

2018

# Ensuring Quality Consumer Service Encounters

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Katina Robertson

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Walden University  
2018

Abstract

Ensuring Quality Consumer Service Encounters

by

Katina Robertson

MS, Cardinal Stritch University, 2005

BA, University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, 2002

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Business Administration

Walden University

July 2018

## Abstract

Counterproductive employee behaviors are inevitable, unpredictable, and widespread in the U.S. retail industry. The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore U.S. midlevel retail leadership strategies used to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Gilbert's behavior engineering model, which links employee behaviors to performance, was the framework used in this study. The data-collection process comprised 7 semistructured interviews with midlevel retail leaders, online company documentation, and researcher observations and assisted in achieving methodological triangulation. Member checking ensured the accuracy of participant responses, while Moustakas' modified van Kaam method was used to guide the data analysis process. Making the customer service experience special, employee rudeness and bad attitudes, and leading by example were the primary emergent themes. The participants revealed key behavior intervention and corrective strategies prior to termination consisted of only 2 steps: coaching or 1-on-1 discussions and formal training. The findings of this study may contribute to retail business practices by expanding existing leadership strategies to engineer employee behaviors that produce consistent quality service encounters, empower employees, improve consumer satisfaction, and increase retail profitability and competitiveness. Resultant retailers' profitability and consumer satisfaction may contribute to social change by directly impacting the U.S. gross domestic product, local communal tax base, and reinforce human civility throughout the retail industry.

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## Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my mother, Sweetie M. Robertson, and my son, Andrew Wilson Jr. Mother, you demonstrated unconditional love with endless sacrifices. You modeled strength, focus, fortitude, and devotion. You dedicated me to Christ and showed me how to have faith and depend on Him. Your countless prayers for my success and well-being were not in vain. Everything I do, I do because you paved the way, and I thank you, love you, and will forever cherish and admire you. My dear son, Andrew, you are a survivor. Born at 26 weeks and two pounds, your spirit of endurance, perseverance, and passion for life were evident from day one. God allowed me to be your mother, a mother to a soldier that started this life in a fight for his life. You showed me how to keep moving, keep breathing, keep looking, keep watching, be patient, and to keep fighting. Twenty years later, you joined the United States Army to serve this country: Still fighting! Everything I do, I do for you. Maintain your military bearings at all times, my dear son, and remember, your creator designed you to never give up.

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## Section 1: Foundation of the Study

In 2014, U.S. consumer satisfaction drastically declined in the retail industry for eight consecutive quarters, well into the year 2016 (American Consumer Satisfaction Index (ACSI), 2016). Consumers base their level of customer satisfaction on the employee-customer service encounter (Lee, Lu, Fu, & Teng, 2017). Employee behaviors are an intricate factor in driving a retailer's revenue, growth, and competitiveness (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Retail leaders strive to achieve consistent quality service encounters; however, due to the unpredictability of employee behavior and deliberate acts of customer service sabotage, service failures continue as a widespread problem in the service industry (Sathiyabama & William, 2015). Midlevel retail leaders must identify leadership strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters.

### **Background of the Problem**

Customer service sabotage creates unsatisfied consumers which can destroy any retail establishment (Odunlami, Olawepo, & Emmanuel, 2013). Customer service sabotage is the deliberate act of lowering the quality of a consumer service encounter (Cohen, 2016). Notably, quality service encounters are a critical success factor, and consumer satisfaction is essential for organizational profitability and retail competitiveness (Keiningham, Gupta, Aksoy, & Buoye, 2014; Mertens, Recker, Kummer, Kohlborn, & Viaene, 2016). The service industry makes up 63.6% of the U.S.'s total gross domestic product (GDP) and due to the service industry's significant

contribution to the GDP, service quality is a high priority for many organizations (Cooper & Davis; 2017; Havir, 2017). Retailers that achieve high levels of customer satisfaction lead to higher repurchase intentions, and higher repurchase intentions depend on both product quality and employee behaviors which may sway a service encounter in a positive or negative direction (Gountas, Gountas, & Mavondo, 2014; Rod, Ashill, & Gibbs, 2016). Sharma and Thakur (2016) referred to employee behavior as what an employee says and does during the service encounter. Huang, Sun, Hsiao, and Wang (2017) termed employee behaviors such as rudeness, inappropriate verbal exchanges, and poor attitudes as counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWB) that are the principal causes of poor customer service encounters, resulting in consumer dissatisfaction. Despite growing research on the importance of consumer satisfaction, the frequency of poor customer service encounters continues within the retail industry resulting in low consumer satisfaction and a loss of profits for the organization.

### **Problem Statement**

Customer service sabotage costs U.S. retailers an estimated \$90 billion each year (Dwivedi et al., 2015). In 2015, an estimated 75% of all retail employees admitted to some form of customer service sabotage, deliberately lowering the quality of the consumer service encounter (Cohen, 2016; Samnani, Salamon, & Singh, 2014). The general business problem is some retail employees' behaviors sabotage quality consumer service encounters resulting in a loss of profits. The specific business problem is some

midlevel department store leaders lack strategies to prevent and correct employees' behaviors that sabotage the quality of consumer service encounters.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage the quality of consumer service encounters. The target population consisted of seven midlevel department store leaders, employed by five top U.S. retailers, who implemented strategies that improved the quality of consumer service encounters. The implications for affecting positive social change included an overall increase in consumer satisfaction and human civility in both the workplace and throughout the retail industry, benefiting both shareholders and the neighboring communities.

### **Nature of the Study**

Qualitative research is an open, emerging, and flexible method of discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). Using the qualitative method for exploration, researchers study subjects in their natural environment while gathering a variety of data to understand a phenomenon (Davies & Hughes, 2014; Yin, 2014). In a quantitative study, the researcher relies on numerical data to examine relationships and differences between variables, uses closed-ended questions, and tests hypotheses (Barnham, 2015; Rust et al., 2017). Mixed method studies, using both qualitative and quantitative components, are more appropriate for large-scale, complex projects that have extended timelines for completion (Davies & Hughes, 2014). The quantitative and mixed method approaches were not appropriate for

this study because I did not collect numerical data for hypotheses testing. Instead, I selected the qualitative approach because I explored a retail phenomenon in a natural environment. I conducted semistructured interviews, via telephone and face-to-face, using open-ended questions to foster an open, emerging, and flexible method of discovery regarding the phenomenon.

I used the case study design for this study. Yin (2014) explained that a research design is a logical plan for acquiring answers to the research question. Thus, when probing a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context and introducing a research question that focuses on the *what*, the case study is the most suitable design because the researcher must capture emerging data using a flexible method of discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Davis & Hughes, 2014). Other designs I considered included phenomenological, narrative, and ethnography. In a phenomenological design, the researcher must focus on the interpretive analyses of lived experiences and capture the uniqueness of an event's meaning to participants (Yin, 2016). Phenomenological researchers attend not only to the events studied but also to their political, historical, and sociocultural contexts (Yin, 2016). For this reason, the phenomenological design was not the best format for this study. In a narrative design, the researcher chronicles life experiences of a single event or series of events for a small number of individuals (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Traditionally, participants' narratives represent the only data used in the study (Yin, 2016). The narrative design was not suitable for this study because researchers who undertake the narrative design must limit their research to the

participants' narratives restricting an explorative probe of the phenomenon in its real-world context. In an ethnography design, the researcher devotes extended periods in the field to study and characterize groups' cultures (Davies & Hughes, 2014). However, there were time limitations for this study, and field observations are contingent upon the participants' schedules, and extended field observations were not feasible. Therefore, the ethnography design was not appropriate for this study. Considering the various designs, the multiple case study design using semistructured interviews was most appropriate because I performed a comprehensive exploration, probing a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context while taking into account emerging data and referencing several types of data sources. Sarma (2015) identified multiple data sources as documentation, archival records, observations, and interviews to contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the research findings.

### **Research Question**

What strategies do some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct retail employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters?

### **Interview Questions**

1. According to your current training procedures, what is a quality consumer service encounter?
2. What are some employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters in your department?

3. What strategies do you use to ensure consistent employee behaviors that foster quality service encounters?
4. What strategies worked best when correcting employee behaviors that lowered the quality of a service encounter?
5. What barriers or challenges did you encounter when you implemented strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotaged the quality of a consumer service encounter, and how did you address the barriers or challenges?
6. What measures do you take to manage an employee whose behavior does not improve after prior corrective strategies?
7. Is there any additional information you would like to share regarding this topic?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Gilbert (1978) behavior engineering model (BEM) is the conceptual model for this study. Gilbert (2007) posited that behaviors are the direct actions of people and argued that behavior is measurable using three theorems:

1. Human competence is a function of worthy performance.
2. There is a reverse relationship between ability and performance improvement potential.
3. Any accomplishment that is deficient in performance is a result of deficient individual behavior or deficiency in the supporting environment, which is most likely due to a deficiency in management.

Gilbert (2007) achieved sustainable performance improvement within organizations and linked individual performance and accountability with the organization's objective of industry competitiveness, quality service encounters, and consumer satisfaction (Crossman, 2010). Gilbert earned recognition for achieving optimal levels of performance improvement because his model does not neglect the complexities of human behavior like most process-centered improvement initiatives (Crossman, 2010). As applied to this study, the behavior engineering model holds that any accomplishment that is deficient in performance or lacks worthy performance is a result of leadership deficiencies.

### **Operational Definitions**

*Counterproductive work behaviors:* Counterproductive behaviors are the social undermining behaviors intended to hinder the creation of positive interpersonal relationships, work-related successes, and favorable organizational reputations (Namin, 2017, p. 115).

*Customer service sabotage:* Customer service sabotage is when a service worker's behavior intentionally harms a customer's interest, which is particularly devastating to service organizations since these behaviors diminish customer satisfaction and long-term profitability (Chi, Tsai, & Tseng, 2013, p. 299).

*Organizational control:* Organizational control is the process by which the organization's leaders regulate or adjust the behaviors of the employees in the direction of the organization's objectives (Weibel et al., 2015, p. 3).

*Service encounter:* A service encounter is a period when a customer directly interacts with an employee of an organization while purchasing services or goods (Andrzejewski & Mooney, 2016, p. 135).

*Service failure:* A service failure is a service-related mishap or problem (real or perceived) that occurs during a customer's experience with a firm (Shin, Ellinger, Mothersbaugh, & Reynolds, 2017).

*Service quality:* Service quality is the extent to which an employee's service meets the customer's need or expectation; it involves a comparison of customer expectation with customer perceptions of actual service performance (Sathiyabama & William, 2015, p. 5334).

### **Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations**

#### **Assumptions**

Assumptions are unverified statements that one accepts as a fact (Yin, 2014, 2016). In preparation for this study, I assumed retail organization leaders would readily participant to highlight midlevel leadership strategies at top U.S. retailers. This was not the case. Several corporate office leaders declined to participate in this study. For individual midlevel leader participants, I assumed they were honest in their admission of eligibility to participate in this study, honest in responding to each interview question, and their commitment to service quality was in alignment with the organization's objective of service quality and customer service. Another assumption was that each participant was forthcoming in sharing their actual leadership strategies for achieving

quality service encounters and their self-proclamation of increasing sales were resultant of their leadership skills. I believe the participants were forthcoming regarding their leadership strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors, however, I do suspect some participants may have withheld the details of some uncomfortable employee-retail leader situations.

### **Limitations**

Limitations are the systematic biases beyond the researcher's control that inappropriately influenced the results of the study (Yin, 2014). The primary limitation of this study was the participant's willfulness to share negative experiences when correcting employee behaviors that sabotaged quality service encounters. Limiting details regarding authentic workplace experiences that required corrective action will hinder readers from associating the results with their own experiences relative to preventive and corrective strategies in the retail industry. Another limitation of this study involved sample size. There are no rules for sample sizes in qualitative research (Yin, 2016). Initially, I engaged five midlevel leaders to participate in this study but to ensure data saturation, I added two additional interviews to ensure no new emerging data. However, seven interviews may limit the transferability of the results throughout the retail and service industry. Also, some participants may have withheld genuine data regarding their leadership abilities or the use of actual leadership strategies in the workplace which may present additional limitations.

### **Delimitations**

Delimitations limit the scope and define the boundaries of a study (Yin 2014). A delimitation of this study was all the data collected, analyzed, and presented is based on the workplace experiences of seven midlevel retail leaders from five top retailers within the U.S. This study is framed using midlevel leadership views who had minimal preventive and corrective resources and limited workplace authority to independently adjust environmental supports to improve employee behaviors.

### **Significance of the Study**

Leaders must act when employees demonstrate counterproductive employee behaviors. Midlevel department store leaders need to identify effective leadership strategies to prevent and correct counterproductive employee behaviors that sabotage consumer service encounters in the retail industry. Midlevel retail leaders could improve existing business practices and financial performance in the retail industry by applying the conceptual method referenced in this study. This study is potentially significant for retail business leaders and their workplace practices as I identified effective strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality consumer service encounters. Properly applying the concepts of this study could contribute to social change by achieving overall consumer satisfaction, increasing civility in the retail industry, and an increase in taxes to support communal social service alternatives benefitting both shareholders and the neighboring communities.

### **A Review of the Professional and Academic Literature**

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore strategies that midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. The organization of the literature review is as follows: (a) an overview of key words and sources used to develop the literature review, (b) a brief discussion of behaviorism since the 1920s, (c) an introduction of Gilbert's behavioral engineering model, (d) a focused review of Gilbert's management theorem, (e) a comparison and analysis of historical process-centered improvement initiatives to achieve organizational improvement, (f) additional information on supporting but independently deficient theories, (g) an analysis of the association and significant role of leadership relative to organizational climate and employee behavior, (h) a conclusive discussion on leadership's consideration of Gilbert's BEM environmental supports.

For this study, I searched electronic resources available through Walden University Library using the following keyword phrases: *consumer satisfaction and quality service encounters, managing employee behavior, quality customer service and retailer's profitability, antecedents to poor customer service, leadership strategies and employee behavior, behavior engineering model, and counterproductive employee behavior*. I queried each keyword in the following databases: Google Scholar, ABI/INFORM Complete, Business Source Complete, Thoreau Multi-Database, ProQuest Central, Sage Journal, Dissertations and Theses at Walden University, PsycINFO, Emerald Management, and ScholarWorks.

One hundred and ninety-four sources formed this study. In the literature review, I cited 100 (52%) of the 194 sources. Each article and dissertation have publication dates after 2013 except for the permitted 10% seminal sources regulated by the *Walden Doctoral Study Rubric and Research Handbook*. Depicted in Table 1 is an aggregate list of references used for this study.

Table 1

*Data Sources Used for Study*

Reference type	Less than 5 years	Greater than 5 years	Total	Percentage
Seminal and contemporary textbooks	5	3	8	4%
Dissertations	2	0	2	1%
Peer-reviewed articles	160	18	178	92%
Non-peer reviewed articles	0	0	0	0%
Government websites	2	0	2	1%
Other References	4	0	4	2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>173 (90%)</b>	<b>20 (10%)</b>	<b>194</b>	

### **Concepts of Behaviorism Since the 1920s**

Since the 1920s, two well-recognized methods of learning known as classical and operant conditioning heavily influenced human behavior development (Jarius & Wildemann, 2015). Pavlov was a Russian physiologist who specialized in animal

physiology (Catania & Laties, 1999). Pavlov discovered classical conditioning after conducting multiple experiments on mice and dog digestive systems and salivary reflexes. Pawlike (1997) deemed classical conditioning as an experimental prototype platform for studying both animals and human associative learning in behavior development. According to Clark (2004):

In the most basic form of classical conditioning, the stimulus that predicts the occurrence of another stimulus is the conditioned stimulus (CS). The predicted stimulus is the unconditioned stimulus (US). The CS is a relatively neutral stimulus that an organism can detect but does not initially induce a reliable behavioral response. The US is a stimulus that can reliably induce a measurable response from the first presentation. The response elicited by the presentation of the US is the unconditioned response (UR). The term “unconditioned” indicated that the response is “not learned,” but rather it is an innate or reflexive response to the US. With repeated presentations of the CS followed by US (referred to as paired training), the CS begins to elicit a conditioned response (CR). Here the term *conditioned* indicated that the response is learned. (p. 279)

As a more basic definition, classical conditioning is a type of learning in which organisms react to multiple stimuli. A response naturally triggered by one stimulus responds to a second and formerly neutral stimulus (Cambiaghi & Sacchetti, 2015).

During Pavlov’s most known experiment, the dog-and-bell scenario, Pavlov noticed that a dog began to salivate after hearing a bell that accompanied a bowl of food.

