouraging me at an early age to take education seriously and to stay in school and do my best. I want to thank my lovely wife Nichole Dawkins, and our two children Gary Dawkins and Sherell Dawkins, who gave their support and encouragement continuously at times when I thought I would not make it. Finally, I want to recognize extended family members, friends, and close colleagues for their unwavering support throughout the entire journey in completing this dissertation work. I am thankful to each of you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Even with enormous investments in customer service training to improve customer and employee relationships, employee performance, and business success, companies are still experiencing a high rate of customer dissatisfaction and complaints (Laharnar, Glass, Perrin, Hanson, & Anger, 2013). Although most companies anticipate and recognize the importance of and need for training development and are investing resources to improve employee performance and organizational success (Kang & Hyun, 2012), there are high level discussions and concerns relating to whether there is a positive impact of training for improving customer service in the focused areas. The widespread idea of training as a key success tool for building customer partnership remains a questionable Human Resource (HR) process. Laharnar et al.(2013) posited that customer service training teaches employees how to be personable, smile, and be professional to customers. However, this ideology of customer service and training is just a small part of a customer employee relationship. To identify and evaluate customer focus training (CFT) as a viable business option, organizations must assess the CFT program as a strategic approach that can motivate and influence employees' behavior and attitude in a positive and influential manner to improve service quality. A research survey conducted in China included 281 service organizations making multigroup model comparisons relating to relationships, cutting across service settings, quality management, and training (Borek, Parlikad, Webb, & Woodall, 2013). Borek et al. (2013) discovered that job-related training had a positive relationship between employee performance and delivering quality service within the overall system performance. Relationships of behavioral and attitudinal attributes are conceptualized as a direct result of the employee's role in influencing and shaping the perception of service quality

and actions portrayed in the delivery of service to customers (Kang & Hyun, 2012). In this study, I assessed the value of CFT to determine the relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service-oriented culture.

Statement of the Problem

Organizations are spending millions of dollars on training programs to educate employees on how to be more sensitive to the needs of customers and serve them in a professional and courteous manner (Rahimli, 2012). Organizations are also investing valuable resources such as time, content development, and trainers delivering CFT programs. The problem lies in the fact that very little is known about the relationships that exist between CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building an organizational service-oriented culture to influence employee behavior to serve customers effectively and to facilitate workplace efficacy. The problem with designing effective training programs to improve employees' behavior and performance is also an increasing demand for organizations to lead and gain competitive advantage in the service industry. This problem represents a knowledge gap related to determining relationships between CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building an organizational service oriented-culture.

CFT sponsored by leaders within organizations is becoming a significant discussion among professionals and scholars as to the implications of training for front-line employees and organizational objectives. Training on global levels has shown significant trending throughout the years, where training statistics indicate a steady rise in development and delivery to emphasize key investments and the importance of training. The American Society for Training

and Development (ASTD, 2008) indicated that in 2004, investments annually for individual employee training were listed at \$955, which reflected an increase from the previous year of \$135. The long-term investments each year on customer training development and delivery to front-line employees are geared to improve performance, satisfy the customer, and improve the bottom line organizationally (Barber & Goodman, 2011). Organizational culture is a broad concept with certain sets of core values, behaviors, and beliefs held by a group of front-line employees (Azanza, Moriano, & Molero, 2013). The actual culture of organizations will shape the everyday behavior of employees based on structured policies, procedures, and guidelines (Borek et al. 2013). These cultural, organizational attributes will ultimately affect employees' behavior and guide performance (Karatepe, 2013).

Customer service training is considered a process for organizational success and an important tool to develop front-line employees' skill set in understanding organizational culture and values. The high demands of customer expectations and quality service from customer advocacy groups have created a challenging environment for service industries to perform effectively to sustain and maintain the optimal level of service. There is a growing concern within the transit industry among front-line employees regarding customer service complaints and confrontations between employees and customers. Leadership within organizations should understand the implications of psychological and social constructs that influence individuals to want to serve customers effectively (Tahir, Naeem, Sarfraz, Javed, & Ali, 2011). Organizations are taking a new approach in identifying employees with a good disposition to serve customers, and they are hiring for the attitude and training for the technical and social skills (McColl-

Kennedy, Sparks, & Nguyen, 2011). Service representatives play an important role in building a customer service culture because they represent the face of the organization. The CFT will be the central approach within this study to gain understanding of front-line employees' perspectives about the relationship of the training to employee performance, engagement, and building a service oriented-culture.

The shortfall in training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service-oriented culture presents a gap and shows the importance of further investigation to help build customer partnership and improve organizational effectiveness. The critical concept of customer service is to understand that front-line employees are the direct link between the public and the organization's strategic goals and objectives (Liu, 2011.). Their attitude and behavior can either influence customer satisfaction and build effective relationships or create a negative perception about service delivery. This qualitative research study added to the body of existing knowledge in human resource management (HRM) and organization development (OD) to help understand the phenomenon of training development and effectiveness to help employee performance to align with organizational goals and objectives in delivering quality service. The findings will benefit other transit agencies throughout the United States and other parts of the world to understand the implications of CFT programs among front-line employees.

Background of the Problem

Organizations historically have investigated the concepts of hiring and training front-line employees for maximum performance in serving customers and have made their best attempts at finding motivated and spirited employees to fulfill customer expectations during interaction and

transaction experiences (McColl-Kenned et al., 2011). In the global community, service organizations are the largest economic engine that drives the economy (Mackelprang, Jayanth, & Xu, 2012). Statistics show that service transactions are responsible for job growth in labor markets and are responsible for hiring front-line employees into entry-level positions that completely interface with the general populous (Portrafke, 2013). Nonetheless, there is still a shortfall in employee performance, customer satisfaction, and organizational success in building a customer service oriented culture.

Quality customer service is derived from the opinion that the experience does not lie in the transaction, but rather in the consumption of the experience to enhance customer perception and opinion of service delivery (Rust & Oliver, 1994). Front-line employees are those who are directly in contact with customers on a daily basis who at times are somewhat reluctant to serve customers in a professional and respectful manner, making it their number-one priority (McColl-Kenned et al., 2011). In the service industry, front-line representatives must be motivated through training programs that provide the opportunity to understand the strategic position of the organization and how service is delivered to customers (Tahir et al., 2011). Portrafke (2013) posited that an organizational service oriented business that fosters the idea of training combined with strategic information sets the foundation for creating a competitive advantage that is sustainable over time. Nonetheless, there are growing concerns among scholars and practitioners in the field of HRM, who is concerned about the impact of training effectiveness as it relates to employee performance, customer relations, and building a service culture (Karatepe, 2013).

The common problem in serving customers is that front-line employees are frequently overwhelmed with negative behaviors that customers bring to the service environment (Barber & Goodman, 2011). A key responsibility of an organization is to recognize negative customer behavior and provide a level of awareness and training to deal with the difficult customers. To identify with situations and circumstances in customer interaction that can potentially lead to confrontation and provide a de-escalation tool to deal effectively for employee performance and customer satisfaction, companies are tapping into this level training for business success (Barber & Goodman, 2011). Over the years, the United States has placed a great emphasis on the manufacturing industries, but there has been a shift where most organizations are looking at service quality, delivery, and employee performance as the key indicators of successful business outcomes (Köksal, Batmaz, & Testik, 2011). Satisfying customers is a unique and dynamic process of evaluation in that it is subjective and complex in nature (Yoo & Park, 2007).

Businesses are using human resources processes as a key departmental structure of resources to plan, manage, and deliver customer service training to improve organizational and employee performance (Bon & Mustafa, 2013). Training development programs have catapulted at the strategic level of organizations to build learning and training environment for employees (Shuck, Rocco, & Albornoz, 2011). Organizations are implementing and developing self-efficacy pre and post training assessment to evaluate and improve customer awareness and service performance (Ford & Dickson, 2012). Customer-focused driven companies around the world are also investing millions of dollars in customer service training initiatives, knowing that the customer is the lifeblood for the survival of the business. Disney Institute is a big proponent

of customer service and satisfaction and places a tremendous emphasis on organizational service orientation, customer satisfaction, and employee performance to deal effectively with customers (Yee, Lee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2013). The need for employee performance, customer satisfaction, and building a customer service culture has created a unique dynamic for organizations to be creative in applying social skills training to enable employees to better serve the general populous and deliver social change in society through effective customer relations (Atanasova & Senn, 2011).

The most important aspects of providing quality service within the workplace internally and externally for customer satisfaction is the ability of front-line employees to perform and engage customers in an effective way to improve workplace efficacy and performance (ASTD, 2008). Nonetheless, to satisfy the customer and to keep employees engaged and performing at a high level to facilitate customer satisfaction have become the most challenging issues for corporate managers and leaders in this era (Yee et al., 2013). Statistics show that there are more employees who are not performing and are not engaged effectively for customer satisfaction than there are high performing and engaged employees (Karatepe, 2013). On a global level corporations are assessing performance and engagement level of employees and are developing business metrics by using results found to focus on customer satisfaction and improve organizational portfolio (Barber & Goodman, 2011). To fully understand the impact of employee performance and engagement and how it affects businesses and customer satisfaction, as cited in Kennedy and Daim (2010) and discussed by Casison and Tansiri (2004), the Gallup Organization, a New York based research entity conducted several research surveys and found

that 22 million workers, amounting to 17% of all U.S. employees are actively disengaged costing the U.S. economy approximately \$300 billion on a yearly basis and resulting in lower productivity and customer satisfaction. Casison and Tansiri (2004) proposed that companies should utilize the results to bridge the gap between employee performance and engagement and incorporate the feedback and findings in the decision making process for customer and employee improvement. Monitoring performance and engagement of employees for business success and customer satisfaction is a priority for most service providers (Shuck & Wollard, 2008). The literature reveals a gap between employee performance and engagement to satisfy customers for organizational success, but this level of relationship is not known (Slatten & Mehmetoglu, 2011).

It is reported that the cost of poor customer service has had an adverse impact on organizations and businesses globally (Patterson & Baron, 2010). The Genesys organization, a world-wide company that connects with over 4,000 customers in over 80 countries, reported that “it cost the U.S. \$338.5 Billion in poor customer service in 16 key economies globally, and the average cost in a year lost to competitors as a result of poor service is \$243 Billion” (Genesys Group, 2013, p. 2). The report showed the importance of customer service and employee engagement and indicated that 86.4% of customers are receptive to employees helping during transactions that require self-service and employee assistance. Poor customer service as reported by the Genesys Group (2013), has had tremendous impact on organizations and enterprises throughout the world directly impacting revenue. The report stressed that customers are not only complaining about the poor service they received, but are defecting to competitors who are

providing better service. Providing quality service is imperative for successful organizations to retain and maintain customer satisfaction.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate the relationships among front-line employees' perceptions of CFT programs, employee performance, engagement, and building an organizational service oriented-culture at Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). The CFT aspects of the research were segmented into three major units, benefits of training, support for training, and motivational attributes for training. Building an organizational service oriented-culture comprises three major components: (a) strategic leadership, (b) human resource (HR) processes and (c) service strategies. The objectives of this study was to provide an in-depth knowledge of the relationships that exist between constructs, and to help Human Resource Development (HRD) practitioners and researchers advance the concepts of training, performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture of quality service.

The approach used interviews, focus group, and documents to facilitate the exploration of CFT programs. Interviews were semistructured as a guide to ascertain knowledge of the phenomenon under investigation, as suggested by Angelis, Parry, and Macintyre (2012). These approaches have the ability to provide a level of validity explored through multiple perspectives to create and reveal understanding of training impact within the confines of employee performance, engagement, and building a customer service oriented culture. I explained the relationships in the study that are too complex to present in surveys and/or experimental

approaches. This approach helped to uncover the differences and similarities within and between units and allow me to analyze findings surfacing across settings where I was able to identify relationships thematically in the literature.

Research Questions

Key overarching question: What is the perception of relationships between CFT programs among front-line transit employees' performance, engagement, and building a service-oriented culture? Four sub-questions in the areas of CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building an organizational service oriented culture was addressed to investigate the central question.

R1. What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and employee performance?

R2. What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and employee engagement?

R3. What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and building a service oriented culture?

R4. What are the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service-oriented culture?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

I investigated and examined the relationships between front-line employees and training from a sociological and psychological perspective to identify what motivates employees to want to serve the customers and each other with the highest level of respect and professionalism. Theoretical concepts and research literature within qualitative studies are designed to bring about awareness and understanding of complex phenomena from multiple perspectives (Houssemand

& Meyers, 2013). Workman (2014) discussed these perspectives as social and human experiences to further understand complex and unique relationships among variables and constructs in research literature and theoretical constructs. I examined the environment that leadership creates to ensure that employees buy into the organizational goals and objectives through corporate-sponsored CFT programs. The concepts of social exchange theory guided this research plan.

Social exchange, historically, has provided a robust framework in understanding organizational behavior, structured on the rule of exchange. According to Kacmar, Bachrach, Harris, and Noble (2012) social exchange contributes to building relationships that are reciprocal in nature and yield a bidirectional experience for something given and something received in return. Gouldner (1960) suggested that social exchange theory is a conceptual approach that embodies reciprocity to build relationships and improve employee attitudes.

The conceptual framework guide the research study from an organizational standpoint (culture), customer service training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. The actual framework suggests that a relationship exists among and between the outlined constructs in a reciprocal process worthy of investigation. Maxwell (2013) reported that a conceptual framework supports a research study by personal experiential knowledge in the real world to enrich the study and to also recognize the researcher as the instrument in the process. The alignment of theory from prior research will create an intentional purpose to study the broader concept of the phenomena, organizational culture and social theoretical constructs. Maxwell (2013) disclosed that a useful conceptual framework helps to

guide the researcher and draws particular attention to key events and phenomena. The drawback is making sure that no one area is so conceptually driven that the other areas of the study are left unattended.

The conceptual framework represents a corporate mindset to meet, examine, and develop concepts of relationships to help enhance employee and organizational performance, training effectiveness, and building a service oriented culture. The framework is influenced by the work of Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985, 1988) to contribute to the foundational concepts that there is a level of communication and relationships that exist between constructs to provide service quality. Chapter 2 contains more about the conceptual framework..

Assumptions

Historically, training has been used as a tool to enhance employee' skills and performance relating to organizational core values and systems to provide quality service (Bakker, 2012). The perception of these attributes can be influenced by employees, supervisors, managers, and others based on varying degree of relationships. One key assumption within the study was front-line employees, selected as participants would have the adequate awareness and background to understand the strategic value of delivering quality customer service. I assumed that each participant who completed the CFT program was equipped with service quality information taught in training and development, thus providing contextual awareness and understanding of a customer oriented culture, and performance and engagement protocol for building a service driven environment for customer satisfaction (Segoro, 2013). I assumed that I would select participants who are able to respond to the interview items in an appropriate way to

provide sufficient data to answer the research questions. My presence and involvement as the researcher, as well as having extensive knowledge and familiarity with organizational training and development, helped build credibility and trust among employees participating in the study. This level of researcher involvement as discussed by Maxwell (2013) is considered a very dependable approach that places participants in a safe and accommodating environment. A qualitative researcher may be skilled and knowledgeable in a specific area or discipline, but at the same time must exercise a level of care and objectivity when dealing with subjects in a research study (Creswell, 2007).

Scope and DeLimitations

The organization chosen for this study is located in the southeastern region of Pennsylvania, which limits the depth and focus of transit agencies globally to a more narrow concept of transit industry focus. The participants in this study are front-line employees within SEPTA. The study includes participants from nine operating locations geographically that serve customers in the five county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania and have participated in CFT programs. The total number of participants chosen for this study was three from each operating district to reflect gender (male and female) and years of experience. The number of participants interviewed were 27 total, from a total population of 2,700 operators. The interviews took place at locations that are independent of SEPTA. The interview process took up to 25 – 30 minutes for each participant. The focus group consisted of nine participants separate from the interview pool but inclusive of the nine operating locations and 2,700 total population. The session lasted

for 45 to 60 minutes in length.. I recorded the discussions and questions by way of audio recording and transcribe accurately the content from both interviews and focus group.

The study is limited to front-line employees based on their involvement in CFT and the fact that they are the face of the organization, meaning that they interface with customers on a daily basis. No management personnel took part in this study because the focus was on employees who interface with customers on a daily basis. This exclusion of management allowed the employees' freedom to be open and honest in their discussions without having to worry about management involvement which could have influenced the responses and comfort of the participants. I did not evaluate the performance of employees, because the purpose was to investigate the relationships between training and building a service oriented-culture.

Limitations

There are key limitations to be considered when embarking upon a qualitative case study, specifically when arriving and drawing conclusions about the participants' experiences (Creswell, 2014). Because this study is qualitative, a causal linkage cannot be established (Patton, 2002). The results are not generalizable, because a random sample would not be appropriate for this study to select participants based on the involvement of only one organization. The participants are front-line employees, and the opinions gathered may not be representative of the total population within SEPTA. The opinions may be influenced by management presence and involvement and more importantly the responses may be biased based on feelings of fear and retribution, even though confidentiality will be at the forefront in protecting the participants. Creswell (2014) reported that a qualitative researcher must be

objective despite the fact that he or she must be immersed in the data collection and involved with participants. Therefore, I established a good rapport with the participants to ensure a high level of collaboration and knowledge to create a positive understanding of the purpose of the research and how it will help to enhance organizational and employee effectiveness in delivering service quality to customers.

Nature of Study

This qualitative case study is appropriate because it gives the researcher a comprehensive understanding through thick description to facilitate in-depth analysis of constructs being investigated (Maxwell, 2013). The methods to collect the data include interviews, a focus group, and document review (Creswell, 2014). I collected information and strived to make sense of the data in an interpretative manner that is holistic through coding to draw conclusions based on the analysis and not just the findings in a piecemeal approach. Yin (2009) offered the benefits of a qualitative case study versus a quantitative approach as giving the researcher a little more control over the research environment and event to facilitate the real world and life context. Additionally, a case study opens up the prospect of a holistic understanding of the phenomena by using key questions inductively from a more general terminology (Creswell, 2007). The research design is detailed in Chapter 3.

Definition of Terms

Customer focus training. Training developed by human resources (HR) and supported by leadership to ensure a connection between front-line employees to understand strategic goals and

objectives of an organization to improve performance, customer satisfaction, and build an organizational service culture (McCull-Kennedy et al., 2011).

Frontline employees. Employees who are in direct contact with customers and play a critical role in the perception of service quality and delivery (Dehghan, Zenouzi, & Albadvi, 2011).

Operating locations. These locations are considered the primary setting or sample population where the research will be conducted with selected participants in the study (Creswell, 2014).

Organizational culture. The concepts of how organizations function to promote growth and development for their employees within the internal cultural context of policies, guidelines, and procedures (Aktaş, Çiçek, & Kıyak, 2011).

Service quality. Within a service organization, the focus lies in the delivery of quality customer service to give an overall experience of organizational culture combined with a customer focused attitude and behavior for customer satisfaction (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985).

Social exchanges. The concepts that employees will develop relationships among consumers and each other for a specific or particular reason that is mutually beneficial in terms of exchanges in delivering quality service (Oc & Bashshur, 2013).

Service-oriented culture. Addresses the unique strategic qualities within an organization to ensure that service is the core business model that facilitates the needs of internal and external customers from a holistic perspective (Tahir et al., 2011).

Significance of the Study

Organizational improvement is pivotal for sustainability in service organizations whether in non-profit, government or private sector based on service performance indicated by the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) in their Public Transportation Fact Book (2013). According to APTA (2013) a major government organization that supports transit agencies throughout the United States and parts of Canada, public transportation agencies spent \$55 billion for operation of service and capital investments in 2011 to provide effective service for customers and rebuild the system, and that ridership has increased in the United States based on the economic conditions. Essentially, there is a growing need within public transit systems to project more awareness and education of emerging changes in the business environment and the characteristics of overall customer satisfaction, specifically pointing to new and existing customers (Lai & Chen, 2011). The probability of an organization surviving without positive employee performance and customer partnership is low. Setting levels of excellence for customer satisfaction through quality service and customer focused training are key components to stay competitive, survive in service environment, and create sustainable customer partnership (Josephat & Ismail, 2012). Front-line employees globally within the transit industry will have a greater understanding of organizational goals to serve customers effectively, bring about a change in reducing customer complaints, and improve the service experience for customer employee partnership, and organizational success. Most transit systems in the United States are funded by government agencies and are members of APTA, so it is critical to provide the best quality of service to justify funding for operations and capital investments (APTA, 2013). This

quality of service begins with organizations and employees working collaboratively to understand the needs of customers to achieve a competitive advantage by creating a more focused framework for customer service environment (Pareigis, Edvardsson, & Enquist, 2011). Because the frontline employees in the study directly interfaced with customers, the research outcomes potentially could provide useful information to other transit systems within the metropolitan regions and throughout the U.S. who are challenged with similar problems. I anticipate that the study will bring about positive social change in the way front-line employees relate to CFT, and that the knowledge gained throughout the research will help HRM to develop programs of greater significance to deliver quality service and build a service oriented culture for customer satisfaction. The outcome for this research will be presented to senior leadership at SEPTA to enhance the efficiency of service delivery to customers.

Summary

In this chapter, I presented an outline of the research study to investigate relationships among front-line employees in transit operations to understand the implications of customer focus training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented-culture. I previously mentioned components in a service driven environment, specifically, the public transportation industry. The chapter contained the problem, problem statement, and the purpose of the research study. The following chapter contains a thorough review of the literature, CFT, employee performance, engagement, and building a service culture organizationally. The chapter concludes with justification for using a qualitative case study research, and Chapter 3 contains details about the design and methods. Chapter 4 contains the results and chapter 5 contains an

interpretation of the results as well as limitations, implications for practice, recommendations for other research and conclusions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter begins with the outline of the conceptual framework to explain the relationships and possible connections between the constructs being investigated in the research study. The following section is an outline of the importance of service quality to set the foundation for the constructs under investigation. This section contains a summary of regional and local views on the transit industry and the organization where the study took place. The theoretical constructs within this study are geared to organizational culture and social theory. I framed these theories to provide a rational viewpoint of the research study. The literature review concludes with key constructs of CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building an organizational service oriented-culture. Finally, a brief summary is presented to justify the use of a qualitative case study for this research.

In terms of search strategies, I used the Walden University Library's multidisciplinary databases for articles, journals, books, and other scholarly sources to support the study. The Science Direct database was used as the main search engine based on its strict publication guidelines of scholarly work from various disciplines. The review will also use documentation as a part of the case study to report pertinent information relating to the participants and organization under investigation. Through the use of key words and phrases used in database searches, I was able to organize and plan this chapter based on the topic and sub-topics under review. Some key words used were *customer relations*, *service quality*, *customer satisfaction*,

human resource, training and development, benefits of training, organizational culture, social exchange, service strategies, and leadership context in training.

Conceptual Development Framework

The constructs to be investigated in this research study will involve customer focus training (CFT), employee performance and engagement, and building an organizational service-oriented culture. The anticipation of the relationships among these constructs is considered to be embedded in two key theoretical overlays to support and frame the study: organizational culture and social theoretical construct. It is widely discussed among scholars that there is a critical role that an organization plays in influencing and implementing strategic ventures for success within the workplace (Bitmiş & Ergeneli, 2011). Over time, because of cultural values, practices, and policies, a general understanding of organizations evolves to bring about effective organizational dynamics among employer, employee, and customers. Essentially, the proposed link in this study as it relates to training, employee performance, customer satisfaction, and service culture is developed and framed by social constructs. The key notion in this theoretical approach is that employees create and sustain relationships among each other, employer, and customer for equal understanding of the exchange. Essentially, the relationships between employer and employees are dictated by social constructs (Sasaki & Araki, 2013). This theoretical approach helps to facilitate the attitudes that employees choose to display when an organization provides resources to support organizational initiatives. In essence, employees feel more obligated to serve the organization when resources are allocated for their learning and development (Nguyen, 2012). An example in this case scenario, the organization will provide the necessary tools for employees

to perform effectively in terms of policies, leadership, guidance, benefits, salary, training, and education and learning opportunities. In exchange, the organization anticipates high expectations from employees in the areas of performance and engagement to enhance customer satisfaction and continues the trend to build an organizational service oriented culture. Embedded in the social theoretical construct is a conceptualized approach to embody the idea of reciprocity (Gouldner, 1960). Researchers found that social exchanges theoretically are developed through a combination of engagement and exchanges that uncover a pattern of reciprocity where obligations are eminent in relationships (Zapata, Olsen, & Martins, 2013).

