

How to improve customer satisfaction with customer surveys and lean for retail



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: This dissertation project is based on a collaboration between the author and Volvo Trucks Europe. To answer the research question of *How to improve customer satisfaction with customer surveys and lean for retail?* This study describes a qualitative study of improving customer satisfaction with lean for retail in the Volvo Trucks dealership network, specifically in the Northern European Market.

Setting the scene: It is essential to understand the challenges and specifications of the truck industry, their impact on manufacturers, and how to deliver an excellent customer experience. First, the buyer and user of a truck may be different. Other specifications in the trucking industry that need to be considered are the legislation regarding CO2 emissions. Moreover, there is an evident driver shortage, leading industry news since the last fall of 2021. Volvo Trucks is a truck manufacturing division, part of the Volvo Group, and one of the world's leading manufacturers of trucks. Consider a premium brand that consistently delivers quality, functionality, and innovation.

Literature review: The author conducted a transparent integrative literature review about the lean methodology, customer satisfaction and co-creation.

Methodology: The study will be qualitative research. The comparative research design used by the author entails the study of using identical methods in two or more cases. There will be secondary data, such as specific surveys Volvo Truck carries, and primary data with eight essential people interviewed. As this is purely qualitative research, the mainstream of data collection will be notes and observations from the author from the interviewees carried out, and the analysis will be thematic.

Empirical findings: The empirical findings show the importance of lean for retail and its impacts on customer satisfaction for the markets in Volvo Trucks.

Data analysis: The data analysis shows how the literature is relevant to the data analyses, and there is a clear connection between the literature and the empirical findings.

Proposal: The author develops a proposal for the Northern European Market, describing the proposal's value and how to improve customer satisfaction for retail.

Conclusion: The author finishes with a conclusion and future research on implementing practically lean for retail from the customer's point of view.

Keywords: lean for retail, customer satisfaction

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B2B: Business to Business

REx: Retail Excellence Survey

HTS: Heavy Truck Survey

PDCA: Plan, Do, Check and Act

VTLA: Volvo Trucks Latin America

CX: Customer Experience

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the background of the study. It introduces the research question, discusses why it is essential, and how the author plans to address this issue through this study. Moreover, the chapter gives an overview of the paper, shown at the end of the chapter.

1.1 Background

Nowadays, customer experience plays a vital role in determining the success of a company's offering. Competing in the global market is the only avenue for survival to create a long-lasting competitive advantage. (Johnston and Kong, 2011). Customer experience was first conceptualised in the mid-1980s with an original view of consumer behaviour by Holbrook and Hirschman (1982), who described consumption as a constant flow of fantasies, feelings and fun encompassed by the "experiential view". This experiential perspective views consumption as a primarily subjective state of consciousness with various symbolic meanings, hedonistic responses and aesthetic criteria.

Later, Pine and Gilmore, in their book on the experience economy (1999), declared experience as an economic proposition in its own right, as consumers undoubtedly demand experiences. More and more companies are responding to this by explicitly designing and promoting them. Schmitt (1999) proposed the concept of experiential marketing and suggested five ways to appeal to customers: feel, sense, think, act and relate. In light of these findings, a few definitions explain customer experience. The most widely used definition among scholars is the one put forward by Verhoef et al. (2009) in their article "Customer Experience Creation: Determinants, Dynamics and Management Strategies". The customer experience arises from the interaction between customers and a company's products or services. All of these interactions trigger a personal reaction in the customer.

Moreover, Schmitt, (1999) mentions that the customer experience is holistic: the customer's cognitive, affective, emotional, social and physical reactions to the company also takes part in determining the customer experience. It is also important to mention that the experience is not only created by the elements the company can control but also by those beyond its control, such as new technology or market volatility. Finally, it is essential to note that the customer experience encompasses the stages of search, purchase, consumption and post-sale and may involve multiple distribution channels (Verhoef et al., 2009).

Companies need to work on their customer experiences actively. Consumer expectations have changed dramatically. Consumers seek experiences that enable them to realise their dreams and achieve their desired lifestyle, directly impacting all economic sectors (Smith & Wheeler, 2002). Consumers also prefer a sense of belonging and identification with a group. It is important to understand that as customer expectations change, the value brands offer must also evolve or change. Customers no longer buy a product based solely on its functional needs, in this case, a vehicle to transport large amounts of material safely and efficiently from one place to another. Owning a brand is comparable to making a social statement about the image customers want (Smith & Wheeler, 2002). If the company improves its customer experience, this would positively impact customer satisfaction and thus loyalty, increase confidence and trust, and create the emotional bonds that, according to the literature, are crucial for companies' competitive advantage. Even though the customer experience directly benefits the customer, a satisfied customer impacts retention rates and cost reduction as there is no rework (Kink et al., 2019).

Customer experience positively impacts a company's financial performance. When companies operate in turbulent markets with high levels of competition and technological turmoil, they can better manage the customer journey and thus improve their financial performance. As competition increases, the positive impact of customer experience on a company's financial performance increases (Kink et al., 2019).

Moreover, the lean methodology can be a great asset in order to improve customer satisfaction. Lean methodology, even though it historically heavily relied on production, its principles can help an organisation to be more customer-centric, only focusing on what adds value to the customer. The thought process of lean was thoroughly described in the book *The Machine That Changed the World* (1990). Lean is a process that involves five steps: Defining customer value, defining the value stream, creating a flow, establishing a pull system and striving for excellence. Lean thinking always starts with the customer in mind. What does the customer value, and what problem does the customer need to solve that an organisation can help with? Due to the five steps or principles, a lean organisation is organised to constantly understand the customer and their needs, no matter the context and specify what the customer value, looking for better ways to provide it (Lean Enterprise Institute, 2023).

This study focuses on improving customer satisfaction by combining lean methodology and shared value creation. It explores possible frameworks to combine the analysis of customer data with the continuous improvement process that the lean methodology stands for. The study's objective is to solve the problem of ensuring competitiveness in an ever-changing market through customer satisfaction and loyalty, implementing the lean methodology and value creation between the company and the customers.

1.2 Project outline

This dissertation project is based on a collaboration between the author and Volvo Trucks Europe. The company has provided all the data and documents related to its customer experience process, including surveys to collect customer feedback, insights, and information for ongoing improvement efforts implemented throughout the entire company, including the dealerships. The author wants to understand and show how value co-creation between customers and the company can help improve customer satisfaction and its impact on the business and its profitability.

The starting point was to read and examine all the documents provided by the supervisors. Understanding Volvo Trucks' main customer experience challenges is crucial in choosing a research topic that is helpful to the company and of great interest to the author. The author continuously took insight into the daily operations and meetings, helped to focus on the desired topic and quickly understood the objective of the research question. Volvo Trucks provided the author with all their contacts relevant to the topic, with introductory meetings by teams. In addition, feedback and support from supervisors twice a month, as well as group meetings with Professor Johan Brink and the author's colleagues, helped to create a roadmap and critical milestones for the research and to find the perfect balance and relationship between theory and practice.

1.3 Research purpose

This study describes a qualitative study of improving customer satisfaction with lean for retail in the Volvo Trucks dealership network, specifically in the Northern European Market. This

study aims to create an integrated and coherent approach to maximising customer feedback through lean methodology to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

1.4 Research objective

This work aims to design a framework that enables a constant flow between customer feedback collected through various internal tools and the design and implementation of action plans to improve customer satisfaction using the lean process already established in truck dealerships, enabling co-creation between customers and the company. This practical research focuses on addressing a genuine concern for Volvo Trucks. Firstly, understanding the importance and details of customer experience in a B2B environment, the power of co-creation between customer and company, the benefits that lean culture can bring to manufacturing companies, and an accurate literature review so that the author can have a global vision is crucial. Secondly, learning about real business cases at Volvo Trucks in other markets to learn about all the specifications, challenges and outcomes as well as the current state of the chosen market concerning the continuous improvement process. Finally, the research will identify possible gaps and opportunities to create a similar framework in the chosen market.