Pavlov unintentionally identified that combining a neutral stimulus (the sound of the bell) with an unconditioned stimulus (the presentation of food) led to an association of these stimuli. Thereafter, a lone neutral stimulus still elicited the unconditioned response (salivation). Thus, the dog learned to associate the sound of the bell with the presentation of food. The former neutral stimulus became a conditioned stimulus and the previous unconditioned response a conditioned response (Bichler et al., 2013). Pavlov discovered that conditioned reflexes develop in response to almost any kind of external stimuli, whether presented intentionally or unintentionally (Pawlik, 1997). However, to condition a human being, a researcher must consider his or her personality and attitude (Catania & Laties, 1999). If you control the environment, you will see order in behavior, and it usually takes seven instances of reinforcement to condition a behavioral response (Catania & Laties, 1999).

B. F. Skinner, once a student of Pavlov, introduced operant conditioning using rats to study adaptive behavior to startling sounds (Iversen, 1992). To make the rat go down the runway and press a lever, Skinner placed food at the exit. In Skinner's first conditioning experiment, he resolved that eliciting stimuli was not necessary in a scientific account of purposive or voluntary behavior; instead past reinforcement history was the critical determinate if the response occurred (Iversen, 1992). Skinner deviated from Pavlov's classical conditioning by demonstrating that changes in behavior are instantaneous, stating that his rats learned to escape and press the lever in one trial (Iversen, 1992). Skinner went on to demonstrate a method of shaping new behavior.

Skinner designed an environment for a rat he called Pliny. Skinner installed a marble pull chain and trained the rat to grasp the chain, carry it across the cage, and drop it in a slot to release food. Skinner recognized this new complex chain of behavior would never occur if he had not designed and built the appropriate environment for Pliny to perform (Iversen, 1992). Operant conditioning is a type of behavioral learning that either strengthens or eliminates individual behaviors based on pleasant or unpleasant consequences (Holley, 2016). Both Pavlov and Skinner agreed that changes in the environment, including positive or negative sanctions, would adapt individual behaviors.

### **Gilbert's Behavioral Engineering Model**

Gilbert (2007) provided a model for human competence. For this study, I used Gilbert's behavior engineering model (BEM) (1978) as the conceptual framework. The BEM is a powerful tool for gathering data on employee behaviors and general organizational factors (Marker, 2007). Gilbert's BEM is an observation-based approach to improving employee performance. Gilbert (1978) introduced a one-factor approach based solely on employees' abilities to achieve worthy performance in the workplace. Worthy performance is the value of the accomplishment exceeding the cost of the behavior or similarly the return on investment (ROI; Binder, 2017). Gilbert (2007) refined his one-factor approach to two-factors because he observed costly employee behavior that disregarded the application of routine workplace training, indicating performance alone is not competence. In agreement, Brinkerhoff (2015) regarded training not as a magic silver bullet but as a method to make an employee capable, which does not

equate to adequate job performance. Employees who acquire new capabilities must transform their learning into new behaviors, which then translate to improved job performance (Brinkerhoff, 2015). Understandably, in Gilbert's revised two-factor model, he focused on knowledge and execution. Gilbert claimed to prove an individual's competence, one must observe his or her behavior. For example, a competent individual will create valuable results without disproportionate costly behavior. Therefore, if human (individual) competence rests within one's behavior, then to *engineer* human competence, one must manipulate human behavior. Behavior is the direct action of an individual, and to shape an individual's behavior and control their mind is the highest virtue (Gilbert, 2007).

Gilbert posited behavior is measurable using three theorems:

1. Human competence is a function of worthy performance.
2. Typical human competence is counter proportional to the performance improvement potential (PIP). PIP is the ratio of exemplary performance to typical performance.
3. Any accomplishment that is deficient in performance is a direct action of deficient individual behavior or deficiency in the supporting environment, which is most likely due to a deficiency in management.

In Gilbert's (2007) competence measurement process, the first theorem is a function of the ratio of valuable accomplishments to costly behavior. The second theorem is the measurement theorem, whereas an individual's normal performance is inversely

equal to the PIP. The PIP is the result of the ratio of exemplary performance to normal or average performance (Gilbert, 2007). In Gilbert's first two theorems, he focused on task accomplishments through human competence. Gilbert established the basis for engineering worthy performance and detailed how to recognize and measure human competence by instituting clear, valuable, and measurable goals (Gilbert, 2007). However, the focus of this study is Gilbert's third theorem (management theorem) where he placed an emphasis on individual behaviors. To engineer employee performance, leadership must manage employee behavior (Gilbert, 2007). Using the management theorem, Gilbert uncovered the causes of organizational competence and incompetence.

To engineer performance efficiently, retail leaders must understand the association between behavior, performance, and accomplishments. Oftentimes, leaders confuse an employee's behavior with performance and accomplishment. Dean (2016) explained accomplishments are positive outputs resulting from an employee's behavior. The transaction between employee behavior and accomplishment combined is what Gilbert termed as performance. Performance is the resultant combination of employee behaviors and the results. Engineering employee behavior is necessary to achieve the organization's goal of quality service encounters and consumer satisfaction (Dean, 2016).

Gilbert created sustainable performance improvement within organizations using the BEM model (Crossman, 2010; Dean, 2016; Hillman, 2013; Turner, 2016; Winiiecki, 2015). Gilbert (2007) linked individual performance and accountability with the organization's objective of industry competitiveness, service quality, and consumer

satisfaction (Crossman, 2010; Dean, 2016; Hillman, 2013; Winiiecki, 2015). Gilbert noted two elements influenced performance in the workplace: employee behavior and environmental concerns. Gilbert (2007) produced a matrix of six dimensions with factors that affected work performance, distinguishing between environmental factors influenced by management and individual factors controlled by the employee. The three environmental factors are data, instruments, and incentives. Factors controlled by the employee, otherwise known as the repertory of behavior, are knowledge, capacity, and motives. Gilbert included six subcategories for environmental support and employee behavior: information, instrumentation, motivation, knowledge, capacity, and motives listed respectively. In Gilbert's six-dimension model, worthy and exemplary performance is resultant of a cooperative interaction between employee behaviors (knowledge, capacity, and motives) and environmental supports (information, resources, and incentives) (Crossman, 2010). To take measure of a human being, one must consider his or her personality (Catania & Laties, 1999). In Gilbert's model, he achieved optimal levels of performance improvement because the model did not neglect the complexities of human behavior like most process improvement initiatives. Process-centered improvement initiatives are based on Total Quality Management (TQM) principles (Crossman, 2010). Oschman (2017) noted leadership uses TQM as a management control system (MCS) to lead an organization daily. When using TQM, leadership guides the organization to achieve competitive, sustainable excellence while improving productivity and profitability, builds organizational capabilities with higher product quality and

performance standards, and meets service delivery objectives to satisfy customer requirements. Using similar process-centered improvement initiatives, leaders narrowly address human capital development through training and retraining, overall failing to reward or acknowledge individual accomplishments (Crossman, 2010).

Although Gilbert (2007) recognized training as a valid performance support, Dean (2016) argued leaders tend to overuse training programs, or they improperly design the training program. Furthermore, most process-centered improvement initiatives are systematic and require individuals to cooperate as members of a process team to accomplish a task or provide a service (Guo & Hariharan, 2016). The determining factor for human competence is to observe an individual's behavior (Gilbert, 2007). Lending special attention to the complexities of one's behavior, Gilbert divided one's repertory of behaviors into three elements: capacity, knowledge, and motivation. An individual's capacity is the expenditure of energy in the form of hard work, sacrifice, and self-denial. Knowledge is the individual's storage of information, theories, and skills; and motivation is an individual's eagerness and their display of positive and amicable attitudes (Gilbert, 2007).

### **Gilbert's Management Theorem**

The focus of this study is Gilbert's (2007) third theorem of deficient performance (management theorem). Gilbert argued deficient performance is a direct action of deficient behavior which is most likely due to a deficiency in leadership (Winiecki, 2015). Several scholars offered empirical evidence explaining why employees engage in

deficient behavior. Shoss, Jundt, Kobler, and Reynolds (2016) argued the coping theory is the reason for deficient employee behavior. Shoss et al. (2016) clarified that deficient behavior is a coping mechanism for some employees due to a manifestation of frustration and negative workplace experiences. Employees that resort to deficient behaviors are responding to acts of provocation in the workplace (i.e. workplace stressors, workplace injustice), and they feel there is an emotional benefit to their deficient behaviors (Shoss et al., 2016). Employers have dealt with deficient employee behaviors since the Industrial Revolution, and there is no real evidence whether the amount of deviant behavior has changed over the centuries or will ever change (Klotz & Buckley, 2013). Nonetheless, Klotz and Buckley attributed deficient employee behavior to theory x, introduced by McGregor (1960), stating that the average employee has an inherent dislike for work. Therefore, leaders should expect most, if not all employees, to engage in deficient employee behaviors (Klotz & Buckley, 2013). Regardless of *why* or *what* motivates employees to engage in deficient behavior, leaders must identify preventive and corrective strategies to curb deficient behavior.

Nowadays, leaders tend to evade fault when it comes to deficient employee behaviors, deflecting onto the employee as opposed to assuming responsibility and stating, I did not provide enough incentives to garner worthy employee performance, or I did not train the employee well (Gilbert, 2007). Typical responses from leadership regarding deficient employee behaviors are “the employee does not care”, or the “the employee has the wrong attitude” (Gilbert, 2007, p. 74). It is easier for the leader to evade

responsibility because assuming responsibility at the outset is “a little troublesome to the conscience” (p. 74). When leadership circumvents accountability for deficient employee behaviors, it eliminates leadership accountability and the likelihood of identifying leadership strategies that will prevent or correct deficient employee behaviors (Gilbert, 2007). When an individual assumes the leadership role, he or she in effect acknowledges their duty for engineering employee performance by troubleshooting deficient behaviors and identifying strategies to produce greater efficiency in the workplace; more importantly, leaders should not shift these responsibilities onto others (Gilbert, 2007).

Some researchers who explored deficient employee behavior termed deficient behavior as workplace incivility (Cho, Bonn, Han, & Lee, 2016; Estes & Wang, 2008; Harold & Holtz, 2015; Walker, Jaarsveld, & Skarlicki, 2014). Estes and Wang (2008) explained civility means being mindful of the dignity of the human being. Tuna, Ghazzawi, Yesiltas, Tuna, and Arslan (2016) described deficient employee behavior as deviant workplace behavior. Cohen (2016) and Sulea, Fine, Fischmann, Sava, and Dumitru (2013) designated deficient behavior as counterproductive employee behavior. Each scholar described and agreed that deficient employee behavior is a form of misbehavior that is harmful to the organization (Anderson & Smith, 2017; Cho et al., 2016; Cohen, 2016; Harold & Holtz, 2015; Sulea et al., 2013; Tuna et al., 2016; Walker et al., 2014). Going forward in this study, I referenced deficient behavior and counterproductive behavior interchangeably. Both terms are inclusive of employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters such as: working slower than needed

or lax performance, treating customers in an impolite manner, inappropriate verbal exchanges with consumers, poor employee attitudes, nonverbal communication such as eye-rolling, or any other form of withdrawal from work efforts. Das (2016) defined nonverbal communication as “communication without words” (p. 199). Das emphasized that nonverbal communication is equally significant as verbal communication during a service encounter. For instance, employee gestures and eye contact relay powerful messages. Das argued too much eye contact may indicate aggressiveness to a customer while too little eye contact may indicate employee disinterest, distrust, or insensitivity. Nonetheless, each of the previously referenced behaviors can erode the ethical and social landscape of an organization and negatively impact profitability and industry competitiveness (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2014; Dischner, 2015; Shoss et al., 2016; Wooderson, Cuskelly, & Meyer, 2017).

Exemplary behavior is when an employee’s behavior is both efficient and produces exceptional levels of accomplishments (Binder, 2017). Within service organizations, employee behaviors are an integral constituent of the service product (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Every customer expects service employees to demonstrate civility, responsiveness, helpfulness, and professionalism during a service encounter (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Largely, consumers measure the quality of the service encounter by observing the attitudes and behaviors of the employee (Gountas et al., 2014; Popli & Rizvi, 2017; Woisetschläger, Hanning, & Backhaus, 2016). For example, when an employee is not only courteous, responsive, helpful, and professional but makes the extra

effort to identify what else the customer may need, refers to him or her by name, assists the customer in locating an item in the store, or simply adds a personal touch to the service encounter, the quality of the encounter significantly improves. Maklan, Antonetti, and Whitty (2017) reported as of 2016, 86% percent of service organizations compete based on quality customer service, and 86% of consumers will pay more for a quality service encounter. Quality service encounters drive consumer satisfaction, customer loyalty, and consumer repurchase intentions, which strongly affect organizational profitability and industry competitiveness (Chen & Fu, 2015; Fonia & Srivastava, 2017; Nikou, Selamat, Yusoff, & Khiabani, 2016; Rod et al., 2016).

In recent customer service studies, many scholars discussed the importance of quality service encounters and the direct association it has on consumer satisfaction; the frequency of poor customer service encounters and its association to deficient employee behaviors resulting in the overall negative impact to the retail industry (Aboyassin & Abood, 2013; Karimi, Gilbreath, Kim, & Grawitch, 2014; Saravakos & Sirakoulis, 2014). Few scholars explicitly linked midlevel leadership strategies to service encounters outcomes (Harris & Ogbonna, 2013; Hou, Wu, & Hu, 2013; Namasivayam, Guchait, & Lei, 2014; Yukl, 2012). Most researchers largely focused on the significance of leadership styles and leadership behaviors and the subsequent impact they had on employee behavior (Aboyassin & Abood, 2013; DeShong, Grant, & Mullins-Sweatt, 2015; Karimi et al., 2014; Popli & Rizvi, 2017; Sulea et al., 2013; Turunc, Celik, & Mert, 2013). However, few researchers outlined actual leadership strategies to prevent and

correct employee behaviors that sabotage consumer service encounters (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2014; Dasgupta, Suar, & Singh, 2013; Hou et al., 2013; Karimi et al., 2014; Tuna et al., 2016). Lee et al. (2017) resolved there is limited knowledge guiding the management of controlling the inconsistencies in employee-customer service encounters. Consequently, face-to-face service encounters are an essential element that continues to repeat in the retail industry (Namasivayam et al., 2014). In addition, service quality is a critical success factor and the main requirement for an organization to increase profitability and achieve sustainable competitiveness (Tseng & Wu, 2014; Wirtz & Jerger, 2016; Zhao & Di Benedetto, 2013; Zumrah, 2015). Therein lies the need for additional research to identify strategies used by midlevel retail leaders to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters.

Deficient employee behaviors not only sabotage quality service encounters but result in financial losses and damage to the retailer's image. CWB is social undermining behavior intended to hinder the creation of positive interpersonal relationships, work-related successes, and favorable organizational reputations (DeShong et al., 2015; Dischner, 2015). Alternatively, service-oriented employee behaviors and attitudes positively impact the quality of service encounters and contribute to consumer satisfaction (Popli & Rizvi, 2017). Tung, Lo, and Chung (2013) described service-oriented behaviors as employee enthusiasm, conscientiousness, and willingness to exert additional efforts to satisfy customers. Popli and Rizvi (2017) included cooperation, consideration, and helpfulness as service-oriented behaviors. Service quality is the

customer's overall evaluation of the service encounter, comparing that encounter with the customer's employee expectations (Lu, Berchoux, Marek, & Chen, 2015). A customer service encounter is a complex, multi-layered concept that is based on stimulus, interaction, and sensemaking (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017). Similarly, Quach, Jebarajakirthy, and Thaichon (2017) asserted that a quality service encounter is the result of a unique interaction between a frontline service employee and a customer. The encounter is unique if and only if the customer experiences a sensation or feeling, making the encounter memorable or exemplary (Bustamante & Rubio, 2017). Exemplary service encounters are the fundamental drivers to gaining a competitive advantage in the retail industry, and this task rests on the performance of the frontline employee (Quach et al., 2017; Rod et al., 2016; Schepers & Nijssen, 2018).

As a result, frontline employee service-oriented behaviors have become an integral strategic objective and a critical success factor for retailers (Maklan et al., 2017; Popli & Rizvi, 2017; Tung et al., 2013; Wallace, de Chernatony, & Buil, 2013). Retailers that distinguish themselves through consistent quality service encounters propel themselves above their competitors, gaining an increased chance of sustainability and profitability within the retail industry (Quach et al., 2017). Adversely, failed service encounters are not only inevitable but difficult to predict (Lee et al., 2017). Customer service sabotage will continue as an everyday phenomenon within retail organizations unless retail leaders implement effective strategies to prevent and correct deficient employee behaviors.