The concepts of organizational service culture and customer focus training (CFT) are critically aligned strategically to empower and foster positive relationships with employees to project a professional attitude as an approach to serve customers effectively. This implementation of strategic values of organizations is an integral part in serving customers and building relationships for organizational success (McColl-Kennedy et al., 2011). The theoretical concepts on profits gained in organizations is a direct result of relationships built over time to foster customer loyalty, employee satisfaction, employee performance, and customer satisfaction (Kumar, Pozza, & Ganesh, 2013). Segoro (2013) indicated that an organization that fosters and embraces a culture driven service environment with a combination of training sets the stage to create a competitive advantage among service providers. It is a strong reality that organizations are recognizing the urgency for training front-line employees and developing activities to enhance performance and engagement in the workplace (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Nonetheless, there is awareness among organizations of the difficulties of measuring

performance and engagement among employees. They acknowledge the fact that it is more feasible to investigate relationships regarding training and employee behavior to understand organizational effectiveness in serving customers (Johar & Sarawati, 2013). This ideology of training and learning in organizations dovetailed with employee attitude in HRM contexts is used as best practices to provide tools to improve performance, customer satisfaction, and create excellent exchanges between employer and employee. It is imperative to investigate the relationships between employee performance and engagement to understand customer satisfaction, and organizational initiatives on service performance. The concepts of customer focus training (CFT), employee performance and engagement, customer satisfaction, and building an organizational service culture as outlined in Chapter 1, are interconnected. The framework dictates that there is a link between the concepts outlined for an investigation and is supported by a level of communication relationally in terms of service quality measurement and perception. (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1988). The expansion and foundation of this conceptual framework will include researchers such as Parasurman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1985) to strengthen the development and understanding of how quality service, employee performance, customer satisfaction, and behavioral attributes are serving customers. Parasurman et al. (1985) discussed the implications of customer service quality as an identifying indicator for successful business practice strategically by differentiating products and services in quality delivery context. Segoro (2013) discussed that the quality of service is the most current trend today in the service industry considering the competitive nature of doing business, and the constant shift in customer demand for exceptional service.

Researchers historically have focused on the customer evaluation of quality service (Portrafke, 2013). This focus is apparent in Parasuraman et al.'s (1985) survey analysis SERVQUAL, which was designed to evaluate the customer experience and perceptions of the quality of service. The work of Parasurman et al. and others was used as the support concepts for the framework under investigation to link CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. Parasuraman et al. recommended that service quality in itself is a very complex phenomenon that requires more than one attribute to understand relationships in behavioral and organizational contexts for delivering quality service. Additionally, providing quality service is a critical role for service organizations requiring strategic measures for successful outcomes. Parasuraman et al. further discussed quality service on a global level to reflect judgment and attitudes resulting in superior service on the part of the employee and the organization. Parasurman et al. stressed the critical value of service quality as core values in strategic approaches in differentiating services and tangible products and the outlook on maximizing profit and performance in service businesses and organizations. The concepts of service quality have become an important customer trends that remain on the continuum as a key discussion among scholars and practitioners for investigation and examination. Based on the competitive nature of service quality in the global marketplace, there is a demand for customer awareness in delivering quality goods and services (Parasurman et. al. 1985). Essentially, Parasurman et. al. focused on the critical nature of consumer behavior and perception of service quality. It is evident in this study that service quality is the engine that drives organizational

success and employee performance in building and gauging performance index (Heskett, Loveman, Sasser, & Schlesinger, 1994).

This conceptual framework is designed and developed from an organizational culture and social theoretical perspectives. Gouldner (1960) and Parasurman et al. (1985, 1988) presented a solid rationale for this framework whereby employee attitude and behavior is contingent upon social exchange. To facilitate these relationships a level of awareness in social exchange and organizational culture is necessary to understand employee performance, engagement and building a service-oriented culture. These two theoretical perspectives serves as the foundation of the study to show the role of organizational culture in enhancing strategic goals and objectives, and social exchange to facilitate the assumption that employees maintain and establish strong relationships for mutual reward and benefit.

The organizational culture highlights relationships of policies, values, and practices evolving over time to show common understanding of organizations, and core cultural attributes to guide an employees' attitude and behavior (Yee, Lee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2013). Additionally, there are potential opportunities that links employee behavior and attitude to organizational culture in fostering and delivering quality service through social exchange (Oc & Bashshur, 2013). Social theoretical perspective on the other hand helps to understand and explain the complex nature of reciprocity relating to employee obligation to the organization, and how they perform and engage as a result of support received from the organization (Nguyen, 2012).

The proposed support constructs that are contained in the conceptual framework reflects the following: (a) strategic leadership, (b) human resources and practices, (c) service strategies

and practices, and (d) CFT. The conceptual idea about these constructs is that they have a two way relationship to help identify and understand the nature of training implications, employees' responsiveness to the work environment, delivery of quality service, and the core essentials of building a service oriented culture. Figure 1 shows the framework of the study.

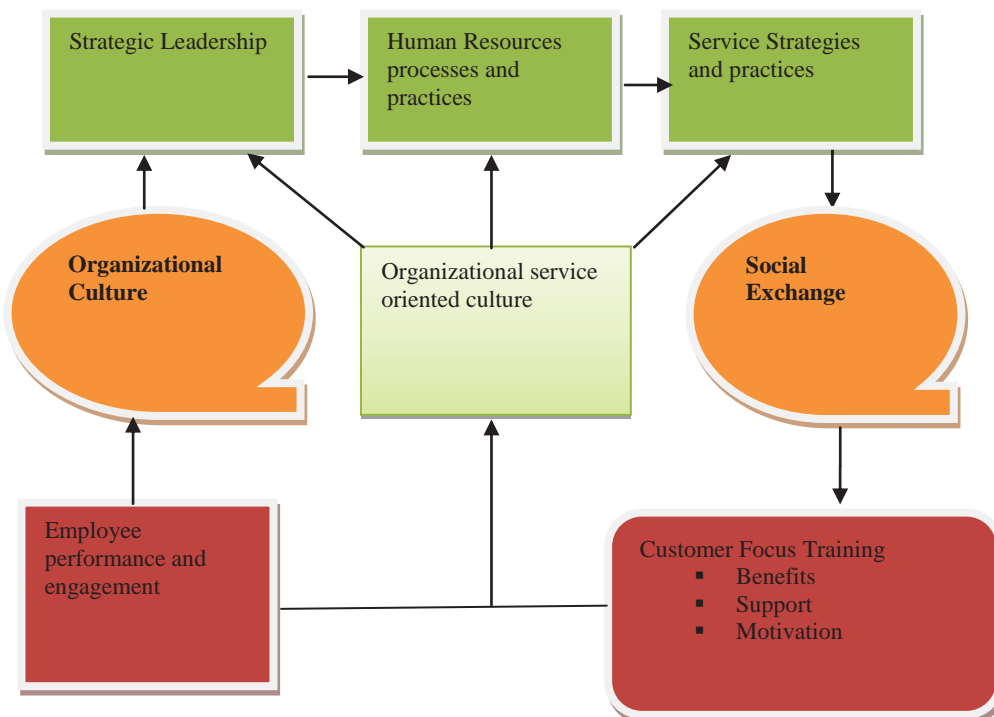


Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

Importance of Service Quality

Discussions among scholars and practitioners regarding service organizations have indicated that training and development for employees in general are major endeavors for human resource management (HRM), to bring about awareness regarding service quality (Swanson, 2009). The process of training has tremendous potential to create strategic alignment between employees and an organization, and link performance and customer satisfaction to the concepts

of training (Swanson, 2009). In order for organizations to keep pace with the global competitive environment, training and development must be incorporated in its culture to help employees address the uniqueness of change and challenges in the customer environment (Esbjerg et al., 2012).

Service driven organizations account for a significant increase in the economic vitality in particular regions they service. Service related organizations present an opportunity for growth, employment, and income generation, specifically among front-line employees who are required to serve customers on a daily basis and interact with them (Portrafke, 2013). A front-line employee globally, plays a very important role in providing the customer with excellent service. Essentially, front-line employees in the service business are the buffer between the organization's strategic objectives and core fundamental vision to establish customer satisfaction (Martínez & Rodríguez del Bosque, 2013). To foster continuous relationships between employees and customers, it is imperative that organizations establish long-term strategies in its goals and mission to improve employee performance to serve customers (Arıkan & Güner, 2013).

It is important to understand that the link between employee performance and economic growth within service organizations is not a simple and clear process to understand (Parasuraman et. al. 1985). In fact, it is argued that researchers should investigate other aspects and relationships of the customer experience to see beyond just the customer perspectives on service quality (Khodakarami & Chan, 2014). Very few studies have ventured to give a holistic viewpoint on customer satisfaction from an organizational orientation approach to include a

strong balance of organizational processes, policies, leadership, and procedures (Dimitrios, Sakas, & Vlachos, 2013). The ultimate outcomes of customer satisfaction are the realization that customer, employee, and employer are the components that make up key strategies for organizational success. Dimitrios, Sasaki, and Vlachos (2013) discussed that the organizational culture reflected internally can become a part of the external customer experience to facilitate a psychological and social bond between employees and employer. Leaders within organizations must be cognizant of front-line employee's abilities to serve customers, and make it a priority to give them the tools necessary for organizational success (Heskett et. al., 1994). An organization should take the time to evaluate customer satisfaction with a level of rigor to ensure competitive advantage within the industry (Dehghan et al., 2011). At the same point, it is just as important to evaluate front-line employee's perspectives on organizational initiatives to help create organizational alignment and enhance service quality and employee performance and engagement among customers (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010).

Orel and Kara (2014) presented a unique study on a process model for introducing a service quality from the standpoint of service providers. The study focuses on the attributes of behavioral inferences, individual interaction, reaction to service engagement and encounters. Orel and Kara concluded that further research needs to uncover the provider as the lens to establish more in-depth background analysis in terms of building service quality relationships. Dev, Zhou, Brown, and Agarwal (2008) discussed the importance of building strong relationships from the perspectives of service providers to ensure conceptual development of processes and procedures. To strengthen the concepts of service quality Parasuraman et al.

(1985) have developed a 21item instrument used to gauge service quality and measure gaps in the process. Numerous studies have used this model to evaluate service performance, consumer behavior, and optimal levels of service to reflect perception and service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). It is argued among scholars that no modification has been made to this model of SERVQUAL for further researching the relationship between perception and service provider in customer relations businesses (Wallace & De Chernatony, 2009).

Views of Public Transit and SEPTA

The regional, local and dynamic need for public transportation within the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation sector has provided a unique opportunity to investigate the relationships among front-line employees to facilitate customer focus training (CFT), employee performance and engagement, and building a service organizational culture. A summary on the importance of public transit within the regional and local community will emphasize the importance and direct implications and contributions to the transit industry.

Historically, public transportation has been a customer driven service that focuses on transportation needs of customers, employees, organizations, communities and society across the globe. Specifically, in the U.S., the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) is a non-profit international association of 1500 public and private transit organizations that engage in the areas of bus and train and operations to ensure customer ridership in North America public transit system (APTA, 2013). APTA's members are dedicated to serve the general public interest to provide safe, courteous, and reliable transportation. According to APTA (2013), more than 90 % of commuters using public transportation in the U.S. and some Canadian states are a

part of APTA member systems (p. 5). Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) is a member of APTA, and employs over 10,000 employees, of which 3000 represents the management system, and the remaining 7000 represents the union environment and interface with customers on a daily basis. The system transports 1,147,200 customers on a daily basis to include all modes of transit as reported in 2013. The service covers the five-county region of Southeastern Pennsylvania to include Delaware, Chester, Montgomery, Bucks counties and the city of Philadelphia. Therefore, when ridership increases based on the economic conditions such as the high price of gasoline, customers will and are turning to public transportation to offset the cost of driving. It is important to train front-line employees with new skills to adjust to the influx of new and existing customers to ensure customer satisfaction and build a solid system for commuters and customers (APTA, 2013). More importantly for a society that is dependent on public transportation, it is critical that leaders within the industry understand the implications of organizational service quality strategies to help employees to perform to the best of their abilities. A business that places priority on service quality through its procedures, guidelines, practices, and policies, fosters a culture that is service driven, create a competitive advantage, and is distinct in providing quality service (Parasuraman, Zeithaml, & Berry, 1985). The next section contains the constructs from conceptual framework and will serve as the foundation on which the study will develop.

Organizational Culture

Historical Views and Definitions

The inner workings of an organization to promote growth, development, and success for employees is contingent upon how the environment is influenced by the culture (Aktaş et al. 2011). Experts in the field of leadership and organizational development believe that culture within the organization plays a pivotal role in shaping the performance, engagement, and the attitude of employees (Aktaş et al. 2011). Organizational culture is considered a shared process of collaboration that engages rituals and customs that are developed in society over time to orient people to the organizational vision (Azanza et al., 2013). Cultural implications within organizations have become more prevalent in society today because of the diverse nature of the work environment, and the importance of employees understanding of strategic goals and objectives, over the years, researchers have tried to explain the phenomenon of different group behaviors and performance measures relating to this ideology (Crutchfield & Roughton, 2014). Schein (1990) referenced in Hogan and Coote (2013) used the most frequent approach in addressing organizational culture as patterns of assumptions shared with groups or people learned through addressing problems externally in adopting and internally integrating into processes and procedures. Schein discussed these processes as well suited to individual performance and engagement and are considered effective and valid; thus it is relevant to teach incoming individuals to understand the culture and problems within.

The current trend is that practitioners and researchers are finding that organizational culture plays a very important part in managing and analyzing the cultural complexities for

business success (Crutchfield & Roughton, 2014). Having awareness and knowledge on the impact of culture on organizational, theoretical constructs, it is critical that leaders and managers within the system encourage a cycle of learning because it encourages employees to adapt to change and foster collaborative learning through shared norms (Chang & Huang, 2012). These shared norms are surrounded by policies, procedures, and guidelines that dictate the strategic position of the organization to support intrinsic values such as expectations and reward systems. In essence, the idea of how individual personalities guide one's behavior and attitude, so it is with organizational culture where it facilitates and guides behavioral issues of employees through shared vision and norms.

As organizations strive to identify differences between organizational culture and corporate culture, there is a distinction offered by Schein (1990) to reflect patterns of behavioral values to include shared systems of beliefs to provide meaning within organizations along with guidelines and policies (Hogan & Coote, 2013). In general, the concepts of culture are knowledge shared by members of an organization to provide a level of meaning that set it apart from other organization's culture (García-Sánchez, Rodríguez Ariza, & Frías Aceituno, 2013). It is also important to have a level of awareness in terms of cultural dimensions within organizations and regions, according to Hofstede (1983) and Minkov (2007) cited in (García-Sánchez et al., 2013), the collective nature of cultural attributes makes it important to understand category of people to include individual personality and individual culture. In actuality the terminology is derived and applied to group think, to reflect nations and or organizations across the global communities engaging values of corporate citizenship and leadership.

Functions of Organizational Culture

An organizational culture that fosters effective customer service along with reinforced training programs creates opportunity for positive encounters and competitive advantage (Abdul-Jalal, Toulson, & Tweed, 2013). It is a well-established fact that employee training and development has a significant impact on employee performance in building customer relationships, improve customer satisfaction, and create organizational success (Tahir et al., 2011). Employees who are fully engaged and immersed in the nature of the business by way of training and leadership have had a tendency to perform at a higher level than those who are less engaged (Jang, Nelson, & Ghiselli, 2013). An organization must accept the philosophy of organizational culture as a sense making mechanism to determine a collaborative process of shared understanding and varying degree of interests and performance on the part of employees (Tushman & O'Reilly, 2013). In this sense an organization will advance beyond the attitude and behaviors of employees and position the mission and vision purposefully to aid employees to see the alignment and shared strategic values. Organizational culture is perceived as a strategic value that extends from the executive leadership level to front-line employees to present the brand of service quality, performance and engagement to create a competitive advantage in the service industry (Acar, Zehir, Özgenel, & Özşahin, 2013). Hadjali and Salimi (2012) explained that within a service organization, it is imperative that employees, specifically front-line service providers create influential qualities that foster a citizen behavioral approach to be competitive. Organizational business structures have been known to be influenced by their policies, guidelines, and cultural attributes (Dehghan et al., 2011). Scholars and practitioners are inclined

to believe that organizational behavior can influence employee's attitude, enhance service quality, and build an organizational service culture (Wallace, De Chernatony, & Buil, 2013). It is a widespread phenomenon that organizational culture has a significant role in fostering and facilitating key strategies for organizational success. These successes are achieved over time by cultural values, norms, and policies to create understanding and awareness about the organization. Berson, Oreg, and Dvir (2008) stressed the importance of organizational culture and values from a leadership standpoint, and how cultural norms and values are used to help guide employee behavior and attitude in the workplace to enhance performance. Moreover, it is presumed that there are relationships that exist between organizational behavior, and employee's attitude towards customer embedded in the social constructs exchange (Wang, Tsai, & Tsai, 2014). It is an assertion that organizations that engage its employees in all aspects of the business strategy process to include training and development culturally is more prone to deliver excellent service quality and improve employee performance (Mackelprang, Jayaram, & Xu, 2012).

Cultural Implications in Service Organizations

Having a clear idea of how culture impacts an organization is very important in leading and managing for organizational change and service quality (Yoo & Park, 2007). It is argued that service organizations are well-established in their approach in embracing and facilitating the quality of service and showing full appreciation and support for building a level of cultural awareness strategies (Rust & Oliver, 1994). The authors mentioned that within the context of a service oriented culture, employees are deemed customer focused or service oriented. This concept can be interpreted as employees having the ability to perform and engage with customers

while performing their jobs. To create this level of focus and quality is a direct result of leadership engagement with employees to build commitment to provide quality service (Yee et al. 2013).

Leading and managing for organizational change and service quality is a part of a developing culture within organizations. Moreover, HRM and HRD play a critical role in building a service oriented culture where employees understand the vision from the onset. A key example is to look at the recruitment and selection process of employees, along with systems of incentives and reward, to facilitate ideas of training programs and knowledge sharing; these are critical elements of developing organizational culture (Minbaeva, 2013). An organizational culture that embraces the concepts of constant learning and engagement plays a significant role in performance improvement and influencing the behavior of employees (Wodecka-Hyjek, 2014). The result of exceptional performance in delivering quality service should be recognized in a very unique way where employees understand the model of service quality. It is a known fact that when employees are aligned with the organizational culture and values, they are less likely to resign or quit the job, and are more inclined to participate more, based on the feeling of being a part of the organization (Yeh, 2013). According to this fact, Parasuraman et al. (1985) confirmed that culture is a strategic tool for bridging the gap between customer satisfaction and performance of how employees deliver quality service. Additionally, an organization that is culturally inclined to embrace a service oriented culture is perceived as an organization that is poised to deliver excellence (Hogan & Coote, 2013).

Research Studies on Cultural Outcomes

Within the field of organizational culture, scholars and practitioners have studied the dynamics, and have recognized the importance of how culture can influence the behavior, attitude, and performance of employees to deliver exceptional service to customers. A research study was done in multiple Taiwanese organizations to investigate the impact of various cultures within the work environment to reflect bureaucratic, innovation, and supporting cultures (Silverthorne, 2004). The outcome of the study revealed that culture influenced employee's attitude and behavior, knowing that there are varying degrees of job satisfaction and employee engagement when the culture within the organization is dominant. It is a common phenomena that a bureaucratic organizational culture yields low levels of engagement and performance by employees, on the other hand an innovative organizational culture shows support for employees and yields a higher return. In essence, the researcher suggested that companies that foster bureaucratic style of culture will in fact have minimal chance of retaining employees in terms of engagement and performance, as opposing to an innovative culture (Silverthorne, 2004).

Innovative ideas and concepts within organizations are the lifeline for survival, as such that these interests should be embraced by scholars and practitioners. According to Hogan and Coote (2013), the concepts of innovation developed by Schein in a multi-layered model proved to be useful and offer effective processes specifically in service driven organizations. The model focuses on organizational culture, specific values and norms to facilitate employees and organizational performance. The key findings from the study showed that the implications for innovative practice in relationship to constructing an organizational culture and fostering a

professional etiquette for delivering service are very essential for supporting innovation and performance. It can be conceptualized that organizations that are deeply involved in supporting service quality initiatives with employee involvement in training, are likely to create competitive advantage and improved performance. The ideology of social constructs and exchanges will be presented in the next segment which is also one of the foundational theoretical attributes of the study.

Social Constructs

The philosophy of social constructs has been one of the most important theoretical foundations used by many researchers in the areas of social psychology to embody sociology and the economic environment (Korschun & Du, 2013). The underpinnings of social exchanges are that people develop relationships among each other for specific and particular reasons that are mutually beneficial. Oc and Bashshur (2013) proposed the idea that social interaction theoretically can aid in understanding employer and employee relationships. The idea that an organization provides tools and resources for employees to succeed on the job, helps employees reciprocate by performing effectively to satisfy customers. Customer focus training (CFT) is a major strategic approach that most service organizations use as a social skill tool to assist HRD to train employees to understand the diverse nature of customers and to meet organizational objectives in providing service quality to customers.

There are significant researchers in the field of social exchange concepts who are credited for their vast knowledge, expertise, and research. Even though there are varying degree of differences and perspectives in the theoretical presentation of social exchanges. The underlying

motive of this theoretical approach is that it involves a level of agreement and obligation to do something, and in return expectations developed over time. One author framed the exchange as having one party receiving a service or conducting a transaction where something of value is received, thus creating a sense of reciprocity of interdependence facilitates relationships (Tse, Huang, & Lam, 2013). Essentially, there is a level of interdependence within the theory of exchange and is considered to be the central feature (Beersma, Homan, Van Kleef, & De Dreu, 2013). In essence, interdependency places a critical emphasis on interpersonal exchanges to reflect transactions in businesses, organizations, and workplaces (Beersma et al. 2013). The process is action oriented whereby parties are involved and responses are taking place. Additionally, one party's action will cause the other to reciprocate, thus setting the stage for mutual exchanges.

According to Terpstra and Verbeeten (2014), relationships are established upon some basic fundamental principles in the workplace to involve variables such as cost-benefit analysis and comparative analysis of alternative choices by employee and employers. In this workplace relationship of social exchanges, leaders and managers support the employees, and in return the employees support the organizational goals and objectives through its mission, goals, policy, and procedure by projecting attitude and behavioral attributes (Walumbwa et al. 2011). This next section will contain the dynamics of social exchanges and functions in organizations.

Functions of Social Exchange in Organizations

Human resources departments have taken a vested interest in the critical role that socialization plays in the performance and exchange processes of employees to provide quality

service (Chuang, Chen, & Chuang, 2013). Social exchange theory has had a long standing relationship with scholars and practitioners in the field of sociology to further understand and explain human behavior in the workplace, specifically identifying motivational drivers behind performance (Gegenfurtner, 2011). The concepts of social theory have been used over the years by researchers in organizations to understand the complex nature of how individuals behave in the workplace and socialize with each other to gain a competitive advantage in delivering quality service. Employees in organizations across the globe working in service industries are inclined to believe that if the organization takes care of their fundamental well-being, it becomes a cultural belief that the organization cares (Ellinger, Ellinger, Musgrove, Bachrach, & Bas, 2013). The mindset of employees seeks to strike a balance in how they build relationships within organizations by exhibiting a level of attitude and behavior based on the commitment level coming from leadership and management proportionately (Ellinger et al., 2013). The concepts of social exchange have always been reinforced on the foundation of management and leadership, along with relationships between subordinates to determine the level of performance and engagement (Kuvaas, Buch, Dysvik, & Haerem, 2012). These relationships are built on a social construct where each member brings some level of value where it is viewed as fair and equitable in the eyes of both parties, and is seen as reasonable (Zapata et al. 2013). This perceived level of value relationships is contingent upon employees having a feeling of obligation and trust based on how the organization engages them and influence how they view leadership and management positively. One of the key issues in social exchange is the idea of trust, fairness, and equity

among employees to sustain and maintain critical relationships for delivering service quality (Blader, Wiesenfeld, Fortin, & Wheeler-Smith, 2013).

Research Studies of Social Exchange

There are discussions surrounding the nature of social exchange theory and how employees are influenced to provide the best service to customers. The concepts of social exchanges have become a valuable tool in understanding and explaining the complex attitude and behavior of employees in the workplace to assist leaders and managers to better understand the phenomena. An exploratory study was conducted to investigate the relationships between member-leader exchange, follower performance and engagement, and organizational behavior (Kuvaas et al. 2012). The study included 552 followers and 78 leaders and supported two dimensions on leader and member interrelationships exchange. The authors suggested that member–leader relationships on an economic approach revealed a negative attitude both in work performance and engagement and organizational behavior. On the other hand a social member–leader relationships yielded a positive outcome in terms of employee performance and engagement and organizational behavior. Researchers have identified and conceptualized two key attributes in the exchange process to reflect management globally in facilitating relationships between organization and employees, and dyadic relational approach where subordinates interact with supervision (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2012). The research involved 300 participants comprised of supervisors and employees in health care organizations, and the outcome analysis revealed that high commitment from supervisors to employees yielded positive behaviors in performance and foster quality service in the workplace.

