

# **Improving customer flow of operations management of a shopping center**

**Tonny Kerley de Alencar Rodrigues**

COPPEAD Graduate Business School / Federal University of Rio de Janeiro  
Irakt@ig.com.br

**Monalyza Teles Teixeira**

Faculdade Santo Agostinho / Teresina, Brazil  
monalyzat@gmail.com

**Isabella Marçal Martins**

Faculdade Santo Agostinho / Teresina, Brazil  
imarcal74@gmail.com

**Cícero Tadeu Duarte Tavares**

Paulista University – UNIP / São Paulo, Brazil  
tadeu@tdca.com.br

**Átila de Melo Lira**

Paulista University – UNIP / São Paulo, Brazil  
atilalira@hotmail.com

## **Abstract**

The objective of this research was to analyze a shopping center operations management process from improvements in customer flow management. The results point to two key solutions that impact the operations management: a) the implementation of guidance displays from the shops map organization; and b) the parking spaces management system.

**Keywords:** Operations Management, Customer Flow, Shopping Center

## **INTRODUCTION**

Shopping Center " is a retail business group planned, developed , owned and managed as a unit " ( Kotler , Armstrong , 2003). Shopping malls have become in Brazil and around the world an attractive environment for a large number of people, for providing commercial diversity , a large number of services and also provide recreational space . Even with all these advantages, it is clear that there are still services that can be improved but are still little explored in the

literature. Las Casas (2012), says that " the quality of service is a key differentiator , and therefore must be constantly evaluated ."

Given this difficulty, the following question arises: What is the impact of operations management on the flow of customers in a shopping mall? It can be seen that the proper management of these processes is necessary for the company to obtain greater profitability and thus achieve a high level of customer satisfaction. The aim of this study was to analyze an operations management process of a shopping mall, from improvements in customer flow management. Taking into account conceptual aspects of quality management operational procedures and satisfaction ratio related to the flow of customers.

## **THEORETICAL BASE**

According to ISO 8402 Quality is the sum of the peculiarities of an organization that provides the ability to satisfy both the explicit needs as implied . To Araújo (2008) quality is a question directed primarily to customers in order to get their satisfaction and delight.

In the service sector where increasing competitiveness is aimed at constantly, quality is something essential that according to Kotler and Armstrong (1993) to offer a quality service, the company can differentiate itself from its competitors. In addition, these organizations focused on service quality is also related to effective care of customers, making it established a narrowing in the business to consumer relationship. According to Junior and Miyake (2011, p. 187)" organizations are more effective in consistently delivering results desired by customers maintaining consistent levels of cost efficiency will be the most competitive. " As a result of increased competition between organizations is noticeable a change in customer behavior that happens to have a more critical eye and be more demanding with regard to excellence in service delivery .

Increased competitiveness, differentiation from competitors and achieve customer satisfaction are some of the factors that underscore the importance of the quality of service delivery. " The service can be a key success factor or, conversely , a critical factor of strategic failure " (Cobra, 2007 , p.56). To Albrecht (1992), a service of excellence is defined as:

A level of service quality compared to its competitors, which is high enough from the point of view of their customers , to allow you to charge a higher price for the service offered , gaining a market share above what would be considered natural, and / or obtain a higher profit margin than that of its competitors .

To obtain the sublimity in the quality of services provided , it is necessary to the management of processes, which is the integration of all the organization's operations seeking to improve and provide this system to run optimally . The operation of all the resources that make up the organization such as technological systems , people and consequently the intellectual capital must also be an integrated manner so that the organization can achieve the satisfactory results of the management method processes. The importance of process management is underscored by BM CBOK Guide (2014 ) as follows:

Advances in the management processes have been instrumental in the progress of corporations , industries and economies. The disciplines of quality and processes have

changed the fate of Japan in the decades after World War II, showing the economic strength that a strong management processes can provide.

The BM CBOK Guide (2014) also highlights that organizations need to be improved as to their ability to anticipate to respond to changes in the market as well as to customer demands.

Knowing the customer is the pillar that supports the service organizations, it is clear that achieving high levels of satisfaction is of great importance to the company's success. According Kopler (1998, p. 53) "[...] the feeling of pleasure or disappointment resulting performance comparison of expected product (or income) in relation to the person's expectations. "When the organization meets the needs and customer expectations , and to establish an image that appears to be credible and reliable, also occurs loyalty . "The company today needs to keep in mind that satisfied customers remain at the company any longer, buy more and speak favorably of the organization " (Kotler , 1998, p. 51) .

## **METHOD**

The following research was conducted in a shopping mall located in the city of Teresina, Piauí, Brazilian Northeast between the months of September and October 2015. Field interviews were conducted with 40 shopping consumers during the process of use of services, but they could be harvested client accounts which had already completed the buying cycle. The relevance of the research assumes that in the current market scenario is common to realize that achieving customer satisfaction is one of the main objectives of the companies , and is also an important distinction that is currently being required , the achievement of higher levels of satisfaction.

In this qualitative research methods were used, which confome Tanaka and Melo (2001) allows interaction, considers the subjects' subjectivity also allows us to understand the individual results, as well as evaluating diffuse and non-specific results. Based on Yin (2005), the case study is a method that covers everything from planning, to the collection and analysis of data. Yin (2005, p. 32) also states that "the case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context."Thus, this study investigates customer satisfaction of a shopping mall, considering human, technical and physical environment.