Retail organizations are formal social structures, and when formed, leadership strives to coordinate employee behaviors to achieve the overall organizational goals. However, individual behaviors are unpredictable and may be impossible to coordinate (Barker & Cheney, 1994; Beyer & Trice, 1984; Cohen, 2016; Stankovic, 2013). Beyer and Trice (1984) examined the use of rewards and sanctions to gain some degree of control over employee behaviors. Beyer and Trice acquiesced that punishment could decrease or eliminate undesirable behaviors, but they failed to reveal positive effects with formal punishment. The possibility of punishment for deficient performing employees cultivates individual self-awareness and serves as a method to uphold the normalcy of an organization while coordinating employee behaviors to collectively achieve a goal (Beyer & Trice, 1984; Harold & Holtz, 2015; Juma & Moronge, 2015; Lau, Au, & Ho, 2003; Van der Steen, 2009).

Dischner (2015) believed workplace sanctions, such as reprimands and suspensions of rule-breaking employees are likely to curb deficient employee behavior. Conversely, the operant conditioning model holds punishment is counterproductive and is of little value and the possibility of a reward can motivate individual behaviors (Beyer & Trice, 1984; Jablonsky & DeVries, 1972; Raus, 2014). Organizations that use punishment as the primary method to control employee behaviors may inadvertently increase deficient behavior (Jablonsky & DeVries, 1972). For instance, the leader is the source of punishment, and the employee associates the leader with an aversive quality, further perpetuating his or her deficient behavior. At first the employee was consistently tardy,

but now the employee's absences increase to avoid the leader and subsequent punishment (Jablonsky & DeVries, 1972). Jablonsky and DeVries resolved that organizations should avoid using punishment as a primary means of employee behavioral control and where possible ignore undesirable employee behaviors.

The basis of the operant conditioning model (Skinner, 1974) is new behaviors originate through a stimulus, conditioning employees to repeat behaviors by positive reinforcement in the form of feedback and knowledge results (Juma & Moronge, 2015). Skinner (1974) defined the term *operant behavior* as an organism's response to consequences. In other words, employees will repeat behaviors with favorable consequences and tend not to repeat behaviors with unfavorable consequences. Leadership should apply positive reinforcement regularly while using some form of a variable ratio schedule because rewards are the motivation behind all behaviors (Jablonsky & DeVries, 1972; Raus, 2014). Stankovic (2013) identified three theorists, McGregor (1960), Maslow (1970), and Vroom (1964), and argued their human motivation models fail to address individual performance within complex organizations.

In Blau's (1964) introduction of the social exchange theory (SET), humans form their relationships based on a subjective cost-benefit analysis. Individuals assess the social and economic rewards of an exchange relationship, and based on the assessment, the individual decides to reciprocate the benefits received or abandon the relationship (Woisetschläger et al., 2016). The more rewards an employee receives for his or her behavior, the more often that employee will duplicate that behavior. Conversely,

Jurkiewicz and Giacalone (2016) argued a consistent lack of consequences in response to deficient behavior establishes a workplace routine that spreads via social learning principles and leads to an escalation of deficient behavior. Therefore, the SET and the operant conditioning model alone do not address the prevention and correction of employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters.

Saraakos and Sirakoulis (2014) professed that leaders must abolish deficient employee behavior not just by ignoring it or by rewarding acceptable service encounters. In an effort to standardized service encounters, some leaders instituted formal control mechanisms such as process improvement initiatives to achieve homogenous workplace processes, limit employee discretion, and reduce deficient employee behaviors (Saravakos & Sirakoulis, 2014).

### **Process-Centered Improvement Initiatives**

Process-centered improvement initiatives are principled on traditional management control systems (MCS). MCS are an integral part of every organization, designed to direct employees' behaviors toward organizational objectives (Christ, 2013; Lueg & Radlach, 2016; Weibel et al., 2015). MCS are a key to governing employee behavior by way of systems, rules, practices, and values (Lueg & Radlach, 2016). Many organizations use process-centered improvement initiatives to align employee behavior, improve operational excellence, control cost, enhance employee morale, and gain customer satisfaction (Guo & Hariharan, 2016). Process-centered improvement initiatives are structured and systematic which requires individuals to cooperate as members of a

process team to accomplish a task or provide a service at a faster pace (Guo & Hariharan, 2016). Notably, the implementation of a process improvement initiative does not require leadership to focus on individual tasks done in isolation, but instead the entire range of tasks necessary to achieve the outcome (Christ, 2013).

### **Result-Oriented Management (ROM)**

Schouten and Beers (1996) introduced result-oriented management (ROM) as a process-centered management system where leaders could achieve maximum employee performance by instituting clear, measurable expectations up front. Schouten and Beers designed ROM to influence employee behavior and influence established patterns of behavior (Van der Steen, 2009). For ROM to be effective, midlevel leaders must take action, adhere to the principles, and maintain control (Van der Steen, 2009). ROM is a top-down, bottom-up concept that consists of numerous strategic plans, yearly plans, and department plans that requires strict adherence from every leader to modify behavioral patterns (Van der Steen, 2009). When instituting ROM, the implication for leadership is in the future, within a predetermined timeframe, managers must report the results of their efforts (Reichel, 1983). If leaders continue their days, business as usual, without consideration of the ROM goals and objectives, the process will fail (Reichel, 1983). Senior managers must create the appropriate environment to demonstrate the seriousness of the ROM initiative, while managers fully commit their time and attention to ensure the ROM initiative is successful and on track (Reichel, 1983).

To implement the formal ROM initiative, leadership must (a) recalibrate the organization's mission, (b) develop a SWOT analysis, (c) form a strategic course of action, (d) set target goals for each organizational area to include leadership, personnel management, and primary process, (e) set target for balance score card, (f) establish priorities for next three years, (g) set out actions for upcoming year, (h) translate yearly plan to each department and project teams, (i) combine and refine plans, (j) create budget and control agreement, and (k) exercise control (Van der Steen, 2009). Most often leaders with noncommitted attitudes and behaviors are the cause of failed ROM initiatives further perpetuating employee frustration and negative attitudes (Reichel, 1983).

### **Continuous Quality Improvement, Six Sigma Initiatives, and Lean Management**

Like ROM, Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI), Six Sigma (SS), and Lean Management (LM) are process improvement initiatives designed to improve customer satisfaction and reduce or eliminate sources of errors to include deficient employee behaviors. CQI, SS, and LM are the leading types of performance improvement initiatives organizations use worldwide to drive major changes across the company (Chaplin & O'Rourke, 2014; Gowen, McFadden, & Settaluri, 2012). CQI is an incremental approach toward process improvement such that leadership's objective is to focus on quality and align all staff with the organization's strategic goals (Gowen et al., 2012). When using LM, leadership focuses on efficiency, reduced costs, and an increased speed of product delivery and services (Gowen et al., 2012). On the other hand, SS is a strict project management approach based on statistics and bottom line results. Leaders that adopt SS rely on employee Black Belt and Green Belt training in statistical techniques, team building, and leadership. Chaplin and O'Rourke (2014) stated SS teams apply statistical process controls to measure and monitor variations in a process over time. In brief, reduction in variability depends upon a statistical concept derived from a statistical unit of standard deviation that 99.997% of a population falls within three standard deviations of the mean (Chaplin & O'Rourke, 2014).

Process improvement initiatives have obvious limitations and do not address all business needs. Process improvement initiatives are resource-intensive, have a high risk of failure, do little to increase product demand, and cannot create a competitive

advantage (Guo & Hariharan, 2016). Since service encounters are multidimensional and include behaviors, processes, and employee performance; process improvement initiatives tend to address process descriptive terms such as waste and efficiency which suggests that most process-centered organizations focus more on cost-cutting measures instead of the complexities of human behavior (Namin, 2017). Gilbert argued both the organization and the employee should benefit from organizational improvements, such that organizations should view the costs of improving human performance as an investment in human capital, which would yield returns valued by both the organization and employee relative to their performance potential (Weinberger, 1998).

### **Weber's Bureaucracy Theory**

Dischner (2015) and Cohen (2016) argued a supporting theory, Weber's (1958) bureaucracy theory. Instituting formal control mechanisms, such as written rules and procedures, it reduces deficient employee behavior in two ways. First, formally standardizing tasks provides employees the necessary details to execute assignments, reducing any task—related uncertainty that may cause the employee to set their own standards for performing a task (Dischner, 2015). Employees may resort to CWB if prescribed standards and guidelines are absent (Askew, Beisler, & Keel, 2015; Dischner, 2015). Second, standardizing assignments not only establishes the basis for predictable and reliable employee behavior, it legitimizes the use of sanctions when there is a general warning about the type of behavior that will result in punishment (Cohen, 2016). Many midlevel leaders do not understand that deficient employee behaviors that sabotage

consumer encounters will not improve without their intervention (Miller, 2014).

Therefore, when considering process improvement initiatives whether ROM, SS, or CQI, leadership must demonstrate the strategic wherewithal to take action and carry out the requirements of the Weberian model.

Process improvement initiatives alone are myopic relative to employee development and can negatively affect the attitudes and behavior of employees subjected to such control mechanisms furthering a perpetuation of deficient behavior (Christ, 2013; Crossman, 2010). In addition, leaders that are not proactive and engaged in leading their employees, in conjunction with process improvement initiatives, fail to prevent or correct employee behaviors and implicitly signal that deficient employee behavior is acceptable (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Yukl (2012) contended that process improvement initiatives and structured programs limit leadership behaviors or nullify their effects. Employee disempowerment occurs when leadership forces employees to follow elaborate rules and procedures when completing assignments (Yukl, 2012).

Gilbert's BEM departed from practices of rewarding and punishing employees to achieve human improvement. Leadership that solely depends upon rewarding employees for their behavior encourages incompetence, while rewarding employees only for their accomplishments and not for their net worth of their performance is ineffective and fails to appreciate human competence (Gilbert, 2007). To align employee behavior with the company's goals and achieve organizational control, retail leaders must identify the direct association of improving employee behavior with leadership strategies.

Understandably, retail leaders have a key role in aligning employee behavior with the company's goals. Karimi et al. (2014) professed leaders have a significant effect on their employee's well-being, job commitment, job satisfaction, morale, and work behaviors. Leadership is about influence (Kaufman, 2017). Leaders set the workplace tone which influences the way employees feel about their employers and the way they perform for and interact with customers (Jurkiewicz & Giacalone, 2016; Wallace et al., 2013; Wooderson et al., 2017). Tung et al. (2013) added that an organization's service climate or culture directly impacts employee behaviors. Employees perceive the organization's service climate and draw inferences on the expectations and rewarded behaviors based on managerial practices, procedures, and policies (Estes & Wang, 2008; Kang, Gatling, & Kim, 2015; Tung et al., 2013). Therefore, it is the leadership's responsibility to establish the organization's climate, which defines the boundaries of acceptable employee behavior in the workplace (Wooderson et al., 2017).

### **Organizational Climate and the Leadership Role**

Organizational climate is the social climate or atmosphere in a work place relevant to policies, practices, and procedures in organizations (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2014). According to the social information processing theory, employees observe and collect information from their social environment such as cues of acceptable and unacceptable behaviors and subsequent consequences (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978). The perceptions of the organizational climate and the attitudes and behaviors of the employees influence employees' behaviors (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2014). Deficient

employee behaviors not only have a stifling effect on coworkers but on the high performance of the organization (Self & Self, 2014; Wooderson et al., 2017). Leadership determines organizational success and serves as the central source of model behavior because employees look to leadership for direction (Cleary, Walter, Andrew, & Jackson, 2013; Engelbrecht, Wolmarans, & Mahembe, 2017). Leadership behaviors encourage or discourage workplace behaviors and those behaviors tend to cascade downward (Estes & Wang, 2008). No other interpersonal relationship in the workplace is more important than the relationship between the employee and his or her leader (Wei & Si, 2013). Leaders have the responsibility to create an organizational climate with values that inspire, energize, and guide service employees (Wirtz & Jeger, 2016). For instance, a positive or negative organizational climate develops as leadership models behavior, introduces policies, and implements reward systems. Employee observations of what leadership rewards, supports, and expects within the organization become meaningful and shared based on natural workplace interactions (Schneider, Ostroff, Gonzalez-Roma, & West, 2017; Tung et al., 2013). As employees adjust their behavior to meet leaderships' expectations, implicit rules governing behavior emerge to form the organizational service climate (Englebrecht et al., 2017; Tung et al., 2013). A strong organizational service climate formed by leadership indicates leadership has invested in their frontline employees' behaviors because quality employee-customer service encounters drive company revenue (Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Leadership at any level within an organization must envision and define a future state better than the current state of the company

(Davenport, 2015). For instance, leadership must collaborate with employees and determine viable strategies to achieve a desirable end. Leaders will inspire their employees to achieve their goals, remove impediments toward goal attainment, and boost and sustain employees' energy by rewarding success and helping others deal with change (Davenport, 2015). Leaders must understand his or her employees, identify their employees' strengths and weaknesses, cultivate and capitalize on employees' unique abilities, and place his or her employees in positions that match their skill set and job demand (Davenport, 2015; Troy, Justin, Jitendra, & Bharat, 2017). Troy et al. (2017) cited 10 successful strategies of the leadership role:

1. Leaders demonstrate job ownership and believe that he or she is responsible for the success or failure of the company.
2. Leaders lower their expectations of others to self-impose a level of tolerance for employee mistakes.
3. Leaders must motivate staff to achieve excellence which is contingent upon job satisfaction, recognition, personal goals, and achievements.
4. Leaders will assist staff in achieving their goals.
5. Leadership will establish a relationship with their employees and not allow idle time for laziness. A solid supervisor-employee relationship establishes trust which increases employee commitment and productivity.
6. Leaders identify and utilize a variety of techniques to manage staff and workplace problems.

7. Leaders recognize employee knowledge, skills, and abilities and place them where they are most efficient.
8. Leaders are effective in clearly communicating a vision, influencing staff to embrace the vision, and implementing the strategy to achieve the vision.
9. Leaders should identify each employee's strengths and weaknesses. Leaders will carry out the mission by assigning staff with the appropriate skills and capabilities to job assignments where they can shine and benefit the team.
10. Leaders are consistent with company rules, procedures, and methods to ensure optimal workplace performance.

Although Troy et al. (2017) highlighted 10 noteworthy and important approaches to the leadership role, they failed to discuss actual leadership strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Alternatively, Harold and Holtz (2015) suggested additional considerations for effective leadership, such as HR should evaluate leadership styles during the managerial selection process and screen out passive leaders. Popli and Rizvi (2017) discussed the three leadership styles introduced by Avolio and Bass in 1991. Leadership style refers to a steady pattern of behavior displayed by leadership when engaging with and influencing subordinates. The leadership styles are transformational, transactional, and passive-avoidant. Transformational leaders emotionally stimulate their employees, coordinating a mutual process of elevating his or her subordinates to a higher level of morality and motivation (Namasivayam et al., 2014; Turunc et al., 2013). Transactional leaders are more

traditional in their leadership style. Transactional leaders explain to their employees what he or she expects in the workplace relative to behavior and have subsequent transaction-like encounters, distributing rewards or compensation for employee behavioral compliance (Clinebell, Skudiene, Trijonyte, & Reardon, 2013; Turunc et al., 2013). Passive-avoidant leaders demonstrate a pattern of inaction and avoidance of decision-making, neglecting workplace problems and failing to model or reinforce appropriate behaviors (Harold & Holtz, 2015; Turunc et al., 2013). Passive avoidant leaders further contribute to employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Desmet, Hoogervorst, and Van Dijke (2015) contended that leadership oftentimes fail to address employees who engage in service sabotage especially if the organization is operating within a competitive market. Regardless of industry or leadership style, leaders should develop a zero-tolerance policy for deficient employee behavior to eliminate any ambiguity when managerial intervention is necessary (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Self and Self (2014) explained when leaders ignore and retain employees with deficient workplace behaviors, it causes multiple negative effects such as a high-turnover rate of valued employees, increased workplace mistakes, poor or delayed decisions, missed deadlines, and potential lawsuits.