The concepts of social exchange as reported by researchers can be used as a tool to support and identify complex explanation regarding the relationships that exist between employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. In general, when workers are supported by financial and social backing from their organizations, they tend to feel obligated to perform and engaged at a higher level by responding to the care shown by the organization (Lau & Roopnarain, n.d.) Employees will respond cognitively, emotionally, and physically in a more devoted way, when organizational leadership takes its time to ensure employees success and development (Tse et al. 2013). It is argued that when the needs of employees are met with organizations under certain situations and circumstances, employee become more engaged in their work and also perform at a higher level in delivering quality service (Ma & Qu, 2011). When organizations make customer focus training a priority, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture a priority within their strategic goal, employees are more engaged and will perform better (Agars, Kaufman, Deane, & Smith, 2012). They are able to respond to management in a positive and encouraging manner that supports building a service oriented culture based on resources and benefits given for growth and development (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

The next section includes the concepts of customer focus training in organizations, the benefits, support for training, and motivation for training.

Customer Focus Training Dynamics

Training and development within an organizational context can lead to new knowledge and skills necessary for enhancing employee job performance, and other strategic outcomes geared to

positively impact social change (Kowalski, Jeznach, & Tuokko, 2014). Historically, researchers have shown that training endeavors can result in tremendous benefits or can produce a positive impact on the employee's performance, team concepts, and organizational success (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). There are significant benefits that employees achieve from participating in customer service training programs. They are motivated by the learning with a strong desire to learn more organizationally, the ability to grow and to develop in an organization (promotion), and to improve oneself holistically (Ahmad, Wasay, & Malik, 2012). It is reported that training is a conditional approach among many others that most organizations take to potentially enhance the performance of employees and align organizational objectives to meet the demands of its customers and employees (Swanson, 2009). The service environment is ever changing where individual and customer demands are prevalent as such that organizations are positioning themselves to respond to new challenges by way of training and development (Cohen et al. 2013). The implications of sharing knowledge with employees regarding business policies, procedures, and customer dynamics are of paramount importance for organizational success (Rahimli, 2012).

In most services-oriented organizations, it is incumbent on key attributes such as employee and customer relationships to determine the quality of service delivered by the organization (Teng & Barrows, 2009). It is argued that training is a critical component of HRD used as a strategic practice to improve employee performance and build a solid service culture (Ellinger et al. 2013). An organizational culture that promotes training and development of its employees is one that is perceived as building and projecting a customer culture (Mathew, Ogbonna, & Harris,

2012). Rose, Teo, and Connell (2014) discussed the importance of developing training programs to effectively coach and mentor employees into concepts of quality service and skills required to serve customers. These qualities and skills are empowering features often displayed by organizational strategic measures to be hospitable and engaging customers, but these strategies are not sufficient enough to facilitate organizational success. The idea of organizational issues and individual concerns is a vital factor to be considered to help enhance employee performance and building a service oriented culture. Ro and Chen (2011) discussed the implications of how employees' view customer service and empowerment within organizational structures. The study under investigation reported the implications of employee performance and engagement, and the perceptions of organizational factors that influenced employee performance and service quality. Based on survey responses from 203 customers, the researchers recommended that organizations should hire individuals who are customer oriented, provide them with customer service training, implement a reward system, and create service standards that are strategic in nature. It is very important to recognize these benefits in the delivery of quality service knowing that front-line employees are the direct link that collaborates with customers, employees, and the organization.

Training Benefits in Customer Service

Over the years organizations have seen a dramatic improvement in their training and development infrastructure leading to new knowledge and skill set gained resulted in improved job performance and other attributes positively impacting organizations (Deros, Saibani, Yunos, Rahman, & Ghani, 2012). Researchers have reported and evidenced the positive impact of training activities in the workplace and the overwhelming benefits transferred to employee

performance and individual growth personally and within teams (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009).

Gegenfurtner (2011) stated there are several theoretical components that are essential for personal growth and development in employee benefits participating in training workshops: (a) the functionality of motivational learning, with the desire to engage and participate in other training for future growth and development (b) advancing individual careers to facilitate different levels of leadership positions, and more rewarding jobs, and (c) the ability to be self-actualized psychologically by achieving one's goals in the workplace and in their personal lives.

It is an ideology in society that there are broad concepts of how employee training is segmented and categorized in the sense of personal, career, and work related achievements (Akkermans, Schalefeli, Brenninkmeijer & Blonk, 2013). In the sense of personal achievement, it reflects a desire for employees to perceive training participation as a tool to help enhance performance and engagement, and move them in the path of personal growth and development. The concepts of career achievement and enrichment in training participation gives employees the opportunity to identify needs and objectives to ultimately help them to reach their career goals, and create opportunities for new career tracks. The idea of work related achievements through training and development helps employees to work collaboratively with customers, employees, and leadership within the organization. It is critical to understand that, employees who focus on attributes of career, personal, and work related achievements, are inclined to be interconnected with other achievements as they are training and developing themselves. It is also important to know that as employees are participating and engaging in training, they are expecting and contemplating the returns on participating. Service oriented organizations combined with

customer focus training are considered key strategic objective used to help employees be more pro-active and customer driven. Customer focused, driven companies around the world are investing millions of dollars in customer service training initiatives, knowing that the customer is the lifeblood for the survival of the business (Deros et al. 2012). Disney Institute is a big proponent of customer service and satisfaction; they place a tremendous emphasis on service orientation, customer satisfaction, and employee performance to deal effectively with customers (Ro & Chen, 2011). The need for employee performance and engagement, and building a customer service culture has created a unique dynamic for organizations to be creative in applying customer focus training to enable employees to better serve the general populous and deliver social change in society through effective customer relations (Johlke & Iyer, 2013). The need to understand how training supports employees is critical knowledge that must be understood among HRM professionals and leaders within organizations.

Supporting Elements for Customer Focus Training

Akkermans, Schaufeli, Brenninkmeijer and Blonk (2013) suggested that training within organizations have a positive influence on employee's behavior when there is a high level of support from colleagues and leadership in assisting in service-based activities and tasks to meet customer needs. Leadership implications are a vital factor to consider in the real world benefit of training and how it influences employees and organization (Senior et al. 2012). Also, while employees need the support for training to achieve effective outcomes in providing quality service and performance driven tasks, it is perceived that there are other concrete situations and

circumstances of influence of which can be construed to be the morale of employees within the workplace.

A few studies have produced results showing that customer focused training has enhanced or improved employee performance, behavior, and customer satisfaction. Dawson, Abbott, and Shoemaker, (2011) purported that organizational attributes and practices are a combination of service quality leading up to customer satisfaction and examining relationships between attributes. The studies signify that customer relations have a positive impact on organizational efficiency and profitability. In essence, the study's results points to the need for future research to understand relationships combined for service quality. Organizations capability to deliver quality service is contingent upon one key attribute among many others, and that is employees who are trained to deliver quality service by recognizing the importance of customer satisfaction, presents a greater opportunity for organizational success (Mackelprang et al. 2012). Training is perceived as an improvement and empowerment tool that should motivate and encourage employees in the sense of learning and creating a stress free work environment (Yavas, Karatepe, & Babakus, 2013). Without a level of motivation in training to support the value and the learning, employees, specifically those who interface with customers on a daily basis will regard the training as just another mandatory organizational assignment.

Training Motivation

Motivation relating to training and organizational development and growth for employees is a learning process where participants express a desire to learn from the training based on leadership climate along with other attributes (Chen & Kao, 2014). Successful outcomes of

training and motivation must be on a high and exhilarating climate to facilitate learning for employees; and when motivation is absent, the probability is that the training will be ineffective. A literature search revealed various types of traditional motivational tools used by organizations to achieve desired outcomes in motivating employees in all aspects of organizational dynamics to involve training and other key processes of participation. Conțiu, Gabor, and Oltean (2012) discussed innovative practices to motivate employees in areas such as promotion, days-off, salary focus, improvement in work locations, and personal recognition. Such approaches motivate employees and give them a sense of well-being, that they open themselves up for other opportunities that may arise to include training and development. Employees are very aware and motivated when they see the benefits and development in organizational activities and how they play a part in the process (Lau & Roopnarain, n.d.). In essence, employee's knowledge and awareness of training benefits will set the foundation for a positive learning outcome, heighten, and motivate employee's readiness to take part in activities relating to organizational learning. The perception of employees regarding customer focus training can become an influential and motivational approach to acquire new learning skills to enhance performance and engagement, and build a service-oriented culture within the work environment. There are several studies relating to customer service training within the hospitality industry to include front-line employees, how they serve customers, and the fact that training played a significant role in influencing behavior and attitudes of employees for delivering quality customer service. One study investigated the effects of customer focus training on employee performance and satisfaction in a major lodging facility in the northeastern region of the U.S. (Choi & Dickson,

2010). The outcome of the study revealed that corporate sponsored training geared to management and front-line employees significantly enhanced the work environment in terms of engagement and employee performance. The results also included that employee turnover was reduced because of training awareness and motivation. Training and empowering employees with some level of reward system has proven to be beneficial for motivating employees in customer driven environments by providing opportunities to connect with leadership (Guinn, 2013). Yavas, Karatepe, and Babakus (2010) also reported that employee should be trained and empowered to serve customers, and be provided with adequate compensation based on performance in dealing specifically with disruntle customer situations. Training and empowering employees to be proactive in service environments over time have contributed immensely in enhancing employees' knowledge and skill set, and have proven to motivate and improve productivity. According to Guinn (2013), even though empowerment, compensation, and engagement are all relevant tools for success in the workplace, it is also important that companies pay attention to the following five areas to ensure efficient performance and engagement: (a) hire employees who are open to engagement, (b) facilitate and foster training program opportunities, (c) provide an outlet for reflection and feedback for growth and development, (d) create programs to recognize and show appreciation for employee performance, and (e) create forum of communication for the executive leadership to connect with front-line employees.

As it relates to theoretical constructs, it is clear to practitioners and researchers that building a service-oriented culture, along with customer focus training programs are strategic approaches

that must be taken to enhance employee performance and engagement in delivering quality service to customers. Employee performance and engagement will be addressed in the next segment.

Employee Performance and Engagement

Employee performance and engagement over the years in the service environment has psychologically focused on the negative aspects of service rather than the positive outcomes of customer relations and employee performance. Current trends are reflecting positive reinforcements psychologically to look beyond just individual weaknesses, but focuses on the strengths of individuals for effective performance (Breevaart, Bakker, & Demerouti, 2014). There are several factors driving individual performance in the workplace, but there is also a positive side to organizational influence on employee performance (Sen, 2009). Essentially, employee performance can be enhanced when there is workplace synergy between leaders and employees. Organizations through policies, guidelines, and practices can foster a high performing work team (Bakker, Arnold B., 2012). Organizations often discussed customer satisfaction and focus as an operational process when in fact the design model should communicate values on enhancing customer experience (Tosti, 2009). To facilitate the needs of customers in the service environment, there are key attributes that determine customer satisfaction; these factors are contingent upon the perceived quality of service, and how well the product satisfies the need of the customer (Tosti, 2009). In essence, these key attributes are linked to the behavioral presentation to create positive customer perception and employee performance to add value to the customer experience (McColl-Kenned et al. 2011). An

organization that strives to understand the complex relationships between employee performance and customer satisfaction is more poised to offer benefits to customers (Gwyn, 2009). To further investigate and understand these complex relationships in satisfying the customers, training programs are strategically used as a way to improve employee performance and engagement and build upon fulfilling customer needs (Liu, 2011). Today, organizations are on the cutting edge in delivering quality service to fulfill the customer needs; they are placing a significant focus of their performance systems to create a high performing work environment for employees (Gruman & Saks, 2011). To create a competitive advantage in the workplace, organizations are now compelled to find new and creative measures to foster and guide employee performance and engagement to achieve a higher level of customer satisfaction.

Exploring the concepts of employee performance and engagement is somewhat a new phenomenon in the world of practitioners with minimal amount of literature to substantiate the academic perspective and research environment (Ali, Hussain, & Azim, 2013). In the business world and service industry, the idea of employee performance and engagement is a critical topic of interest because of customer interests, and organizational performance financially (Andrew & Sofian, 2012). In essence, the concept of performance and engagement is a foundational structure for organizations to encourage and motivate employees to maximize productivity (Mone, Eisinger, Guggenheim, Price, & Stine, 2011). From a scholarly perspective to incorporate practitioners and academics in the reasoning of employee performance and engagement, it is widely accepted that a workplace that places emphasis on how the employee performs, generally builds an infrastructure that is competitive in nature (Lavigna, 2009). Within this competitive

environment, there are several contributing factors indicated by this study done in the public sector of the Federal Government to reflect four critical takeaways (a) effective leadership, (b) alignment with employee skill set and organizational mission, (c) balancing work life, and (d) training development. Each of these four dimensions represents an opportunity to motivate and encourage employees to perform and engage effectively and to build a service-oriented culture that facilitate the needs of customers.

Human Resource Management (HRM) throughout the years developed consultative and supportive roles by contributing vastly in the area of employee performance and engagement (Godbout, 2000). The Gallup organization has a long history of management and employee interventions over a span of 30 years, where they do surveys and conduct research all over the globe, and classify employee performance and engagement as a fundamental approach that identify organizational culture and orientation that engages employees (Connolly, 2012). Gruman and Saks (2011) discussed employee performance and engagement as a mentality that individuals take to create a level of cognitive and emotional attachment to others proactively to improve job performance. Recent studies in the area of service performing industries that exhibit practices such as training, empowerment, and reward systems, enhances the likelihood of improving employee performance and engagement (Ali, Hussain, & Azim, 2013). A previous study done in the healthcare profession, which is considered a customer driven service environment where frontline employees are the first line of support to customers, the study used emotional response to goals and directives set by organization to gauge employee performance and engagement (Kim & Oh, 2012). The study revealed that teamwork and empowerment had a

positive impact on performance and engagement. Organizational efforts in providing training also presented a positive outcome for employee performance, and dovetailed with the idea of being burnout and recovery performance in the workplace based on the rigors of the job. The results also indicated that healthcare organizations could enhance frontline employee burnout by creating a platform for teamwork, and customer awareness management process through empowerment to regain performance positively.

Andrew & Sofian (2012) viewed employee performance and engagement as a process of reciprocity in relationships and have received tremendous attention from various companies. Organizational orientation and dynamics have a unique way to engage employees in particular events and or tasks that they deemed significant and important for employee participation and engagement to facilitate service transactions (Gruman & Saks, 2011). On the other hand, employees choose to perform or engage with the organizations they see as a benefit to their fundamental well-being and move beyond transactional levels to a more committed exchange (Chuang et al. 2013). A workplace that provides effective tools to its employees opens up channels for increased levels of job performance, career growth, and improved service quality (Landry & Vandenberghe, 2012). A successful service organization must work overtime to engage employees to the point where they are fully committed and willing to go beyond organizational expectations (Gruman & Saks). A recent study showed how corporate leadership facilitates the effectiveness of performance and engagement by linking leadership credibility, evaluating organizational orientation, and strategies of engagement (Men, 2012). The study utilized an online survey of 157 employees located in a Fortune 500 company and reflected that

leadership credibility, specifically the CEO, creates a positive environment resulting in employee engagement and performance at a higher level. The study also revealed that perception of organization by employees also create a positive outlook on engagement and performance when leadership is viewed as being credible in their dealings with employees.

Kennedy & Daim (2010) discussed opportunities that lie within the work environment where evidence based research showed that when employees feel valued and are involved and engaged, their performance level rises to the point of meeting organizational goals and objectives. There are basic initiatives within an organization that can create a sense of well-being and benefit for employees. Within the context of these values, there are effective leadership for employees to model the way, effective communication, both ways, and creating a development career path for employees. Researchers discussed that when there is visible access to HRM to guide both managers and employees regarding policies and guidelines, employees have a greater understanding of how to perform within the context of achieving organizational goals and objectives (Li, Sanders, & Frenkel, 2012). To truly understand the employee's perception of the organization and what motivates them to perform and engage effectively, companies must gauge employee's ideas and opinions about the organization through engagement surveys and questionnaires to understand their needs. Kennedy & Daim (2010) postulated the idea that results from the responses of surveys and questionnaires must not be taken lightly by leadership, and should be used as a data generating model to bridge the gap between employees' and organization to enhance and improve performance.

Over the years, the mindset and conceptualization of employee engagement and performance from an academic standpoint gives complex variation in its definition and purpose in an organizational context and employee behavior (Weigl et al. 2010). Today it is critical that researchers and practitioners in the field of HRM have a solid grasp on the global perspectives of competition among organizations, and to understand the implications of how it affects performance and engagement among employees (Minbaeva, 2013). The concepts of performing and engaging, well within an organization is a personal approach that each member takes in delivering service by engaging psychologically, physically, cognitively, and emotionally during performing tasks (Clarke & Hill, 2012). According to Li et al. (2012), they discussed that there are varying degrees of employee willingness to perform and engage effectively, and are contingent upon emotional and cognitive overlay to differentiate the relationship between employee performance and engagement versus how leaders motivate and encourage employees. Qualitative and quantitative research solidifies the fact that supervisors and managers are critical players in enhancing employee's performance and engagement to provide quality service, and can significantly influence employee behavior and attitude (Analoui & Samour, 2012). To provide excellence in service organizations, ineffective or sub-par performance on any kind within the customer service supplier chain, presents tremendous issues in the economic and service environments, and is likely to create dissatisfaction among customer and organization (Keating, Alpert, Kriz, & Quazi, 2011). To solidify the idea of support for employees, specifically front-line employees, it is imperative that they establish a level of sensitivity to the needs of customers and be pro-active, and at the same time be supported by managers and

leaders who are not face to face with customers. Organizations today, specifically those that are service driven, need employees that are able to perform and engage customers and other entity of the business in a positive manner. Employees who are more engaged and take a more positive role in meeting customer needs, are prone to feel more responsible to ensure high quality in delivering excellence (Agars et al. 2012). Thus, an employee who performs at a very high standard may remain with the organization for a very long time specifically for the support that leadership extends, and the benefits that he or she contributes to create a successful organization (Vosloban, 2012). Researchers and practitioners both recognize that front-line employees play a critical role in the delivery of quality service to the general population, and that organizations invest and monitor performance to ensure service quality (Karatepe, 2013). The concepts of high performing teams, both on the part of the employees and organizations, brings about the expectations that are just as high on the side of the employee and the organization (Warren, 2011). The relationships between employee and organization can be considered a reciprocal agreement where the employee performs and engage at a very high level based on how the organization treats them. In order to maximize the potential of how employees perform, a research study cited in Li, Sanders, and Frenkel (2012) showed that when leaders and managers are in the immediate vicinity of employees, and provide resources to conduct business, employees respond positively in their job performance.

Employee engagement and performance is a multi-faceted approach that can be defined in a broader context other than just employees working within the goals and objectives of organizational structures to deliver service to the customers (Yi, Nataraajan, & Gong, 2011).

There is a concept within the idea of performance and engagement to reflect how hard the employee worked under stress and has burnout as a result. This condition is in response to work environment that has a greater level of stressful encounters (McCormack & Cotter, 2013) and can impact how employees perform and engage with customers and each other (Flint & Blocker, 2010). The phenomena of burnout or exhaustion can be looked at from various perspectives to reflect a level of exhaustion where employees are physically and mentally tired, as such that there is a lack of effort to go above and beyond the call of duty (Chang & Huang, 2012). In some more recent research and discussions among scholars, observations suggest that the possibility of psychological barriers and challenges can influence employee burnout on the job to impact performance and engagement based on the approach that employees take in responding to these challenges (McCormack & Cotter, 2013). A study was done with a sample of 292 students and the results showed that the higher the level of social participation, the more positive outcome in performance and engagement during studies, and the low level of social participation resulted in more burnout and decreased engagement and performance (Salmela-Aro, Tolvanen, & Nurmi, 2011).

Some researchers discussed performance and engagement as a very optimistic and positive role an employee plays within the workplace to display job fulfillment through vigor, a level of commitment and dedication, and absorbing what the organization has to offer (Salmela-Aro et al. 2011). The idea of employees being vigorous in the workplace is portrayed by a positive approach to the job with levels of social and psychological strength to withstand any negative situation, and still maintain focus on delivering excellence in service with persistence (Bitmiş &

Ergeneli, 2011). Employee performance and engagement are critical in terms of dedication, in that they strongly relate to the level of effort employees' work to show significant experience in enthusiasm and pride as the work is being approached and completed (Ali et al. 2013). It is recognized that the concepts of employee performance and engagement is not simply another jargon or phenomena that psychologically and socially drives employees to perform. In fact, the concepts are widely investigated and examined to show organizational commitment, behavioral implications, job enrichment, and engagement particularly to show citizenship behavior (Yi et al. 2011).

There are further arguments that depict performance and engagement as a two – way process in that an organization must be pro-actively engaged employees to be involved in the everyday process, as such that they make informed choices and decision to engage and participate in work meaningfully (Zopiatis, Constanti, & Theocharous, 2014). The evolution in work performance and engagement globally has had a significant impact on how employees are involved in work, where there has been a tremendous decline in recent years in the relationships between employee and employer based on psychological and social issues of agreement in work engagement and performance. The levels of engagement, performance, and support is critical in the workplace as employees look to employer for social and psychological support. Employees, specifically those that interfaced with customers on a day to day basis; looks towards the organization for clear direction, accountability in performance, effective, efficient and a safe surrounding (Whiting, Donthu, & Baker, 2011). Employees perform and engage better in the workplace when clear guidelines are being set, and employer establishes a sense of safety,

motivation, and commitment to facilitate high performance and engagement for quality output (Gursoy, Chi, & Karadag, 2013). It is essential that employers know the underlying causes and factors that drive employees performance and engagement in the workplace.

From an organizational perspective, there are various contexts that allow individuals to be engaged in the workplace and perform at a very high level. There are also specific and intentional contexts, that organizations work within to ensure that employees are highly involved and engaged in work to perform at a very high level as well. In other words, the level of engagement and performance of employees can be a determinant relationship between employee and employer to drive the service quality and creativity (Wang et al. 2014) . In essence, a workplace that provides a high level of support and leadership are very critical components for fostering a high culture of performance and engagement by employees (Li et al. 2012) . Harrington (2011) discussed that an organization with a supportive management structure creates a constructive and creative work environment, in that when an organization shows a level of care and inclusion for its employees, they are more inclined to perform and engage at a higher level within the workplace.

Organizations are supposed to be charged and empowered to develop their work environment through well-defined policies and guidelines to help motivate and encourage employee to perform and engage effectively for customer satisfaction and deliver service quality (Karatepe, 2013). Policies within organizations as indicated by Karatepe, “should focus on work engagement as a positive relationship with employees to enhance job performance, establish an extra role in customer satisfaction, and look at work engagement as the mediator and motivator”

(p. 134). As related to policies and procedures, organizations should be geared to the fundamental well-being of the employees so it gives a sense of organizational citizenship that proactively empower employees to perform at higher levels (Yi et al. 2011).

Policies and guidelines can also be used as a vehicle to promote organizational development, and training to promote a culture that recognizes employee performance and engagement, achievements by facilitating the overall needs of employees in terms of flexibility and motivation (Lee, Magnini, & Kim, 2011). A cross-industry survey was conducted using 587 frontline employees from multiple service industries to explore how organizations provide benefits on a leisurely basis to improve the quality of life for employees on the basis of work to leisure conflict and the quality of life, with the leisure benefit system as the moderator (Lin, Wong, & Ho, 2013). The results showed a negative relationship between work – to – leisure in relation to the quality of life, and on the other hand a leisure benefit system showed a positive relationship with quality of life to encompass direct satisfaction. Lin et al. (2013) further discussed that leisure benefit satisfaction is a coping mechanism for front line employees to resolve conflicts from work – to – leisure conflict situations. However, in the transit and operational system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA), front-line employees are an integral part of the organization, which make it even more critical to focus on the social and the psychological needs for full involvement and engagement for delivering quality service and improving performance. Therefore, it is for this reason that organizations must understand the importance of how front-line employees' conduct themselves in the

workplace as it relates to organizational orientation in building a service oriented culture. The next segment focused on the elements of building an oriented service culture.

Organizational Oriented Service Culture

An organizational culture that fosters effective customer service along with reinforced training programs, creates opportunity for positive encounters and competitive advantage (Hošková-Mayerová, 2011). It has been a general accepted practice that employee training and development has a significant impact on employee performance in building customer relationships, improve customer satisfaction, and create organizational success (Tahir et al. 2011). Within the context of researchers and practitioner perspectives on service quality, there is a common thread that speaks to the idea that the quality of service is a long-term investment that organizations forecast in their strategic business objectives (Heskett et al.1994; Parasuraman; et al.1985). It is perceived on a global basis that a successful service business organization must portray a service oriented approach in delivering quality service through strategic measures to support and guide employees. The concepts of service-oriented culture of business strategy can be viewed from various perspectives (Tang & Tang, 2012). The perspectives outlined by Tang and Tang, supported the idea that high performance human resource (HR) strategies on organizational behavior in a service oriented environment has tremendous implications in the workplace (Abdul-Jalal et al. 2013). The study included 1133 customer-facing employees and 119 service managers in the hotel industry to show the social climate and the influence of HR strategies and practices on organizational behavior. The outcome of the study demonstrates that a

high level of involvement on the part of HR strategies and practices can determine how front-line employees treat and react to customers in a service quality environment.