1.5 Research question

This research question allows the writer to focus on the area they want to know. A simple research question leads to unfocused research and data collection. (Bryman & Bell, 2011).

To achieve the set objectives, this paper will answer the following question:

RQ 1: How to improve customer satisfaction with customer surveys and lean for retail?

In order to find a suitable research question, the author analysed the topic and the current challenges faced by the company in terms of customer experience to find out the most relevant question. Furthermore, thanks to the help of the supervisors at Volvo Trucks, the author found the best direction for the research, considering the time constraints, the scope of the research and the interests of both the company and the author. There have been several reasons why the author has decided to work on this research question; firstly, it is essential to mention the author's interest in improving the customer experience within organisations. It is a popular topic in managerial research, and learning more about the theme was crucial for the author. Moreover, the research process is more relevant if there is a personal interest in the topic to ensure the research quality and do meaningful work (Bryman & Bell, 2011). Furthermore, being a relatively new material, there are many views on the topic, and there may be an opportunity to contribute to niche research, such as lean and customer satisfaction. Finally, it may be relevant research for the automotive sector. Lean is a universal methodology applied in many organisations, so the author can assume that the results may be relevant across various industries.

1.6 Research limitations

This study had several limitations. This work will focus on developing a framework to ensure a constant flow of work between the continuous improvement process, such as lean, already established at dealerships and customer insights in the Northern European Market. Initially, thorough research will be done on best practices at Volvo Trucks and getting to know the dealerships in the selected market to later design a process with the information gathered from the interviews. Due to time constraints, it is beyond the scope of this study to create a feedback loop from the dealers of the proposed implementation process to collect feedback. Moreover,

even though it is not a limitation, it is essential to mention that all the interviews carried out have been with employees from Volvo Trucks, so the respondents can potentially be biased and can have a tunnel vision of their work and possible improvements.

1.7 Thesis structure

This thesis is organised in the following way:

| CHAPTER | OUTLINE |
|--------------------------------------|--|
| 1. Introduction | Introduction to the research question and background. |
| 2. Setting the scene | A brief explanation of the truck industry and the company. |
| 3. Literature review | Review of existing literature in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lean Methodology, Customer satisfaction and Co-creation. |
| 4. Methodology | Research methodology describing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research strategy, Research design, Research method, Data collection, Research analysis and Research quality. |
| 5. Empirical findings | Results about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The current state of lean in Volvo Trucks. • Challenges and benefits of lean. |
| 6. Analysis | How the literature is relevant for the empirical findings. |
| 7. Proposal | Proposal improving customer satisfaction with surveys and lean for retail, considering the literature and empirical findings. |
| 8. Discussion and Conclusions | Conclusions about the work carried out by the researcher and future investigation recommendations. |

Table 1: Thesis Structure

2. SETTING THE SCENE

2.1 The truck sector

It is essential to understand the challenges and specifications of the truck industry, their impact on manufacturers, and how to deliver an excellent customer experience. First, the truck industry has an essential characteristic that others may not have. The buyer and user of a truck may be different. Customer experience is the internal and subjective response customers have to direct or indirect contact with a company. Direct contact generally occurs during purchase and use and is usually initiated by the customer. Indirect contact often involves unplanned encounters with representations of a company's products and services. (Meyer & Schwager, 2007).

Several actors might have direct contact with the truck, with their personal internal and subjective responses, thereby influencing the overall customer experience. For example, in the

purchase process, the business owner buys the truck; however, the owner might not be the truck driver, which means another person would also have direct contact through the use of the truck. The difference between the owner and the driver means that to deliver an excellent customer experience, the company must consider these two actors involved in direct contact.

Other specifications in the trucking industry need to be taken into account, according to the European Commission and the remarks by Executive Vice-President Timmermans at the press conference on the revision of CO₂ emission standards for Heavy-Duty Vehicles, published on February 14, 2023, 99% of trucks on European roads, have internal combustion engines. They are all diesel engines, which means they depend on imported fossil fuels and contribute to air pollution. Legislation for CO₂ emissions has only been applied to heavy trucks. However, there is a proposal to expand the scope to small and large trucks, which will affect new registrations. The objectives set by the European Commission are that all trucks will be required to emit 45% less energy compared to 2019 by 2030. In 2035, this will have to be 65% less than that in 2019, and in 2040, it will be 90% less than that in 2019 (European Commission, 2023).

The objectives are fleet-based; therefore, each manufacturer must meet them as an average for their entire fleet. Reducing CO₂ emissions will result in most new trucks coming into the market with zero emissions by 2040 (European Commission, 2023). These regulations have opened up a new market share for truck manufacturers; according to a study made by Report Linker, The Europe Electric Truck Market was valued at USD 286.87 million in 2021 and is expected to reach USD 4,358.25 million (Report Linker, 2022). However, electric trucks have a specific disadvantage, making them unsuitable for trucks on the road 24/7; initially, most electric trucks will need to be charged overnight at their home depot. An AC Onboard charger (43 kW) takes approximately ten hours to charge the battery from empty to full (Volvo Trucks, 2021). To achieve an excellent customer experience, manufacturers need to consider new factors that have yet to be an issue, such as the charging time of the batteries.

Due to the objectives set by the European Commission, the truck business is transitioning to electric vehicles, which are an excellent solution to combat climate change and maintain pace with transforming the industry. However, the increasing demand for electric trucks is not only due to the benefits for the environment but the financial advantages they have for the owners. Studies show that a typical electric vehicle owner can save up to \$1,000 in annual fuel costs and possibly even more with potential government tax incentives (Richmond, 2023). However, this transition to a new vehicle comes with challenges to provide an excellent customer experience. Production companies are finding themselves with the issue of the unfamiliarity with this new electric vehicle technology and a lack of specifically trained technicians to maintain their vehicles (Stråkander, 2023).

According to the article "European trucking industry: The Rise of Rates and What to Expect", the freight business represents a large section of the logistics market. The goods transported by truck represent 75% of all cargo in Europe; however, there are other challenges that this industry faces, which will affect customers and manufacturers. (Access World, 2019). On the one hand, there is an evident driver shortage, leading industry news since the last fall of 2021. As the average age of truck drivers increases, attracting younger generations can be challenging due to the nature of the work, long hours on the road alone, spending days or weeks away from home, and sleeping on the truck. With generational changes, the services and solutions manufacturers offer to deliver an excellent customer experience must also change.

Millennials (born between 1977 and 1994) grew up in immense, fast-paced change. They were born into a technological, electronic, and wireless society, with global boundaries becoming

more transparent, opening up new possibilities in a world where everything seemed possible (Williams, 2010). To deliver a great customer experience, interactions must be shifted. For this generation, doing business with companies that share their beliefs is vital to encourage faith in improving the world (Williams, 2010). Therefore, a business's mission must speak of a purpose.

Moreover, given that continuous feedback is essential, they value positive reinforcement at accelerated rates compared to previous generations. They want more input into all things they participate in, pushing for a co-creation environment. The increase in the cost of gas and the inflation characterising the actual market, which might affect the online shopping expenditures of customers, affecting the trucking industry, which will at the same time have a direct effect on truck manufacturers (Access World, 2019).

2.2 Volvo Trucks

Volvo Trucks is a truck manufacturing division, part of the Volvo Group, and one of the world's leading manufacturers of trucks, buses, construction equipment, and marine and industrial engines. The Group also provides complete solutions for finance and services headquartered in Gothenburg, Sweden. In February 1928, the first truck was manufactured in Lundby, Gothenburg, where headquarters are currently located (Volvo Trucks, 2023a). Volvo Truck's vision is to be the world's most desired and successful transport and infrastructure solution provider. Leading the way and tackling global challenges in the transport industry, striving for better everyday life for people (Volvo Trucks, 2023b). The core values that guide these actions are quality, safety, and environmental care (Volvo Trucks, 2023c).