The retention of employees with CWB or deficient behavior stifles a retailer's competitiveness. As a countermeasure, management could use funds for employee training and development, research and development, equipment and software updates, enhanced compensation packages, or rewards programs. Contrarily, organizations

exhaust funds daily on the retention of marginally performing employees (Self & Self, 2014). Notably, several authors have expanded the conversation to include senior leaders as sources of deficient behavior (Brandebo, Nilsson, & Larsson, 2016; Cleary et al., 2013; Crossman, 2010; Desmet et al., 2015; Foulk, Woolum, & Erez, 2016; Kang et al., 2015; Leary et al., 2013; Self & Self, 2014). In any case of deficient behavior whether frontline employee or leadership, Gilbert (1978) declared:

For any given accomplishment, a deficiency in performance always has as its immediate cause a deficiency in a behavior repertory, or in the environment that supports the repertory, or in both. But its immediate cause will be found in a deficiency of the management system. (p. 76)

### **Considering Environmental Supports**

The national customer satisfaction score is at its lowest score after eight consecutive quarters of decline (ACSI, 2016). Consumer spending and retail sales were disappointing considering the weakening of customer satisfaction (ACSI, 2017). Historically, many scholars discussed the frequency of poor customer service encounters, the importance of consumer satisfaction, and the impact it has on the retail industry (Aboyassin & Abood, 2013; Estes & Wang, 2008; Desmet et al., 2015; Karimi et al., 2014; Saravakos & Sirakoulis, 2014; Shin et al., 2017). The significance of effective leadership strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters is critical within the retail industry (Tseng & Wu, 2014; Wirtz & Jerger, 2016). Addressing deficient employee behavior is a learnable skill (Keegal, 2013).

Leaders must build a congenial relationship with their employees, demonstrating respect and sensitivity to their needs (Karimi et al., 2014). Gilbert recognized that most leaders immediately attribute deficient performance to motives or capacity. Gilbert argued otherwise, declaring most employees have both sufficient motives and capacity for exemplary performance. Leadership should consider environmental supports before considering that an employee does not care, or they are imperceptive. To improve human performance, Gilbert focused on correcting the environment as opposed to changing the person. Gilbert provided a systematic and systemic method to highlight the causes of performance gaps by distinguishing between an individual's repertory of behavior and the environment (Chevalier, 2014). Gilbert's six-dimensional behavior engineering model has six explorable factors, which require manipulation to improve deficient behavior. The six factors to improve deficient behavior are (a) data, (b) instruments, (c) incentives, (d) knowledge, (e) capacity, and (f) motives (Winiecki, 2015). Factors 1 through 3 are environmental supports or factors that may improve or impede the worker's performance. Alternatively, factors 4 through 6, knowledge, capacity, and motives directly relate to the employee's repertory of behaviors toward their job performance. Gilbert numbered the six dimensions according to his suggested sequence of analysis or leadership's consideration.

Gilbert explained the most influence to achieve employee performance improvement lies within environmental supports, which are solely leadership's

responsibility. Within the data subcategory of environmental support, Gilbert (1978) listed:

- Leadership must provide relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of the employee's performance.
- Leadership must provide descriptions to the employee regarding his or her expectations for the employee and their performance in the workplace.
- Leadership must provide a clear and relevant guide to adequate performance.

Like the ROM model, Gilbert detailed the first three elements within the data subcategory that leadership should consider before the instrumentation subcategory such as the design of workplace tools, ensuring that materials scientifically match employee needs.

Consequently, the process improvement initiatives referenced appropriate on-the-job tools to complement or match human factors. After careful consideration of the first two subcategories, leadership should then consider the third environmental subcategory of incentives. Gilbert listed:

- Leadership should ensure adequate financial incentives are available contingent upon employee performance.
- As an alternative, leadership should include the availability of nonmonetary incentives.
- Leadership should ensure that advertisement of career development opportunities and ensure accessibility to employees.

Gilbert (1978) resolved if leadership effectively corrected the environmental supports to include information, tools, incentives, and training and still did not achieve worthy performance, then and only then should leadership focus on the employee's reparatory of behavior, while not ignoring the need for improvement in the organization's future selection and the recruitment process.

### **Transition**

In Section 1, I introduced the problem statement, purpose statement, conceptual framework, and literature review. While acknowledging employee behaviors in the workplace have a significant influence on quality customer service encounters, leadership strategies have an equally important role in determining employee behaviors. Exploring leadership strategies to encourage employee behaviors that consistently result in quality service encounters requires long-term commitment from leadership (Keeble-Ramsay & Armitage, 2014). Senior management must keep in mind that deficient behavior is not exclusive to frontline employees but can influence leadership as well.

Researchers have long recognized Gilbert's BEM as one of the earliest and best-validated human performance technology models for improving performance in the workplace, whether frontline employees or leadership (Binder, 2017; Turner, 2016; Winiecki, 2015). The findings of this study may interest other retail leaders and service managers that seek effective strategies to encourage employee behaviors that achieve quality service encounters, and foster consumer satisfaction and customer loyalty. Retail

leaders and service managers that achieve quality service encounters benefit from increased profitability and industry competitiveness (Rod et al., 2016).

In the literature review, I focused on Gilbert's BEM, Gilbert's third management theorem, process-centered improvement initiatives, ROM, continuous quality initiatives, Six Sigma, Lean Management, Weber's bureaucracy theory, organizational climate and the leadership role, and environmental supports. In Section 2, I detailed the role of the researcher, the research method and design, and the data collection process. In Section 3, I presented the findings of this research study and what I believed this study may contribute not only to the retail industry, but to all business entities that depend on quality service encounters and consumer satisfaction to achieve competitiveness within the service industry.

## Section 2: The Project

In this section, I present the project methodology. Following a restatement of the purpose, I describe the role of the researcher, participant information, and justification for choosing the specific research method and design. Details regarding the study population and sampling, ethical guidelines, data collection instruments, data analysis, and reliability and validity complete the section.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage the quality of consumer service encounters. The target population consisted of seven midlevel department store leaders, employed by five top U.S. retailers, who implemented strategies that improved the quality of consumer service encounters. By consistently achieving quality service encounters, the implications for social change are overall consumer satisfaction and increased civility in the retail industry benefiting both shareholders and the neighboring communities.

### **Role of the Researcher**

A qualitative researcher serves as the primary instrument for the data collection process (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers guide and control several aspects of the data collection process to achieve high ethical standards, gain a firm grasp of the phenomena, and present clear procedures for protecting human subjects (Yin, 2014). Yin claimed that a good case study researcher possesses a strong professional competence and

demonstrates a responsibility to scholarship. Competent researchers ensure data accuracy, strive for credibility, stay current on their topic, and understand the significance of disclosing the need for methodological qualifiers and limitations to their work (Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Yin 2014). I was not familiar with the research locations, and there were no existing relationships with any of the participants. I had no familiarity with the research topic other than being a consumer who is passionate about quality service encounters and exemplary customer service within the service industry.

I carefully followed the guidelines of the Belmont Report (1979), ensuring beneficence by (a) doing no harm, (b) maximizing possible benefits, (c) minimizing possible harms to the participants by safeguarding confidentiality, and (d) avoiding any form of deception in the study. I pledged fairness and respect to each participant by prudently considering what material to include in this study, protecting against any foreseeable harm.

To mitigate potential personal biases, I bracketed my perspective to prevent viewing data through a personal lens. Bracketing is a method that consists of setting aside one's views and beliefs regarding what one already knows about a subject throughout the investigation (Chan, Fung, & Chien, 2013). Chan et al. (2013) opined that bracketing is a means of increasing the validity of the data collection and analysis process. Documenting and recording all the participants' responses during the interview process will eliminate researcher's biases by acknowledging unrecognized thoughts and views (Yin, 2014).

Interviews are one of the most important sources of case study evidence (Kallio, Pietilä, Johnson, & Kangasniemi, 2016). There are three types of interview formats: structured, unstructured, and semistructured. In the structured interview, a researcher adheres to an interview schedule, asking all the participants the same questions, in the same order and using consistent wording (Doody & Noonan, 2013). Although the structured interview reduces researcher bias and subjectivity, it limits the participant's ability to elaborate on the topic (Doody & Noonan, 2013). The unstructured interview is nondirective and flexible, whereas the researcher opens with a very broad question, and the participant's responses generate follow up questions. The valuable aspect of an unstructured interview is the researcher can probe the participant's response to gain an understanding of their experiences and the meaning they make of those experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016).

### **Participants**

The participant eligibility criterion for this study were midlevel leaders who worked for specific retailers with at least three years of supervisory experience and increased sales resultant of their leadership strategies. This study included seven midlevel department store leaders from five top U.S. retailers. In December 2016, the American Customer Satisfaction Index (ACSI) report acknowledged these retailers for having exemplary customer service initiatives and increased sales, despite the widespread and nationwide decline of consumer satisfaction and poor customer service encounters.

Upon gaining Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, I searched LinkedIn, identifying individuals with the professional job titles of sales manager, area manager, store manager, customer service manager, sales team manager, and assistant store manager at select department store retailers. I identified 75 potential candidates for this study and sent them LinkedIn connection requests. Of the 75, forty midlevel leaders from five top U.S. retailers accepted my LinkedIn connection requests. Once a connection accepts your request, you can inbox them and view their email address and telephone number if posted. Next, I sent an email which included a copy of the participant recruitment letter (Appendix A), detailing the reason for my contact and the purpose and the parameters of the study. Initially, all preliminary communication and correspondence was via email. Of the forty LinkedIn connections, seven agreed to participate in this study. Five participated in face-to-face interviews, while the remaining two participated via telephone.

To establish a working relationship with each participant, I introduced myself, explained the purpose of the study, and the conditions of the consent form. I provided each candidate my contact information and explained their participation was completely confidential, voluntary, and they withdraw from the process at any time. I explained the risks and benefits of participating in the study and assured each participant of my availability during the interview process.

## **Research Method and Design**

### **Research Method**

There is an ongoing debate amongst scholars regarding quantitative and qualitative research methods (Campbell, 2014; Caruth, 2013; Kahlke, 2014; Makrakis & Kostoulas-Makrakis, 2016). Alternatively, some theorists determined the distinctions between quantitative and qualitative methods are misleading, and scholars should avoid debates (Davies & Hughes, 2014). Therefore, for the sake of this study, I adopted Corbin and Strauss' (2015) qualitative and quantitative definitions: Qualitative research is an open, emerging, and flexible method of discovery, while quantitative research involves objective measurements that use numerical and statistical analysis to support or refute a hypothesis. To answer the research question for this study, the quantitative approach would stifle emerging data opportunities because quantitative researchers rely on numerical data to examine relationships and differences between variables through closed-ended questions (Bettany-Saltikov & Whittaker, 2013). Pietkiewicz and Smith (2014) determined quantitative researchers are most concerned with counting occurrences, volumes, or the size of associations between entities. Equally unbecoming is the mixed method approach, which is a combination of qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Caruth (2013) indicated mixed method research is more advanced, time consuming, extensive, and may require the use of a research team. Mixed method researchers utilize this method for large-scale, complex projects that have extended timelines for completion (Caruth, 2013; Davies & Hughes, 2014). Most career

researchers use the mixed method approach to highlight a circular sequence of exploration, measurement, and qualitative analysis to place an emphasis on the scientific findings (Davies & Hughes, 2014; Hayes, Bonner, & Douglas, 2013). Some researchers argue that good research studies involve sophisticated methodologies; in contrast, a good study is simply comprehensive and clear (Davis & Hughes, 2014; Yin, 2014, 2016). Thus, in the interest of time, clarity, and practicality, the qualitative approach was the justifiable approach to answering the research question for this study. The qualitative researcher has generous research opportunities and a level of flexibility not readily offered by any other method (Dubois & Gadde, 2014; Hyett, Kenny, & Dickson-Swift, 2014). My intentions for this study were to identify what midlevel leadership strategies prevent and correct employee behavior that sabotages quality service encounters. Using the qualitative method, I interviewed and inquired of midlevel leaders their strategies used in their natural environment while gathering a variety of data to understand a phenomenon.

### **Research Design**

The research design is the logic that links the collected data and the study's findings to the primary research question (Yin, 2014). When probing a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context and introducing a research question that focuses on the *what*, the case study design is the most suitable design because the researcher must capture emerging data using a flexible method of discovery (Corbin & Strauss, 2015; Davis & Hughes, 2014; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013). While answering the

research question and using the case study design, the researcher's flexible method of discovery to obtain methodological triangulation included semistructured interviews, a review of company documents and artifacts, and direct observations of physical artifacts such as pertinent technological equipment, tools, and instruments. A major strength of the case study data collection process is the opportunity to use multiple sources as evidence (Yin, 2014, 2016). Yin (2014) and Houghton et al. (2013) stated case studies based on multiple sources of evidence are higher in quality, as opposed to other studies based solely on single sources of information.

Other designs considered for this study included phenomenological, narrative, and ethnography. In a phenomenological design, the researcher must focus on an interpretive analysis of lived experiences and capture the uniqueness of an event's meaning to participants (Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, & Cheraghi, 2014). After data collection, the researcher converts the individual's statements of lived experiences into words while categorizing themes and finally documenting a comprehensive description of the phenomena (Sanjari et al., 2014). Yin (2016) argued phenomenological researchers attend not only to the events studied but also to their political, historical, and sociocultural contexts. For this reason, the phenomenological design did not fit my proposed study. In a narrative design, the researcher chronicles life experiences of a single event or series of events for a small number of individuals and retells their story (Campbell, 2014; Petty et al., 2012). Traditionally, participants' narratives represent the only data used in the study (Caine, Estefan, & Clandinin, 2013; Yin, 2016). Thus, the

narrative design was not suitable for this study because it limits and restricts an explorative probe of a phenomenon in its real-world context. A researcher that employs the ethnographic design can produce empirically, theoretically rich studies regarding complex social problems, while devoting extended periods in the field studying members of a cultural group in their natural setting (Campbell, 2014; Davies & Hughes, 2014). For this study, there were time limitations, and field observations required corporate approval and were not an option for this study. Therefore, the ethnography design was not suitable for this study. In considering the various designs, De Massis and Kotlar (2014) claimed case study designs are “particularly relevant to organizations and management studies because the researcher promotes an understanding of the dynamics present within single settings by using a variety of lenses, which allows for multiple facets of the phenomenon to be revealed and understood” (p. 16). The case study design was most appropriate for this study because the researcher can initiate a comprehensive exploration within an organization, probing a contemporary phenomenon in its real-world context, while taking into account emerging data and referencing multiple data sources for a clear and convincing case study (Houghton et al., 2013).

To achieve data saturation, Marshall, Cardon, Poddar, and Fontenot (2013) recommended 15 to 30 interviews for qualitative case studies. In contrast, Fusch and Ness (2015) argued data saturation is not attainable based on the number of participants per se, but more concerned with the depth of the data. For this study, I initially planned to interview five midlevel retail leaders. There is no one-size-fits-all method to reach data

saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Therefore, to ensure I achieved data saturation, I added two additional participants resulting in seven semistructured interviews. At this point, it was apparent there was no additional information emerging. Fusch and Ness (2015) explained data saturation is the point in the data collection stage when there is no new data, no new themes, and no new coding.

### **Population and Sampling**

Several scholars argued qualitative methods of research can achieve depth and understanding using smaller sample sizes (Chowdhury, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013; Palinkas, Horwitz, Green, & Wisdom, 2015; Thomas, 2015). The scope and setting for this multiple case study initially included a sample size of five midlevel department store leaders from three different department retailers. To ensure data saturation, two additional midlevel retail leaders from two different retail stores agreed to participate in this study. Participant recruitment occurred using the professional networking application called LinkedIn. I identified potential candidates with sales manager, area manager, store manager, customer service manager, sales team manager, and assistant store manager titles who met the eligibility criterion of at least three years supervisory experience and boasted sales experience. I purposefully selected and identified midlevel retail leaders who worked for specific retailers recognized by ACSI. Purposive sampling is a sampling method used to gain access to participants who are well versed in the topic and can share the most relevant and rich data regarding the phenomenon (Poulis, Poulis, & Plakoyiannaki, 2013).

Data saturation is the point in the data collection stage when there is no new data, no new themes, and no new coding (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To achieve data saturation, I increased my sample size from five midlevel leaders to seven midlevel leaders. After the seventh semistructured interview, it was evident there were no data, no new themes. I achieved data saturation for this study.

### **Ethical Research**

The Walden IRB consists of faculty and staff members that are responsible for ensuring all institutional research complies with the university's ethical standards, U.S. federal regulations, and any applicable international guidelines (Johnson, 2014; Walden University, 2016; Yin, 2016). I received IRB approval #02-21-18-0522911 prior to conducting the research for this study.