One of these key perspectives mentioned is from an individual standpoint to reflect the part employees play in terms of personality and attitudes that embody the concepts of service orientation to differentiate why service attitudes and behaviors are individually different from one person to the next, while the next perspective is from an organizational outlook to drive internal structure, climate, and culture (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010). On the individual approach to service oriented delivery of quality service, the dynamics can be technical skills, which move employees out of the realm of being customer oriented (Abdul-Jalal et al. 2013). Today, based on competition globally, service industries are hiring for attitude, and training for the technical competence which require a level of soft skills to deal effectively within the service sector (Paterson, 2011). Moreover, the quality of personality types and other attributes constituting HR hiring practices in acquiring the right fit for the position in delivering quality service is critical for employee performance, as they are tasked with tremendous pressure in serving customers (Tsaur & Tang, 2013).

Some researchers note the perspective of an organizational oriented approach as a strategic business process can be externally focused to reflect key characteristics such as marketing and advertising to engage the community, key stakeholders, and customers (Waligo, Clarke, & Hawkins, n.d.). Then there is the internal focus of the organizational oriented approach which in essence is the core process of an organization to investigate and examine its operating climate, goals and objectives, mission, policies, guidelines, and internal processes for delivering quality

service to customers (Choo, 2013). The expectations of a service oriented organization working on internal stability and control is recognized as one that encourages communication and involvement to facilitate creativity, innovation, and to investigate and explore new ideas (Choo, 2013). Recent studies showed that layers within an organizational oriented culture, specifically norms and behavior are driving forces that contributes to employee performance and organizational efficiency (Hogan & Coote, 2013). It is a widespread phenomenon between scholars and business practitioners in creating and building core concepts of value within organizational oriented service culture (Limpanitgul, Jirotmontree, Robson, & Boonchoo, 2013). Researchers investigated job attitudes and organizational commitment where data were collected from one nationality working in businesses with various cultural norms and value within the same industry. The study results showed that a collective organizational oriented culture encourages employees with a high level of commitment to the workplace where they envision their job more inclusive and engaging. A service organization according to Tsaur and Tang (2013) who places emphasis on front-line employees' ability to deliver quality service, is one that recognizes and can manage and lead to quality customer satisfaction and job performance (p. 1). Essentially, it is important that service organizations identify and understand the underlying attributes of service oriented practices, and what key approaches are essential to deliver exceptional service quality (Pimpakorn & Patterson, 2010). The concepts of service oriented organizations are driven by key elements that are considered to be cultural norms of the leadership, managing human resources, and service strategies and practices in delivering service

quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). The following sections will give a brief description of each of the listed norms.

Leadership Context of Service

Leadership within any business organization has a significant influence on how employees perform, and how an organization operates effectively overall. Leaders have the ability to navigate the development of HR to perform in unique processes and programs to address the needs of employees in a variety of ways to foster service driven organizational culture (Yee, Lee, Yeung, & Cheng, 2013). On a global perspective, leading for organizational change and effectiveness is considered the most essential element for developing and creating a service oriented culture over-time (Dimitrios, Sakas, & Vlachos, 2013a). The disposition and competence of leadership essentially within the service environment will shape the perception of employees and how the culture is developed and maintained as a result (Heskett et al., 1994). Yee et al., (2013) collected dyadic data from 230 service businesses in Hong Kong to investigate the relationship between several constructs to include transformational leadership, transactional leadership, performance skills, goal orientation, and, service quality. The result uncovered that a transformational leader is more effective than a transaction led environment. The information from the study reported goal orientation as more effective than performance skills in fostering service oriented quality in a high customer contact environment. Thus, the study concluded that leadership within organizations is critical for delivering service quality and gauging performance levels.

According to Heskett et al. (1994) it is imperative that the nature of effective leadership within the service environment be emphasized to promote delivering quality service and exemplary performance. A service environment that is perceived as being customer driven and service oriented is one that promotes a level of care and courtesy where stakeholders, leaders, employees, and customers are in alignment with the goals and vision to promote service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Organizations are critical in promoting service with effective leadership because it enhances employee performance and organizational efficiency (Munir, Rahman, Malik, & Ma'amor, 2012). There is a positive image that organizations create when they are being led by effective service leaders. (Yee, Yeung, and Cheng (2010) discussed the idea of service quality by looking at the operational aspects of relationships within the workplace, and came to the conclusion that employee and organizational performance are deeply seated in the strategic approaches of leadership with emphasis on service quality. Researchers such as Heskett et al. (1994) postulated the concepts of service – profit interchange that gives credence to employees to potentially deliver excellence in service quality to customers and improve business performance. Organizations are realizing that effective leadership within the workplace yield a high level of performance measures that projects service quality for organizational development, employee performance, and customer satisfaction (Yee et al. 2010). Therefore, it is very essential to understand the core competence and attributes of leadership, relationships with employee job performance by knowing the implications of poor quality service from a leadership and performance perspectives. The next segment contained processes and practices in the human resource environment.

Human Resource Processes and Practices

Employees are the most important resource that any business or organization needs to compete in the local and global service environment. Organizational human resource management (HRM) activities are a very critical function, in that process should seek to develop employees to their fullest potential to contribute to the success of the organization (Minbaeva, 2013). The concepts of human resources and best practices within organizations pay special attention to how jobs are structured, how performance is measured, development of organizational training initiatives, wages, and contract negotiations (Rau, 2012). HRM generally has a positive impact on organizations in terms of employee performance, decision making, and organizational effectiveness (Schalk, Timmerman, & Heuvel, 2013). Parasuraman, Zeithaml, and Berry (1988) discussed the concepts of quality from a foundational approach to include people as the most valuable asset within the organization. The authors placed significant emphasis on multiple tiers of performance measures which essentially is a HRM function that is critical to gain feedback on customer satisfaction, employee performance and satisfaction.

HRM processes and practices have become a common discussion among scholars and practitioners in the field, where employee growth and development is the common theme in creating a successful service organization through various empirical studies (Feng, Wang, & Prajogo, 2014). Jiang et al. (2012) discussed that several studies in HRM showed that successful organizations rely on strategic leadership to initiate and create a learning environment for employees to meet and exceeds their full potential in job performance. It is a general accepted norm that managing the experiences of customers is first coupled with managing the

performance of employees throughout the organization to first establish internal and external alignment for providing quality service, and to gauge performance strategies (Hossain, Moon, Yun, & Choe, 2012). Parasuraman et al. (1988) further suggested that an organization that invest in maintaining a service oriented culture focuses more on HRM to assess performance and engagement, and develop employee skills through training and education. Furthermore, (Schalk et al. 2013; Parasuraman et al.1985) stated that an organization whose interests are service orientation and customer satisfaction must focus on sound HRM strategies and practices to deliver quality service. Therefore, it is essential for service organizations to assess and strategize how service is delivered and find best practices in the field of human resources to ensure service quality (Rust & Oliver, 1994).

Service Strategies and Practices

Tsarenko and Tojib (2011) noted service strategies and practices are encounters that an organization experience during interactions with various types of customers with different needs and behavior. The idea of strategies and overall encounters of providing service is regarded as key moments where front line employees become the point of contact representing the organization to build and create a positive relationship with customers (Lloyd & Luk, 2011). Millions of customers are involved in the service environment each day, making it a very important focus for organizations to care for customer needs in the most appropriate way. The importance of service quality and employee engagement must not be underestimated (Heskett et al.1994; Parasuraman et al. 1988) discussed two key elements of service, and that is customer satisfaction and employee engagement through empowerment. As indicated by Heskett &

Parasuraman, customer satisfaction is the fundamental approach to service quality. Customer satisfaction is an approach that employees must take to ensure that the needs of customers are met with a respectable and timely manner to let customers feel special (He, Li, & Lai, 2011). It is vital that employees understand that customer needs are a priority and take precedent over their own needs at times (Schwartz, 2010). A workplace that invests in employee performance and engagement in attempting to build a service oriented culture, will ultimately change the perception of how the organization is viewed by a customer (Parasuraman et al.1988).

Empowering employees to act is the key responsibility of leadership (Ro & Chen, 2011). Essentially, when an employee is empowered, it enables him or her to make informed decisions that are beneficial to the customers and organization, and more importantly, it gives the employee control over daily activities (Humborstad & Perry, 2011). The service industry is dynamic and evolving with a tremendous level of complexities, making it somewhat difficult to standardize service; therefore it is important for management and leadership make the service environment an autonomous platform for delivering service quality. An employee who is self-directed and empowered by the organization, will make informed service decisions that are inclined to benefit customers and the organization (Anonymous, 2010).

The system used for delivering quality service to customers, can be perceived and described as an efficient and consistent model (Parasuraman et al. 1985). Building a service-oriented culture significantly contributes to employee performance and engagement, and the strategic value of the organization to fulfill its organizational goals and objectives for quality service delivery. Heskett et al. (1994) stressed the importance of quality service consistently and

the design process to solidify the fact that a well-planned system will ultimately deliver service quality effectively. To strategically understand the delivery of quality service, it must be designed from multiple perspectives in terms of practices, procedures, and strategies (Parasuraman et al. 1988). The full understanding of the perspectives must be conceptualized from the standpoint of system failure and prevention; to the holistic value of service recovery. A level of communication to ensure service quality and technology, knowing that the global service environment is facilitated in part by technological innovations (Coccia, 2014). These perspectives are critical for organizational success in delivering service quality and is related to how well the service is being performed (Yee et al. 2010). Key studies show the relationships between service quality and employee performance and engagement. The next section will preview studies in the area of service-oriented culture.

Studies in Organizational Oriented Service Culture

The phenomenon of culture has been studied throughout the years by scholars and practitioners in the field of organizational behavior to understand employees' attitudes in organizations and the workplace to gauge individual and organizational performance (Limpanitgul, Jirotmontree, Robson, & Boonchoo, 2013). Several studies have explored culture at the individual, organizational, and societal level. Limpanitgul et al. (2013) reported on a study to test the dynamics of organizational culture in relations to employee's attitude on the job, and pro-active service delivery socially in a collectivist culture. Data were collected from 439 participants from two major airlines, one based in Thailand, and the other in the U.S. with both being cabin service attendants from the same nationality working in different cultures. The

findings revealed a positive impact on attitude on the job in both populations. Because of this study, scholars and practitioners are drawn to the outcomes to further understand job attitudes, and prosocial behavior that influences the work environment. This level of understanding is important, according to Ellinger et al. (2013) in that when organizations identify ways to foster and develop an organizational service oriented culture; employees are empowered and motivated to provide quality service to customers. Ellinger et al. (2013) also discussed in a study that assessed and addressed the implications of HRM resources to balance and develop an employee's skill set on providing service quality. The authors discussed social theoretical constructs to examine the relationships between workplace investments and social relationships, and service driven employees' disposition in terms of attitude and behavior. The results from the 407 front-line employees from various service companies revealed a strong and positive relationship between social, organizational investments, and employees' commitment to service quality and organizational citizenship.

West (2013) purported that creating a service oriented culture, requires a critical level of understanding the cultural environment and what it will take for sustainability. The author draws information from in-depth research from the United Kingdom National Health Services, and discussed the importance of building a quality service culture for clients at every level of the organization. The information in the research stressed the development of a service oriented culture as one that propagates objectives that are clear, and possess a supportive workplace environment. Scholars and practitioners have expressed interest in work environments that are supportive in nature, and focus on a service-oriented approach (Eren, Eren, Ayas, & Hacıoglu,

2013). Organizations are taking strategic approaches in creating and fostering a service oriented culture to create superior service and value in satisfying customers, and withstanding the competition (Eren et al. 2013). The authors explored the relationships between organization oriented service culture among 745 branch members in the banking industry to reflect job satisfaction and performance. The study revealed that a service oriented environment is related to employee job performance, customer satisfaction, and can fundamentally impact financial performance in a positive way. Based on this level of findings from researchers in the area of performance and service measures, it is discussed that leaders should take a pro-active approach to empower employees to deliver quality service to build an organizational service oriented culture (Heskett et al. 1994; (Parasuraman et al. 1988; Ro & Chen, 2011).

Justification for Using a Qualitative Research Case Study

This qualitative case study is geared to understanding the relationships that exist between customer focus training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture among front-line employees within the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). It is noted that employees, along with organizations in the transit industry recognize the importance of delivering quality and successful service (APTA, 2013). Front-line employees are the most important resources of transit organizations as reported by APTA, they are responsible for providing customer experiences that run beyond just transactions, but make significant contributions to the economic vitality of regional communities and create customer satisfaction in delivering quality service. Essentially, a case study is appropriate for this study and is set apart from ethnography based on the fact that it calls for in-

depth study of anthropology and social, cultural norms and requires extended time in data collection (Creswell, 2007). Grounded theory was not chosen for this case study because it involves multiple theory perspectives which can pose a problem for the researcher in determining the effectiveness of organizing categories in detail (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013). The narrative approach will not be used in this study because it potentially may not present the cultural strengths of the participants in the case study which require in-depth understanding and knowledge of the phenomena (Creswell, 2014). A key example would be the researcher presenting a key story of a participant as the central component in the study, and misalignment occurs with data collection of discussions (Creswell, 2007). The method of a quantitative approach will not be used in this study based on the fact that it cannot accurately describe or interpret the relationships between CFT programs, employee performance, and organizational service orientation (Maxwell, 2013). The mixed method approach will not be necessary for this research study, as the qualitative approach is quite fitting for this case study.

Summary

This chapter contained a description of the conceptual framework to explain the potential constructs and alignment to show the relationships and associations presented to achieve the objectives of the study. Further, I presented a brief historical context to provide some background for the study. I also provided a review of the literature and theoretical constructs to support the study specific topics in the review. The following chapter contains the method that was used in the study.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

A research case study is designed to address social and human needs to understand existing relationships and issues (Jang et al. 2013). This research study was conducted to facilitate an investigation into front-line employees' experience participating in CFT to ascertain an in-depth understanding of the learning in terms of employee performance and engagement and building a service-oriented culture. As a part of this qualitative research plan of study, I made clear the setting, participants, events, and protocol in data collection, as discussed by Covell, Sidani, and Ritchie (2012). This chapter contains the design of the research, population involved, sampling procedure, sample instrumentation, data collection strategies, data analysis ideas, and validation of study.

Research Design

A case study design was used in this research study to investigate the relationships between customer focus training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service orientated culture. This approach, according to Yin (2009) brings to the forefront subliminal explanations on social, behavioral understanding as to the why and the how of complex phenomenon under study. This case study approach was selected based on the complex nature of the research questions to uncover the experiences of front-line employees participating in customer focus training to gain in-depth understanding of perception and relationships within the phenomenon under investigation. Key theoretical constructs of organizational culture and social theoretical exchange will be used in this case study to create the foundational basis for the investigation. The ideology in using this design is to facilitate understanding of the real-life

experiences of front-line employees' performance and engagement, aligned with CFT, and building a service oriented culture. Creswell (2007) emphasized the importance of a case study research in that the approach is "embedded in activities that finds the observer in the real world, and is consisted of interpretative material values that makes the world a visible place for the researcher" (p. 36). Denzin (as cited in Creswell, 2007) also reiterated that a qualitative approach is immersed in interpretation and natural attributes of world views. Denzin's view is an example of understanding the environment of participants and their settings naturally, and making attempts to understand and interpret the phenomenon that attribute meaning that people attached to them. I will conduct an investigation into how front-line employees view customer focus training, how it relates to performance, and how building a service-orientated culture derive from such experiences to justify key investments in training initiatives.

This case study approach design is structured to provide researchers an overall understanding of front-line employees with experience in participating in the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority customer focus training. In essence, the utilization of this qualitative approach is geared to the experience of participants and to help strengthen what the researcher knows through previous and existing work (Yin, 2009). A case study provides a level of knowledge and understanding of a particular phenomenon in a research, because it is a flexible design that place significant emphasis on exploring a problem rather than prescribing or making a prediction (Creswell, 2014). The design also allows the researcher to address broad research questions and narrow the focus to address the problem, instead of attempting to predict the outcome of the study (Yin, 2009). Creswell (2014) further discussed

that while statistical approach may be able to address situations that are homogeneous and routine in nature, a case study can provide creativity, innovation, contextual and conceptual meanings. Researchers also argued that a case study lacks the ability to generalize globally based on inherent subjectivity and generalization in certain particular context (Yin, 2009). This case study emphasized in-depth analysis contextually of just relationships between frontline employees, training, and service-oriented culture.

Sample Structuring and Population

The total population of operators for this study is 2,700, of which 27 was selected to participate in the interview process and nine was invited to participate in a focus group. The two groups of participants were from the same locations, but were not the same individuals. I used a purposeful sampling approach to select participants for semistructured interview and a focus group. I reviewed training documents within the administrative division of Surface and Light Rail Operations to verify employees who had attended CFT, reviewed the employees' files to ascertain years of service with the organization, identified particular districts demographically, and verified gender, male or female. Vosloban (2012) discussed these approaches as an essential focus to understand the population being addressed in a research study. Poulis et al. (2013) offered this purposeful sampling as an effective option to uncover in-depth knowledge and understanding of the research problem. I selected participants who met the criteria for selection as well as having the experience and knowledge to understand the phenomenon to create substantial credibility and transferability. Key criteria for participants were (a) they have attended customer focus training at some point in their career (b) their work locations is within

one of the nine operating districts to reflect the North, South and Suburban (c) they are either male or female and (d) they have been employed with the organization for 1 – 20 years. The sample size of this research plan will stay within a selected number of units to reflect Surface Bus and Light Rail Operations. Poulis et al. (2013) stressed the importance of data collection methods, to focus on the lowest units of analysis to organize and plan to embody the whole concepts of study. Patton (2002) has also supported this holistic approach. In this concept, each case is ideal typically allowing replication across findings to provide conceptual meaning, themes, and categorical inferences (Covell et al., 2012).

Front line employees from nine operating locations within SEPTA were encouraged to participate by way of purposeful sampling methods, and multiple approaches in data collection developing the best cases useful to practitioners, educators, and professional in the field of HRM, and OD to address the unique needs of front-line employees to provide quality service. The rationale for selecting this purposeful sampling is to ascertain rich information for in-depth analysis, and learn from the central phenomenon, rather than empirical generalizations (Barratt, Choi, & Li, 2011). I explored CFT programs bounded by time and activity of multiple individuals to collect information utilizing interview approaches in the data collection process (Verhoef & Lemon, 2013).

The research was completed in the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) public transit system in Philadelphia Pennsylvania. The population is a well-defined group of front-line employees who operate buses and trolleys within the five county region of southeastern Pennsylvania, and interfaced with customers on a daily basis. Patton (2002) stressed

the importance of data collection methods, to focus on the lowest units of analysis to organize and plan to embody the whole concepts of study. In this concept, each unit is ideal typically allowing replication and triangulation across findings to provide conceptual meaning, themes, and categorical inferences (Covell et al. 2012).

The sampling process yielded similarities in characteristics within subgroups and or geographical locations and facilities for comparison analysis. I explored CFT programs bounded by time and activity of multiple individuals to collect information utilizing interview approaches via conference call and or face-to-face interaction and focus group generation in the data collection process (Maxwell, 2013). Singleton and Straits (2010) elaborated on the concepts of purposeful sampling and relayed the idea that it is not a perfect fit for probability sampling specifically in instances where generalizations are needed to draw references and analysis. Some notable weaknesses in a purposeful way of drawing sample is the idea that the researcher must have prior knowledge of the population in selecting cases before they are selected (Singleton & Straits). In essence, a researcher must be able to keep his or her biases in check when conducting this highly sensitive sample selection process. Maxwell (2013) discussed the idea of non-probability methodology to reflect an intentional and purposeful approach, which is conceptualized through convenience, and the selection and knowledge of others. See Table 1 for criteria used to select the participants for the research study.

Table 1. *Sample criteria: Gender, years of employment, training attendance, and job locations.*

Male Interviews	Female Interviews	Years of service: 1-5 6-10 11-20	Attended CFT Program	Operating Districts	Number of Case Study	Regional Districts
1	2		Yes	Midvale	1	North
2	1		Yes	Comly	1	North
1	2		Yes	Frankford	1	North
2	1		Yes	Allegheny	2	South
1	2		Yes	Callowhill	2	South
2	1		Yes	Southern	2	South
1	2		Yes	Elmwood	3	South
1	2		Yes	Frontier	3	Suburban
2	1		Yes	Victory	3	Suburban
Total 13	Total 14					
27 participants for interviews	Interviews: 30 - 45 minutes			9 Operating locations	3 Cases	
Focus Group	Focus Group	1 forum: 45 minutes to an hour				
Male	Female					
5	4					
9 participants for focus group				9 Operating locations		Same Districts Different participants
<u>Documents</u>	<u>Total Population</u>	<u>Target Population:</u>	<u>Total Organization Population</u>			
Utilizing information from the organization to guide the study, and select participants.	2700 Operators serving the Five County Region of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA)	36 total participants for research study	10,000 employees employed by SEPTA to include operators			

Instrumentation

The intent in this case study was to utilize a self-designed interview guide composed of a certain set of questions for participants derived from the research questions listed in Chapter 1.

The proposed focus group will involve an experienced moderator and note taker to manage and facilitate the forum to establish credibility and objectivity in the process. A self-designed data documentation process was used to capture information during the discussion, which will be limited to 45 to 60 minutes. The questions will be framed in the same sequence and context as the interview, and will be facilitated by the researcher as the moderator and note taker.

Research and interview Questions

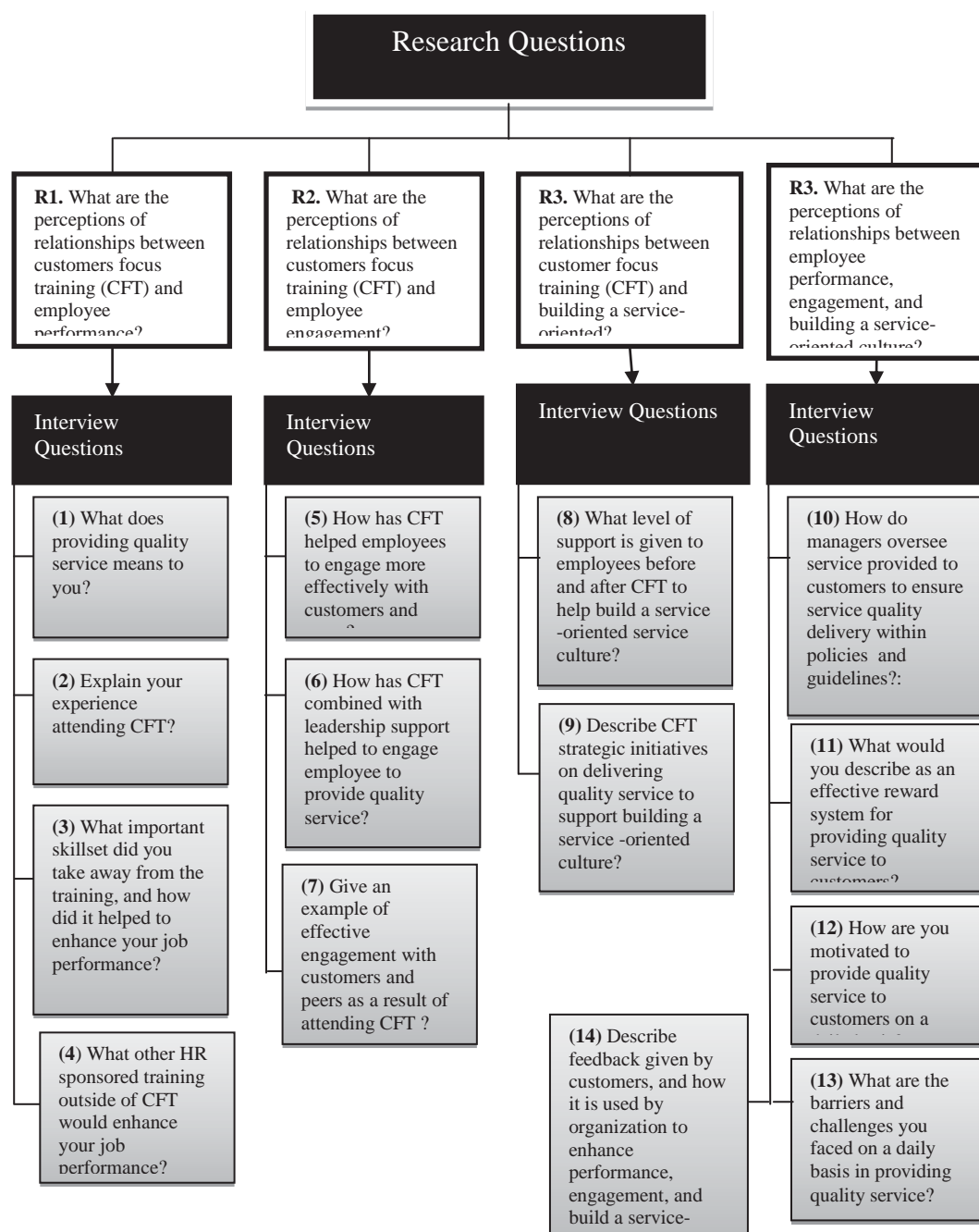


Figure 2. Interview guide: Research questions and interview questions.