The 130 countries are divided into different markets: Asia/Pacific, Europe, Middle East/Africa, North America, and South America. With 2.300 dealers and customer service points worldwide (most of them are not owned by them). Consider a premium brand that consistently delivers quality, functionality, and innovation. Volvo Trucks delivered 145.195 trucks in 2022, the best performance in the company's history, with a 19% increase from 2021. Moreover, Volvo Trucks also increased its market share in 41 markets globally (Volvo Trucks, 2023d).

Volvo Trucks has customer commitments that guide them in every direct and indirect interaction with customers. The customer commitments are spread through all their dealership's networks to ensure a homogeneous customer experience that meets the expectations of a premium product such as the Volvo Truck. In Europe Volvo Trucks has two standardised actions across all dealerships to measure customer satisfaction and gain insights. One is the Heavy Truck Survey (HTS), a syndicated survey for brand and customer satisfaction; the other is the Retail Excellence Survey (REx), a transactional-based customer survey supporting the retail organisation.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of a literature review is to gain an understanding of the existing research relevant to customer experience, lean methodology and co-creation. As well as exploring the contributions and limitations of this research to the author's particular study. This chapter begins by explaining the lean methodology and its impact on customer satisfaction. Later, the author deeply dives into customer experience, its benefits, and customer co-creation.

3.1 Literature review structure

The literature review findings complement the survey data's results. The author conducted a transparent integrative literature review. An integrative review is a specific method of synthesising previous empirical and theoretical literature to provide a more comprehensive understanding (Whittemore, 2005). Most of the literature was researched through Google Scholar and the Gothenburg University Library website. All publications are journal articles, reports and books about how co-creation can influence customer satisfaction.

The search for relevant literature began with broad keywords such as "Customer satisfaction", "Co-creation", "Customer loyalty", "Customer experience" and "Lean manufacturing". This search was the first step; however, the results were extensive, so the scope of the research was expanded. "Customer satisfaction AND B2B", "Lean AND customer experience", "Lean AND customer satisfaction", "Lean AND principles", and "Customer co-creation AND value". In addition, the author also scours the list of references in the most meaningful articles to find literature relevant to the topic, such as service-dominant logic to understand the basis of co-creation or experience economics to provide a foundation for what customer experience is. In this way, the author found literature on the benefits of co-creation for a company and how customer experience and lean methodology can be combined. However, there needs to be more literature on co-creation, the specifics of customer experience in a B2B environment, the management implications and the application of lean methodology to customer experience and its benefits. The sampling criteria must ensure representativeness and are important indicators of the reliability and accuracy of the results. (MT Souza et al., 2010). Even though the ideal procedure is to include all studies found, the author followed inclusion and exclusion criteria due to the workload and time constraints.

| Inclusion criteria | Exclusion criteria |
|---|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Connections with the rest of the literature. Such as lean or customer satisfaction. 2. The articles have managerial implications. 3. Articles that are mentioned several times in different reference lists. | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Articles set in a specific industry. For example, tourism, healthcare 2. Articles cited less than 150 times. 3. Studies with a qualitative focus. |

Table 2: Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the articles

3.2 Lean methodology

Historically, lean relies heavily on manufacturing because of its background. Lean was introduced in Japan with the Toyota Production System. Lean helps manufacturers improve production processes and increase employee job satisfaction. Lean is based on the simple fact that customers pay for the value of the service they receive, not for the defects (Womack et al., 2007). This is an essential concept in the context of customer experience. According to Womack et al., (2007), lean is a process that involves five steps: Defining customer value, defining the value stream, creating a flow, establishing a pull system and striving for excellence.

Define customer value: Value is what the customer is willing to pay. To do this, the company must identify the customer's actual or latent needs. The value stream definition works to establish what the customer values and identify all activities contributing to these values.

Activities that do not add value to the end customer are considered waste. These can be divided into non-value adding but necessary, non-value adding and unnecessary activities. Companies must do everything possible to minimise the first type of waste and eliminate the second (Womack et al., 2007). By reducing and eliminating unnecessary processes or steps, the company can ensure that customers get what they want while reducing the cost of producing that product or service. To make it "flow'," the next step is to ensure that the flow of the remaining steps is smooth and without interruptions or delays (Womack et al., 2007). Building a pull-based system enables just-in-time delivery and just-in-time manufacturing, where products are produced precisely when needed and in the quantity needed (Womack et al., 2007). Pull-based systems are always created from the needs of the end customers in order to satisfy the needs of the customers (Womack et al., 2007). Finally, it strives for excellence. It is the most important among them. It makes lean thinking and continuous process improvement a part of the corporate culture. Every employee should strive for perfection while delivering products based on customer needs. The company should be a learning organisation and always find ways to improve every day (Womack et al., 2007).

3.2.1 Lean Methodology and the customer journey

Global competition, an uncertain demand environment and higher consumer expectations are among the many drivers driving companies to adopt optimised productivity improvement tools such as lean (Goshime et al., 2019). Similarly, many companies focus on creating a meaningful customer experience which is considered critical to achieving competitive advantage and satisfied customers (Bolton et al., 2014; Verhoef et al., 2009).

The key to this approach is to minimise what Womack et al., (2007) defines as waste without compromising the outcome and value provided to customers. To achieve this, it is most effective to identify non-value-adding work at the touch points of the customer journey (Chatzopoulos & Weber, 2021). The interest in focusing on touch points is that customers interact with companies through touch points across multiple channels and media (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016). The customer journey conceptualises a customer's journey with a company over time during the purchase cycle through multiple touch points. It describes the customer's pre-purchase journey, including post-purchase information seeking. Importantly, this journey includes previous experiences with a brand. Four categories of customer experience touch points can be distinguished: brand-owned touch points, designed and managed by the company and under its control; partner-owned touch points, jointly designed, managed and controlled by the company and partners; customer-owned actions that are part of the customer journey but over which the company or partners have no control; and social/external/independent touch points that play a critical role in influencing the decision-making process by others during the customer journey (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

Branded and partner-owned touch points are where a company can have the most significant impact on change. They are essential to minimising waste without compromising the value they provide to customers. The service offered by the company must meet customer needs at a specific time and price. Therefore, it is a systematic approach to identify and eliminate waste (non-value-adding activities) through continuous improvement (Goshime et al., 2019). To determine value in lean methodology, the company needs to understand all its activities at the touch points it controls to optimise the entire process from the customer's perspective (Goshime et al., 2019).

When designing the Customer Journey, it is crucial to consider several aspects of the lean methodology: (1) Determine a value for the customer throughout the Customer Journey, i.e. to know what value to provide at each touchpoint that the company designs and controls in order

to know the latent needs of the customer. (2) Identify the value stream throughout the Customer Journey, i.e. which processes are necessary to provide value to the customer at the touch points and which are not, i.e., waste. (3) Establish a data flow throughout the customer journey, as a seamless experience across all channels through channel integration creates a more robust customer experience. (4) Establish a data pull throughout the Customer Journey, which allows us to collect customer feedback to understand their needs and possible improvements. (5) Continuously seek perfection for a holistic Customer Journey that is flawless, joyful and delightful, starting from the data pull established to close the loop (Chatzopoulos & Weber, 2021).

The author believes that lean waste analysis can uncover the root causes of poor customer experience because the organisation could set up several steps during the touchpoint that consume customers' time without any obvious value to them, which can create the impression in customers' minds that their time is not essential to the organisation and can be wasted. Let us imagine that a customer needs to have his truck serviced to illustrate this. Every time he goes to the dealer, he is asked for a set of data that the customer has already given. The customer feels that he is wasting his time and that the company needs to value it and improve. Assuming that the customer's resources, such as time, money and attention, can be wasted because of activities that do not add value (Lemon & Verhoef, 2016).