The U.S. Public Health Service required four main procedures the IRB must ensure each researcher's study include: (a) informed consent, (b) assessment of harms, risks, benefits, and the effort to minimize any threat or harm, (c) equitable selection of participants to ensure no unfair exclusions or inclusions of any groups or person, and (d) confidentiality of all information relative to the participants involved (Yin, 2016). Similarly, the Belmont Report (1978) is a statement of basic ethical principles and guidelines aimed to resolve ethical problems surrounding research involving human subjects (Office of Human Research Protections, 2016; Yin 2014, 2016). The Office of Human Research Protections (2016) specifically acknowledged the principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice. Cugini (2015) explained respect for persons

entailed two ethical considerations: respect for autonomy and protection for persons with reduced autonomy. Beneficence is the ethical obligation to maximize benefits and minimize harm or “do no harm” (Cugini, 2015, p. 54). Justice is the principled obligation to treat each participant equally: providing participants protection from research related risks and access to research related benefits (Quinn, Kass, & Thomas, 2013).

LinkedIn served as a model platform to identify information-rich candidates for this study. After searching professional job titles and identifying 75 potential candidates for this study, I successfully established 40 professional connections from five major retailers who accepted my LinkedIn connection requests. Forty candidates received a copy of the participant recruitment letter via email which included the purpose of the study, their role in the study, and information about why the study is important. Of the forty LinkedIn connections, seven expressed interest and agreed to participate in the study. The first five LinkedIn participants worked in the North Texas area and scheduled face-to-face interview dates. To achieve data saturation, I included two additional semistructured interviews using LinkedIn connections.

LinkedIn is a professional networking application that provided access to the midlevel leaders who worked for select department retailers. I used their posted email accounts and later gained access to their telephone numbers. After which all communication and correspondence was via telephone and email until the scheduled interview date. The participants in North Texas received a hard copy of the participant recruitment letter and informed consent. To reinforce confidence and trustworthiness, I

explained to all the participants, the measures I would take to ensure confidentiality, the significance of their role in this study, and highlighted their professional contributions towards improving future leaders and their leadership strategies within the retail industry.

For each interview type, I used the interview guide (Appendix C) to ensure a consistent format during each interview process. I discussed several key elements of the interview process with each participant.

- The interview process may take approximately 30 minutes with the first 5 minutes being a review of the informed consent letter (Appendix B).
- Explained the purpose of the informed consent letter, advising the participant that their participation was voluntary, and they may stop the interview or withdraw from the interview process anytime by sending an emailed notification of withdrawal.
- Identified the risks of their participation and highlighted my efforts of mitigating those risks by ensuring confidentiality and naming all participants using a pseudonym (Participant 1-7).

If a participant chose to withdraw from the study, the researcher destroyed all information related to that participant without prejudice. Upon completion of this study, all informational files will contain codes for participant confidentiality and archived in a fireproof locked cabinet for 5 years. After the five-year period, my intentions are to destroy the data by shredding documents and erasing all digital files, which will safeguard the confidentiality of each participant.

There were several measures taken in this case study to ensure participants' ethical protections of beneficence, justice, and informed consent. The researcher followed procedures, such as adhering to the formal process of seeking approval to conduct research while minimizing potential harm (psychological, emotional, social, and financial) and developing strategies to eliminate or mitigate such risks (Johnson, 2014; Walden University, 2016; Yin, 2016). Another measure taken was using pseudonyms to protect the participants' confidentiality and the non-usage of company names to remove the likelihood of identifying contributing organizations (Johnson, 2014). By confidentially labeling transcripts and all electronic data; saving information on one specific flash drive and storing it in a locked file cabinet will ensure data security (Walden University, 2016; Yin, 2016). The researcher is the sole individual with the key and access to the locked file cabinet to prevent a data security breach. The researcher is the primary individual interacting with each participant during the research process to preserve autonomy while treating each participant equally and providing them protection from research related risks and access to research related benefits.

### **Data Collection Instruments**

The researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument through all phases of qualitative research due to human involvement and the high contextual requisite for case studies (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Houghton, Casey, Shaw, & Murphy, 2013; Sarma, 2015). Customarily, interviews are the primary data source in the case study design (Doody & Noonan, 2013; Peters &

Halcomb, 2015; Yin, 2014, 2016). Qualitative researchers systematically collect, organize, and interpret textual material elicited through talk or conversation (Dubois & Gadde, 2014; Grossoehme, 2014). O'Brien, Harris, Beckman, Reed, and Cook (2014) explained qualitative researchers gain understanding from an individual or group's perspectives and experiences regarding a social phenomenon while in their natural environment. Qualitative case studies have the most interesting research opportunities due to constant human interactions (O'Brien et al., 2014). For this study, I conducted seven semistructured interviews with seven midlevel retail leaders from five different major retailers. During the interview process, the interview guide provided a sense of order and structure throughout the interview process. Each participant agreed to audio recording their interview session. Afterward, I provided each participant a copy of their interview summary for member checking. Birt et al. (2016) claimed when researchers perform member checking, he or she validates, verifies, or assesses the trustworthiness of qualitative results.

### **Data Collection Technique**

The first step of the data collection process for this study followed IRB approval. Semistructured interviews were the primary method used for data collection in this study. Semistructured interviews are the most common method researchers use to achieve data saturation, gain access to rich detailed data, and understand participants' experiences, how they describe those experiences, and the meaning they make of those experiences (Castillo-Montoya, 2016; Doody & Noonan, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Ingham-

Broomfield, 2015; Onwuegbuzie & Byers, 2014). For each candidate I used an interview guide, which included a list of sequential reminders:

1. Thank participant for their time.
2. Advise the participant of the length of the interview.
3. Ensure the participant of the confidentiality requirements to include the use of pseudonyms.
4. Collect informed consent agreement.
5. Ask participant remainder follow up questions.
6. Explain the member checking process and subsequent expectations after the interview process is complete.
7. Conduct closing remarks.

Doody and Noonan (2013) explained that researchers use interview guides to collect similar types of data from all participants and provide a sense of order during the interview process. Another method of data collection are researcher's observations and the organization's online documentation which I used to augment the interview data. Direct observations are the gold standard among qualitative data collection techniques (Morgan, Pullon, Macdonald, McKinlay, & Gray, 2017). De Massis and Kotlar (2014) discussed that a researcher's direct observations advance rich insight into the human, social, and organizational aspect of the company, while company documentation is unobtrusive and provides background details about the organization. Each data source has explicit roles, serving as pieces of a puzzle with each piece contributing to the

researcher's understanding of the whole phenomenon (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). Government and web-based information regarding the company are useful, but one must scrutinize the content for relevancy and inclusion in the study (Yin, 2016).

I used a personal mini audio recorder in the data collection phase to capture the audio of the interview process with each participant's approval. Doody and Noonan (2013) offered that note taking could be distracting and interfere with the interview process. Therefore, it is essential to use high-quality recording equipment that is operational, has a battery pack with extra batteries, and is familiar to the researcher. As a backup to the personal minirecorder, I activated my iPhone 8 voice audio recorder with participant permission. Each candidate understood the precautionary measures and responded informingly to the seven interview questions. During the face-to-face interview process, I took notes being careful not to focus too much on notetaking while staying aware of being impartial and controlling my facial expressions. Researchers should hold back personal comments and facial expressions (Hyden, 2014). On average, each interview (telephone and face-to-face) lasted between 25-30 minutes.

There were seven semistructured interviews conducted in this study. LinkedIn served as the medium to gain access to the respondents. All the participants expressed some level of discomfort with providing company records. Therefore, I augmented data collection using online company records (e.g., company websites, corporate governance and annual reports, company presentations and webcasts, and investor reports), archival data, notetaking, and direct observations to achieve methodological triangulation.

Methodological triangulation is a means for the researcher to substantiate the study's findings and is useful during multiple sources comparisons (Fusch & Ness, 2015). To follow is a detailed account of the data collection process regarding the interview method and subsequent interview encounters.

### **The Interview Process**

After IRB approval, data collection began with seven semistructured interviews with midlevel retail leaders from five top U.S. retailers recognized by the ACSI (2017). Each interview was audio recorded using two recording devices: a Sony mini recorder with back up batteries, and a fully charged iPhone8 with an available charged battery pack. Each participant received a copy of the participant recruitment letter and a copy of the informed consent. I used an interview guide to maintain the structure of each interview. All but three of the seven interviews occurred onsite and averaged 25-30 minutes in length. I verbally thanked each participant for their time and cooperation, advised them of the participant confidentiality, reviewed the informed consent and reminded them of the member checking process. After each interview and leaving each store, I journaled my observations and thoughts for three reasons: (a) to ensure my suspension of judgement regarding the phenomena (b) to keep everything in order and fresh in my mind relative to my personal feelings about the store, the candidate, my perspective, and the environment, and (c) to increase the confidence, congruency, and credibility of this study. Reflexivity is the continuous process of self-reflection that a researcher documents to create awareness of their actions, feelings, and perceptions that

may go otherwise unaddressed or hidden during their research (Amankwaa, 2016; Darawsheh, 2014). For each participant, I prepared a hard copy folder and an electronic file that included each participant's pseudonym, organization, signed consent form, and related notes.

I transcribed the audio using Microsoft Word. Within 24 hours each candidate received an emailed summary of their interview to complete the member checking process. Member checking occurs when the participant reviews the summary of their interview for accuracy (Brit et al., 2016; Houghten et al., 2013).

### **Face-to-Face Interviews**

The face-to-face interviews began with Participant 1 (P1), who works as a store manager for Store 1. After the initial contact on LinkedIn, P1 and I exchanged contact information. P1 was very engaging and informative about her role as a retail leader. P1's interview process lasted 45-minutes. P2 is a sales manager at Store 2. Upon entering the store, I observed lots of excitement and cheerful staff hustling throughout the store. P2 was passionate and emphasized the importance of employee empowerment within the workplace. P2's interview lasted 30 minutes. P3 works as a business manager for Store 3. When entering Store 3, I noticed a quiet lull throughout the store which was nothing like Store 2. P3 stressed the significance of gaining customers through relationship building. P3 was strikingly reserved in some of her responses but offered recommendations for more senior retail leaders to lead by example. At the end of P3's interview, she identified another supervisory associate assigned to a different department who would agree to

serve as a participant. P3's interview lasted 33 minutes. P4 was the outcome of a snowball sample. Snowball sampling consists of selecting a participant resultant of a referral. For instance, in P3's interview, she suggested I speak with another supervisor in a different department, same Store 3. Snowballing is an acceptable practice if it is purposeful, not done out of convenience (Yin, 2016). Yin clarified, if during an interview you learn of another person or person(s) who can make an information-rich contribution to the study then the lead is purposeful. P4 is a sales manager at Store 3. I introduced myself and explained the purpose of my study. I confirmed her eligibility, advised that participation is voluntary and that she may withdraw from the process at any time. P4 was eager to participate and immediately acknowledged and accepted the terms of the participant recruitment letter and signed the informed consent. P4 was joyful and offered a great deal of information. P4 stressed that nonverbal communication is equally important as verbal exchanges. P4 responded to each interview question and this encounter lasted 20 minutes. P5 is a pacesetter manager at Store 3. P5 responded to each interview question with noticeable reservation. To ensure there was sufficient details to include in the study, I asked three follow up questions. P5's interview lasted 20 minutes

### **Telephone Semistructured Interviews**

Uncertain at this time if I reached data saturation with the five face-to-face interviews, I included two additional interviews using respondents from LinkedIn. Both participants requested additional details. I emailed them copies of the participant recruitment letter and informed consent form for their review. P6 and P7 provided their

contact telephone numbers. P6 returned his informed consent, right away, via email stating, “I agree to participate in this study”. P6 was very confident and well versed with retail operations. P6 responded to each interview question and his telephone interview lasted 30 minutes. P7 is a sales manager at Store 5. P7 agreed to the informed consent via email and knowledgably responded to each interview question. P7’s telephone interview lasted 40 minutes.

### **Member Checking**

After completing the semistructured interviews, the next phase of data collection was member checking. Member checking occurs when the participant reviews the summary of their interview for accuracy (Brit et al., 2016; Houghten et al., 2013). Birt et al. (2016) claimed when researchers perform member checking, he or she validates, verifies, or assesses the trustworthiness of qualitative results. Within 24 hours of each semistructured interview, I summarized each participant’s responses and provided the summary to them via email for member checking. Each participant approved their interview summaries after several reminders. By requesting the participants to review and verify the initial interpretations, I confirmed the initial analyses were appropriate.

In using Yin’s (2014) process for data analysis, I had (a) compiled the data, (b) dissembled the data, and (c) reassembled the data. To achieve the final two stages of Yin’s data analysis process, I carefully transcribed all audio recordings and uploaded them into Nvivo 11 Pro for concise data organization towards (d) data interpretation, and finally (e) conclude the data with the identified trends, patterns, and themes.

### **Data Organization Technique**

Organizing the data was the last step in the data collection process. Data organization began after interview transcription and document collection. Participants did not willfully volunteer any company documentation during the interview process. So, an external database of company websites, corporate governance and annual reports, presentations and webcasts, investor notes, training information, organization announcements, and researcher observations were bookmarked and recorded for data analysis purposes. Case study researchers use multiple data sources such as documentation, archival records, observations, and interviews to contribute to the overall trustworthiness of the research findings (Sarma, 2015). However, interview narratives along with other case study data will remain separated from the researcher's interpretations (Yin, 2014). Researchers should create a separate case study database that serves as an orderly compilation of all documentation and fieldwork collected during the study (De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Yin, 2014). An orderly data collection method can lead to stronger data analyses and increase the rigor and reliability of the study (Hyett et al., 2014; Yin, 2016). The main function of a case study database is for data preservation and the ease of information retrieval (Yin, 2014, 2016). After collecting data from the participant recruitment process, recorded interviews, member checking summaries, interview transcriptions, and the textual analysis, I electronically stored the data using Microsoft Word. I saved and stored all Microsoft Word files and other electronic information on a password protected laptop and a password protected jump drive that is

in my care, custody, and control. I protected participant's confidentiality by organizing files with alphanumeric codes (e.g., P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6, and P7). I have the only key for the locked file cabinet. I used Nvivo 11 Pro software for data organization. Nvivo 11 Pro software provides researchers time saving opportunities by cross-referencing and coding uploaded raw data and interview transcriptions into categories and themes (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). After the required 5-year data storage requirement imposed by the IRB, I will shred all hard copy participant data and erase the digital files.

### **Data Analysis**

This qualitative case study consisted of seven semistructured interviews from midlevel retail leaders employed with top U.S. department retailers. The data analyzed for this study included interview transcriptions, company websites, corporate governance and annual reports, company presentations and webcasts, training reports, investor reports, field notes, and researcher observations. Noble and Smith (2014) described data analysis as an interactive process where the researcher systematically searches and analyzes the data to offer a revealing explanation of the phenomena (Noble & Smith, 2014). Houghton, Murphy, Shaw, and Casey (2015) added the objective of data analysis is to rigorously and creatively organize, detect patterns, and identify themes. Yin (2016) argued that qualitative researchers should demonstrate some level of "methodic-ness" in their research (p. 14). Yin introduced a five-step data analysis process for qualitative researchers consisting of (a) data compilation, (b) data disassembly, (c) data reassembly, (d) data interpretation, and (e) drawing a conclusion. Methodic researchers lend a sense

of completeness to their study and avoid unexplained bias or deliberate distortion while carrying out their research (Yin, 2014, 2016). To conduct a high-quality data analysis and from the outset, I utilized all the evidence collected and kept all raw data apart from any interpretation. Since qualitative research is highly textual in nature and allows for the collection of discovery material and unanticipated events, it is critical to (a) check and recheck the accuracy of the data, (b) ensure a thorough analysis rather than cutting corners, and (c) continually monitor data for researcher's bias (Yin, 2016). As a strength, when exploring peoples' experiences, a qualitative researcher may collect and analyze data from six sources of evidence including documents, direct observations, participant observation, archival records, physical artifacts, and interviews (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013; Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2014, 2016). Apart from interview transcriptions, the use of multiple data sources (e.g., interviews, documents, direct observations, participant observation, and archival records) and corresponding textual data was the framework for data compilation. When using multiple data sources, the researcher gains the most important advantage of developing converging lines of inquiry or data triangulation (Kerwin-Boudreau & Butler-Kisber, 2016; Yin, 2014, 2016). Case study researchers use a triangulated research strategy (Cronin, 2014). Yin (2014, 2016) agreed triangulation of evidence establishes research credibility and complementary dimensions of the same phenomena.