There are multiple relationships between constructs based on the literature review relating to training, employee performance, engagement, and building a service oriented culture. The following are the interview questions that will drive the research study.

Interview Questions

RQ1. What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance?

1. What does providing quality service means to you?
2. What was your experience like attending CFT?
3. What important skillset did you take away from the training, and how did it help to enhance your job performance?
4. What other HR sponsored training outside of CFT would help to enhance your job performance?

RQ2. What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee engagement?

5. How has CFT helped employees to engage more effectively with customers and peers?
6. How has CFT combined with leadership support helped to engage employee to provide quality service?
7. Give an example of effective engagement with customers and peers as a result of attending CFT?

RQ3. What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and building a service oriented-culture?

8. What level of support is given to employees before and after CFT to help build a service oriented culture?
9. Describe CFT strategic initiatives' on delivering quality service to support building a service oriented culture?

RQ4. What are the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service-oriented culture?

10. How do managers oversee service provided to customers to ensure service quality delivery within policies and guidelines?
11. What would you describe as a reward system for providing excellent service to customers?
12. How are you motivated to provide quality service to the customers?
13. What are the barriers and challenges you faced on a daily basis in providing quality service?
14. Describe the feedback given by customers, and how it is used by organization to enhance performance, engagement, and build a service-oriented culture?

Data Collection

This study consisted of structured in-depth interviews geared to front-line operators within the transit system of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority, along with a structured focus group using interview questions to guide the overall study to understand the

research problem. The strategy was to interview participants from nine operating locations within the system, and to pull from those same districts, participants assigned to the focus group to ascertain in-depth knowledge and triangulation of both methods. The participants were given two options in the interview process, interviewed face – to – face at the SEPTA headquarters located in down Philadelphia, or via teleconference at a time that was convenient for both me and the participants. The interviews took 25 – 30 minutes to complete, and were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis by the researcher. The interview schedule consisted of 27 employees. The focus group was conducted at the same location at a specified time that was convenient for the participants and researcher. The forum occurred once, and lasted for 45 to 60 minutes with 9 employees. The focus group was facilitated by the researcher as the moderator and transcriber overseeing the process. The total number of participants in the overall study was 36 front-line employees, to reflect 27 in the interview process, and 9 in the focus group. Organizational documents and records were used to review participants to ensure that they meet the criteria for the study to reflect years of employment, training attendance, operating locations, and gender.

Data Analysis

The use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has a reputation in academics as well as developing performance measurements in the areas of corporate, social and environmental care, and business models (Yearworth & White, 2013). The key advantage in using CAQDAS programs is the ability to save on time and rigor in managing data by providing the researcher with the convenience of organizing and tracking various

components of the data. Trotter (2012) posited that computer analysis programs help the researcher free up an enormous amount of time to give way to a richer and more in-depth data analysis and evaluation. Covell et al. (2012) argued further that the rise of CAQDAS has become more prevalent in developing common themes and categories from key research questions to understand complex business issues and organizational processes. A CAQDAS tool, possibly Nvivo software was used to help organize data collected for the researcher to analyze and interpret from multiple cases.

Data analysis in a qualitative study requires a certain level of skill set from the researcher to assess writing notes marginally, develop and construct field notes, and identify relationships categorically (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2013). This process coded information data for analysis and interpretation. Creswell (2014) discussed two main types of coding used in a qualitative research study for data analysis to reflect open and axial coding. This study used an open coding process to validate data transcript and code concepts found in the collection process. An axial coding process will also be employed to organize data into a thematic sequence for clarity and understanding. The data were presented in tables and figures to give a visible description of relationships among constructs. The analysis of the data presented a summary of notes, key words, code identification, interpreting codes to themes, and drawing inferences categorically to the literature review framework. The objectives of this study were to triangulate the data collected from interviews with the data collected from the focus group and documents.

Verifying Qualitative Data

Maxwell (2013) discussed validation as a truthful statement presented by a researcher in a qualitative study. A case study is designed to report accurate and truthful information that is consistent with the research problem (Creswell, 2014), and consistent throughout the research study. The use of triangulation helped to validate the data from multiple sources. Triangulation was used as a way to verify and compare data between sources.

I used an auditing process approach to obtain conformability according to experts in the research field. Creswell (2007) posited that researchers participating in a qualitative study are more inclined to seek out conformability opposed to objectivity to establish data values that essentially can be achieved through auditing process. The objective is to store recorded information systematically in a safe place. The use of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) has a reputation in academics as well as developing performance measurements in the areas of corporate social and environmental care, and business models (Yearworth & White, 2013). The key advantage in using CAQDAS programs is the ability to save on time and rigor in managing data by providing the researcher with the convenience of organizing and tracking various components of the data. Trotter (2012) indicated that computer analysis programs help the researcher free up an enormous amount of time to give way to a richer and more in-depth data analysis and evaluation. Covell et al. (2012) argued further that the rise of CAQDAS has become more prevalent in developing common themes and categories from key research questions to understand complex business issues and organizational processes. This qualitative case study research will allow the researcher to give a detailed narrative and analysis

of customer focus training, its relationship relating to performance, and building a service-oriented culture based on data collected.

Reliability and Validity

To understand the terminology of reliability and validity in a qualitative study, a researcher must indicate these processes from different perspectives (Nitz, Ainsworth, Nerdel, & Prechtel, 2014). To address key design and methodological questions of weakness in this research study, the concepts of credibility, applicability, and transferability are all critical criteria's essential for addressing vulnerabilities (Covell et al. 2012). The researcher as the instrument in the research study must explain possible biases by taking approaches such as triangulation to ensure data collection from a diverse population of individuals for quality assurance (Maxwell, 2013). This approach allowed consistency with the focus group as well as the designed interview guide to facilitate the same interview questions with the interviewees. Careful consideration was given to the validity and reliability of data collection and communication plan to ensure compliance with organization, university board, and treatment of employees.

Protecting the Participants

This research study was conducted to investigate the relationships between customer focus training, employee performance and engagement, and building a service-orientated culture among front-line employees within the transit system of Philadelphia, and surrounding counties. Informed consent was provided to participants before they engaged in the study. Participants were assured that all conversations would remain confidential and that only the findings will be shared with organizations, and that all names remain anonymous. This research plan got

approval from the Walden University IRB process for informed the consent of the data collection methodology and human participation prior to the start of research and fieldwork. All involvement with participants emphasized the highest level of compliance and care with transit industry and university standards to facilitate full disclosure to participants of the purpose and benefits of study.

The objective of this research plan was to have data collection free from biases, and ultimately protecting the fundamental privacy and integrity of the participants in the study. The study protected employees by showing the value of their involvement. Full disclosure was communicated to employees during and after data collection process to establish high collaboration and dissemination of findings. The issue of confidentiality was a concern during the study and the participants will remain anonymous. The fact that I had a high level of familiarity with the organization's policies and guidelines, extra care and precaution necessitated each approach when collaborating with employees and collecting data. The protocol of showing ethical consideration is critical in gaining confidence from participants and organization to eliminate extrinsic factors such as biases that can have an adverse impact on participants and outcome in a research study. Therefore, each segment of the study had approval from the organization's leaders to ensure credibility and transparency in the research design and methodology. The hope also was that my background would help to build confidence and respect among the participants. Also, drawing conclusions because the study was qualitative where the ability to predict or link casual attributes is limited.

The study was monitored by directors from nine operating locations who were independent observers and gatekeepers to ensure efficiency and effectiveness of the employee's assignment to the interview pool, focus group, and pertinent record and documentation needed for the research study. The support of leadership within an organization to enhance service quality is one of the most successful ideologies today that creates sustainability in employee performance and business success (Yee et al. 2013). I used transit operations, administration and HRM, to gain access to the participants' documents, information, and records, based on informed consent from the Chief Operating Officer of Bus and Surface Operations who oversee the nine operating locations for the research study.

Summary

In this segment I presented the research methodology and designated design to understand the relationships between customers focus training, employee performance and engagement. Justification for selecting a case study approach was discussed, along with preferred research design over other methods. Key areas of identification to advance study were population and setting, sampling approach, instruments to be used in research, collecting data, and the dynamics of analyzing the data. Chapter 4 contains the findings and chapter 5 contains an interpretation of the key findings of the research study.

Chapter 4: Results

The objective of this qualitative exploratory research study was to provide a rich description of the data for each case in the interview process of 27 employees, and the focus group with nine employees. The data described in the process were used to categorize the three cases and the focus group to gain in-depth perspectives from the front-line employees to facilitate performance, engagement, and building a service oriented culture aligned with CFT. This chapter contains a description of how the data were collected, description of the participants, analysis of the data collected in conjunction with the questions geared to the research, and the findings and analysis. Using a case study design, I collected data from interviews and a focus group, analyzed the data, and structured the data into themes.

Process Description of Data Collection

Service quality and delivery requires complex collaboration and interactions among front-line employees, customers, managers, leaders, and the entire organization. Each operating district or service locations has its own uniqueness in engaging and performing interactions for service quality. The key target population for this study included 36 front-line employees from nine operating locations within the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA).

The strategy for recruiting the participants emerged from the administrative operating department that documents, employment history, training records, years of employment, service locations, demographic region, and gender. This strategy helped me to have easy access to participants and screen, select, and contact them by e-mail and/or phone from each operating

location. I provided consent forms to each participant from the operating locations along with an invitation to participate in the study. The interviews were broken down into three case studies representing the Northern, Southern, and Suburban Divisions, and one focus group representing the same population with different participants from the same divisions and operating locations. Once all the participants responded and accepted the invitation and signed the informed consent, I began scheduling the participants for the interview process, which was the first stage of the data collection (a) Northern Division (b) Southern Division, and (c) Suburban Division. Once all the data were gathered from the interviewing process, I scheduled the nine participants for the focus group independent of the interview participants, but who were from the same locations and divisions as the interviewees.

The organizational structure of participant recruitment from the 9 operating locations within SEPTA is shown in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5.

Table 2

Case 1: Operating locations

Northern Division:	Male	Female	Years of service	Attended CFT	Participants
Midvale	1	2	1 - 20	Yes	3
Comly	2	1	1 - 20	Yes	3
Frankford	1	2	1 - 20	Yes	3

Table 3

Case 2: Operating locations

Southern Division:	Male	Female	Years of service	Attended CFT	Participants
Allegheny	2	1	1 - 20	Yes	3
Callowhill	1	2	1 - 20	Yes	3
Southern	2	1	1 - 20	Yes	3
Elmwood	1	2	1 - 20	Yes	3

Table 4*Case 3: Operating locations*

Suburban Division:	Male	Female	Years of service	Attended CFT	Participants
Frontier	2	1	1 - 20	Yes	3
Victory	1	2	1 - 20	Yes	3

Table 5*Focus group participants from nine operating locations*

Focus Group:	Male	Female	Years of service	Attended CFT	Participants	Divisions
Midvale	1		1 - 5	Yes	1	North
Comly		1	6 - 10	Yes	1	
Frankford	1		11 - 20	Yes	1	
Allegheny		1	1 - 5	Yes	1	South
Callowhill	1		6 - 10	Yes	1	
Southern		1	11 - 20	Yes	1	
Elmwood	1		1 - 5	Yes	1	
Frontier		1	6 - 10	Yes	1	Suburban
Victory	1		11 - 20	Yes	1	

Preparing Data for Analysis

For this study, I used interview and focus group data to compare and triangulate the information. This allowed me to intentionally validate the data collected from the interviews and the focus group (Creswell, 2007). Chapter 3 of this research study contained the approach that I formulated inductively to gain opportunities to present the data analysis in a thematically rich presentation that covers all aspects of the interviews and focus group. I analyzed the data using an inductive approach to provide a platform for themes and exploration regarding the subject of training and front-line employees on a step by step approach (Creswell, 2007). According to Maxwell (2013), a research approach must sequentially and carefully organize and plan the data

in a clear and succinct way to guide the research study in a step by step process when it comes to an inductive thematic analysis that involves an exploratory qualitative inquiry.

Step 1

I interviewed 27 participants and facilitated a focus group with nine participants. The focus group took the longest because the participants were very engaged in the process and wanted to make a significant contribution, while the participants in the interview process presented a more structured discussion that allowed openness and personalized expressions of their participation and experiences in the CFT. During both focus group and interviews, I took notes and recorded the conversations. This level of documentation and recording in both interviews and focus group was important just in case there were recording failure in the process (Creswell, 2007).

Microsoft Word was used to record the data responses from participants regarding the interview questions. I assigned unique identifiers to each participant in the research study to reflect participant number (years of employment), zip code, regional location, and operating locations. The identifiers were used to see which participants responded to the interview questions originally and helped with data management from the same participants to validate the original results. The identifiers also helped to protect individual's privacy in the research study (see Figure 3). According to Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), these levels of evaluation of data and verification allows the researcher to get a firm understanding of the responses from participants, which in turn gives a way to identify the experiences, structuring, developing, and locating emerging themes by statements of significant importance. Creswell (2007) noted that

these processes also create validity and reliability of the information transcribed from interviews and focus group. See *Figure 3* for scheduled interviews and focus group identifiers demographically.

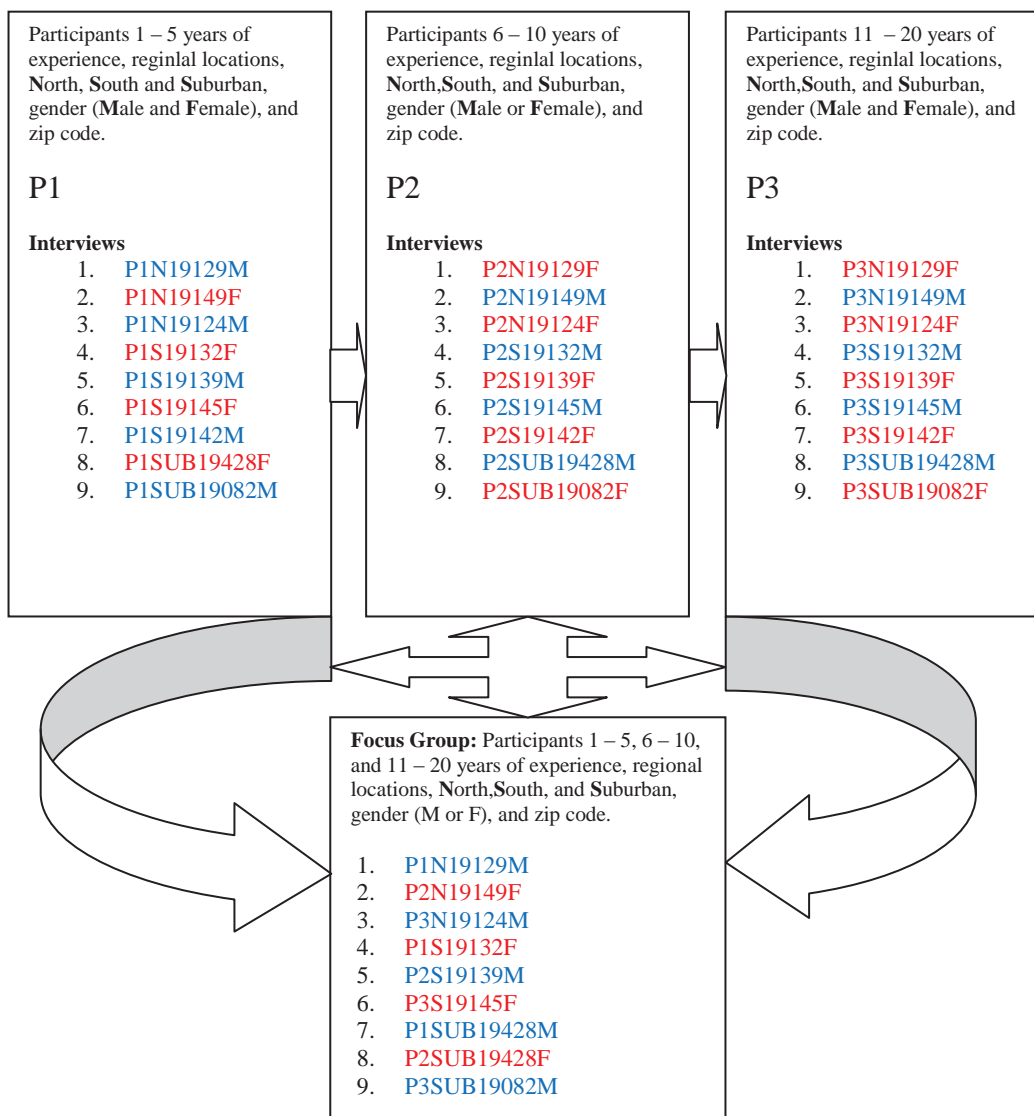


Figure 3. Participant identifiers: Interviews and focus group.

Step 2

The data were transcribed from interviews and focus group, and I was able to gain in-depth knowledge of participants' experiences in CFT by making assumptions relating to common themes, similarities, and differences. I was also able to document and highlight meaningful comments created and developed from the participants' responses (Maxwell, 2013). The repeated listening to the audio recordings, helped to solidify the accuracy of the data transcribed. The participants were given the opportunity to review the transcript for accuracy once the process was completed, and they indicated that the responses were accurately documented.

Step 3

I examined the data for information that seemed to have no value and eliminated it. The information considered of no value mostly occurred during the interviews when I gave the participants some level of flexibility to express themselves in terms of their personal feelings in relations to their experience with CFT. Being able to go beyond a specific question helped the participants to reflect on the research questions. Nonetheless, there were situations where the participants provided information that had nothing to do with the study and I had to, re-direct and focus the participants on the interview questions. Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2013), discussed the value of information to a research study relating to the responses to the questions in a research study, and clearly pointed to the non-added value that can be problematic for the researcher and the study. As I prepared the information for analysis, I was able to eliminate and reduce the data by deleting information that had no relevancy in terms of the responses.

Step 4

The data were uploaded and coded into NVivo qualitative software to help plan, organize, and prepare for analyzing the interview question responses from participants in both the focus group and interview sessions. The coding process involved the use of NVivo to open up a visual presentation of the dataset in groups and categories stored in a meaningful approach and organization (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 2013). This key approach allowed me to identify key words, patterns, themes, phrases, emerging themes, and categories displayed and imported in a matrix form. An organized format was used to ascertain and verify the key interview questions to facilitate comparability in the outcome, and provided a level of quantification of responses from interviewees and participants in the focus group.

Step 5

The NVivo tool was very effective and efficient because of the very small sample size in this study. Manipulating the various functions of NVivo data management capabilities, I was able to consolidate the data in the coding process, store the data in files, and annotate information for ease of clarity. The tool filter information relevant to the study, sort data for categorical inferences, and copy and paste information to identify themes in order to quantify the frequency of responses. I was able to create tables where the data were exported from NVivo to Microsoft Word to give a visual presentation of the data. In this step, I analyzed the data further to bring together emerging patterns and themes cluster. In this process, I re-evaluate the varying differences and similarities among the three groups of participants responses from the 1 – 5, 6 – 10, and the 11 – 20 years of employment. I was able to capture similar responses to begin the process of pattern identification and correlating the emerging themes. I then analyzed the

responses given for a particular question and categorized responses into themes that emerged. Given the total number of responses to a question, I then divided the number of responses that fit within that particular theme by total number in the group to calculate percentage of responses.

Step 6

I identified a number of themes in the data analysis to reflect the four key research questions that were analyzed with the results which are listed in the analysis of the data and the results section of this research study. Each interview question from 1 – 14 provided responses from the three participant groups to answer research questions 1 – 4. Through the data collection process, I had an opportunity to repeat themes and emerging themes to support responses given by the participants.

Step 7

I then, provided a detailed description of the themes and how they correlated with the overarching research questions and the interview questions. Next, I combined the responses of the participants and placed the information into tables to show the frequency of common responses. Using that process, I could compare and contrast similarities. I could also tie the responses back to the research questions.

Step 8

When appropriate, I was able to insert direct quotes from participants' responses to support the results of the research questions and interview questions. This approach helped to highlight the themes and narratives, and also bring out the participants' experiences with CFT. I made every effort to include all the participant responses in the data analysis process.

Analysis and Results of the Data

The results are presented thematically within the structure of the four research questions. The interview questions were based on the research questions. The participants in the research study were uniquely identified as Participant 1, 2, and 3 listed in the Northern, Southern, and Suburban service regions, along with zip code to identify specific locations. An example, P1N19129M means participant 1, by zip code, and represented by a male or female (M or F), see Figure 3 for participant identifiers. Tables 7 to 11 helped me to analyze the data in terms of common and emerging themes coded from interviews and focus group for interpretation. These contain demographic information.

Table 6

Interviews: 1 - 5 years of employment: Male and female: Regional and individual locations.

North: Male or Female	South: Male or Female	Suburban: Male or Female
1 - 5 M	1 - 5 F	1 - 5 M
1 - 5 F	1 - 5 M	1 - 5 F
1 - 5 M	1 - 5 F	1 - 5 M

Table 7

Interviews: 6 - 10 years of employment: Male and female: Regional and individual locations.

North: Male or Female	South: Male or Female	Suburban: Male or Female
5 - 10 F	5 - 10 M	5 - 10 F
5 - 10 M	5 - 10 F	5 - 10 M
5 - 10 F	5 - 10 M	5 - 10 F

Table 8

Interviews: 11 - 20 years of employment: Male and female: Regional and individual locations.

North: Male or Female	South: Male or Female	Suburban: Male or Female
10 - 20 F	10 - 20 M	10 - 20 F
10 - 20 M	10 - 20 F	10 - 20 M

10 – 20	F	10 – 20	M	10 – 20	F
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Table 9

Focus Group: 1 – 20 years of employment: Male and female: Regional and individual locations.

1 – 5	M	North
6 – 10	F	North
11 – 20	M	North
1 – 5	F	South
6 – 10	M	South
11 – 20	F	South
1 – 5	M	South
6 – 10	F	Suburban
11 – 20	M	Suburban

Research Question 1

What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance? I used interview questions 1 – 14 to address the research questions. Employees with 1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 – 20 years of employment answered these questions. I analyzed the responses in the three categories of years of tenure separately to show similarities and differences among the three groups.

Table 10

Themes derived from research question 1: Interview questions 1 – 4.

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance?

1 – 5 years of employment

1. Doing my best, being a public servant, keeping customers happy.
2. Good experience with CFT, empathy, especially with ADA training, patience.
3. Patience, staying focused, dealing with different personalities.

4. Need better understand of policies, SEPTA's communication with customers about information, more frequent training, need to train managers.

6 – 10 Years of employment

1. Being knowledgeable, being safe, courteous
2. Good experience, therapeutic, continued to hone skills
3. How to deal with so many different personalities, patience, and a good attitude
4. Need more hands on training with customers, more frequent training, management should get hands on training as well, dealing with fares

11 – 20 years of employment

1. Good relationships with customers, professionalism, operating safe while driving
 2. Good experience with CFT, Informative
 3. New skills gained to perform and engage customers, overall enhancement of skills, safety awareness skills
 4. Self sufficient, frequent refresher trainings, hands on training, new training in safety procedures and policies
-

The feedback from all three groups was to solidify and confirm if there is a relationship between CFT, employee performance, engagement, and building a service oriented culture. To answer Research Question 1 on performance with Interview Questions 1 – 4, the respondents with 1 – 5 years of employment reported that 55.6 % defined quality service as keeping the customers happy, 33% reported that it is doing the best toward everyone around them, and 11% defined quality service as being a public servant. To address Interview Question 2 regarding the participants' experiences attending CFT, 100% of the respondents agreed that CFT was a positive experience, 37.5% said that CFT provided them with new information, 25% reported that CFT helped them to engage with the public, 12.5% reported that CFT helped them to engage with other operators, and 12.5% found the ADA training to be most helpful.

Interview Question 3 was related to skillsets acquired as a result of attending CFT, 55.6% of the respondents reported that the training aided them on how to deal with passengers and peers, 22.2% said that the training helped with patience, and 22.2% reported that CFT helped with providing customer focused service. To answer Research Question 1 on performance with Interview Question 4 addressing the need for other training outside of CFT that would help to enhance performance, 44.4% of the respondents stated that they did not see the need for any additional HR sponsored training, 22.2% asked that training occurs more frequently, and 22.2% believed more trainings should occur between SEPTA and the passengers. The remaining 11.1% requested further clarification of SEPTA's policies for operators. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 1 – 4 addressed by the 1 – 5 years of employment participants relating to service quality, experience attending CFT, skillsets acquired, and other HR trainings to enhance job performance:

P1N19124M: Doing the best towards everyone around you. Passengers, peers, coworkers, everybody. I realize I'm a public servant. I'm here to serve the public and to offer quality customer service can be a challenge on any day. It means to give your all. Do your best. Be professional at all times. Try to, anyways. Just do your best. Quality service actually means a whole lot. To make the customer happy and want to keep them riding with SEPTA, they need to be happy. Greeting them when they get on the bus, telling them to have a great day. Making sure everyone feels relaxed. As a professional operator, customer service to me is that you give to the passengers what you expect. If you give them your best, you will receive the best. You have people getting on the bus

and you need to make sure that you're approaching them in a customer focused manner. Keeping everybody happy and getting them around safely. Helping customer get where they're trying to go with the best of your knowledge.