3.2.2 Characteristics of a lean organisation

A key to achieving a lean organisation is the 'learning culture,' which is directly linked to customer management (Al-Najem et al., 2012) and how it strives for continuous improvement. Furthermore, they can react and respond to market changes (Al-Najem et al., 2012). To foster a learning culture, it is vital to have a customer-centric organisation. Customer-centric organisations are held together by the core value that every decision starts with the customer and anticipated opportunities for advantage (Shah et al., 2006). A standard norm in customer-centric organisations is that employees are customer advocates, and employees share information to meet customer needs better (Shah et al., 2006). To have a learning culture, the most distinctive feature is the human element, where employees are respected and empowered, as they are allowed to present and express their ideas and innovations, share knowledge, and work cross-functionally (Al-Najem et al., 2012). Thus, they are motivated in their daily work and can be advocates for the company.

3.2.3 Benefits and challenges of a lean company

Using lean tools is a simple and low-cost solution to achieve productivity and profitability, continuously focusing on eliminating waste throughout the organisation. (Oliveira et al., 2017). In other words, ensuring a continuous improvement process that for many people can be synonymous with 'innovation', the continual challenge to make things better in products, processes, customer service, etc. (Bessant & Caffyn, 1997).

In a competitive market, lean can be the solution for survival and success. Lean can help organisations achieve targeted productivity by applying easy-to-implement and maintainable techniques to focus on value-adding activities for the customer and maximising profitability. (Oliveira et al., 2017; Goshime et al., 2019)

3.3 Customer Satisfaction

In today's world of intense competition, the key to sustaining a competitive advantage lies in developing high-quality service or product that will, in turn, result in customer satisfaction

(Sureshchandar et al., 2002). The firm's future profitability depends on satisfying customers in the present (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). Adding new customers rather than maintaining relationships with current customers is more costly, so those firms should enjoy greater profitability (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993). However, for a firm to differentiate itself from the competition, it is essential to understand what customer satisfaction is (Sureshchandar et al., 2002).

| Authors | Definition | Publication and date |
|--|--|--|
| G.S. Sureshchandar, Chandrasekharan Rajendran, R.N. Anantharaman | The customer's overall satisfaction with the organisation is based on all the encounters/experiences of the customer with that set organisation. | Journal of Services Marketing, July 1 2002 |
| Paasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V. A., & Berry, L. L. | Customer satisfaction is a comparison between expectations and performance. Delivering quality to maintain a steady customer satisfaction index means consistently conforming to customer expectations. | Journal of Marketing, January 1985 |
| Eugene W. Anderson & Mary W. Sullivan | Customer satisfaction consists of consistently providing high-quality products. Managing satisfaction is controlling the impact of negative disconfirmation through complaint handling and effective customer service. | Marketing Science, Spring, 1993 |
| Gilbert A. Churchill, Jr. & Carol Surprenant | Customer satisfaction links processes culminating in purchase and consumption with post-purchase phenomena such as attitude change, repeat purchase, and brand loyalty. | Journal of Marketing Research, November 1982 |

Table 3: Customer Satisfaction Definitions

Customer satisfaction can be essential for a firm's competitiveness. It measures the evaluation of a customer experience with a firm or organisation based on their emotions regarding the value received; in other words, does the company's service or product solve the customer's pain? Has the experience in all the interactions been pleasant, easy, and effective with the organisation? This definition is shared among scholars, so it is the base the author has considered to dive deep into customer satisfaction and its managerial implications.

3.3.1 Importance of customer satisfaction

Customer satisfaction is considered a prerequisite for customer retention and loyalty and helps realise economic goals like profitability and market share return investment (Sureshchandar et al., 2002). Providing high satisfaction leads to higher repurchase intentions, and the expected number of times a buyer will repurchase should rise accordingly (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

Research has shown a strong positive correlation between customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. When satisfied with a product or service, customers are more likely to become repeat customers, provide positive reviews and referrals, and remain loyal to the brand. Satisfied

customers also tend to spend more money on products and services and are more forgiving of occasional mistakes or lapses in service. (Bowen & Chen, 2001). Satisfied customers are critical to the ongoing health of a business (Barsky & Labagh, 1992). It is essential to mention that a minor change in satisfaction can lead to a substantial change in loyalty increment (Bowen & Chen, 2001). Companies gain competitive advantages through constant innovation, better targeting of customers and additional services. In order to achieve a competitive advantage listening to customer feedback can help improve performance. (McColl-Kennedy & Schneider, 2000).

3.3.2 Factors that affect customer satisfaction

It is vital to have an organisational strategy that helps to ensure customer satisfaction, retention, and long-term success. For this, there are several aspects that the managerial team must consider.

First, it is crucial to understand that promoting a customer-centric organisation is essential to increase customer satisfaction. This means that all the designed processes consider the customers' needs. A clear example can be the recruitment process. These people will provide excellent customer service, ensuring the organisation's people are aligned and motivated to provide excellent service. In addition, training critical skills is a requisite. Customers expect that when dealing with the organisation, it will be easy, efficient, and satisfactory, i.e., companies that go the extra mile to solve problems and address their needs. Customers want convenient, easy-to-use products (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007; Min et al., 2015).

Another critical factor is to understand the needs and expectations of customers, i.e., collect feedback from customers (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007) to ensure that services and products solve customer pains. Furthermore, listening to feedback and encouraging continuous improvement in the organisation is essential to increase customer satisfaction (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007). Related to this factor is the customisation of products as they cater to individual needs (Min et al., 2015).

In addition, quality is also crucial; this is one of the most significant factors as if the product does not meet a customer's quality expectations, the likelihood of non-repeat with the brand is high (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007; Min et al., 2015) Price is also a factor that impacts customer satisfaction as Customers want products and services that are priced reasonably and competitively, and they appreciate companies that offer good value for money (Min et al., 2015). Brand reputation is critical; customers want to do business with trustworthy, transparent, and reliable organisations; if the organisation's customer reviews are vital, customer satisfaction will increase (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007; Min et al., 2015).

3.3.3 How to measure the impact of customer satisfaction on business performance

A principal goal of customer satisfaction research is to determine, in advance, what will affect customer satisfaction- identifying the most prominent customer benefits. The fundamental objective of satisfying customers is to improve profitability by expanding the business (Barsky & Labagh, 1992; Bowen & Chen, 2001).

Once the actions have been determined, it is essential to categorise them so that the organisation understands its strengths and weaknesses. They can be organised: (1) Critical strength; Important for the customer and are performed well by the company. (2) Insignificant strength;

Not crucial for the customer and performed well by the company. (3) Potential threat. is a danger zone represented by attributes that give competitors an advantage. Attributes in this category perform poorly relative to the competition and do not compare well with customers' other reference points. Such attributes, however, may become more critical to guests if their quality improves (Barsky & Labagh, 1992). It can be said that a key to business success is the relationships you maintain with your customers. For this, it is important to put into operation the concept of customer satisfaction so that it can be monitored (McColl-Kennedy & Schneider, 2000).

3.4 Co-creation

To understand the value of co-creation, it is crucial to understand the Vargo and Lusch service-dominant logic and its characteristics that all authors rely upon to explain the benefits of value co-creation.