Data disassembly consists of breaking down the compiled data into fragments, assigning labels or codes, rearranging the fragments into themes, groupings, and

sequences while cross-referencing similarities with field notes (Yin, 2016). Equally, in the reassembly phase, the researcher must interpret the relationship among the codes, rearrange and recombine the data graphically or in tabular or list formation (Yin, 2014, 2016). Disassembly and reassembly are repetitive and part of a trial-and-error process. During the disassembly phase, I analyzed the interview text using a phenomenological research analysis method called the modified van Kaam method (1966). Moustakas (1994) introduced the modified van Kaam approach to afford novice researchers a framework to extract meaning from each participant's interview and subsequently develop a collective meaning from all the participants. The sequential steps included:

1. Listening to and transcribing each participants interview. This step included listing and grouping each participant's experience
2. Reviewing the transcripts and eliminating unclear comments, filler words (e.g., uhm), and irrelevant responses to the experience in question.
3. Clustering the core themes prior to coding.
4. Identifying the relevant reoccurring (invariant) phrases (constituents) and constructing individual textual descriptions.
5. Building a textual description for each participant by writing summary statements based on the responses.
6. Creating individual structural descriptions based on the previous step while synthesizing the reoccurring phrases and themes.

7. Developing a composite description of the meaning and essences of the experience for the group as a whole.

Apart from Microsoft Word and Excel, I used Nvivo 11 Pro to assist with the disassembly and reassembly phases of the analytic process. Nvivo 11 Pro is a computer software package and a powerful data management tool produced by QSR International. NVivo 11 Pro offers timesaving opportunities by systematically coding, sorting, identifying patterns, developing categories, and tracing linkages amid concepts from transcripts, surveys, field notes, and any other imported documentation (Chowdhury, 2015; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). After applying the modified van Kaam's method of analysis (Moustakas, 1994), using Microsoft Word I imported all textual data into Nvivo 11 Pro, defined an initial set of codes, and ran multiple queries. The most used query features were text, coding, and matrix. Researchers use the text search query throughout the analysis process to identify all occurrences of a word, phrase, or concept. The researcher uses the coding query function to search and retrieve all coding assigned to specific attributes. When using the matrix query function, the researcher checks for rigor and repetition in research (Cronin, 2014). Researchers use matrix queries to present a comparison of multiple nodes and attributes in a numeric table. While using Nvivo 11 Pro, the researcher adds rigor and transparency to his or her study by providing a comprehensive record of all decisions made during the data collection and analysis phase (Houghton et al., 2013). Nvivo 11 Pro software manages the process of data coding, indexing, retrieval, storage, and cataloging, but the

researcher must interpret the social interactions and the contextual complexities resulting from the reassembled data (Houghton et al., 2015; Chowdhury, 2015). The process of data interpretation occurs post computer programming and requires the researcher to make sense of the data to develop a rich and full explanation in response to the research question (Gale, Heath, Cameron, Rashid, & Redwood, 2013; Yin, 2014).

To separate my preconceptions about the study topic, I used bracketing and member checking methods to ensure rigor and trustworthiness of this study. Complete bracketing is an impossible task; however, the researcher should set aside common assumptions about the external world and avoid imposing these assumptions on one's study (Yin, 2016). To make my personal lens explicit, I documented my personal interests and motivations regarding quality service encounters and retail civility. Researchers must document in detail the potential relevance of their personal attributes, motivations, prior interests, and views that may bear in some way on the research (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Another strategy for mitigating preconceived notions of researcher bias is to “bolster” the participant’s understanding of the research process by explaining the stages of data analysis and thematic evolution (Kornbluh, 2015, p. 404). Explaining the stages of data analysis, and how themes evolve, will remove the perception that the researcher may favor specific responses, freeing the participant to openly respond to the interview questions (Kornbluh, 2015).

Houghton et al. (2013) explained member checking happens when case study participants review the summaries of their interview to ensure accuracy. Birt et al. (2016)

claimed when researchers perform member checking, he or she validates, verifies, or assesses the trustworthiness of qualitative results. To conclude the study, Yin (2014) suggested researchers develop a sequence of statements that systematize the data analysis in response to the central research question. In this study, Gilbert's (1978) behavioral engineering model is the theory used in the conceptual framework. I used Nvivo 11 Pro to code data and develop themes and patterns across the multiple data sources. Yin (2016) wrote that the conceptual framework presents the focus of your study. I conducted updated searches for newly published studies to synthesize the findings and analyze data for patterns and key themes that indicated connections between retail employee behaviors, quality service encounters, midlevel retail leadership strategies that led to consumer satisfaction, and customer service sabotage in the retail industry. I analyzed and compared data to new publications and checked for recurring themes and key correlations to validate the findings of this study.

### **Reliability and Validity**

Qualitative researchers primarily collect, analyze, and interpret nonnumeric data that naturally occurs through talk, observations, images, and documents (Wilson, Onwuegbuzie, & Manning, 2016). To portray eminence in qualitative studies, scholars strive to achieve a high level of trustworthiness by properly collecting and interpreting their data, and ensuring their findings and conclusions accurately represent the phenomena in its natural setting (Baillie, 2015; Yin, 2016). Qualitative researchers must somehow demonstrate rigor, so their findings are trustworthy, meaningful, relevant and

applicable within the real-world (Baillie, 2015). Due to the elusiveness of reliability and validity, no researcher can achieve it completely (Yin, 2016). Yet, there are a variety of research techniques to enhance rigor (Baillie, 2015). Below are several techniques introduced by Guba and Lincoln (1980) to establish rigor and strengthen the nature of qualitative inquiry.

### **Reliability**

Yin (2014) introduced four principles of data collection that a qualitative researcher can use to establish the overall validity and reliability of their study. Principle 1: The researcher should use multiple sources of evidence. Using multiple sources of evidence strengthens case study data when there are notable converging lines of inquiry (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Yin, 2016). Converging lines of inquiry or triangulation occur when the researcher corroborates the findings with multiple data sources. Triangulating research will help strengthen construct validity for case studies (Yin, 2013, 2016).

Principle 2: The researcher must create a case study database with (a) evidentiary-based data and (b) researcher's reports. This process will help ensure the researcher organizes and separates each collection and that information is easily retrievable. Having separate collections, a reviewer can evaluate the evidentiary-based data without access to the researcher's notes. Researchers that resist comingling their databases increase the reliability of their study.

Principle 3: The researcher should maintain a chain of evidence. When a researcher maintains a chain of evidence, they ensure no lost evidence through

carelessness or bias. Additionally, an observer can map the origin of any evidence from the initial research question to the case study conclusion. To increase the overall quality, validity, and reliability of a study, the researcher must have a well-maintained chain of evidence (Mariotto, Zanni, & Salati, 2014).

Principle 4: One should exercise care when using data from electronic sources. Electronic information can be overwhelming. Specific authors that dominate written contributions regarding a specific topic may have an interpretive slant or bias (Yin, 2014). Therefore, a researcher must cross check online company reports and associated material with other sources to understand the whole picture. Following Yin's four principles of data collection will make the data collection process explicit, so the results reflect a concern for construct validity and reliability.

### **Reliability**

The reliability of a researcher's study depends on overall data stability (Houghton et al., 2013). The goal of reliability within a study is to minimize the errors and biases (Yin, 2014). Houghton et al. (2013) likened study reliability to study dependability. A later researcher's adherence to documented procedures and interview protocol should yield similar results that are reliable and dependable (Amankwaa, 2016; Cope, 2014; Houghton et al., 2013; Leung, 2015). Morse (2015) argued to achieve reliability through research credibility one must use overlapping methods to achieve research trustworthiness. To address the element of reliability, Grossoehme (2014) and Yin (2014) suggested researchers conduct their study as if an auditor could in principle, repeat the

procedures and arrive at the same results. To achieve reliability in research, multiple scholars recommend some form of comprehensive journaling to include inquiry audits, audit trails, reflexivity journals, personal journals, or diaries (Amankwaa, 2016; Leung, 2015; Yin, 2016). Noble and Smith (2015) stated researchers that consistently record their analytical procedures attain research reliability. For document management and to ensure research reliability (analogous to dependability), I created a case study database with two separate folders in Microsoft Word: an evidentiary-based folder and a researcher's reports folder. I stored my reflexive journal in the researcher's report folder. Darawsheh (2014) claimed a researcher's reflexivity might increase the confidence, congruency, and credibility of the study. Reflexivity is the continuous process of self-reflection that a researcher documents to create awareness of their actions, feelings, and perceptions that may go otherwise unaddressed or hidden during their research (Amankwaa, 2016; Darawsheh, 2014). Another method I used to lend credibility to this study is bracketing. Bracketing is a method that consists of setting aside one's views or beliefs on what one already knows about a subject throughout the investigation (Chan et al., 2013). However, bracketing is not possible without researcher reflexivity. The researcher's awareness of their preconceptions is necessary to prevent undue influence during the interview process.

I used Nvivo 11 Pro, computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS), to assist in managing and synthesizing the collected data. Nvivo 11 Pro is a powerful data management tool, developed to assist researchers with handling, storing,

and managing voluminous data projects (Houghton, Murphy, Meehan, Thomas, Brooker, & Casey, 2016). When using Nvivo 11 Pro, the researcher gains timesaving opportunities with systematically coding, sorting, identifying patterns, developing categories, and tracing linkages amid concepts from transcripts, surveys, field notes, and any other imported documentation (Chowdhury, 2015; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Researchers who use Nvivo 11 Pro add rigor and transparency to their study by providing a comprehensive record of all decisions made during the data collection and analysis phase (analogous to an audit trail) (Houghton et al., 2013; Houghton et al., 2016). An audit trail is a set of comprehensive notes that will outline the decisions made throughout the research process (Houghton et al., 2013). The researcher can use the audit trail as his or her rationale for the methodological and interpretative judgments throughout the study (Houghton et al., 2013).

Member checking or respondent validation is the most crucial tactic for assessing research trustworthiness (Anney, 2014; Baillie, 2015; Kornbluh, 2015). Member checking is actively involving the participants to verify the accuracy of the interview summaries (Amankwaa, 2016; Morse, 2015; Yin, 2016). For this study, I used member checking to achieve research reliability and validity.

### **Validity**

To ensure the validity of a study, a researcher must properly interpret their data, and the conclusion must accurately reflect and represent the real world studied (Yin, 2016). Validity refers to whether a final product is a true portrayal of what it claims to be

(Grossoehme, 2014). Lincoln and Guba (1985) declared the most crucial technique for establishing research validity is member checking (as cited in Amankwaa, 2016). As previously discussed, member checking occurs after data collection or during analysis when the researcher shares the interview summaries with the participants to verify accuracy and ask for any additional contribution or clarification on the topic (Cope, 2014; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Goodell, Stage, & Cooke, 2016). Birt et al. (2016) emphasized participants that perform member checking can validate, verify, and assess the trustworthiness of the researcher's findings. To further strengthen the validity of one's study, Houghton et al. (2013) recommended prolonged fieldwork engagement and persistent observations. Similarly, Maxwell (2013) combined prolonged engagement and persistent observations, stating that intensive long-term fieldwork consists of producing and preparing an in depth understanding of fieldwork situations, including the opportunity to make repeated observations and interviews. Observations consist of systematically watching and recording one or more events, occurrences, interactions, or nonverbal communication to address a research question (Wilson et al., 2016). Prolonged engagement occurs when the researcher remains in the field (with the participant) long enough to gain a full understanding of the phenomena or until the researcher achieves data saturation, and there are no reoccurring themes or additional information (Houghton et al., 2013). To ensure the validity of this study and with the approval of each participant, I audio recorded each interview, while observing and documenting key phrases and corresponding body language during the face-to-face interviews. To

safeguard high-quality data collection efforts, I bracketed my preconceptions about the topic, listened intently, and spoke in modest amounts. Bracketing means suspending one's natural assumptions about the world so that one can understand the phenomenon without prejudice (Finlay, 2014; Sorsa, Kiikkala, & Astedt-Kurki, 2015). I immersed myself in the field and conducted seven semistructured interviews until I undoubtedly achieved data saturation. A researcher achieves data saturation when there is enough data to replicate the study, no new information appears, and further coding is no longer possible (Fusch & Ness, 2015; Marshall et al., 2013). Afterward, the participants received their interview summaries to verify I accurately captured their views. Finally, in my field notes, I explicitly and methodically recorded the steps in the data collection process and linked all evidence to each data source to establish a well-maintained chain of evidence.

### **Credibility**

To achieve a credible study, a researcher must assure proper collection and interpretation of the data. The researcher must ensure the findings and conclusions are accurate and reflect the phenomena studied (Yin, 2016). Sarma (2015) argued research credibility essentially ensures research reliability. For instance, the use of overlapping measures, such as interviews and field visits for data collection, ensures research credibility, which in turn directly addresses research dependability (reliability) (Sarma, 2015). Amankwaa (2016) established that consistency is equivalent to trustworthiness in qualitative studies. Yin (2016) explained researchers must adopt an "attitude" throughout their study to achieve trustworthiness (p. 86). Creating a strong sense of trustworthiness

is the primary way of establishing research credibility. A researcher's explicit and methodical recording of how and why they chose a study site, selected participants, chose data collection methods, and used various techniques to overcome obstacles will aid in building research trustworthiness (Yin, 2016). Applying the principles of triangulation or keeping a "triangulating mind" throughout the study will strengthen its credibility (Yin, 2016, p.87), as well as aid in the attainment of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

Data triangulation is the combination of multiple sources validating the same phenomenon (Cronin, 2014; Yin 2014, 2016). Sarma (2015) postulated triangulation is crucial for the credibility of qualitative research and lends to the overall truthfulness of the research. For this study, I triangulated data sources relying on semistructured interviews, direct observations, historical records, and electronic sources. Electronic information can be overwhelming and may have an interpretive slant or bias when written by specific authors that dominate the contributions regarding a particular topic (Yin, 2014). Therefore, I established limitations on electronic sources, as well as cross checked online material with direct observations and interview candidates to understand the whole picture and ensure accuracy. Member checking satisfies the goal of achieving research reliability, validity, and credibility (Houghton et al., 2013; Sarma 2015; Yin, 2014, 2016). I conducted member checking to achieve research credibility. Again, member checking occurs during data collection or during analysis when the researcher shares the interview summary with the participant to verify accuracy and asks for any

additional contribution or clarification on the topic (Cope, 2014; De Massis & Kotlar, 2014; Goodell et al., 2016).

### **Transferability**

Transferability denotes the degree to which the results of qualitative case study research apply to other contexts with other respondents (Anney, 2014; Noble & Smith, 2015). Cope (2014) claimed to achieve research transferability, a researcher's findings must have meaning to others not involved in the study, and readers can associate the results with their own experiences. Houghton et al. (2013) suggested thick descriptions to increase research transferability. When a researcher makes plain all accounts of the context, from data collection to the results, including examples of raw data, the researcher has achieved thick descriptions (Anney, 2014). A researcher may achieve transferability when using purposive sampling (Anney, 2014). Purposive sampling consists of selecting individuals or groups of individuals that are especially knowledgeable about the phenomenon of interest (Anney, 2014; Palinkas et al., 2015). When using purposive sampling, a researcher focuses on key informants that can answer the research question (Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) countered that deliberately selecting participants with like views do not represent a maximum variation sample. Yin argued that selecting participants with different views can help the researcher avoid bias in their study. Anney (2016) and Palinkas et al. (2015) resolved that in all situations, the researcher's goal is to collect information-rich sources. For this study, I used both purposeful and snowball sampling. I searched LinkedIn and contacted seven midlevel retail leaders that worked for specific

U.S. retailers. I detailed each account of my research and provided examples of raw data including direct quotes from my field notes to substantiate theme development. In doing so, the reader can make informed decisions about the applicability of the findings regarding specific contexts.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability is the degree of neutrality or extent to which the respondent shapes the findings of a study and not that of the researcher through bias, motivation, or interest (Amankwaa, 2016). To achieve confirmability, a researcher uses thick, rich quotes from the interview process and includes specific quotes to move or inspire the reader (Cope, 2014; Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2013). Sarma (2015) explained triangulation could reduce the effects of researcher's bias and lend to confirmability. Anney (2014) and Amankwaa (2016) recommended the use of audit trails, triangulation, and reflexivity journals as additional methods to establish research confirmability.