P1S19132: In the beginning, it was a two day course in a class setting. Personally, the 2nd day was more effective. We did ADA training that day where the professional operators pick up passengers in the wheelchairs, and I would just get so discouraged because we are so focused on the timing. We had to practice being the passengers in the wheelchairs and we learned how uncomfortable they could be. So now, after that training, I look at these situations in a different way. I've been in their shoes, for a day, and now I tend to be more empathetic. Had I not taken the class, I don't think I would have felt this way now. My suggestion would be that everybody revisit this class after 12 months as a refresher.

P1N19124M: The skillset that I took away that was most important, was the way to make my own analysis of every single person. The different ways to act and conduct myself while serving customers, and how to deal with all different types of personalities. You end up not having problems once you understand the training purpose. I never have problems because I try to use every single thing I get out of these trainings. It's worked perfectly for me. It helped me with being patient and staying focused. Customer service and de-escalation training is something that we can all use yearly to keep us sharp. That would keep down a lot of complaints and issues, in regards to fare. A lot of things that the operator goes through and the organization must continue to train and develop employees

to deliver excellent customer service.

In response to Research Question 1 on performance with Interview Questions 1 – 4, the respondents with 6 – 10 years of employment reported 66.7% having a good relationship with customers, 22.2% indicated being knowledgeable, and 11.1% reported safety as a component of quality service. Interview Question 2 revealed participants' experiences as having 100% satisfaction rate, 22.2% commented that they learned a lot from other drivers, and 44.4% reported that they learned how to take on the perspective of the passengers. Interview Question 3 related to skillsets acquired as a result of participants attending CFT and how it helped to enhance job performance, and 77.8% stated that the training raised their awareness of passengers and their needs and perspectives, and 22.2% reported a heightened awareness and focus while driving. The participants reported on Interview Questions 4 addressing other HR sponsored outside of CFT that would enhance job performance, and 22.2% indicated no need for any other training, 22.2% reported more frequent training, 22.2% stated a need for more management education, 22.2% saw the need to educate the passengers, and 11.1% reported the need for more hands on training. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 1 – 4 addressed by the 6 – 10 years of employment participants relating to service quality, experience attending CFT, skillsets acquired, and other HR trainings to enhance job performance:

P2N19124: Just being knowledgeable about your route, or maybe the area that you're working in temporarily. Being courteous and try to help customers the best way that you can. Assisting customers with where they need to go. In my opinion, it's the relationships that you also create between the driver and the passengers. When they get on the bus, the

first person they see is you. If they're having a bad day for whatever reason, and they get on the bus and then you talk to them and you greet them. It makes their day better, and I think it makes your day better as a driver providing this positive attitude when customers get on your bus.

P2SUB19428M: The training was an excellent training experience in as far as obtaining knowledge that would benefit my career. To start off with the key points of understanding what you need when you talk to the customers. Understanding safety measures and obtaining a good career. I really enjoyed that training, my whole class did. We actually wished it was a little bit longer because it was a little of an emotional rollercoaster, that class. It was very therapeutic as far as being able to express yourself freely and not have to worry about any type of repercussions and you felt like you were being heard.

P2S19145M: I feel like the CFT gave me new insight into how people may react to things that you may do throughout the day and how things you may do may be perceived by them. I also see the need for more frequent training for management, passengers, and just hands training for a better delivery of service.

In response to Research Question 1 on performance with Interview Questions 1 – 4, the respondents with 11 – 20 years of employment, 44.4% reported having a good relationship with customers, 33.3% indicated that quality service is to remain professional at all times while serving the customers, and 22.2% reported that quality service is operating safely while transporting the customers. Interview Question 2 relating to participants' experiences attending

CFT, reported 88.9% having a great experience attending the training, one respondent did not participate in the training and gave no perspective on this question, while 77.8% described the experience as very informative.

The responses to Interview Question 3 in the area of CFT and skillsets to help enhance job performance, 44.4% reported that they gained skills that helped them engage with passengers, 44.4% commented that the training enhanced their overall skillsets, and 11.1% reported that the training helped in the area of safety awareness. Interview Question 4 relating to HR sponsored training outside of CFT that would enhance job performance; 33.3% reported no additional training needed, 33.3% commented that more frequent refresher trainings would be beneficial to them, 22.2% requested that more hands-on-training would be beneficial, and only 11.1% requested that new safety training programs should be implemented. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 1 – 4 addressed by the 11 – 20 years of employment participants relating to service quality, experience attending CFT, skillsets acquired, and other HR trainings to enhance job performance:

P3N19124F: Quality service is providing safe and courteous customer service. Making sure everyone gets where they're going. Making sure the passengers move along so everyone can get on-board the vehicle. Quality service means we're here to service the public. If you see somebody walking down the street and putting their hand up, you don't just keep on driving like a lot of guys do. I mean, we're out here to service the public, open the doors and take them where they need to go. Doing my job effectively, professionally at all times. Providing the best service I can, and safely. We are the

frontline, we're the ones customers see first. So we have to uphold the standards of SEPTA.

P3SUB19428M: The instructor gives you a tool, if you don't already know how to use the tool, then they will show you how to use the tool. When you go back out there in the field, the least you can do is try to use that tool. And if it works, then continue to use it. If it doesn't, then try to find another. But each time you go to focus class, things like a test, you'll see a question and then later down the line you see it presented differently. So you just get better at it. I took away a lot of things, like don't rush to judgment in situations. That will escalate things. Just back up for a minute and think about how you should handle the situation. After 20 years of operating a vehicle, the tools that I got from the training helps me significantly, I don't need anything else.

P3N19124F: The de-escalating class was really good. Dealing with angry passengers was the focus, and how you cope and stay professional at all times made sense. I just deal with customers differently. It's not what you say, it's how you say it to the customers. So, the de-escalating class was a really good class. I think it should be offered a little bit more often as a refresher, maybe every six months or once a year to keep the operators focus on the big picture of serving the customers.

Research Question 2

Table 11

Themes derived from research question 2: Interview questions 5 – 7.

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee engagement?

1 – 5 years of employment

5. Work with others, providing quality customer service
6. Disconnect between leadership and operators, leadership support helped to avoid mistakes
7. More communicative and helpful to passengers and peers, engaged difficult customers and keep situations from escalating

6 – 10 Years of employment

5. Heightened awareness for passengers, more patience for customers, sharing knowledge with other operators
6. More leadership role, some level of leadership support
7. Improved relationship with customers, able to de-escalate situations

11 – 20 years of employment

5. Good relationships with customers, patience with passengers, effectively communicate with customers
 6. Satisfaction with leadership support, lack leadership support and inconsistency
 7. Better able to relate to passengers, better communication with passengers, no engagement in conflicts or negative situations
-

In response to Research Question 2 on engagement with Interview Questions 5 – 7, the respondents with 1 – 5 years of employment, 57.1% reported that the training helped them to work effectively with others, and 42.9% reported that the training helped them to provide quality

customer service. To understand leadership engagement aligned with CFT and quality service, combined with experiences of effective engagement with customers and peers, 44.4% reported a disconnect between the leadership and operators, while 55.6% reported that leadership support helped operators to avoid mistakes when serving customers. In serving and engaging customers and peers effectively, 55.6% of participants reported that CFT helped them to be more communicative and helpful to passengers, while 44.4% indicated that the training helped them to engage more with difficult passengers and keep situations from escalating. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 5 – 7 addressed by the 1 – 5 years of employment participants relating to CFT and employee engagement, leadership support, and effective engagement with customers and peers:

P1N19149F: The class helped me look at people in a different way. The first class helped me to be more sensitive to people's needs. You don't really know what they are going through. I take the job personal, I mean, in terms of my own development. I pay attention to what's happening around me, and have encountered people who are not receptive to courtesy. Some people are just having a bad day. I'm human, so that doesn't feel good. The training helps me to be mindful of the people I encounter and just deal appropriately and customer friendly.

P1S19129M: The training helped out a lot in terms of helping my co-workers. Especially if I see one of them who just got out of training and just getting on the street, instead of being somebody that just thinks of them as a rookie, I've learned if I've got a new person who is a little slow, the right thing to do is say stay calm, remember your training and

offer to help them as much as you can.

P1N19124M: Leadership uses their own directions to guide the operators. They follow their own rules according to what I perceive, but sometimes these ways don't match the reality of the operator. I don't mean that we are violating rules and guidelines. But technically the approach of leadership sometimes doesn't support the customer service initiatives on delivering quality customer service. We are doing our jobs to the best of our abilities and sometimes there is a lack of support on the part of leadership presence in the field to truly understand what the operators experienced in a given day.

In response to Research Question 2 on engagement with Interview Questions 5 – 7, the respondents with 6 – 10 years of employment, 44.4% reported a heightened level of respect for the passengers and improved attitude, 44.4% reported having more patience with passengers, and 11.1% benefitted from sharing knowledge with other operators. In the area of leadership support and engagement to provide quality service, 55.6% indicated that leadership could do more for the operators, 22.2% stated that leadership supported them appropriately, and 22.2% offered no response to this question. In relationship to effective engagement as a result of CFT with peers and customers, 55.6% reported an improved relationship with customers and peers, and 44.4% reported being able to deescalate situations between customers and peers. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 5 – 7 addressed by the 6 – 10 years of employment participants relating to CFT and employee engagement, leadership support, and effective engagement with customers and peers:

P2N19124F: Yes, I can say that training did a great job in helping me to engage better

with customers and peers. There's a lot of pressure on the drivers. Everything falls on us. You are responsible because you are the driver. You are in charge. CFT, when I attended those classes, it helped me become more patient and understanding.

P2N19129F: Well, as far as customers and peers, I think the training helped me to engage more on a respect level because what I learned is that everyone wants to be respected. So the training helps you give respect to get it back in return, specifically when dealing with customers or a coworker.

P2SUB19082F: The leaders encourage us to think of customer service as our livelihood. This is our job and we are here to do this as safely as possible by looking back at our training. You're here to get customers to Point A and Point B safely. I was told punctuality and appearance go a long ways. I also see and reflect on the training as a de-escalation tool that helps me to deal with the difficult customers.

In response to Research Question 2 on engagement with Interview Questions 5 – 7, the respondents with 11 – 20 years of employment, 33.3% reported that CFT helped to enhance their relationship with passengers, 22.2% commented that the training helped them improve on being patient with passengers, 22.2% said the training gave them the tools to communicate more effectively with the passengers, and 22.2% said that CFT did not significantly helped them at all. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 5 – 7 addressed by the 11 – 20 years of employment participants relating to CFT and employee engagement, leadership support, and effective engagement with customers and peers:

P3S19145M: Dealing with the customers first, always try to greet them and be on time. I build a relationship with the customers that ride everyday. If someone is running for my vehicle, I'll wait. I know my regulars. I've been in their shoes. I know what that feels like. Communicating with my peers. For the most part some can be a little challenging. I can communicate well with my passengers and peers. My passengers respect me, I respect them. I think I have a better relationship with customers overall now as a result of the training.

P3SUB19082F: The training helped me to engage with the customer at a professional level at all times. Being courteous and attentive. With my coworkers and passengers, I try to give them as much positive information as possible. It's never personal. It's business. I'm a patient person, so the training helped me to be more patient. I always think of me being that customer. It's patience for me.

P3S19142F: That is kind of a tough question when it comes to leadership support and engagement. They do not support you. Slim to none. They say treat the customers how we want to be treated. Sometimes too much weight is given to the customer, and I think the company has to be careful of how much weight and credibility they give to what the customer says. Sometimes it's factual, sometimes it's not. There's not an even balance. The impression I get is that the operator's are usually the one's that did something wrong in terms of customer complaints, and I see a level of inconsistency and lack of support from the leadership in this aspect of service delivery.

Research Question 3

Table 12

Themes derived from research question 3: Interview questions 8 – 9.

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and building a service oriented - culture?

1 – 5 years of employment

- 8. Self-reliant, support from co-workers, level of support from leadership
- 9. Customer driven organization

6 – 10 Years of employment

- 8. Lack leadership support context
- 9. Customer driven organization

11 – 20 years of employment

- 8. Job focused, engagement and strategic initiatives
 - 9. Customer focused
-

In response to Research Question 3 on CFT, strategic initiatives of service quality, and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions 8 – 9, the respondents with 1– 5 years of employment reported 33% being more reliant on self than on management, 22.2% reported seeking support from co-workers, 22.2% indicated not finding enough support from leadership, and 22.2% reported being satisfied with leadership support. Overall, 100% of the respondents in this group reported SEPTA as being a customer oriented organization. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 8 – 9 addressed by the 5 – 1 years of employment participants relating to CFT and building a service oriented culture, and strategic initiatives on service quality:

P1N19124M: The support of my coworkers is the only thing I can mention as a supportive influence. My coworkers, and the director are a part of how I make it through each day. Sometimes the director walks in the depot and ask how I'm doing. It makes you feel good. That feeling of concern is an indication that the organization cares about the operators'. I would also have to say that a lot of support comes from my dialogue with other operators. Particularly senior the operators. Some may have advice or support, and sometimes I don't agree with some of the things they say, so I have to be aware of who I'm listening to and getting support from.

P1N19149F: I think the organization does more for the customer than for the employees. I believe that they let the customers get away with a whole lot in terms of customer complaints received by the organization regarding operators behavior and performance.

P1S19132F: There was some support from leadership, I should say, and also from my peers, I went out there and tried to work things out on my own, and had a difficult time with the experience, and is still learning on my own. I came to the class and tools to deal with customers were given to me in the beginning plus the tools I got in the class, I was like "Oh yeah. I got those tools." It all blended together and it was a breath of fresh air. A couple of days after that I had a great outlook on everything. Everyday isn't like that. But I just remind myself that I have the tools and power and control and it's not like a bossy person. It's confidence. That's the word. confidence is a big deal in doing what we do.

In response to Research Question 3 on CFT and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions 8 – 9, the respondents with 6 – 10 years of employment reported that 50%

of them were not satisfied with the support given before and after CFT, while 25% responded with some level of satisfaction with the support given, and 25% of respondents had no comment on this question. In relationship to to strategic initiatives on delivering quality service to support building a service oriented-culture, 100% of the participants responded that SEPTA is a customer oriented organization. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 8 – 9 addressed by the 6 – 10 years of employment participants relating to CFT and building a service oriented culture, and strategic initiatives on service quality:

P2N19129F: Before the training, I don't believe it was much support. At least, I don't know for other depots. But my experience at my depot is that I can't trust management. If I have an issue, I should talk to my union rep first. The dispatcher would put themselves first and that was my perception of management coming into the CFT, I felt that management view us as a number. After training I felt a little bit better. There were some things in place that were new, like, they're holding management accountable for how they treat the operators. It all has to start at the top and trickle down. We have management who talks to us however they can demean us at times, and it does not create a good environment to deliver quality service to the customers. I don't know if I'll see the direct change, because it'll take time. But I'm glad there are some things in place to create a good buffer between the customers and management, things are better than when I started, but I hope more steps can be taken to improve relationships for the better.

P2S19139F: Before the training, you're going out there with limited knowledge of how to perform the job. Once you get the training, you've got a vision and it helps you perfect

your job. The CFT training opens up all the key points. I learned that after the class, even though I didn't have a lot of interaction with management before the class, I have learned that if I have a problem, I can go to leadership and seek out the help that I need.

In response to Research Question 3 on CFT, strategic initiatives of service quality, and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions 8 – 9, the respondents with 11 – 20 years of employment reported 67% of them used CFT to help them focus on the job, 33.3% stated that they felt that the organization did not engage them to see the strategic customer service initiatives, while one respondent did not participate in CFT, 88.9% participants reported that SEPTA is a customer oriented organization, while 11.1% reported having no knowledge of what the strategic initiatives entail.

The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 8 – 9 addressed by the 11 – 20 years of employment participants relating to CFT and building a service oriented culture, and strategic initiatives on service quality:

P3S19132M: Well, I think that the CFT helps me see a broader picture. When I first started, everything I was taught, it brings it all together and helps me see why we do things the way we do things. If you are focused on the bigger picture, the job you have to do, it is all going to come together. The level of support the organization gives is that they train you and give you the tools to succeed. Once they give us the tools, then it is out of their hands, and it is now for you to implement what you learned from CFT.

P3N19129F: I do not personally see much support in helping the operator to see the strategic goals of the organization. I think some of the superintendents should come out

on the line and see what we have to deal with. I do not care how many classes we go to, it may not help. Each situation is different. You hear other people's stories and how they handled it, and you think about how you handled it.

P3SUB19428M: SEPTA instills in us when we first get started in the organization to do our best to help the customer and be professional at all times. We have to look at the big picture. When we start talking in focus class, the instructor says the same thing. Look at the things in the big picture and the job will come together.

P3S19145M: I see how SEPTA has done a lot of things for the customers. They are implementing lighting into the stations to take some of the fear away from customers so they will continue to use the service. You have more people and personnel involved in working with coworkers in mentoring programs. When I started in 94' and attended training, our trainer rode with us in the vehicle. It was so effective that manpower could no longer support the program, but the organization tried their best to help the operators. They talk to the operators more now than when I started out with the organization. They are providing more training to help us understand the strategic objectives.

Research Question 4

Table 13

Themes derived from research question 4: Interview Questions 10 – 14.

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

What are the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service oriented culture?

1 - 5 years of employment

- 10. Supervision support
- 11. Satisfying reward system
- 12. Spiritual beliefs, helping others, personal attributes
- 13. Traffic conditions, passengers, communication, getting lost
- 14. Effective feedback, more attention to customer complaints, schedule maintenance

6 -10 Years of employment

- 10. Service focus by managers, poor supervision
- 11. Excellent reward system, reward system needs improvement
- 12. Innate personality, character and helping others
- 13. Lack management support, equipment, general public, and schedule
- 14. Responsive feedback, focus more on customers and more disciplinary, lack responsive feedback

11–20 years of employment

- 10. Adequate supervision, more interaction on the part of management
 - 11. Good reward system, additional reward system for employee
 - 12. Personality and character, recognition from others, livelihood
 - 13. Difficult customers, equipment, safety, and scheduling
 - 14. Ineffective feedback, room to improve on feedback, no opinion
-

In response to Research Question 4 on the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions 10 – 14, 67% of the respondents with 1 – 5 years of employment reported feeling supported by supervision in the delivery of service within policies and guideline, while 33.3% reported feeling unsupported. In terms of responding to the question of recognition, 66.7% of the participants reported the recognition or reward system as being satisfactory, while 33.3% found the process to be lacking. When inquired about motivation, 33.3% stated that they are motivated by spiritual and religious beliefs, 33.3% reported being motivated by helping others, 22.2% indicated that they are motivated by their own personal characteristics, and 11.1% reported being motivated to provide for their family.

When asked about challenges encountered on a daily basis to deliver quality service, 22.2% reported the traffic as being problematic, 22.2% could not find any one single source of barriers and challenges, 11.1% reported a lack of communication between organization and passengers, and also supervision and operators, and 11.1% reported fear in getting lost in an attempt to provide quality service. The question of feedback from customers, and how it is handled by organization to enhance performance and engagement, and build a service oriented culture, 44.4% reported that feedback is handled well by the organization, 33.3% stated that SEPTA needs to be more pro-active when it comes to customer complaints, 11.1% of the respondents reported that the organization must make schedule maintenance a higher priority, and 11.1% reported that they are unsure about how the organization handles feedback from customers. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 10 – 14 addressed

by the 1 – 5 years of employment participants relating to relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service oriented culture:

P1N19124M: The managers do a good job. They make sure things get done. I see supervisors making sure everything is going smoothly. They're helpful, they don't just show up to solve the problem. They show up to manage the situation. These are two different things. The supervisors have been behind me 110%. They've been doing one heck of a job. Not only do they look out for us, they also keep the interests of the passengers in mind, too.

P1S19139M: Management is great at making sure people are on time. They're awesome at that. Customer service wise, they could do a better job engaging with customers. I think managers see service through commendations or complaints, maybe the manager isn't writing up the operators', but just having a conversation with them. If they get a complaint they'll address it with you. Also with commendations. That's where managers are involved.

P1S1914F: The operations actually recognize operators for a job well done. They have programs like employee-of-the-month. They have a recognition dinner for those who have done really well, and they have the newsletter congratulating certain employees who have performed well in doing their job. I think that level of recognition is going above and beyond to show the operators that service quality is important.

In response to Research Question 4 on the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions

10 – 14, 67.7% of the respondents with 6 – 10 years of employment reported that managers were more concerned with service delivery, 22.2% reported poor supervision, and 11.1% felt a disconnect from leadership. Nonetheless, 100% of the participants agreed that SEPTA is a customer oriented organization. In terms of recognition and reward systems, 44.4% of participants are satisfied with the current process of recognizing employees, 33.3% expressed dissatisfaction with the process of recognizing employees, and 22.2% of the respondents offered no comments. The respondents reported on the question of motivation, showed that 55.6% were motivated by personality, character, and helping others, 33.3% reported being motivated by job satisfaction, and 11.1% reported being motivated by religion and spirituality.

When asked about challenges encountered on a daily basis to deliver quality service, 30.8% viewed management as a challenge when it comes to support, 30.8% reported the equipment as a challenge, 23.1% stated the general public as being challenging, and 23.1% reported that the schedule can be challenging when trying to be on-time consistently to serve the public. The question of feedback from customers, and how it is handled by the organization to enhance performance and engagement, and build a service oriented culture, 44.4% found that the organization were responsive to customer feedback, 44.4% felt that the organization must do a better job with customer feedback and be less punitive to the employee, 11.1% felt that the organization is not very responsive to customer feedback. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 10 – 14 addressed by the 6 – 10 years of employment participants relating to relationships between employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture:

P2SUB19428: As far as managers and supervisors, they make sure we understand our jobs as operators. We provide a service for the customers and make sure that everything runs smoothly. As long as we get the right policies and manuals, we can provide good service.

P2S19145M: I got a letter once from the General Manager with 2 tickets to 6 Flags Great Adventure, just thanking me for providing excellent customer service to our riders. I've been recognized as an employee of the month and employee of the year again for providing exemplary customer service to our passengers. I've gotten recognition from the organization and it makes me feel very good. There are several processes in place to recognize the operators, and I really do not see the need to change anything but to continue to build and enhance what we already have.

P2S19132M: I'm motivated because I wanted this job. I want to do a very good job with information I receive from the training, through management, through other operators, will help me be a better operator. I am motivated essentially by just a simply thank you for a job well-done, whether it comes from the customer, management, or my peers.

P2N19124F: Challenges and barriers are prevalent when it comes to operating a bus and serving the public, it is the biggest challenge. It's not easy. You go through a lot serving the public. You get cursed at, among other things, it's a lot happening with the public. It's not easy. You encounter a lot with traffic, schedules, and supervision expectations. At the same time, in spite of everything, I think your personality helps to combat the challenges.

I think that in itself can overcome the greatest of challenges and obstacles in delivering quality service to the customers.

In response to Research Question 4 on the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service oriented culture with Interview Questions 10 – 14, 67% of the respondents with 11 – 20 years of employment reported that they received adequate supervision, while 33% reported that management needed to interact and engage more with the operators. When the participants were asked to respond to the question of recognition and rewards system, 68.7% reported feeling satisfied with the current rewards system, and 31.3% reported that having additional awards should be considered. To answer the question of motivation in providing quality service to the customers, 55.6% of participants reported personality and character as sources of motivation for them, 22.2% reported that they are motivated by recognition received, and 22.2% being motivated by having a job.

When asked about the everyday barriers and challenges faced in the delivery of quality service, 44.4% reported that the difficult customers can be the biggest challenge, 22.2% stated that the equipment was a concern, 22.2% reported that safety while driving was a concern, and 11.1% viewed the scheduling as an ongoing issue. The question of feedback from customers, and how it is handled by an organization to enhance performance and engagement, and build a service oriented culture, 55.6% reported that feedback was not used effectively, 33.3% stated that the organization used feedback effectively to address feedback from customers, and 11.1% of participants offered no response to this question. The following responses are examples from Interview Questions 10 – 14 addressed by the 11 – 20 years of employment participants relating

to relationships between employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture:

P3N19124F: The managers are very good in providing direction and guidance to the operators. If you have a problem on the street, they want to assist you to the best of their ability. They want you to get back on track. I've never had problems. If you're delayed, they try to get you back on schedule to meet the needs of the customers.

P3S19139F: Overall communication, most of the managers I don't get to see as often. If I see them, I go to their office and point out a problem and they listen. The supervisors, on the street, I have a relationship with and I can tell them what my needs are. I would say the majority of supervisors on the street I'm very comfortable with. The control center personnel are the only person that I have a problem with as far as communication and direction. You can't say all of them is problematic, but they need to really understand that we need their help. They need to be a little more compassionate, because these streets are hard. We don't need babysitters. We need support.