Historically, marketing has inherited a model of exchange from economics, which has a dominant logic based on the exchange of "goods," which are usually manufactured outputs. Marketing has focused on goods as the unit of exchange, and a goods-centred view has been dominant (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). Good-dominant logic postulates that the purpose of economic activity is to make and distribute things that can be sold. However, Vargo and Lusch argue that all economies are service economies (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). In addition, the authors argue that people are constantly moving toward more specific specialities; therefore, mass production is no longer a solution to satisfy customers' needs. It is not like services were never necessary. However, they are becoming more apparent in the economy as specialisation increases. Less of what is exchanged "goods" is the dominant manufactured-output classification system of economic activity. Services and the operant resources they represent have always characterised the essence of economic activity (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The service-centred view implies that marketing is a continuous series of social and economic processes primarily focused on the skills and knowledge with which the firm constantly strives to make better value propositions than its competitors. Because firms can always perform better at serving customers and improving financial performance, the service-centred view is a continuous learning process directed at improving skills and knowledge (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). The service-centred view can be stated as follows: Identify or develop core competencies, the fundamental knowledge and skills a company has that represent a potential competitive advantage. Identify other potential customers that could benefit from these competencies and cultivate relationships that involve customers in developing customised, competitively compelling value propositions to meet specific needs. Finally, measuring marketplace feedback to learn and improve the firm's offering to customers and consequently improve firm performance (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

Service-dominant logic is more than being consumer-oriented within the firm; it means collaborating and learning from customers and being adaptive to their individual and specific needs. Service-centred dominant logic implies that value is defined by and co-created with the consumer rather than embedded in the output. From the service-centred view of marketing, firms are in the process of continual hypothesis generation and testing. Outcomes (e.g., financial) are not something to be maximised but something to learn from as firms try to serve customers better and improve their performance (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

The primary difference key for the research author is the customer's role in good-dominant and service-dominant logic. In traditional goods dominant logic, the customer is merely the recipient of the goods. Marketers do things to customers; they segment, penetrate, distribute,

and promote them. However, in a service-dominant logic, the customer is a co-producer of the service. This crucial difference significantly impacts the author's research to deepen the knowledge of how co-creation can impact customer experience and the benefits and challenges that arise (Vargo & Lusch, 2004).

3.4.1 When does customer co-creation happen

It is important to understand when co-creation occurs. According to Payne et al. (2008), Co-creation occurs when a customer consumes or uses a product or service rather than when the output is manufactured. This distinction is vital because a customer will only consume a product or service if the product or service adds value. To ensure the outcome, consideration of the customer is necessary. Since the customer is always a co-creator of value: There is no value until an offering is used. Experience and perception are essential to value determination (Payne et al., 2008).

Companies aim to integrate additional customer resources into the company's processes to support the company's value creation (Saarijärvi, 2012). Customer value propositions are fundamental strategic tools for companies to externally communicate the core benefits of their market offerings and internally focus on the right things to deliver those benefits to customers (Saarijärvi, 2012).

3.4.2 Why is value co-creation important

Co-creation and increasing added value is a desirable goal for organisations as they can assist them in highlighting the customer's or consumer's point of view and improve the front-end process of identifying customers' needs and wants (Lusch & Vargo, 2006). In this way, organisations can create more value for their customers by involving them in a process where they can provide input and feedback, leading to better products and services that better meet their needs and preferences (Payne et al., 2008). Literature also specifies that in the value co-creation process, in addition to providing customers with products and services specific to their needs, companies make more efficient use of resources (Payne et al., 2008), which connects directly to lean methodology, intelligent use of resources and greater customer engagement. Prahalad & Ramaswamy, (2004) mention that co-creation leads to value creation tailored to customers' specific needs and preferences, resulting in higher levels of customer engagement and loyalty. Customers are empowered and want to play a more significant role in the exchange process. When harnessed strategically, the shift towards more active customers can allow companies to deliver their value propositions more effectively (Saarijärvi, 2012).

In addition, co-creation can lead to new and innovative ideas as customers and companies work together to develop new products and services that better meet market needs. By working collaboratively, customers can provide feedback (Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). This relates directly to how this process allows for customer insights so companies can gain a deeper understanding of their customers (Payne et al., 2008), which is connected to customer intimacy, creating deeper customer relationships and, as a result, a deeper understanding. Furthermore, customisation will be a natural outcome. The process design allows for co-creation and a high degree of customer intimacy (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Finally, it is essential to mention how co-creation generates continuous improvement and learning, as companies can continuously receive feedback and improve products and services. In addition, co-creation can be a learning experience for companies and customers as they collaborate in developing new products and services. This can lead to the development of new skills and knowledge that can be applied to future projects (Pralhad & Ramaswamy, 2004).

Overall, co-creation will naturally improve customer satisfaction as customers can provide input and feedback on products and services, resulting in higher customer loyalty and repeat business. By involving customers in creating products and services, companies can create products and services that better meet the needs and preferences of their customers, resulting in mutual benefit for both parties.

3.4.3 How to promote customer co-creation

Taking advantage of all customer encounters is essential to create a deeper connection and understanding of customer needs (Payne et al., 2008). Communication encounters are mainly activities primarily to connect with customers and promote and enact dialogue. Usage encounters refer to customer practices in using a product or service and include the services which support such usage. Service encounters comprise customer interactions with customer service personnel or service applications. Managing encounter value-creating processes includes setting goals for both customer and supplier and evaluating whether current encounters achieve these goals. Lastly, emotion-supporting encounters help to understand the needs and create an emotional connection through stories, promises, and values (Payne et al., 2008).

3.5 Research Gaps

The author's recommendation for future research is to have a deeper investigation on the theoretical implications between lean and customer satisfaction. What the author has seen is that there are no existing articles that make a connection between lean methodology and the impact it can have on customer satisfaction. Several authors talk about the characteristics of lean, such as reducing waste or working on what adds value to the customer (Womack et al., 2007; Chatzopoulos & Weber, 2021). Assuming customer satisfaction improves with the use of lean, but there needs to be a deeper understanding of the benefits it can bring and how it can be implemented. It has been the author itself that has made the connection on how to design the customer journey using the characteristics of a lean organisation and the possible implementation.

Furthermore, in lean, as the author Womack et al., (2007), it implies that understanding the customer's needs is necessary, and now the same is true. There needs to be detailed research on how co-creation with customers and asking them for feedback can help create products and services that solve customer pains, allowing the organisation to do it agile and efficiently. As a result, customer satisfaction increases. Vargo & Lusch, (2004) develop the service dominant logic, which focuses on having information and knowledge about the customer so the company can constantly strive to improve value propositions. So it can be said that co-creation is important to know customer needs. Collaborating and learning from customers and adapting to their individual and specific needs are essential to be competitive. Hence, a service-centred dominant logic implies that value is defined by and co-created with the consumer (Vargo & Lusch, 2004). However, there is no connection to how to gather customer data and co-create with them to improve continuously, according to the lean methodology, and the impact it can have on customer satisfaction. With this research gap in mind, the author will work on creating this flow or closed loop between customer feedback, lean methodology and the impact this has on customer satisfaction and the economic benefits this brings to the organisation.

4. METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodology chosen for the research and the motivations behind the choice to meet the research objectives. Leading with the research strategy and the design, later with the method and how to gather existing data and finally, how to analyse it and ensure the quality of the research.

4.1 Research Strategy

The study will be a qualitative research which will empathise and focus on words and images rather than qualifications. Qualitative research views social reality as a constantly shifting and emergent property of an individual's creation (Bryman & Bell, 2019). In this case, with the customer satisfaction and the power of co-creation to improve it, reality can change if the perception or standard of what people expect of organisations differs, which makes organisations change their strategy and constantly evolve with the current times, new tools, technologies, personal motivations, and what society values.

The author's investigation will be qualitative, which focuses on collecting and investigating non-numerical data to understand, in this case, how to improve customer satisfaction with lean for retail. Qualitative research shows many strengths and benefits; for example, the issues can be examined in detail and in-depth, moreover; the research framework direction can be quickly revised as new information emerges (Anderson, 2010), which is essential for the author to be flexible in the investigation to deliver valuable inputs to the company.

As the results and conclusions of the data will be soft and connected to human emotions, motivations, and decision-making processes, it only makes sense to have data based on human experience, which is powerful and sometimes more compelling than quantitative data. Furthermore, although findings cannot be generalised to a larger population since data is usually connected from a few cases or individuals, it can be transferable to another setting, which can be helpful for other business units at Volvo Group, such as Volvo Buses. (Anderson, 2010). The primary research method will be based on conducting interviews, and using secondary data to understand which are the crucial aspects to improve customer satisfaction with lean for retail so that the author can pivot and advance the research according to the results obtained.