In order to protect the identity of Shopping concerned, it will be identified as Shopping Center X. The choice of this Shopping Center to the research is the need arising from the increase in customer traffic at that location, and verification of positives and negative interfering in consumer insight and directly influence the levels of satisfaction. It was also found the importance of process management in improving the operations and influence the flow of consumers.

To carry out this study we used a semi-structured interview guide consists of 7 questions, applied to customers, in order to collect data for later review the information collected. According Chizzotti ( 2006, p. 98), " the objective of the content analysis is critical to understand the meaning of communication, its manifest or latent content , explicit or hidden meanings ." After reviewing the research proposals have been drafted that aim at increasing the shopping center customer satisfaction X.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

According to the analysis of the interview, it was noticed that there are two main points that can be improved through the process management, and influence the flow of customers. It was they, the difficulty of internal location , consumers, and the complexity to find parking spaces. These items are detailed below, that will present the issue , the opinions of customers , and proposals for solutions to these dilemmas.

## **Difficulty in internal location**

It can be seen through research that there is great dissatisfaction among customers regarding the difficulty of location within the mall . Report that to a person who is going to Riverside for the first time, you need to go to another who already know the company be located inside the mall . This is due to the structure and " confused" architecture of shopping .

*" I will not lie I like least is the question of location of the stores , I do not think here an easy walking location. For those who come the first time there's no way , I believe most people always lose right? Why willy-nilly the mall structure is a bit confusing , so I think a great , one of the major defects , I personally think that the question of location of the stores to a person who comes first, second , third time , to more times. They always lose, is not easy. " ( Interview 5 )*

*"So then, for those who come the first time is tricky because they say that here one comes there in the center when you pick up a hallway , wheel, wheel, back to the same place , so to be able to adapt is often difficult for those who come the first time and without someone, a companion who already know right? who knows how to walk in the mall. " ( Interview 2 )*

It also realizes that some customers fail to make use of shopping services simply can not find the place you seek. This difficulty that consumers have a location inside the mall makes this problematic is the second largest motivation of customer dissatisfaction .

*"The question to find a store , I think quite complicated , so we can find here . Once I came here and I can not find the food court . " ( Interview 4)*

*"I think complicated here to walk , I always get lost . " ( Interview 17)*

*" I do not consider a mall here , I consider a gallery. Why not have a convenience of a mall . Everything is more difficult here. The boy just come around asking information is not well signposted , it is a hot thing , lost almost everyone already here in this mall . " (Interview 14)*

Given the above it can see that there is a real need to implement tools that help customers to move around with ease , so they can find what they seek. Thus, it is proposed to insert digital totem mall or directories that facilitate indoor location, allowing the client to access information about shops, services and a location map .

It is recommended to be located at strategic points : at the main entrance near the food court and at another point of great movement . The improvement in visual communication would be a suggestion for the solution of this dissatisfaction .

## **Parking**

The car was one of the issues raised due to lack of vacancy in periods of great movement as weekends and holidays. The company has to note that a more adequate parking raises the level of customer satisfaction , which to get to the mall , has the facility to quickly find a place in a cool shady spot .

*" [ ... ] There's something here that is not very good , is the parking is very little. We arrive , wheel and can not find . "(Interview 27)*

*" [ ... ] The very small and very poorly organized parking, I think everyone knows that the mall is where has the flow of a lot of people , so they could work , [ ... ]" ( Interview 29)*

A study of the times where there is a large flow of people will be crucial for stores could offer deals or other offers to attract customers during off-peak hours, generating greater convenience when looking for a parking space .

*" [ ... ] Need to improve parking, " n " things. " For example, in periods that are very ... Christmas is kind , child day, you feel very difficult to park " ( Interview 1 )*

The introduction of electronic free spaces identification systems could offer responsiveness to the customer that comes to parking, directing him where you will park without delay , without excess circulation in the area, and hence increase customer satisfaction with ease of park at the mall.

The benefits of the electronic system installation parking for drivers, would fuel economy , saving time to park that influence in increasing the time to do the shopping , avoid conflicts by playing the vacancies. Shopping for X, the reduction of stress the driver when looking for a job can be reflected in the welfare , improving the company's image as the comfort and concern for the driver. One can also avoid irritation q which would result in the withdrawal of that benefit Shopping, and shifting to the competition for failing to park your vehicle .

## **CONCLUSION**

This study showed the importance of a quality service to the shopping center, focusing on increased customer satisfaction with improvements in the management system and processes. Thus, it was shown that the insertion of internal methods and tools that aid in the location of the clients and to implement a system that helps in the parking space management, making the need for rapid transportation of customers.

The responses of the questionnaire reached the goal of identifying the strengths and weaknesses of the company. But merely because of customer resistance to answer the questions, because as it was a field interview consumers claimed the haste and lack of time.

For further studies, it is suggested to follow and analyze opinions from customers regarding the implementation of the methods applied and the influence of process management in increasing the number of consumers who frequent the mall.

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Faculty St. Augustine (St. Augustine College), Teresina, Piauí, Brazil  
COPPEAD Graduate Business School, Federal University of Rio de Janeiro  
Universidade Paulista (Paulista University), São Paulo, Brazil.

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