P3S19142F: "I always like the operator of the month award. With the operator month award, that is very beneficial; especially if you got a small gift."

P3N19124F: "Getting up every morning with a clear mind and thanking God for waking me up and getting out on time, and having a clear environment around me, gives me a sense of motivation. Just being me, motivates me."

P3S19132M: Well, some of the barriers are buses that don't perform well. Sometimes the buses aren't clean. Those are some of the barriers. Other than that, you'll have traffic

problem, kids acting up on-board the bus. The equipment desk isn't always up to par.

Other than that, there's not too many other problems that come up.

P3S19145M: I believe that SEPTA is very focused on customer feedback. What I don't understand is that when we get feedback sometimes they make it seem as though you're guilty before you know what the situation is. I think that mindset needs to be changed.

The operator should have the opportunity to explain. But for the most part I think SEPTA is on top customer feedback as they are recorded.

Results Across all Three Groups

Researchers historically have focused on the customer evaluation of quality service (Portrafke, 2013). This focus is quite apparent in Parasuraman, et al. (1985) survey analysis – SERVQUAL designed to evaluate the customer experience and perceptions of the quality of service. Scholars have argued that no modification has been made to this model of SERVQUAL for researching the relationship between perception and service provider in customer relations businesses (Wallace & De Chernatony, 2009). Therefore, this model stands as a sustainable and verifiable resource for this study (see Figure 1) Conceptual Framework for quality service to align research questions throughout the study as well as the literature review. Research Questions 1 – 4 were designed to understand the perceptions of relationships between CFT, performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture among frontline employees with 1- 5, 6 -10, and 11-20 years of employment within the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority.

Research Question 1

The results of Research Question 1 relating to the perception of relationships between CFT and employee performance vary among the three groups interviewed in this research study. The inquiry about the perception of quality service among the three groups uncovered similarities. The most significant commonalities among the groups were that of having a good relationship with customers and keeping them happy. More than 50% of respondents across all three groups stated that having a good relationship with customers and keeping them happy is vital to providing quality customer service. Exhibiting knowledge and professionalism were also important aspects mentioned among the three groups as it pertains to providing quality service. The respondents within the group of the 6 – 10 and 11 – 20 were the only ones that commented more on safety being a part of quality service. When the participants reported about their experiences attending CFT, the overwhelming proportion across all three groups, except for one individual from the 11 – 20 group who did not participate in the CFT, responded having a good experience. Although all three groups reported a positive experience, a small percentage of the participants also touched on an important aspect of the training in which they reported learning new information from other operators who attended the training. When asked about important skillsets taken away from CFT and how it helped them with overall job performance, the majority of the participants in all three groups stated that the training helped them learn how to relate and deal with passengers. The respondents also reported that the training heightened their safety awareness.

In regard to CFT and employee performance, the final interview question posed to participants in the three groups focused on additional training that would help with overall job performance. More than 75% of participants across all three groups agreed that no additional training was needed. However, a small percentage in each group stated that trainings should be held more frequently to educate management, passengers, and more hands on training for supervision. Overall, all of the operators across the three groups perceived that there is a relational benefit between training and job performance that can help increase effective customer service and safety awareness of the operators and passengers. A service organization according to Tsaur and Tang (2013) who places emphasis on front-line employees' ability to deliver quality service, is one that recognizes and can manage and lead to quality customer satisfaction and job performance (p. 1). Therefore, providing training on a regular basis will increase the knowledge of policies and guidelines among operators to serve the customers effectively. This level of focus on performance will also keep the lines of communication open between management and operators, and most of all, it will be effective in learning new ways to keep the customer happy and provide excellent service.

Research Question 2

I also assessed the perception of relationships between CFT and employee engagement among the three groups. The respondents from all three groups reported that the training enhanced their relationship with the passengers and assisted them in providing quality service. Although the majority of the respondents reported that the training enhanced their relationship with the passengers, more than half of the participants in the 1 – 5 years of service group stated that the training helped them work with other employees. However, a small percentage (22.2%)

in the 11 -20 year group reported that it did not help them significantly. In relation to CFT and leadership support, I discovered an interesting dynamic among the three groups. The research showed that as the years of service increased, the operators found leadership support to be inconsistent. According to the research, 55% of the 1 – 5 years of service operators reported that leadership support assisted them with avoiding mistakes with customers as 55% in the 6 – 10 years reported that leadership needs to provide more support. The respondents in the 11 – 20 years of service group almost unanimously agreed that leadership support is inconsistent (88%). These results indicate a lack of leadership support as years of service increase. The respondents reported that attending CFT helped them improve their relationship with the customers and helped them engage with the customers more effectively. Members of the three groups also reported that the training helped them engage in de-escalation techniques among the customers, with the exception of 22.2% of the respondents in the 11-20 groups as they reported that they do not engage in conflicts or negative situations. Based on the interpretations of the operators, there was a consensus that the training helped them engage with customers more effectively and enhanced their relationship among the customers. In essence, according to the participants, the training is very helpful with implementing customer service, but must be supported by leadership continually. Leadership implications are a vital factor to consider in the real world benefit of training and how it influences employees and organization (Senior et al. 2012).

Research Question 3

The relationship between CFT and building a service oriented-culture was also examined. When discussing the level of support given to employees before and after training, the three groups were divided with their interpretations. Among the 1 – 5 years, the respondents were

evenly split on their consensus reporting that they seek support from coworkers as they did not have enough support from leadership, and they also reported being unsatisfied with support. In the 6 – 10 year group, 50% of the respondents were not satisfied, and only 25% were satisfied with the support received. And only 33% of the 11 – 20 year group felt that the organization did not provide support, while 67% used the training to help them focus on their job duties. When asked to describe CFT strategic initiatives for delivering quality service to support building a service oriented culture, 100% of the respondents that participated in the training reported that SEPTA is a customer focused organization. Although all of the respondents agree that SEPTA is a customer focused organization, the operators also agree that they need more support from leaders. A service environment that is perceived as being customer driven and service oriented is one that promotes a level of care and courtesy where stakeholders, leaders, employees, and customers are in alignment with the goals and vision to promote service quality (Parasuraman et al. 1985).

Research Question 4

The perception of relationships between employee performance, engagement, and building a service-oriented culture was also examined. More than 60% of the respondents from each group reported that the supervision they received from management was adequate in ensuring service quality delivery within policies and guidelines. However, 34% of the respondents from all three groups reported poor supervision. Overall, 65% of the individuals in each group reported a positive experience with management as it relates to overseeing services provided by the employees.

More than 50% of the respondents reported that the reward system for providing excellent service was satisfactory, with only about 30% of the respondents reporting that the reward system was lacking, and could be better. The respondents were asked what motivated them to provide quality service, and the responses varied in several different categories among the three groups. The motivating factors ranged from spiritual and religious beliefs, personal character, job satisfaction, recognition received, and providing for their families. Although each of these categories was reflected in all three groups, there seemed to be no significant relationship between the responses given among the groups. The employees with the most years of service (11 – 20) seem to be the most comfortable and confident in the delivery of quality customer service.

With respect to the challenges and barriers presented on a daily basis, the respondents from all three groups touched on several issues that plagued them as a whole, including traffic, passengers, lack of communication, schedule, equipment, and safety. A significant challenge presented in the 1 -5 year group was a fear of getting lost as a barrier, which was not present in any other group. Also in the 6 – 10 year group, 30% reported that management was not supportive. The operators were asked to describe feedback given by customers and how it is used to enhance performance, engagement, and build a service-oriented culture. There was an interesting dynamic among the respondents as it pertains to feedback given by customers. More than 50% of the operators in the 11 – 20 year group reported that feedback was not used effectively, while the majority in the 1 – 5 and 6 – 10 years reported that SEPTA responds well to customer feedback. However, 50% of the respondents in the 6 – 10 year group reported that

SEPTA was more disciplinary at times to the employees in regard to the feedback received from customers. No respondent from any other group reported feedback being used as a disciplinary measure among the operators. Gouldner (1960) and Parasurman et al., (1985, 1988) presented a solid rationale for effective collaboration and feedback from customers and employees whereby attitude and behavior is contingent upon social exchange to facilitate relationships that are reciprocal in nature to build an organizational culture to address the needs of employee performance and engagement, and to deliver oriented service quality.

Focus Group Themes and Responses

The tables below represent the responses of the focus group conducted with 9 participants from different operating locations and districts to include gender, years of employment, and operating locations. The participants were asked the same interview questions as the participants in the interview sessions, and were different operators from the original 27 selected for interviews.

Table 14

Focus group session: Themes derived from research question 1 with interview questions 1 – 4.

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance?

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

1 – 5 years of employment

P1N19129M: (1) “Being safe and courteous (2) The class was a very positive experience and enlightening (3) Being aware and observant (4) The classes is perfect no need for anything else.”

P1SUB19428M: (1) “Service with a smile and keeping the customer happy (2) The class was good, it helped me to deal better with customers (3) Learning things you may have missed while operating the vehicle (4) More education for people from different countries who cannot speak English.”

6 – 10 Years of employment

P2N19149F: (1) “Being aware of your environment (2) The class was a good experience to help operators see the big picture (3) Learn how to communicate better to create understanding between customers and co-workers (4) More hands on training, teaching operators how to handle difficult customers.”

P2SUB19428F: (1) Meeting the customers where they are to provide a safe and courteous service (2) I appreciate the leadership presence in the classroom, it gave a sense of care and concern and a better understanding (3) Exercising patience with people with disabilities (4) More refresher classes to help operators with safe driving, people just walk out into the street. Operators do not lose their skills, rather refresher classes just help to keep them sharp.

11 – 20 years of employment

P3N19124M: (1) On-time performance in making the line and representing the company (2) The class was a great refresher, you know as veteran operators, sometimes we need training to help us (3) Learn not to be complacent after many years of doing the same things over and over, my eyes are now open and focus on the job (4) Creating better relationships with the City to provide a safe environment to get up and down the streets.

P3S19145F: (1) Doing my very best to please the customers, and just making them happy (2) The experience was enlightening hearing from other operators (3) Being more patient with customers you encounter on a daily basis, and be safe (4) More leadership training to help supervision be more understanding of the operators.

Table 15

Focus group session: Themes derived from research question 2 with interview questions 5 – 7.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee engagement?

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

1 – 5 years of employment

P1N19129M: (5) “Having the ability to be more observant of others, and greet them (6) Leaders does a good job, but must be more hands on when dealing with operators (7) Seeing others perspectives.”

P1S19132F: (5) “Showing a general concern for the customers and meeting their needs (6) The leaders make sure that the operators are performing within policy and guidelines (7) Communicating more effectively with customers.”

P1SUB19428M: (5) “Communicating with the customers and making them feel happy (6) Training helps the operators to see the big picture of the organization (7) Greet customers with a smile.”

6 – 10 Years of employment

P2N19149F: (5) “More empathetic to the needs of customers (6) Need support from leadership when it comes to safety issues (7) Try to understand the customer, especially people with disabilities (ADA).”

P2S19139M: (5) “Being very cautious in approaching customers (6) More support from leaders and the organization (7) Meet the customers where they are and try to adjust.”

P2SUB19428F: (5) “Greeting passengers to get to know them better (6) I pretty much look to other operators for certain information (7) Stay professional and courteous at all times.”

11 – 20 years of employment

P3N19124M: (5) “Remaining professional at all times (6) Leaders could be a little more hands on, but for the most part, they do a good job with the customers (7) Education for the customers.”

P3S19145F: (5) Communicating to the best of my abilities to keep the customer satisfied with just a simple hello and a smile (6) Leaders should come out into the field and

experience what the operators do on a daily basis (7) Seeing the training course as a stepping stone to help operators provide good service

P3SUB19082M: (5) Build a good relationship by being professional and having patience
 (6) The operators feel a disconnect with leadership presence in the field and also support
 (7) Stay focused on doing the job and doing my best to create a safe ride for customers.

Table 16

Focus group: Themes derived from research question 3 with interview questions 8 – 9.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and building a service oriented-culture?

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

1 – 5 years of employment

P1N19129M: (8) “SEPTA is very concerned about the operators well-being (9) The organization focuses on making the customer experience a good one.”

P1S19132F: (8) “We work well together, and get very little support from management (9) SEPTA is concerned about the customer and you can see it in the way they handle complaints and commendations.”

P1SUB19428M: (8) “We know our jobs better based on the training, we get new knowledge to handle the difficult customers (9) The organization places a lot of focus on safety I think, to make sure the customers and operators are safe.”

6 – 10 Years of employment

P2N19149F: (8) “I believe we need more support before and after the training to help us see the big picture (9) We are trying to see the bigger picture but don’t understand sometimes the direction of SEPTA.”

P2S19139M: (8) “The support could be better, but they make sure we have the tools to do the job (9) Driving the bus should be a requirement of the leaders, so they get to see the world we operate in day in and day out.”

P2SUB19428F: (8) “I agree that the support overall could be better (9) I understand my commitment to serve the customers once I am here.”

11 – 20 years of employment

P3N19124M: (8) It is not easy serving customer, I learned a lot on my own along with information received from CFT (9) SEPTA has become a customer centric organization over the years and am happy to be a part of it. There is a lot of information SEPTA gives to the customer in terms of social media and simply customer support.

P3S19145F: (8) “The training helped me to pay attention to some of the things that I may have missed along the way (9) Customer service at SEPTA is geared for the customer, and more needs to be done for the operators.”

P3SUB19082M: (8) “I pretty much learned things on my own as I go, and the training reinforced what I already know (9) SEPTA gives you the tools to do the job, it is up to the operators to go out and give quality service to the customer.”

Table 17

Focus group: Themes derived from research question 4 with interview questions 10 -14.

Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance and engagement and building a serviceoriented-culture?

1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 - 20 years of employment

1 – 5 years of employment

P1N19129M: (10) I feel supported by the organization based on the training they give you upon starting with the organization, they provide rules and guidelines for the operators to follow (11) I am very pleased with the recognition program in place (12) I am motivated when customers call in and give a commendation on my behalf (13) The schedules can be a big challenge at times, and (14) SEPTA use feedback from customers to let us know how we are doing, good or bad.

P1S19132F: (10) The organizationy gives you a bus to drive and pretty much you are on your own, but if you need help with something, they are there to help you (11) I like what they have in place for the operators, but I think they could do a little more (12) I feel good when the customer is getting quality service, I am driven by making sure that the customer is satisfied in using SEPTA (13) Traffic is a everyday challenge, as well as the school kids who come onboard vehicle with no home training, and (14) The feedback given by customers sometimes are used in a more disciplinary approach by supervision.

P1SUB19428M: (10) The managers could do a better job helping the operators understand policies so we can deliver excellent service to the customers (11) Managers can be inconsistent at time but for the most part, they leaned to the customer issues rather

than the operators (12) I am motivated by the goodness that I do for people, and take pride in doing so (13) I have a problem with the equipment, sometimes you report a malfunctioning vehicle and you still end up with the same problem, and (14) I appreciate every feedback given to me by supervision, it helps me to see the direction of the organization and helps me to deal better with the general public.

6 – 10 Years of employment

P2N19149F: (10) I understand that rules and guidelines must be followed, but SEPTA needs to focus more on building the operators confidence to go out and do good customer service. The training is a great start, but we need more hands on training from managers and supervision (11) I am grateful to have a job, but I do see the need for more encouragement from leadership to help motivate the operators more and build morale (12) I am motivated by my upbringing to always do what's right and pleasing in the sight of GOD, do unto others as you would have them do unto you (13) The passengers, specifically the ones that don't like to pay their fare can be a big challenge, and (14) I see the direction that SEPTA is going when it comes to customer service, and I am happy to be a part of the journey. It is not perfect, but I see an attempt being made to take care of the operators and customers at the same time.

P2S19139M: (10) The managers make themselves available for me when I need help, we have a great relationship, and I understand what are the do's and dont's in operating my vehicle effectively, and at the sametime being safe and courteous to the customers (11) I would like to see more incentives being given to operators for a job well-done, it is not an easy job working with the general public (12) I motivate my self to serve the customers,

even when I do not feel like it, it is the right thing to do (13) The schedule is my biggest challenge, they want you to be on-time, but sometimes the schedule won't allow timeliness , and (14) I see a need for a balance between customer feedback and operators credibility to deliver good service to the general public.

P2SUB19428F: (10) I see the need for more support from managers to help deliver quality service to customers (11) I could use a day off is a good way for management to recognize an employee for doing a good job (12) I am motivated when I see that management cares about the well-being of the employees (13) Barriers and challenges for me lies within the experience with the rude and difficult customer. SEPTA needs to educate the public a little better, and (14) The perception of feedback from the customer at times can be more of a disciplinary nature.

11 – 20 years of employment

P3N19124M: (10) If you are doing what the job requires, you really don't need managers to oversee your work. Just continue to do your best (11) The company should pay more attention to operators who are safe in operating the vehicle over a period of time, and reward them for being safe. It is not easy operating the vehicle and being polite and courteous at the same time (12) Showing up everyday and do a good job is my motivation to satisfy the customer (13) The general public and everyday maintainance of vehicle is my biggest challenge everyday, and (14) Customer feedback is a good thing if it is used effectively to help the operators in a positive way to provide good customer service.

P3S19145F: (10) I view management as being more disciplinary in their approach, and deemed the employee guilty before having a discussion (11) There is lots of ways to reward the employees when they are doing a good job, but I am motivated by the paycheck the organization offers (12) I am just motivated to have a job, and is able to take care of my family (13) One of my pressing challenges is with the control center, and how they communicate with the operators. The experience can be negative for the operators and can cause a problem with timely deliver of service to customers, and (14) Customer feedback is based on how it is given to the operators and how it is received. For the most part I stay away from negativity and try to do the best job possible to please the customers.

P3SUB19082M: (10) I have been around the organization for sometime now, and feedback has given a sense of how to serve the customer better (11) The organization could do more for the operators considering the nature of society today (12) It is not an easy job serving the general public (13) I see a challenge with the schedule, school kids, and difficult customer who refuse to pay their fare, and (14) SEPTA takes customer feedback very seriously, I have seen customer complaints being used to fix existing problems to make the service better. I also see a need for SEPTA to do a better job addressing the needs of the operators.

Data Triangulation

In Chapter 3, I stated the reasons for using a qualitative case study to investigate how front-line perceived CFT in relationship to their performance and engagement, and building a

service-oriented culture. There are numerous studies done on the implications of training effectiveness, but there is no clear-cut evidence to justify how employees feel about the training and how it makes a difference for them in delivering quality customer service. The majority of the research done as stated in the literature review was of a quantitative nature. In this study, I used a focus group and individual interviews to collect data for triangulation. The results from the focus group, as well as the individual interviews were to triangulate the data.

The focus group was conducted to further examine the relationship between SEPTA operators and CFT in relations to performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. In regard to CFT and employee performance, almost 90% of participants in the individual interviews and focus group agreed that the training was helpful and necessary for providing quality customer service and improve performance. When asked the about the perceptions of relationships between CFT and employee engagement, 100% of the participants in the interviews and focus group pointed out that CFT helped them become more customer focused as it gave them an insight on being more observant of others, more empathetic to customers, and remaining professional at all times while serving the customers.

Overall, 85% of the participants within focus group and interview process agreed that as a result of CFT, they try to meet customers where they are to keep them happy. The relationship between CFT and building a service oriented-culture was also examined. A small number of participants across the various groups in the study agreed that the organization is concerned about the operators, and provide training to better complete job goals and performance. The

majority of the operators are motivated by providing great customer service and more so when they receive recognition from the customers.

In regard to the 27 operators being interviewed, as well as the focus group, there were some key similarities, and very few differences among the responses. The most significant similarities were that of viewing SEPTA as a customer focused organization, reporting that CFT is helpful in learning new ways to engage with customers, and to provide good customer service. Almost 75% of the participants in the focus group and the interview participants agreed that management needs to be more involved and give more support to the operators. The participants also concurred on the challenges of providing excellent service, which consisted of the schedule, difficult passengers and the equipment. These responses were prevalent in both individual interviews and focus group. There were few significant differences among the focus group and the operators in the interview process, almost 85% of the participants interviewed had a favorable perception of the rewards system, but on the opposing end, the majority of the participants in the focus group felt that the reward system was lacking. When it comes to what motivates the operators, there were a wide range of factors which consisted of just being happy to have a job, providing good customer service, religious beliefs, and family background. However, a common theme among the participants in the focus group was that of providing good customer service relating to quality service. This theme was not consistently represented among the 27 operator's interviewees, however, their individual responses all led to the common goal of providing good customer service.

Summary

I structured the content of Chapter 4 to present the analysis, findings, and results of the qualitative exploratory investigative research study guided by four key research questions and 14 interview questions. Front-line operators in the transit system of the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority had an opportunity to offer their experiences and perceptions in attending CFT, share how the experience enhanced performance and engagement, and expound in building a service-oriented culture to deliver quality service to customers. The study is broken down into three cases to reflect years of work experience, gender, operating locations, and CFT attendance. A focus group was also conducted with different employees bounded by the same criteria as listed in the three cases. All the participants in the study were pleased to be a part of this study, and wanted to contribute in a meaningful way to help improve CFT, and to help in delivering quality service to the customers. The participants made themselves available even when it was an inconvenience to them in terms of the schedule and meeting locations for the interviews and focus group. I was able to interview all 27 participants, knowing that the study met the saturation point after 20 interviews between groups. I enjoyed the interaction and quality discussions so much that I wanted to continue to see if there were any new or different perspectives that would emerge. The focus group also provided a robust discussion that was aligned with the interviews, except for some differences. But for the most part there were clear alignment with all three cases and focus group.

Research Question 1 with Interview Questions 1 - 4 focused on the relationship between CFT and employee performance. The focus was on delivering quality service, experience attending CFT, skillset taken away from CFT to enhance job performance, and other HR

sponsored training that would help enhance job performance. Research Question 2 with Interview Questions 5 – 7 was related to the concepts of relationships between engagement and CFT. The focus was on engagement with customers and peers, leadership support, delivering service quality, and effective engagement as a result of attending CFT. Research Question 3 with Interview Questions 8 – 9 was used to address the level of support given to employees before and after CFT to help build a service oriented culture, and description of the CFT strategic initiative in delivering service quality to also build a service oriented culture. Research Question 4 with Interview Questions 10 – 14 was used to report on employee perception of policies and guidelines in delivering quality service, oversight of managers, a reward system for providing quality service, motivation to provide quality service, barriers and challenges faced on a daily basis in providing quality service, how customer feedback is used by organization to enhance performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. The content of Chapter 5 includes a summary and report on the findings of the research analysis, recommendations for future studies in the area of HRM training and employee development, and the conclusions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

The objective and purpose of this case study on the perceptions of front-line operators in relationship to CFT and how it impacts performance, engagement, and building a service oriented-culture, were to gain a greater understanding of how training enhances customer service delivery for service provider in attaining a competitive advantage in the transit industry. The approach used in this study was a combination of interviews from three groups of employees, and a small focus group. The data were gathered using individual interviews, and data from the focus group.

Chapter 1 contained the objectives and problem for the study. The literature review contained information to align with the conceptual framework, and research questions. The methodological approach was described in Chapter 3, and the detailed analysis of data collection was addressed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 is a synopsis of the research findings, the relationships between the literature review and findings, the implications of the study's outcome on organization and employees, limitations discussion, future study in training and development, and recommendations. This chapter also contains concluding statements relating to each research question.

Intrepretation of the Study

Research Question 1: What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focused training and employee performance? Based on the data collected from 36 employees there is a strong relationship between the training and employee performance. This is supported

by the data that showed that 100% of the participants indicated that the training helped them to perform more effectively in one way or another. The key themes on CFT and how it helped employees perform effectively were building strong customer relationships, exhibiting knowledge and professionalism, and keeping the customer happy. The participants believed that if good relationships are established with customers and operators, they set the stage for a healthy customer service experience across the board. They also gave strong responses regarding being professional and knowledgeable as a result of CFT experience, and shared genuine responses in keeping the customer happy. Being professional and knowledgeable were common threads prevalent with all the represented groups in the research, but some participants emphasized a need for more refresher training, frequency of training, developing training for passengers, and more hands-on training to involve supervisors. These approaches would help the employees to be more successful in the delivery of quality customer service. Ellinger argued that training is a critical component of HRD used as a strategic practice to improve employee performance and build a solid service culture (Ellinger et al., 2013). An organizational culture that promotes training and development of its employees is one that is perceived as building and projecting a customer service culture and enhancing performance (Mathew, Ogbonna, & Harris, 2012). SEPTA is providing training to the frontline employees and there seems to be a positive relationship between CFT and performance, based on the employees' perception and responses to the interview questions.