### **Data Saturation**

To achieve data saturation, one must include enough data to replicate the study with no new data, themes, or coding possibilities appearing (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Researchers who use small sample sizes can achieve data saturation; however, using smaller sample sizes may involve prolonged engagement with each participant (Marshall et al., 2013). Fusch and Ness (2015) argued data saturation is not about the sample size per se but about the depth of the data. It is best for qualitative researchers to select individuals that can provide information-rich interviews (Fusch & Ness; 2015; Roy, Zvonkovic, Goldberg, Sharp, & LaRossa, 2015). For this study, I used purposeful and snowball sampling. Uncertain if I achieved data saturation after five semistructured interviews, I added to additional semistructured interviews using LinkedIn connections. I immersed myself in the field, ensuring prolonged engagement while conducting seven

semistructured interviews until no additional information emerged. Aside from the semistructured interviews, I collected and relied on multiple data sources like direct observations, company websites, corporate governance and annual reports, company presentations and webcasts, training and investor reports. Yin (2016) discussed that applying the principles of triangulation or keeping a "triangulating mind" throughout your study will strengthen the study's credibility (p.87), as well as aid in the attainment of data saturation (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Data triangulation is the combination of multiple sources validating the same phenomenon (Cope, 2014; Cronin, 2014; Sarma, 2015; Yin 2014, 2016).

### **Transition and Summary**

For this qualitative case study, I conducted each step of the research process adhering to the philosophical conventions that inform research standards and signify the critical attributes of sound research. After gaining IRB approval, I systematically and methodically, documented and recorded every step and purposefully selected and interviewed seven midlevel retail leaders from top U.S. department retailers to answer the primary research question: What strategies do some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters?

For Section 3, I uphold the tenets of sound research and present the findings from this study, provide a critical analysis and synthesis of recent studies, and discuss the applicability of the findings respective of today's professional business practices. Properly applying the concepts of this study could contribute to social change by

achieving overall consumer satisfaction, increasing civility in the retail industry, and enhancing financial benefits to both shareholders and neighboring communities.

### Section 3: Application to Professional Practice and Implications for Change

Section 3 begins with an introduction to the study followed by presentation of the findings. The study's applicability to professional practice is discussed, along with implications for social change, some recommendations for action and further research, the researcher's reflection, and the conclusion.

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study was to explore strategies that some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage the quality of consumer service encounters. There were six emergent themes resultant of the data analysis process. The emergent themes coupled with online company documentation was used to triangulate data sources and formed the findings of the study.

#### **Presentation of the Findings**

The overarching research question for this study was: What strategies do some midlevel department store leaders use to prevent and correct retail employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters? A careful analysis brought forth six themes within the findings: (a) make it a special experience; (b) rude and bad attitudes; (c) lead by example and coaching; (d) write-up and suspensions; (e) it starts at the top; and (f) ideal employees in retail. Each participant provided rich information during their interview process and expressed a great deal of passion for their organization, workplace, and the customers they serve; which leads us to the first emergent theme.

**Theme #1: Make it a Special Experience**

Each midlevel leader referenced making the customer service experience special. For interview question 1, participants expressed what a quality customer service encounter entailed. P1 through P6 responded confidently advising all employees are to engage with the customer and ask questions to identify their needs. P1 opined “a quality service encounter is all about respect.” Acknowledging what customers’ needs are and trying to fulfill those needs in the fastest and friendliest way possible. P2 offered “my associates should engage with a customer within 30-60 seconds of entering the floor.” P3 expressed sentiments of not treating patrons as customers but as people while trying to get to know them (relationship building). P6 and P7 mentioned not only is the associate required to go above and beyond for a customer, but the leadership team is equally responsible for carrying out this behavior. Keeping the customer in mind, P7 added “merchandising products so that it is easy for her to shop” is important. Each midlevel leader stressed the importance of quality service encounters and the only way of achieving them is to know your customer. Figure 1 illustrates a Nvivo 11 Pro word cloud of the top 100 words recorded in Question 1 from P1 through P7.



There are rising reports of employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters which prove detrimental to any organization (Anderson & Smith, 2017; Cohen, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2017; Kilian, Steinmann, & Hammes, 2017; Lee et al., 2017; Odunlami et al., 2013). Retail leaders are to influence the behaviors of their employees and are responsible for prohibiting and correcting CWB (Englebrecht et al., 2017).

### **Theme #2: Rude and Bad Attitudes**

When asked what were some employee behaviors that sabotaged quality service encounters in their department, the body language and demeanor of P1-P5 changed. The advantage of face-to-face interviews allowed for direct observations. I observed and heard while noting P1, P3, and P4 inhale deeply with a slight eye roll. The behaviors of participants, P2, P5, P6, and P7 were physically less telling relative to their experiences when employee behaviors are misaligned, but there was a shift in tone and demeanor, nonetheless. For example, the tone of the conversation became firm and pointed. P1 shared she witnessed employees fail to greet customers, not give them respect or one-on-one attention. P2 referenced employees who lacked floor awareness and some employees expecting the customer to come to them as opposed to approaching and greeting the customer. P4 shared her reports of uninviting body language. “For instance, an associate’s arms folded with a bad attitude while ignoring the customer. Oh, my goodness that is the worst thing in the world”. Nonverbal communication is “communication without words” (Das, 2016, p. 199). Das stressed nonverbal communication is equally

significant as verbal communication during a service encounter. P5 and P6 referenced younger employees that really don't want to be in the workplace. P6 critiqued the younger generation and their proclivity to communicate through text messaging, spending extensive amounts of time on electronic devices, limiting their socialization skills which negatively impacts the workplace and quality service encounters. P6 and P7 broaden the scope of sabotaging employee behaviors by discussing that stores have less staff compared to times past. P1, P3, P4, P5, and P6 used the words *bad* and *attitude(s)* frequently while responding to interview question number 2.

Several scholars agreed with each participant's descriptions of sabotaging behaviors or CWBs, adding employee withdrawal, tardiness, misuse of time, fiddling with cell phones, spreading rumors, intentionally working slow, and poor quality of work (Chernyak-Hai & Tziner, 2014; Cohen, 2016; Dischner, 2015; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2017; Omotayo, Olubusayo, Olalekan, & Adenike, 2015; Puni, Agyemang, & Asamoah, 2016; Samnani et al., 2014). Omotayo et al. (2015) prepared an exceptional article detailing some of the causes of employee sabotaging behaviors such as unfair treatment, job dissatisfaction, intention to quit the organization, job stress, poor remuneration, social pressure, and conflict. Aside from what causes CWB, what are some leadership strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters?

### **Theme 3: Lead by Example and Coach**

When asked what preventive strategies you use to ensure consistent employee behaviors that foster quality service encounters, training ranked the #1 response. Each participant underlined training as a leadership strategy to ensure every employee strives to achieve quality service encounters with every transaction. P1 stated “training is a continuous effort. Daily and ongoing. Training is a preventative in the workplace and leadership need to model the expected behavior”. P2 mentioned training and coaching but focused more so on having a supportive working environment. P2 avowed when supervisors support their staff, “it empowers the employees, and as a result, they will use good judgment and take good care of the customers”. P3 highlighted her company wholly encourages employee training to ensure that all employees have advanced product knowledge. P3 added that leadership should model fairness and honesty which is another important strategy to gain employee respect and consistency with quality service encounters. P4 stated systematic employee coaching, making all her employees aware of what they are supposed to do because they don’t know what they don’t know. P5 outlined the importance of leading by example and letting staff know what they need to do. “Where they are weak, coach them and make them strong” (Participant 5). P6 firmly declared leading by example is paramount. Model the behaviors that he wants to see. Regularly he walks the floor, greeting customers and making sure staff are well. He stressed routine communication and coaching in the moment are primarily his methods for ensuring staff provides consistent quality service encounters.

In reviewing and linking each stores' online reports, multiple forms of documentation confirmed extensive training strategies, brand promises, mentoring programs, company culture reports, and employee handbooks supporting P1 through P7's claims. Direct observations, online references, and semistructured interviews aided in achieving data saturation and methodological triangulation. One retailer has a program that provides charitable assistance to their employees after a life setback such as personal illness, a death in the family, or other situation. Another retailer boasts six company employee training and development programs for their associates' personal and professional growth. Brinkerhoff (2015) regarded training as a method to make employees capable but it does not indubitably lead to adequate job performance nor will training achieve 100% impact. Gilbert (2007) confessed nothing is more critical to creating competence than establishing clear, valuable, and measurable goals for an employee. To achieve consistent quality service encounters, leadership must be able to manage or engineer employee behavior.

#### **Theme 4: Write-Up and Suspensions**

When asked what corrective strategies you use when an employee's behavior disregards the application of routine workplace training and leadership coaching, P1 through P5 grew visibly concerned and somewhat apprehensive when responding to this question. During the face-to-face interviews, visual cues were telling in that the participants personalized their experiences, mentally recalling real and familiar instances with certain employees whose behaviors disregarded their training and coaching. P1

indicated she only had one that was incorrigible and the leadership strategy she used started with an in-depth, one-on-one conversation about what she expected in the workplace. Next, she showed him a training video in which he signed documentation that he viewed the video. P1 established a timeline and a follow up conversation to discuss his progress. Meanwhile, she monitored and observed him. When his behavior did not change, documented write ups began the suspension and demotion process which eventually lead to termination. P2's leadership strategy was slightly different. His leadership approach consisted of continuous encouragement and support. However, if the egregious behavior continued, P2 stated a formal meeting would occur. Notably, P2 advised he does not like to do write ups but stated he would follow the requirements of the HR department. The responses of P3-P7 aligned with P1's response. Generally, employees are more satisfied with leadership that discipline employees who demonstrate CWBs, are fair and respectful to their employees, and who are trustworthy (Englebrecht et al., 2017).

#### **Theme 5: It Starts at the Top**

While discussing barriers and challenges experienced by P1 through P7 when implementing strategies to prevent and correct behaviors, the employee themselves seemed the primary barrier or challenge. P1 expressed her main barrier is the employee with a bad attitude who refuses to comply, speaks while you are speaking, and always have a retort for every comment or instruction. P1 shared a story about a young employee who had personal issues, and she brought her frustrations to work every day, repeatedly

offending customers. P1 admitted to taking the employee to the side, coaching her on workplace expectations relative to customer service. P1 added after learning the employee's struggle; she suggested the employee "pray about the matter but leave it in the parking lot until the end of the day because God did not create humans to be angry." P2 introduced leadership as a workplace challenge. P2 resolved some causes of CWB are leadership focusing exclusively on the numbers and not the people. If leadership encouraged and supported staff more often, they will achieve their expected outcome, and customers will continue to come back. P3 recognized employees with bad attitudes, who don't care and really don't want to work, as huge issues in the workplace. P4 attested that humans are creatures of habit and can be barriers to themselves. Like P1, P5 had one employee that was incorrigible. P5 recollected, "He was negative. Simply a bad employee who didn't listen". After multiple warnings, P5 performed the necessary documentation and referred him to HR for termination. Like P1 through P5, P6 articulated disengaged employees are the main challenges in the workplace. "Wrong person, wrong job; wrong person, wrong company" (Participant 6). P1, P2, P3 and P6 expanded the discussion asserting senior management must model the behaviors they want to see. P1 and P2 stated "positive workplace behaviors start at the top with senior management. Expecting others to demonstrate behaviors that they themselves fail to portray is contradictory." Several scholars agree with P1 and P2. Leaders cannot expect certain behaviors from their subordinates if they do not demonstrate the behaviors themselves (Englebrecht et al., 2017; Mo & Shi, 2018). Each participant shared what

behaviors and traits an ideal employee should have which leads to the final emerging theme.

### **Theme 6: Ideal Employees in Retail**

In discussing employees as barriers to themselves in the workplace, each participant highlighted behaviors and traits that employees should demonstrate when faced with corrective actions. P1 and P5 mentioned having one employee that was unresponsive to coaching and redirection, noting that most employees straightened up after a warning of suspension or demotion. Ideal employees are respectful towards all levels of management according to P1. P2 felt like most employees should understand the importance of making every service encounter special because the customer did not have to patronize their store. P3 stated that ideal employees should be personable. P4 voiced ideal employees will know their job and know the product. Akin to P3, P5 believes that employees should know how to engage with people. All participant responses overlapped when describing ideal employees as outgoing, personable, resourceful, and aware of how to engage with their customers. P6 concluded “retail is a people business, and if you do not like engaging with others, you are in the wrong business.” P1 and P3 resolved “if senior management does not care about his or her people, then the whole place falls apart.”

### **Application to Professional Practice**

The conceptual framework for this study is Gilbert’s behavioral engineering model (BEM) which is an observation-based approach to improving employee

performance. The specific framework element for this study was Gilbert's (2007) third theorem of deficient performance (management theorem). Gilbert argued deficient performance is a direct action of deficient behavior which is most likely due to a deficiency in leadership (Winiiecki, 2015). Researchers have long recognized Gilbert's BEM (see Figure 2) as one of the earliest and best-validated human performance technology models for improving performance in the workplace, whether frontline employees or leadership (Binder, 2017; Turner, 2016; Winiiecki, 2015).

	<b>Information</b>	<b>Instrumentation</b>	<b>Motivation</b>
<b>Environmental Supports</b>	<i>Data</i> 1. Relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of performance 2. Descriptions of what is expected of performance 3. Clear and relevant guides to adequate performance	<i>Resources</i> 1. Tools and materials of work designed scientifically to match human factors	<i>Incentives</i> 1. Adequate financial incentives made contingent upon performance 2. Non-monetary incentives made available 3. Career-development opportunities
<b>Person's Repertory of Behavior</b>	<i>Knowledge</i> 1. Systematically designed training that matches the requirements of exemplary performance 2. Placement	<i>Capacity</i> 1. Flexible scheduling of performance to match peak capacity 2. Prosthesis 3. Physical shaping 4. Adaptation 5. Selection	<i>Motives</i> 1. Assessment of people's motives to work 2. Recruitment of people to match the realities of the situation

Figure 2: Gilbert's Behavior Engineering Model. From *Human Competence: Engineering Worthy Performance* (p. 88), by T. F. Gilbert, 1978, San Francisco, CA: Pfeiffer. Copyright 2007 by the International Society for Performance Improvement. Reprinted with permission.

Gilbert (2007) included factors that affected employee performance, distinguishing between environmental factors influenced by management and individual factors controlled by the employee. The three environmental factors are data, instruments, and incentives. Factors controlled by the employee, otherwise known as the repertory of behavior, are knowledge, capacity, and motives. Gilbert included six subcategories for environmental support and employee behavior: information, instrumentation, motivation, knowledge, capacity, and motives listed respectively.

In Gilbert's model, worthy and exemplary performance is resultant of cooperative interaction between employee behaviors (knowledge, capacity, and motives) and environmental supports (information, resources, and incentives) (Crossman, 2010). To engineer performance, a manager must be able to deal with behavior; and *all* leaders regardless of their titles are responsible for engineering employee performance (Gilbert, 2007). The transaction between employee behavior and accomplishment is what Gilbert called *performance*. P1 through P7 reported when employee behaviors sabotage a customer service experience, they coach in the moment, listen to the employee's perspectives, provide clear objectives to correct, observe and monitor, then provide feedback. The participants' reports of dealing with employees' CWBs are exemplary and satisfies Gilbert's first dimension regarding environmental supports. The data category includes (a) providing the employee relevant and frequent feedback about the adequacy of performance, (b) providing descriptions of supervisory performance expectations, and (c) providing clear and relevant guides to adequate performance. Gilbert (2007) found if

an employee's behaviors do not improve, leadership typically resolve "the employee does not care", or the "the employee has the wrong attitude" (Gilbert, 2007, p. 74). To take measure of a human being, one must consider his or her personality and the complexities of human behavior (Catania & Laties, 1999; Namin, 2017).

All the respondents for this study conveyed they understood their employees and respected their learning styles. Each participant recommended training as an initial response to failed service encounters. P1, P2, P3, P5, and P6 spoke of giving employees at least three chances to correct their behaviors. P1 and P2 spoke extensively about building a supportive learning environment, style-flexing, and empowering their staff. When asked what strategies do you use when an employee's behavior disregards the application of routine workplace training and leadership coaching, each participant referenced write ups, suspensions, demotions, and terminations. However, P2 specifically stated, "I would let them know that I am on their side and I want to make sure this behavior is not repeated. So that they feel comfortable enough to know that I have their back and it's not something that is reprimanding".

In the BEM model, Gilbert suggested moving to the second category of the environmental support field which is instrumentation. Gilbert advised workplace instrumentation consists of leadership ensuring the design of the tools and materials for work specifically match the employee human factors. The third category of the environmental supports field is motivation. The motivation field includes leadership strategies that (a) ensure the availability of adequate financial incentives contingent upon

performance, (b) leadership should make nonmonetary incentives available, and (c) ensure the employee is aware of career development opportunities. Gilbert (1978) determined if leadership effectively addressed and corrected the environmental supports which include information, tools, incentives, and training and the employee still did not achieve worthy performance, then and only then should leadership resort to the factors which are in the control of the employee.