The research is an inductive investigation, the author is making specific observations of how specific markets connect insights from the customers and apply them to the already existing process of continuous improvement established at dealerships, recognising some patterns that might need improvement, or that might influence the customer and his or her level of loyalty to the brand. However, the author will combine inductive and deductive research as the investigation advances. Starting with an inductive study helps the author develop a relevant research topic, construct a strong working theory, and then follow up with deductive research to confirm or invalidate the conclusion, avoiding research biases.

It is also vital to consider ontological considerations in the research strategy since they directly impact the design and methods. Ontology is concerned with the assumptions made about the nature of reality (Bryman & Bell, 2019), and there are two key concepts. Objectivism and constructionism. For this research, the author has the constructionism, an ontological position that emphasises that social phenomena and categories are accomplished by their actions (Bryman & Bell, 2019). For example, through this ontological position, the people who work there create and evolve the organisation's culture and improve the tasks that each role has to do with the changing markets. For this research, the author uses the constructionism position

because even though there will be deep research of best practices within Volvo Trucks, the primary research method is interviewing since the author believes that employees can change and create social interactions with customers, that is in a constant state of revision and improvement.

A given ontological position implies a particular epistemological position and understanding of how to gain knowledge of that reality (Bryman & Bell, 2019). Adopting a constructionist ontology, the epistemology is interpretivism, understanding human behaviour as well as the "how" and the "why" of social action (Bryman & Bell, 2019). So, taking this information into account, the primary strategy of the research is to understand the motivations of the customers of Volvo Trucks, as well as the social interactions workers can change and create with the gathered data to improve customer experience, hence, their satisfaction with the brand.

The author chose this method mainly because it fits Volvo Trucks' values: "Our products are built for people by people" (Volvo Trucks, 2023d). Moreover, it is essential to consider the author's personal preferences and personality in addition to organisational factors. The author enjoys face-to-face contact, so boosting those aspects is essential. Since the research quality relies on the author's abilities, taking advantage of the author's social abilities is smart. Several factors can influence the research strategy and the methods chosen, such as the organisational factor, which can include the size and the pace of change (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

4.2 Research design

The research design provides a framework for data collection and analysis. There are different research design methods, each representing a different way to set the research work and thus obtain the desired results (Bryman & Bell, 2019). There are different ways to approach a research design due to its specific characteristics. It can depend on many aspects, such as the research conducting interviews or the work process. Considering this information, the author has chosen the Comparative design.

4.2.1 Comparative design

This design entails the study of using identical methods in two or more cases. The study focuses on an intense examination of the system in different case studies where the author then can use several research methods, avoiding a significant reliance on only one, such as semi-structured interviews and documentary data collection (Bryman & Bell, 2019). In this case study, the author will focus on the system of continuous improvements in Latin America and the Northern European Market and how considering customer data input can positively impact the business. This research's intercultural approach focuses on studying the interaction between people and organisations with different cultural backgrounds (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

4.3 Research method and data collection

4.3.1 Secondary data

These are the data from surveys previously conducted by the company or existing documentation at Volvo Trucks that can be of use for the research. These are two surveys, the Heavy Truck Surveys (HTS) and the Retail Excellence Survey (REx) survey, which are to measure customer satisfaction.

HTS is a benchmark syndicates survey, meaning that all the Heavy Truck manufacturers in Europe Participate and have access to the same information the survey gives. This survey has been carried out since 2000 and is done in thirty countries. The survey is conducted anonymously, so the contact with heavy truck owners is on behalf of major truck manufacturers. The number of interviews can vary from manufacturer to manufacturer, mainly due to the market penetration of each manufacturer. The target group of these surveys are companies operating heavy trucks, and the respondents are owners, fleet managers or drivers who are part of the truck purchase decision-making process. The focus on the HTS is strategic; it is used to highlight areas of improvement at Volvo Trucks and to understand how the brand is positioned compared to competitors. The survey provides all manufacturers with information about the sales, workshop and specifications of what customers consider important or advantageous in their trucks.

On the other hand, there is the REx. Being one of the premium brands, Volvo Trucks strives for a premium customer experience throughout the customer experience. REx helps measure dealer performance in prioritised touch points within sales and workshops to: foster a client-centric organisation, identify dissatisfied customers as early as possible, find root causes of customer dissatisfaction, and decide upon actions needed to be taken in order to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty. This survey is done all over Europe, and the target customers can be either customers that have purchased a truck recently or visited the workshop during the event time. Even though both are part of the REx survey, the questionnaire depends on the type of interview since the number of times the customers can be interviewed can vary. The main objective of the REx survey is to work on continuous customer feedback and create action plans to improve the customer experience continuously. In order to ensure continuous improvement, REx Survey reports are delivered throughout the year. Depending on whether it is workshops or sales, the data is collected within different time frames to then gather the data in a report. Moreover, it should be noted that dealers and markets have access to this information all round the year. Here is the cyclical process with a real-life example. The first report is delivered in March, and it contains information from the last year. The dealers present a quarterly action plan in March to show the actions to tackle the problems raised by the customers. The second report is delivered in October, with information from January to June. The cycle starts again with the next report delivered in March of next year.

4.3.2 Primary data

The research is carried out with five interviews, with professionals within Volvo Trucks, regarding customer experience and lean methodology. Eight key people who can provide a global and pragmatic view on the challenges organisations face regarding implementing customer insights in lean for retail. Choosing a study sample is an essential step in any research project since it is rarely practical, efficient, or ethical to study whole populations or, in this case, a whole organisation. (Marshall, 1996). The selection of an appropriate method depends upon the aim of the study. In this case, purpose sampling is the best method since it samples participants strategically so that those sampled are relevant to the author's research question. In addition, this research uses snowball sampling, making initial contact with a small group of people relevant to the research topic and then using these to establish contacts with others (Bryman & Bell, 2019). In this case, the author contacted Kristin Signert, Director of Customer Experience & Insight, and Bruna Araujo, Customer Experience Manager. These two people are experts in customer experience and work actively within the organisation to set the framework to deliver an excellent customer experience. After the interview, three classifications were made to ensure the relevance of the interviewees to the research question.

First level: Understanding the lean methodology and the business case in Latin America and how they have developed the project.

1. They are part of the project that have worked on lean.
2. Have a global vision of how this project started, the needs it meets and the challenges it faces.
3. They are actively working on projects that mix lean methodology and customer experience.

Second Level: Understanding the current status in Europe and how they use lean for retail and to improve customer satisfaction.

1. Responsible for lean processes at dealerships
2. Responsible for collecting and analysing customer data through surveys.

Third level: The market.

1. Responsible for the customer experience in the market.
2. Responsible for the lean methodology implementation.

This way, the people interviewed are experts in their occupation and organisation. In addition, at the beginning of each interview, an introduction of the persons and their work is requested to ensure that they are experts. In qualitative research, there is an emphasis on greater generality in formulating initial research ideas and on interviewees' perspectives since there is much greater interest in the interviewee's point of view. Interviewers can depart significantly from any guide used to ask new follow-up questions. As a result, qualitative interviewing tends to be flexible. In a semi-structured interview, the author has a list of questions on specific topics to be covered. However, questions may not follow precisely the outlined in the guide. Questions not included in the guide may be asked as the interviewer picks up on things interviewees say (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

Five semi-structured interviews are conducted because although keeping the interview with a clear focus is important and helps the author keep the interview on track, the flexibility to explore key insights that arise in the conversation in a semi-structured interview helps the author incorporate data that otherwise would not have emerged. This type of interview is beneficial specifically to the proposed research question, as many elements may positively or negatively impact how to co-create. There is no right or wrong answer, and although the answers were aligned in this case, with a broader sample, the outcome may vary.