In order for the organization to be successful in the delivery of quality service to the customers and maximize resources, I highly recommended that CFT continues to be a part of the

training curriculum for front-line employees to help them perform and engage at a high level with customers, peers, and supervision. Therefore, providing training on a regular basis will increase the knowledge of policies and guidelines among operators to effectively serve the customers. The CFT related constructs within this study were found to have a positive relationship. This is a clear indication that suggests that when employees perceive their place of work as being interested in their well-being through training and development, they will exhibit higher levels of performance in their work. These relationships are indicative of the responses provided by participants in their perception of quality service, CFT importance and experience, and skillsets acquired by attending the training.

Research Question 2: What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and employee engagement? From the data collected, I determined that there is a relationship between CFT and employee engagement. Almost 60% of the participants expressed their views positively about CFT and how it helped them to work with others to provide quality service, and to be more communicative and helpful to the customers. While the views on leadership support relating to engagement was not consistent across the groups, a significant number of operators felt that there was a disconnect and inconsistent support between operators and leadership. Successful delivery of customer service is contingent upon how well employees are motivated and empowered to serve the customer. If employees perceive that the organizational leaders are not giving them the tools to do the job effectively to engage the customers, it is possible that the employee will not give 100% of his or her time to create a customer focused environment. According to Heskett et al., (1994), it is imperative that the nature of effective leadership within the service environment

be emphasized to promote delivering quality service and exemplary performance. A service environment that is perceived as being customer driven and service oriented is one that promotes a level of care and courtesy where stakeholders, leaders, employees, and customers are in alignment with the goals and vision to promote service quality (Parasuraman et al., 1985). There are basic initiatives within an organization that can create a sense of well-being and benefit for employees. Within the context of these values, there is effective leadership for employees to model the way, effective communication, both ways, and creating a development career path for employees.

According to the participants in this study, they view the CFT as a vital tool to help them engage with managers, customers, peers, and implement customer service initiatives, but must be supported continually for sustainable delivery of quality service. The gap in the literature shows that leadership support in the work environment is pivotal for employee engagement and performance. Kennedy & Daim (2010) discussed opportunities that lie within the work environment where evidence based research showed that when employees feel valued and are involved and engaged, their performance level rises to the point of meeting organizational goals and objectives. It is recommended that leaders within the organization make themselves visible and available to support the front-line employees, and to continue to make CFT available to employees to help them process and implement some of the learning they received from the classroom. While there are individual factors contributing to business success, there are organizational processes and guidelines that drive engagement (Sen, 2009). The service

environment must provide support to the employees holistically, which is a driving force for engagement.

Research Question 3: What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and building a service oriented-culture? The results from the data collected showed that 100% of the participants agreed that SEPTA is a customer focused organization. While the views of all three groups varied in their responses, they shared a common concern regarding support before and after training, where they commented on being more self-reliant and seeking support from their peers instead of management. The participants also discussed training as a strategic measure to focus more on the job, but also felt that the organization needs to empower and engage them more in terms of seeing how the organizational initiatives are applied to the work environment. Training and building a service oriented culture is a hand in hand process that requires good collaboration between employees, supervisors, managers, and key strategic leaders in any organization.

An organizational culture that fosters effective customer service along with reinforced training programs, creates opportunity for positive encounters and competitive advantage (Hošková-Mayerová, 2011). One researcher indicated that it has been a generally accepted practice that employee training and development has a significant impact on employee performance in building a service oriented culture, customer relationships, improved customer satisfaction, and creates organizational success (Tahir et al. 2011). Based on the results of this study, it is highly recommended that supervisors and managers of the organization practice leadership encounters to meet the needs of not just the customers but also the front-line

employees. This approach will directly influence organizational citizenship behavior, and build upon HRM processes and practices to enhance and improve employee job performance, engagement, customer satisfaction, and build a service oriented culture. In a service environment, front-line employee relationships with customers and leaders will determine the levels of customer service experience, therefore it is very important to also focus on the HRM and HRD aspects to developing employees' skills to enable them to be customer focused (Minbaeva, 2013).

Research Question 4: What are the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement, and building a service-oriented culture? There seems to be a strong relationship between the constructs listed in this research question. The data reported 67.7% of respondents felt that managers support them in the delivery of quality service within policies and guidelines. On the other hand, the responses and themes varied across the groups in reporting about the reward system, motivational aspects of service delivery, challenges and barriers in service delivery, and how the organization used feedback from customers to enhance performance and engagement, and build a service oriented culture. Although the participants reported significant perspectives on the quality of service delivery within policies and guidelines, more than 50% of them felt that customer feedback needs to be handled differently by the organization. Customer feedback is perceived by the employees more as a disciplinary approach in terms of the investigative process and evaluation. To fully understand the employee's perception of the organization and what motivates them to perform and engage effectively, companies must gauge employee's ideas and opinions along with customer concerns through

engagement surveys and questionnaires to better assess the needs from both perspectives.

Kennedy and Daim (2010) discussed the idea that results from the responses of surveys and questionnaires must not be taken lightly by leadership, and should be used as a data generating model to bridge the gap between employees' and organization to enhance and improve performance.

The participants also felt a strong relationship between recognition and delivering quality service, with almost 68% of the employees who believed the organization is doing well in this area. There are key elements in the literature to solidify the importance of incentives and reward systems on an organizational cultural basis. A key example is to look at the recruitment and selection process of employees, along with systems of incentives and reward, to facilitate ideas of training programs and knowledge sharing; these are critical elements of developing organizational culture to best serve customers (Minbaeva, 2013). Therefore, it is critical that the organization continues to support the employees in delivering quality service, recognize employees, and reward them for a job well done to help improve performance and engagement, and help to build a customer focused organization.

Limitations of the Study

There are limitations that exist in all research studies. This research contains certain limitations that should be taken into consideration when reviewing the responses of the participants and data collection process. The limitations in this study include the lack of generalizability, my own biases as a researcher in the study, and front-line employees participation in the study. Additionally, limitations to be considered include time sensitive

approach in completing the transcripts from the interviews and focus group. The qualitative nature of recording and listening to multiple levels of audio from the participants' interviews were necessary to validate and establish reliability from the transcripts results. Gaining commitment and trust from the front-line employees was a limitation, as well as the issue of identifying knowledgeable participants to be interviewed for 30 – 40 minutes, and to participate in a focus group lasting 50 minutes.

The interviews were conducted with front-line employees from three groups with different years of employment within the organization to reflect the 1 – 5, 6 – 10, and 11 – 20 years, and a focus group of nine different employees with the same criteria. The results of both methods are specifically geared to that population, and is generalizable only to that particular population. Maxwell (2013) discussed that the strength within a qualitative research study is highly dependent on the data collection, based on the information gathered from the participants and the analysis. Generalizability is a process of examining the external validity that can be transferred to areas not related to the study directly (Creswell, 2014). It is a general concern that qualitative researchers do not generalize findings unless there are similar studies in existence (Maxwell, 2013). This process will allow the researcher to maximize how similar research in different environments can present different outcomes (Creswell, 2014). One key factor for me was not to introduce my own biases in the research study based on my own experience using the transit system. It was also critical for me to ensure that the interview questions were structured in such a way to gain relevant information regarding the operators' experiences. My knowledge and

experience of leadership and organizational behavior did not in any way influenced the results or outcome of this research study.

Recommendation for Practice

The results are discussed and detailed in Chapter 4, and as a result, there are some key recommendations that can be accomplished based on the findings of this research study. Organizations that want to have good customer service must provide customer service training on a regular basis and that training should be focused on the needs of the employees who have the most contact with customers. The process of training has tremendous potential to create strategic alignment between employees and an organization, and link performance and customer satisfaction to the concepts of organizational behavior (Swanson, 2009). In order for organizations to keep pace with the global competitive environment, training and development must be incorporated in its culture to help employees address the uniqueness of change and challenges in the customer environment (Esbjerg et al., 2012). The best practices in customer focused training is the ability for leadership to support and encourage employees to see the strategic goals and vision of the organization to create alignment for service quality. This research study on CFT, performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture focused on how well employees understand the organizational values of delivering quality customer service, and how effective is the training to ensure preparedness for the work environment. It is an assertion that organizations that engage its employees in all aspects of the business strategies to include customer information, training and development culturally is more prone to deliver excellent service quality and improve employee performance and build key

relationships for business success (Mackelprang, Jayaram, & Xu, 2012). It is highly recommended that service organizations should strategically develop training programs where the customer service goals are clear throughout the employee learning and development. Several discussions have focused on the effectiveness of training and education to evaluate the return on investments to see whether the training is meeting the needs of the employees from an organizational standpoint. Therefore, it is a key recommendation that organizations must evaluate the training before and after the employee attends, and follow up with them by way of surveys, questionnaires, and personal interventions to see the effectiveness of the training.

Recommendation for Future Studies

The approach to this study was a single case to investigate the relationships between CFT, employee performance and engagement, and the dynamics of building a service culture. The research study was investigative and exploratory, and has the capabilities to move beyond the outlined recommendations listed above. As a follow up to this study in the future, it would be beneficial if the practical application and learning is assessed by reaching out to the participants in a six month period or a year later via questionnaire to see the extent to which they are still practicing what they learned in the training. This study could also set the foundation for service providers who do not directly interface with customers, but could see the usefulness of customer service training internally for key stakeholders and constituents.

The concepts of this study could be conducted similarly with transportation employees in other cities to see if there are differences in the perceptions of the value of customer focused training, and even compare the type of training. Further research could be done on a quantitative

basis with a larger population of front-line employees within a wider geographic region. This process could be done by surveying this larger population to provide substantial insight into the relationships between CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building a service culture. The results of surveying a larger population would be very beneficial in many ways and it would reduce certain limitations of generalizability in the research study.

Social Implications

The possible positive social change in this study is to help the organization organize and plan CFT programs to better help the front-line employees to deliver exceptional customer service, and to prioritize the training as a key investment for strategic customer initiatives. This research could also help organizations maximize revenue by teaching and training employees the importance of service quality, which in turn will enhance performance, and meet organizational goals to serve the customers. Additionally, the implications of social change within this study will help employees to develop a cohesive relationship with managers and supervisors, which will transcend into the customer service environment to improve productivity, revenue, efficiency, employee and customer satisfaction, and cost saving benefits for the organization. Additionally, this study can be adopted at all levels of the organization in terms of leadership development, and planning and organization to address the diverse needs of internal and external customers.

Reflections

This case study provided a first hand approach to understand the processes within this study. More importantly the research allowed close encounters with the researcher and participants to help understand their experiences in the work environment of serving customers. Individual interviews were conducted, as well as a focus group to gather the data. The focus group presented an opportunity for good dialogue and discussions face-to-face. This process was also beneficial for triangulation of the data between interviews and focus group. To eliminate researcher's biases from this process, one of the operators was appointed to be the note taker. The fact that this was my first time conducting a formal focus group, I was able to make a quick connect with the rest of the group, as the process allowed a more interactive approach than the personal interviews. I am now convinced that each operator is not defined by the seat that they sit in to transport passengers. My experience with each of them has given me new insights into their perception of service quality and leadership implications. They all bring a unique set of ideas and examples that can help to improve service delivery, and management to see things from their perspective. The implications for positive social change as outlined above is a clear indication of the value, width and depth of how this study can be implemented in organizations to address the complex needs of employee, training development, and customer service approach in delivering quality service.

Conducting this study provided significant learning for me in terms of planning and developing strategies to collect data from participants in a qualitative study. The experience allowed new knowledge in the area of interviewing and facilitating a focus group. Analyzing the

data through code identification and categorization was the most difficult learning using the NVivo qualitative computerized system. The research study allowed me to have a greater understanding of the data collection process, and how to relate the responses to the literature, problem, employee, research questions, and recommendations for successful implementation of customer focused training.

Conclusion

In this research study, I explored the perception of frontline employees in the transit system of Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority to better understand the relationships between CFT, employee performance and engagement, and building a service oriented culture. The study was grounded by four research questions with 14 interview questions exploring the employees' understanding of the constructs within the research. The findings of the data analysis, indicate various gaps in the literature review between employees and leadership, where the support is lacking before and after training to help employee understanding the goals of the organization strategically to deliver quality service. The participants expressed a great degree of understanding of performance and quality service, but felt that they could be better prepared when it comes to engaging customers, peers, and supervision. The participants agreed that the organization is customer focused, but felt some level of disconnect with leadership and their ability to give more support to the front-line employees. Customer feedback and how it is used by the organization shows a gap in the literature that solidifies the idea that all customer information received by an organization should be reviewed in a fair and equitable way to ensure that the employee perform the job to the best of their ability. Tsarenko and Tojib (2011) noted

service strategies and practices are encounters that an organization experience during interactions with various types of customers with different needs and behavior. Additionally, from the findings of this research, I uncovered several areas for improvement in management and leadership training to better help the front-line employees to serve the customers effectively. The findings also solidify the need for other training that could be beneficial for employee growth and understanding the complex nature of customer service dynamics. Past research has shown a relationship between training and customer service effectiveness based on customer service feedback surveys, but there has been very little research done regarding employee response to training effectiveness to serve the customers and they meet the needs of organizational expectations. There is a great deal of customer service study of the topic of customer satisfaction and training, but very little published information on the perception of how employee view training, performance, engagement, and building a service culture. I developed this research study to expand upon knowledge in the field of study, and to further add new knowledge to the field of study by addressing the research problem in this study.

Organizational leaders, administrators, and stakeholders are now tasked with this effort of bridging the gap to ensure the CFT, employee performance, engagement, and building a service oriented culture are aligned uniquely to deliver quality service to customers. It is critical that all parties in the organization are on the same page when it comes to consolidating effort to deliver quality service. The effort starts at the top of the organization, and moves to the very front-end to meet the needs of the front-line employees who serves the customers on a daily basis.

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Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview questions

R1. What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee performance?

1. What does providing quality service means to you?
2. What was your experience like attending CFT?
3. What important skillset did you take away from the training, and how did it help to enhance your job performance?
4. What other HR sponsored training outside of CFT would help to enhance your job performance?

R2. What are the perceptions of relationships between customer focus training (CFT) and employee engagement?

5. How has CFT helped employees to engage more effectively with customers and peers?
6. How has CFT combined with leadership support helped to engage employee to provide quality service?
7. Give an example of effective engagement with customers and peers as a result of attending CFT?

R3. What are the perceptions of relationships between CFT and building a service oriented-culture?

8. What level of support is given to employees before and after CFT to help build a service oriented culture?
9. Describe CFT strategic initiatives' on delivering quality service to support building a service oriented culture?

R4. What are the perceptions of relationships between employee performance and engagement and building a service-oriented culture?

10. How do managers oversee service provided to customers to ensure service quality delivery within policies and guidelines?
11. What would you describe as a reward system for providing excellent service to customers?
12. How are you motivated to provide quality service to the customers?
13. What are the barriers and challenges you faced on a daily basis in providing quality service?

14. Describe the feedback given by customers, and how it is used by organization to enhance performance, engagement, and build a service-oriented culture?

Appendix B: Letter of Cooperation from Partners

Date: 8/25/14

Dear Michael Dawkins,

Based on my review of your research plan, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled "Employee Perception of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation" within the Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority. As part of this study, I authorize you to interview front-line operators who serve the public on a daily basis, conduct a single focus group among operators, and disseminate findings to the organization and participants. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include: Providing access to the participants by way of directors from each operating location, and making the necessary resources available to the student researcher as needed. These resources involve releasing records to researcher for screening and selecting participants for the research study. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve this research study in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the student's supervising faculty/staff without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Signature_____

Contact Information_____

Walden University policy on electronic signatures: An electronic signature is just as valid as a written signature as long as both parties have agreed to conduct the transaction electronically. Electronic signatures are regulated by the Uniform Electronic Transactions Act. Electronic signatures are only valid when the signer is either (a) the sender of the email, or (b) copied on the email containing the signed document. Legally an "electronic signature" can be the person's typed name, their email address, or any other identifying marker. Walden University staff verify any electronic signatures that do not originate from a password-protected source (i.e., an email address officially on file with Walden).

Appendix C: Letter of Invitation Requesting Participation

Nine Operating Transit Locations

8/25/14

Dear Director (Name),

I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University in the Ph.D. in Management Program. The purpose of this correspondence is to invite your staff operators to participate in a research study at Walden University on the topic of “Employee Perception of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation”. The outcome of this study can be very useful to the organization because there has been proven literature and acceptable model on how effective training can enhance employee performance, engagement, and help build a service-oriented culture.

I would like to conduct interviews with three of your operators, and one schedule separately to participate in a focus group. The information gathered will remain confidential. An executive summary analysis of the research study will be shared with all the participants at the conclusion of the study by electronic mail. Each interview will take approximately 30 – 45 minutes, and the focus group will take approximately 45 minutes to an hour.

I contact you by email or phone during the next couple of weeks to confirm your support in this study, and to gain access to the facility to inform participants of their selection to the research study, and to hand delivered research packet to them. If you have questions regarding this research study, please contact me at michael.dawkins@waldenu.edu

Best regards,

Michael L. Dawkins
Doctoral Candidate Walden University
Ph.D. in Management
michael.dawkins@waldenu.edu

Appendix D: Confidentiality Agreement

Name of Signer: Michael Dawkins

During the course of my activity in collecting data for this research: “Employee Perception of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation” I will have access to information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant’s name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I’m officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.

Signature: Michael.dawkins@waldenu.edu

Date: 8/25/14

Appendix E: Informed Consent

You are invited to take part in a research study of Employee Perception of Customer Focus Training in Public Transportation. You were chosen to participate in this research study because you attended customer focus training (CFT) at some point in your career with the organization. We value your input and felt that your participation in this study will help the organization understand the value of customer service training from your perspective. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to participate.

This study is being conducted by Michael L. Dawkins, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. He is also a Program Development Specialist that works in the Human Resource Department of Leadership and Development here at Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA). You may already know me as a Human Resource Representative who works with the management and leadership development team, but my role in this research study is completely independent of SEPTA’s operations. The approach of this study is to get front-line employee’s perspectives and perception of customer focused training (CFT), and to identify ways to enhance performance, engagement, and build a service-oriented culture to best serve the customers. The focus of this doctoral study is in the area of training development, employee performance, engagement, and building a service - oriented culture.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to understand how front-line employees perceive customer focus training and to understand the experience of training from their employee perspectives. In addition, the goal is to explore the return on investment in training and development to best serve customers.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Consent for an individual interview for about 30 – 45 minutes or participation in a focus group for about 45 minutes to an hour. You will only be invited to participate in one of the above: interview or focus group. The interview and focus group will be audio-recorded for the researcher’s convenience to analyze the data collected. This information will not be shared with anyone, and only the analysis of the data will be shared with participants and organization at the end of the study.

Here are some sample questions to consider:

1. How has the customer focus training helped you to perform effectively in serving customers and your peers?
2. How has the customer focus training helped you to engage effectively in serving customers and your peers?
3. How was your experience attending customer focus training?
4. What global knowledge do you have about the organization in terms of building a customer oriented - culture based on your experience attending customer focus training?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in the study is voluntary, and the researcher is not liable or responsible for any compensation for your time or participation in this research study. This is confirmation that your participation will be respected, and you will not be treated differently if you decide not to participate in

this research study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later on in the study. You may stop at any given time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

This research study does not involve any risk or harm within the scope of your work or daily activities. Information collected during this interview and focus group process will remain confidential, such as your name and responses to interview questions and discussions. The expected benefit of your participation in this study will be the exciting opportunity to represent your organization in this qualitative research study, and to eventually obtain information on the results of the findings.

Confidentiality:

All information provided by participants will remain confidential. The researcher (Michael Dawkins) will not share or use any information for purposes not relating to the scope of the research study. The data collected will be retained of five-years. Your name will not be included on any of the data collected or any other identifier that could possibly link you to the information, analysis or reports from the study.

A member checking process will occur once the interviews and focus group information has been transcribed by the researcher with a unique identifier for each participants, a copy of transcription will be sent electronically or mailed to each participant to verify the accuracy of reported information, and to possibly to create an opening for further discussion if necessary.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher at michael.dawkins@waldenu.edu or (610) 659 - 5694. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Walden University Institutional Review Board for Ethical Standards in Research and speak to Dr. Leilani Endicott who is the Walden University Research Participant Advocate. Her phone number is 1 - 800 - 925 – 3368, extension 3121210. Walden University’s approval number for this study is 09 – 15 – 14 – 0288947 and it expires on September 14, 2015.

The researcher Michael Dawkins will give you a copy of this form to keep.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the research study well enough to make a decision about my participation. By signing this document, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant

Date of consent

Participant’s Signature

Researcher’s Signature

Michael Dawkins

Appendix F: Curriculum Vitae

Michael L. Dawkins

- Summary** Self-directed enthusiastic educator with a passionate commitment to employee, student, organizational development, and learning; seeks to provide analysis based information and leadership to support building a customer service culture at Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority and other transit agencies across the globe. Posses' outstanding communication skills; present information in a variety of ways emphasizing relevance for organization growth and development. Providing consultative leadership, planning, training assessment and support, and program development for small businesses and organizations.
- Professional Goal:** To continue on in the research process of customer relations training, and to consult with organizations to make significant contributions to society.
- Education:**
- Walden University:
 Major : PhD in Management
 Concentration: Ledership and Organizational Change, 2011 - 2015
- Rosemont College, Rosemont Pennsylvania – MBA in International Business. 2000 – 2002
- Eastern University, St. Davids, Pennsylvania – BA in Organizational Management. 1997 – 2000
- Core Skills:**
- High level of internal and external communications with stakeholders and senior level management
 - Extensive research and consultative role in the area of training and teaching development to a broad audience
 - Excellent written and verbal communication, problem solving, decision making, and fast learner
 - Knowledgeable in the areas of utilizing all Microsoft products, and other learning and training tools
- Professional Experience:**
- 2008 – Present:** Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) Philadelphia, PA : **Program Development Support:** Human Resources Division:
- Responsible for evaluating, planning, developing, and implementing

authority-wide programs and activities relative to management/employee development and organizational change

- Manages corporate training facility, including oversight of scheduling and procurement of training equipment and materials
- Assists in the development and implementation of computer based training
- Initiates' training needs assessments to determine the scope of current and future needs

2006 – 2008: Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) Philadelphia, PA : **Constituent Relations Coordinator:** Public and Government Affairs Division :

- Manages the day-to-day constituent and community relations activities with stakeholders who share the company's long term interest
- Interacts, identifies, and organizes pro-active groups among elected officials, the business community, customers, neighborhoods and organized labor
- Maintain stakeholder data-base for each of the five counties in service region
- Formulates, develops, and initiates strategies to solicit support for the company's funding needs
- Service implementation and changes, and construction project impacts in the service area
- Community liaison for company with residents, community groups, businesses, elected officials and customers
- Coordinate with organization and municipal departments and agencies to assure proper and timely notification to stakeholders
- Work closely with Government Affairs, Media Relations, and Communications department staff to develop strategies to our external and internal constituents
- Responsible, as a project liaison, for all elements related to support of projects including deadlines, budget, and informational pieces used for promotions and events
- Work with community groups and or elected officials to resolve service, facility, and constituent issues

1996 – 2006 Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (SEPTA) Philadelphia, PA: **Customer Relations: CCT Connect Para transit**

- Process transportation application for seniors and disabled individuals
- In-person interview to facilitate eligibility processes

- Research, evaluation and analysis to help determine eligibility
- Update and maintain several data-bases /business letter writing
- Outreach and education geared to senior and disabled community
- Customer support via call center to facilitate customer inquiry, complaints and registration process
- Coordinate with Chief Scheduler to select qualified candidates for scheduling unit, panel interviewing process, screening applications and training new hires. Ensuring hiring process is conducted within HR and SEPTA policies.

1992 – 1996 SEPTA (Southeastern Pennsylvania Transportation Authority) Philadelphia, PA : **Schedule Analyst: CCT Connect Para transit**

- Analyze, prepare and evaluate trip data to ensure the highest of productivity is generated in the scheduling process, with extensive communication with internal units and external agencies to ensure quality transportation service.
- Trip planning and reservations for seniors and disabled individuals
- Making recommendations to improve the quality of service
- Coordinate with Chief Scheduler in selecting, interviewing and hiring Schedule Makers to the unit. Team orientated environment to facilitate mentoring and training.

Faculty Teaching Experience:

2004 – Present, Rosemont College School of Professional and Graduate Studies, Undergraduate and Graduate Accelerated Business Degree Programs: Rosemont, PA. **Adjunct Faculty**

- Syllabus and curriculum design and development
- Cooperative learning
- Student motivation
- Whole group learning
- Student assessment
- Multicultural awareness
- Student centered learning
- Classroom management
- In-class and On-line learning deliverables
- Utilized on-line training platform tools : Drexel Web-ct, Rosemont way, and Epsilen
- Leadership and career development seminars

Courses Facilitated: Intercultural Communications, Organizational Behavior, Positional Bargaining and Negotiations, Mediation and Conflict Resolutions, Public Relations, Advertising & Marketing, Communications

Theory, Human resources, and International Business.

Rosemont College student advisory committee: Academic Standards and Practice committee member: Evaluate policies and guidelines, and student's grade appeals and academic concerns.