The BEM is primarily an outline of a performance troubleshooting sequence, and this sequence is the most efficient one because it is most likely to get the greatest leverage for the performance engineer. But it should not be misinterpreted as a sequence of importance. (Gilbert, 2007, p. 91)

Knowledge is the fourth category of Gilbert's BEM in the person's repertory of behavior field. Strategies in the knowledge dimension are (a) scientifically designed training that matches the requirement of exemplary performance, and (b) placement. Gilbert (2007) explained the knowledge dimension by presenting the contrast. For instance, instead of scientifically designed training, contrasting practices are (a) leave training to chance, (b) put training in the hands of supervisors who are not trained instructors, (c) make training unnecessarily difficult, and (d) make training irrelevant to the individual's purposes. The fifth category in the field of a person's repertory of behavior is capacity. The capacity dimension includes (a) flexible scheduling of performance to match peak capacity, (b) prosthesis, (c) physical shaping, (d) adaptation, and (e) selection. To offer clarity, Gilbert (2007) explained the capacity dimension by

presenting the contrast. For instance, instead of flexible scheduling of performance, (a) schedule performance for times when people are not at their best, (b) select people for tasks that have intrinsic difficulties in accomplishing, and (c) do not provide response aids (illustrations to make duties clear). The sixth category in the field of a person's repertory of behavior is motives. The motives dimension includes (a) leaders should assess people's motives to work, and (b) recruit people who match the realities of the situation. In contrast and to provide clarity to the motives dimension, Gilbert (2007) provided a contrasting view of (a) designing the job so that it has no future, (b) avoid creating working conditions that employees would find more pleasant, and (c) give pep talks rather than incentives to promote performance in punishing situations.

Gilbert (2007) argued all human behavior and behavioral components of performance have two significant aspects: a person's repertory of behavior ( $P$ ) and a supporting environment ( $E$ ). The person's repertory and the supporting environment together form *behavior*. Gilbert defined behavior ( $B$ ) as a product of both repertory and environment or  $B = E \cdot P$ . When an employee demonstrates CWB hindering competent performance, the leader or the performance engineer may alter their behavior by manipulating a person's repertory or by changing the environment, or both. Traditionally, managers and HR specialists assume the employee has a problem, never considering the environment (Dean, 2016). When attempting to improve human competence by altering behavior, the leader must determine the best approach. One can aim to improve the information, tools, or the incentives that support performance (environmental supports);

or choose to modify directly the person's repertory of behavior through training or other devices. Keeping in mind, Dean (2016) found most managers and HR specialists assume the individual requires fixing, not the environment. This leads to training as a corrective measure. If the manager's assumption is wrong regarding the employee, three things may result (a) the training efforts may not improve the performance which ultimately discredits the training and the trainer, (b) the organization spends unnecessary money on ineffective solutions that may have been resolved if environmental support factors were explored first, or (c) the disparity between the average and exemplary performance remains.

Many midlevel leaders have limited authority and a limited number of resources. Each participant indicated one-on-one conversations, coaching, and training as the 'go to' remedy for CWB. However, if the employee was unresponsive, the training effort was the beginning of a downward spiral leading to write ups, suspensions, demotions, or termination. A finding of this study, based on the seven midlevel leaders interviewed, was when an employee is unresponsive to training, the termination process begins. Midlevel leaders in the top U.S. retail stores only explore one dimension but imagine if senior leaders would support and authorize midlevel leaders to move to the second dimension, or even the third dimension to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters.

### **Implications for Social Change**

Customer service sabotage costs U.S. retailers an estimated \$90 billion each year, and an estimated 75% of all retail employees admitted to some form of customer service sabotage (Cohen, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2015). The findings of this study are pertinent to not just midlevel retail leaders but all leaders throughout the service industry. The conceptual framework used for this study is Gilbert's BEM in which midlevel leadership strategies include six dimensions of resources for troubleshooting employee CWBs prior to termination. Applying the findings of this study can reduce the number of employees deliberately lowering consumer satisfaction across the nation, as well as professionally develop and groom both the midlevel leader and the employee for future career opportunities. Gilbert's BEM focuses exclusively on human competence and behavior and is the only model endorsed by the International Society for Performance Improvement (Wooderson et al., 2017). A succeeding social contribution, if readership applies the findings of this study, is an increase in U.S. consumer satisfaction and repurchase intentions. The service industry makes up 63.6% of U.S. total gross domestic product (GDP). Due to the service industry's significant contribution to the GDP, service quality is a high priority for many organizations (Cooper & Davis; 2017; Havir, 2017).

### **Recommendations for Actions**

Quality service encounters are an antecedent to consumer satisfaction (Martin, 2016). Failed service encounters are not only inevitable but difficult to predict (Cohen, 2016; DeShong et al., 2015; Dischner, 2015; Lee et al., 2017; Wooderson et al., 2017).

Customer service sabotage will continue as an everyday phenomenon within retail organizations unless retail leaders implement effective strategies to prevent and correct CWBs. Seven passionate midlevel retail leaders from five top U.S. retailers were the participants in this study. It was evident each participant loved their job, enjoyed engaging with people, and appreciated the rewards of consumer satisfaction. The participants of this study revealed their expectations for their associates are to make every service encounter a special experience. CWBs (rudeness and bad behaviors) are inevitable and unpredictable in the retail industry (Lee et al., 2017). The participants' strategies to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters were leading by example, conducting one-on-one conversations, and coaching as necessary. In instances where employees were nonresponsive to coaching and redirecting, formal documentation such as write ups, suspensions, demotions, and terminations followed.

There are three recommendations resulting from this study, to which all regions with major and small retail organizations that contribute to the local tax base and overall nation's GDP should give attention. It is recommended that retail leaders and human resource partners adopt Gilbert's behavioral engineering model. Gilbert's model provides additional strategies and resources for midlevel leaders to further develop their associates while improving customer satisfaction. Gilbert (1978, 2007) asserted when an organization provides environmental support factors, it empowers the employee to perform at exemplary levels. The second recommendation for action emphasized by P6

and P7 is a retailer's reassessment of the selection and hiring process. Competent service employees are vital for an organization's operational efficiency, service quality, and serve as the "human face" of the retailer (Bateson, Wirtz, Burke, & Vaughan, 2014, p. 419). Therefore, an efficient recruitment and selection process is essential. Bateson et al. (2014) reasoned the recruitment process must select individuals who can cope with the operational and customer service demands. Failure to implement an efficient recruitment process will lead to a vicious cycle of CWBs and dissatisfied customers (Bateson et al., 2014).

McKinsey & Company produced an extensive research report called *War for Talent* which examined how the best companies build strong leadership talent pools and how better talent drives company performance (SHRM, 2016). The McKinsey & Company report focused on U.S. businesses but the principles applied globally with some adaptations to local culture and practices. The *War for Talent* report detailed the process of revitalizing recruiting strategies and established the value of a robust sourcing strategy. According to the report, robust sourcing is described as (a) understanding what the company really wants, (b) finding who you really need through acquisitions, outsourcing (hiring people who have polished their talents elsewhere) or insourcing (attracting the best people right out of college and training them well), (c) growing people internally through job rotation, (d) using multiple strategies (not relying on one strategy but rather investing in additional sourcing strategies to help achieve diversity and balance), (e)

recruiting continuously, and (f) hiring people from outside the organization to refresh the talent pool.

The third recommendation aligns with P6's contribution to addressing CWB immediately. CWBs are contagious and can spread like the common cold, in that they are prevalent, easy to catch, and do not require a specific type of carrier to spread them (Foulk et al., 2016). Foulk et al. explained CWBs (i.e., rudeness) expands cultural boundaries and industries. CWB is a growing problem that needs immediate attention. Therefore, passive leaders or leaders who demonstrate patterns of inaction in the workplace, such as avoiding decisions, neglecting workplace problems, and failing to model or reinforce appropriate behaviors need not only an immediate reassignment but require a performance assessment using Gilbert's BEM to further develop his or her leadership abilities. Passive leaders impact more than 20% of U.S. employees and have associated economic and personal costs totaling \$23.8 billion annually due to employees' lost productivity, absenteeism, and health care costs (i. e. psychological distress, problem drinking, and family undermining; Decoster, Camps, & Stouten, 2014; Holtz & Hu, 2017). Like Bateson et al. (2014) recommended an efficient recruitment process for service employees, Harold and Holtz (2015) mirrored this recommendation for leadership. HR partners should evaluate leadership styles during the managerial selection process and screen out passive leaders (Harold & Holtz, 2015). Effective leadership is the recipe for organizational success, and the absence thereof leads to a path of dysfunction (Ghazzawi, 2018; Holtz & Hu, 2017).

The results of this study are significant and may assist retail leaders in restoring workplace civility (removal of CWBs) which presents a positive impact on both employees and customers. Improving consumer satisfaction equates to happy shoppers and consequent positive encounters, not just in the stores but during later individual encounters. I aim to present the findings of this study through available presentation opportunities such as conferences, training seminars, or within organizations that need resources to improve their consumer satisfaction within the industry. Additionally, I will pursue publication in the following journals: (a) *The Journal of Organizational Behavior*, (b) *Managing Service Quality*, (c) *Performance Improvement*, (d) *The Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*, and (e) *The Journal of Service Management*.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

Future research regarding the CWB phenomenon should be action research. Action research calls for researcher involvement as an interventionist (Yin, 2016). Yin (2016) explained action research couples with an action plan for future implementation and monitoring change. The findings in this study showed CWB has long term and detrimental effects on peers, leadership, customers, and the organization. Namasivayam et al. (2014) claimed few researchers have explicitly linked leadership behaviors and empowerment to customer satisfaction. Friedemann and Pundt (2018) identified a relationship between leadership behavioral strategies and employee service behaviors but suggested human resource practices should support and align with leadership's behavioral strategies. In this study, leadership assumed responsibility for preventing and

correcting employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. However, the participants only focused on one dimension of Gilbert's BEM. If redirecting and coaching failed, the documentation process began leading to termination. One recommendation for further action research is identifying retail leaders with human resource practices utilizing Gilbert's BEM, and measuring the impact in the workplace, on employees, and consumer satisfaction. Further action research on CWBs within the retail industry could compare leadership strategies and human resource recommended practices for preventing and correcting employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Only HR can examine each key role and identify the individual's contribution to the organization (Davenport, 2015). Further recommendations may include increasing the sample size of retail leaders from top U.S. retailers as reported by the ACSI.

### **Reflections**

As I reflect on my doctoral journey with Walden University, I can honestly equate the commitment, research rigor, and emotional peaks and valleys to military boot camp. In boot camp, you must constantly demonstrate attention to detail. Attention to detail means paying precise attention to everything in your surroundings from the tucked bed sheet corners on your rack, to situational scenes and conditions onboard a U.S. vessel. Attention to detail is what you need to complete a doctoral journey. Whether it was to pay precise attention to the rubric while writing, responding to a classmate's discussion post, aligning your problem statement, research question, and the first line of your

purpose statement, memorizing APA nuances, or submitting your IRB application. I understand why only a small percent of individuals hold a doctoral degree. The *Survey of Earned Doctorates* (National Science Foundation, 2017) reported the number of doctorates awarded over time “averages a 3.3% annual growth rate which is punctuated by periods of slow growth and even decline” (para. 1).

I am a U.S. consumer, and I am passionate about quality service encounters and human civility in the workplace and within the communities. In this study, there are several references to scholars who reported the prevalence of CWBs, and the focus of this study was to identify the leadership strategies proven effective to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Fast forward to after gaining IRB approval; the data collection process was probably the third most difficult part of the doctoral journey. I anticipated top U.S. retailers named by the ACSI (2017) would express interest in participating in this study while acknowledging their midlevel leader for exemplary performance and permit them to highlight their professional leadership strategies. The opposite occurred, each retailer either ignored the recruitment request or outright declined to participate.

In reviewing my reflective journal, I suspect only three of the seven participants were comfortable with discussing what strategies they used to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. When asked about what strategies they use when an employee is unresponsive, four participants' demeanors shifted, and I sensed some level of discomfort. Conflict is something that is also

inevitable when there is human interaction. I recommend that every organization that provides a service implement formal scenario-based training (dimension four on Gilbert's BEM) to professionally develop all employees on every level within the organization. Johnson confessed, "It is not the presence of conflict that causes chaos and disaster but the ineffective ways that it is handled" (as cited in Edwards & Mathews, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore some midlevel retail leadership strategies that prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters. Seven passionate midlevel retail leaders from five top U.S. department retailers participated in this study. There were six emergent themes. Responses from the interviews, researcher's observations, and multiple online documents established methodological triangulation and provided insight of the strategies used to redirect employees demonstrating CWBs. Several scholars professed CWBs are inevitable, unpredictable, and widespread; ultimately destroying quality service encounters and lowering consumer satisfaction in the retail industry (Cohen, 2016; Dwivedi et al., 2015; Gountas et al., 2014; Lee et al., 2017; Odunlami et al., 2013; Rod et al., 2016). The findings of this study revealed the primary leadership strategies used to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters are one-on-one conversations, coaching, and training. If the employee was unresponsive, the training efforts were the beginning of a downward spiral leading to write ups, suspensions, demotions, or termination. The conceptual framework used for this study is

Gilbert's BEM which will enhance midlevel leadership strategies to include six dimensions of resources for troubleshooting employee CWBs prior to termination. Applying the findings of this study can reduce the number of employees deliberately lowering consumer satisfaction across the nation, as well as professionally develop and groom both the midlevel leader and the employee for future career opportunities. Gilbert's BEM focuses exclusively on human competence and behavior and is the only model endorsed by the International Society for Performance Improvement (Wooderson et al., 2017).

I recommended that human resource partners in the retail industry adopt and align business practices with Gilbert's behavioral engineering model. Leadership at all levels should experience an individual assessment using the BEM. Passive leaders should receive reassignment, along with refreshing the recruitment and hiring practices with recommendations from the McKinsey & Company report. Train midlevel leaders to immediately identify and correct CWBs, and to sequentially troubleshoot employee behaviors using first the three dimensions in environmental supports, then the next three dimensions in the person's repertory of behavior. Gilbert ascertains that within the first three dimensions of the BEM, employee behaviors will improve producing quality service encounters and improved consumer satisfaction, obliterating all evidence of CWBs.

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## Appendix A: Interview Guide

Interview: Leadership Strategies for Preventing and Correcting Employee Behaviors

- A. Meet participant at designated meeting location or dial in to participant on designated date and time for telephone interview
- B. Thank participant for time and cooperation in the study. Introduce myself and the purpose of the study. Inform the participant that the interview will take about 30-minutes consisting of seven questions, and I will respect his or her time. Collect hard copy of informed consent form.
- C. Ask participant for permission to record the session while advising that the purpose of recording is to capture everything that I am unable to write during notetaking. Remind the participant that the face-to-face interview and all material collected is in confidence and for the researcher's use only.
- D. Activate the recorder and introduce myself as the researcher and announce the participant by their assigned code, as well as verbally note the date and time of the interview.
- E. While questioning each participant, I will conduct direct observations watching for nonverbal cues, apprehension, comfort level, and redirect with probing questions to achieve depth when necessary.
- F. At the end of the interview, I will ask if the participant has any additional information they would like to share. If not, I will thank them for their time and recap with a brief explanation of the member checking process.

G. I will email the interview summary to the participant within 48 hours for their review.

## Appendix B: Interview Questions

Time of the interview:

Date:

Place:

Interviewer Katina Robertson (researcher)

Interviewee (P1)

The purpose of this study is to explore the leadership strategies that midlevel retail leaders use to prevent and correct employee behavior that sabotage quality service encounters.

### **Questions**

The following are the interview questions.

1. According to your current training procedures, what is a quality consumer service encounter?
2. What are some employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters in your department?
3. What strategies do you use to ensure consistent employee behaviors that foster quality service encounters?
4. What strategies worked best when correcting your employee behaviors that lowered the quality of a service encounter?

5. What barriers or challenges did you encounter when you implemented strategies to prevent and correct employee behavior that sabotaged the quality of a consumer service encounter, and how did you address the barriers or challenges?
6. What measures do you take to manage an employee whose behavior does not improve after prior corrective strategies?
7. Is there any additional information you would like to share regarding leadership strategies that midlevel retail leaders use to prevent and correct employee behaviors that sabotage quality service encounters?

## Appendix C: National Institutes of Health Training Certificate



## Appendix D: John Wiley and Sons License Terms and Conditions

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Apr 11, 2018

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