In creating the interview guide, two different aspects were taken into consideration by the author. The first decision was to choose the type of interview, which in this case was semi-structured. To do this, the first step was creating bullet points covering the critical information to extract from the interviews, considering the literature and the research scope. Hence, there was a clear focus on the questions to ensure their quality. Once the focus and expected results were precise, it was time to develop the questions, which are relevant to give answers to the proposed research question. Creating these questions allowed the author to start the interviews as calmly and organised as possible and then explore other areas within the conversation with the interviewee. These are the five areas that the interview guide covers: 1) introduction of the author and the research topic and purpose; 2) introduction of the respondent, his or her line of work and responsibilities; 3) questions regarding the project development in the specific market, 4) core questions to deepen the knowledge and learn about benefits 5) closing the interview (see Appendix 1).

The first part of the guide aims to clarify the purpose of the interview, the topics to be covered and a brief introduction of the interviewer and interviewees. The core of the interview focuses on questions with an emphasis on greater generality in the formulation of initial research ideas and interviewees' perspectives so that they can share their opinion and know-how and create a safe space by sharing insights on benefits, decision-making process, challenges and allow for a deep discussion. The structure of most of the questions is either direct questions, "What do you think are the benefits of co-creation?" or interpreting questions, such as "Do you mean that the dealers are focused on what adds value to the customer?" (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

The interview guide has been the same for all three levels of the people sampling described above, as the dealer is interested in the impact of co-creating with the customer and considering their opinion for the business and customer satisfaction, being at different levels of development in implementing lean methodology and customer experience. The role of the author during these interviews has been, firstly, to make clear the purpose of the interviews and the needs of the author, create order on the topic areas to discuss so the questions flow reasonably well, make sure the author understands what the interviewee is saying with follow up questions and with specifying questions, make sure there is room to deviate from the interview guide but always having in mind the objective and make sure there is no topic area left behind. Summing up, the author's role in the interview was keeping the discussion focused on the objective, making sure the discussion stayed within the topic areas, making a good closing and closing with a commitment to get back in touch via email if any further questions arose in the future and take notes on the key points mentioned. It has proved to be a challenge as there is only one researcher, which has meant maintaining a very high degree of concentration and extra preparation. With the follow-up question and specifying questions, it has been possible to minimise respondent bias since the authors pushed the interviews to reflect on their answers and validate them.

The interviews were conducted online using the Teams tool. The main reason for conducting the interviews through Teams was the handicap of not being geographically in the same country; however, when interviewing people in Gothenburg, the author decided to conduct the interviews through Teams because of the flexibility, as last-minute adjustments to the scheduling could be made. In addition, no clear evidence shows that the interviewer's capacity to secure rapport is significantly reduced compared to a face interview (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

| N | Name and Position | Country | Duration | Tool |
|----------|---|-------------------|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. | Respondent 1, Lean Specialist | Latin America | 60 min | Teams |
| 2. | Respondent 2, CX Specialist & Respondent 3, Market intelligence analyst | Latin America | 60 min | Teams |
| 3. | Respondent 4, Operational Development Manager | Scandinavia | 30 min | Teams |
| 4. | Respondent 5, Marketing Director; Respondent 6, Customer Data and Insights Manager; Respondent 7, Operational | Northern European | 40 min | Teams |

| | | | | |
|----|--|-------------------|--------|-------|
| | Development Manager | | | |
| 5. | Respondent 8, Retail Development Manager | Scandinavia | 40 min | Teams |
| 6. | Respondent 6, Customer Data and Insights Manager; Respondent 7 | Northern European | 50 min | Teams |

Table 3: Interviews carried out

4.3.3 Data collection

As this is purely qualitative research, the mainstream of data collection will be notes and observations from the author from the interviewees carried out. Research methods such as participant observation and semi-structured interviewing allow the author to keep an open mind about what she needs to know so that concepts and theories can emerge from the data. (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

4.4 Research analysis

One of the most common approaches, and the one the author used, is thematic analysis. When looking for themes, even though there are different approaches, the author has chosen "repetitions", which are topics that occur again and again (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

To develop thematic analysis, the first step the author took was to familiarise themselves with the content, transcribe it, and read it several times to extract possible connections or themes in the text. The author identified and named the codes (see Appendix 2), adjusting the codes reading through the text. Once the author finished identifying all the codes, re-reading the text was essential to ensure that the codes referred to the critical parts of the interview, adjusting them if necessary. Once satisfied with the codes, the author put them together in themes. A great benefit of thematic analysis, for this research question specifically, is that it helps to sort through the information and see what patterns are most prevalent, giving the author a clue as to the most important ideas or insights (Bryman & Bell, 2019). However, it can also be a big challenge, as being such a soft theme, many quotes can belong to different codes. As a disadvantage of the thematic analysis, the author can mention that the information could fit into different themes, giving a feeling of unclear and unordered information. Moreover, it is essential to consciously choose the key quotes that gather the most crucial information about the research question.

4.5 Research quality

4.5.1 Reliability

Reliability is concerned with the question of whether the result of a study is repeatable. The term is commonly used to address whether or not the measures applied to business management concepts (such as team working, employee, motivation, and customer experience) are consistent (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

4.5.2 Replicability

For replicability to happen, the study must be replicable. This means that the author needs to describe his or her procedures in great detail (Bryman & Bell, 2019). For that, the author has described the methodology thoroughly so other researchers can replicate it if they want it.

4.5.3 Validity

Validity is concerned with the integrity of conclusions generated from the research. There are four main types. However, considering the nature of the qualitative research, this author is concerned with external and ecological validity. On the one hand, External validity is concerned with whether the result of a study can be generalised beyond the specific research context. On the other hand, ecological validity concerns whether social scientific findings apply in everyday, naturally occurring social settings (Bryman & Bell, 2019).

To ensure validity, the author can take up different strategies, but triangulation is the one that fits best, meaning that multiple individuals analyse the same data. In this specific research, the data has been analysed by the author and the two company supervisors to brainstorm the following steps and ensure minimum biases. With the data gathered from interviews, the author and the supervisors can discuss the conclusion and next steps and share thoughts to analyse the data through different perspectives.

5. EMPIRICAL FINDINGS

The main focus of this chapter is to present the data from the primary data collection. The findings from semi-structured interviews are presented by two main themes (1) Lean in Volvo Trucks and (2) Customer Experience in Volvo Trucks.

After reading the transcripts of the interviews, the themes have become apparent to the author. In order to have a complete overview of the research question. Furthermore, in order to maintain an organised structure and to follow the comparative design features, the author has created codes within the themes. The themes and codes are presented in Appendix 2.

5.1 Lean in Volvo Trucks

The interview process has enabled the author to get a clear picture of the diagnosis of the lean process for the retail situation at Volvo Trucks. First, the author made a diagnosis with an unbiased overview of the situation. Furthermore, she has also learned which process is currently in place to be able to make recommendations in the future. Codes within the theme show the evidence. (1) explaining the current state of lean in Latin America, (2) the state of Lean in the Northern European Market, (3) the benefits and challenges of implementing lean in an organisation and (4) the methodology.

5.1.1 Lean in Latin America

First, it is essential to mention that the lean process in Latin America has been in operation for a long time. It has a significant advantage in showing results and working structures that have already been implemented. Nevertheless, the lean process in Latin America can significantly help and inspire to create and implement a standard structure among all the markets, in this case, the Northern European Market.

First, it is essential to talk about the governance implemented that allows for creating a learning community, sharing knowledge and ensuring that all departments and areas are working on improvement projects, with the ultimate goal of reducing activities that do not add value to the end customer. The interviewee talks about the importance of having clear roles that allow the deployment of the lean methodology. *“There are a number of lean coaches split up in different functional areas to support the process and implementation”-R1.*

As lean is an innovative or not-so-common work process in administrative or commercial areas, it is vital to ensure a process that allows learning and training since lean is historically connected to production processes. That is why they have a coach who supports the other areas to work on the necessary soft skills and work together on blockages that may arise, in addition to the technical information that allows them to make the lean methodology a reality.

“So we each selected one area to have weekly meetings and coaching sessions with the people there. And then, we asked the areas to select a person from within the area. That would be what we are calling the lean Facilitators in the area. The person who would absorb the knowledge that we would develop to be able to implement the methodologies for their reality”- R1.

It is also important to mention how these facilitators become leaders who encourage continuous improvement and work cross-functionally. As these people are most likely experiencing similar challenges, they create a core team to support and give feedback to each other. *“The core team will be the person that will help the colleagues to implement or improve the project”- R1.*

As the author mentions, showing results achieved through this methodology is more accessible in Latin American markets because they have been working on it for longer. Four levels categorise the level of development of the lean foundation, from immature to mature. However, several facilities in Latin America have the highest status, which are a reference globally. *“There is a global team of lean coaches and senior coaches on the production side where they can evaluate. It gives lean and some recommendations and recognitions within our report”.- R1.*

The start of lean in Latin America came about to ensure bringing a new vehicle to the plant without extra investment in a new building. They applied the lean methodology and had a great result. This was in 2002, and it became a reference plant for Volvo Trucks globally; simultaneously, they started working on new lean tools until, in 2017, the management team in Latin America opened the challenge of moving the lean concepts to other areas, as there was an opportunity for improvement that would allow them to improve, not only in the production sites but also in the other areas. *“Why don't we expand it to other areas? Why are we not applying it to the dealers? Moreover, he set the journey to start for lean for dealers”- R1.*

Even with the experience and the results that demonstrate the validity and benefits of lean, the interviewee mentions the importance that experts or coaches also need help and need to keep evolving and improving in order to remain competitive in the market and that in order to support other people and areas, they also need training and teamwork. *“We also have our coach here. We meet with him every week or two weeks to present what we are developing and seek his direction”-R1.*

Finally, it is essential to mention the implementation of the methodology from a bottom-up and top-bottom perspective. The day-to-day actions have to be aligned with Volvo Trucks' vision and have to be strategic actions that help to achieve that vision. Therefore, the creation of improvement projects must have three clear blocks: people, customers and business results, as well as a clear reflection on how it will help to achieve the strategic vision. The deployment of actions with a strategic vision, i.e. convincing top-bottom and bottom-up vision, ensures that they are working in alignment and with a common goal. *“We have a reflection with the directors on the projects we need to get to our annual targets”- R1.*

The combination of bottom-up and top-bottom vision ensures that creating a culture of improvement in all areas, with people and teams, clarifying how teams do day-to-day work is connected to the strategic vision, which brings many benefits to the organisation, as people are committed to the outcome and improvement. *“Which is the connection between indicators and connect them with the strategic objectives? What are the operational KPIs, how do they connect, and how do they contribute to which strategic objective? So that they know their contribution”-R1.*

To understand lean deployment in Latin America, in 2022, they had several improvement projects within eight areas of work. Furthermore, out of the total number of dealers in Latin America, more than half are actively working with a lean methodology. They have meetings with a clear dashboard of actions in green and red to improve safety, customer satisfaction, processes and services.

5.1.2 Lean in Europe and the Northern European Market

Here, the author will focus more on the global vision of lean in the European market as she will focus more specifically on the Northern European Market in the proposal section. In lean for retail in Europe, they work on three key aspects: employee engagement, customer satisfaction and business results. The biggest challenge is to work on the vision of incorporating customer feedback in improvement projects. The focus has changed, and they have started with the vision of the technician working in the dealers and creating a connection of improvement projects between what the technician says and then what the customer says.

“Asking them: What kind of problems have you had in your deliveries? Because if we connect, for example, the questions in the REx result and the technicians' daily problems, They are generally the same”- R4.

In addition, to work on these projects, their work process is similar to that established in Europe. With daily meetings, the focus is not on the KPIs set and how to work towards achieving those

objectives, but rather the reflection in these daily meetings starts with the problems that have arisen in the previous days. Then they make an action plan to eliminate or improve any processes to ensure the same problems do not occur again. To summarise, it can be said that Latin America has a more proactive way of working based on improvements that customers mention. In Europe, they base their project work on problems that technicians have had before, which can be more reactive.

Furthermore, this is connected to the culture and priorities of a dealership. Suppose there is no built-in culture of the need to work under the lean model and the benefits that this brings. If there is not a deployment to support the people in the teams and work together with them, which can be through coaches and a core team as they do in Latin America, there will always be other priorities. *“They will always prioritise the delivery. If you have to choose between spending time working with improvements or delivering a truck, then delivering a truck will always be the winner out there”- R4.*

The use and collection of data are crucial; without the information about what the customer needs, having a clear picture of which are the adding value activities is impossible, and it is something to work on. In order to know what the customer values, there are surveys Volvo Trucks has. However, there are some challenges to it. *“We need to rely on good data and good data collection, and we need to know how to work with this data and also to be able to collect the data”- R8.*

5.2.3 Benefits and challenges of lean

Thanks to the interviews conducted, it can also highlight the benefits of the lean system. To summarise, the benefits detected by the interviewers are: (1) a Connection between the different stakeholder groups; (2) A work process that allows continuous improvement; (3) A standardised work structure that allows to use of resources in a smart way (4) A learning community that differentiates the organisation from the competition.

The connection between headquarters, markets and dealers will enable organisations to work cohesively and efficiently. Work in a coordinated and fast way, increasing the engagement of dealers and markets, i.e. the people in direct contact with customers. And it is an essential aspect to take into account to ensure lean. *“The dealers translate the lean to their needs, but we need to improve it. To be more connected since we are the reference in Latin America for the other markets”- R1.*

In addition, to meet customer needs, the organisation also needs to evolve. For this, a work dynamic based on continuous improvement is critical, with measurable improvements and strategic agility to make decisions quickly while considering the client's data and feedback and constant learning. In other words, co-creating between the customer and the organisation. *“The lean is a means to promote, improve your results, and reach your objectives”-R1.*

It also ensures, in these times of a volatile and changing market, that the use of the resources is wise and spend the necessary time working on the actions that will add value to the customer and give positive economic results and deep dive into the needs of the customer. In the work developed in Latin America, lean implementation resulted in big savings, so the people could invest time in adding value activities for the customer.

“Lean practices. Methodologies that ensure we get it right the first time have no rework or reduced rework”- R1.

“Lean can be a perfect fit to improve customer loyalty and business growth”- R4.

“I would also include as a benefit better experience for the customer at the end of the day, which will have a positive impact on our business. With that continuous purchasing cycle, customers keep returning and buying from us, which is essential for the business”- R5 & R6.

“It has also been a more positive way from the salesman at the workshop with the lean methodology where you establish a dialogue, where you are involved, where it is not only being used to see a bad result or good result, it is used to dig into the results”- R8.

Creating a learning community that allows stakeholders to learn from each other is key to achieving a more engaged dealership network. The reality is that the challenges that dealers face on a day-to-day basis can be similar, and being able to foster learning from each other is a great benefit that only requires a little effort or resources to be successful at the market or headquarters level. In addition, having a more engaged network is a key benefit of celebrating results and giving recognition for a job well done. Furthermore, an engaged network will be proud of their work and want to contribute new ideas and improvements.

“Also, we ask each area to promote events to recognise the best projects or the people most involved, where the main projects of the department are shared and presented”- R1.

“When people start to see their efforts reflected in KPIs, this is a big game changer because their work directly impacts them, and their engagement increases when they see their day-to-day job improvement getting easier and less waste”- R1.

“Worker engagement in Latin America is one of the highest in Volvo, and lean contributes to that”-R1.

However, there are several challenges to lean for retail implementation that the author detected across the interviews. Firstly, an aligned organisation is essential, with an organisational structure ready and willing to support the implementation process. The chances of success are minimal if there is a lack of support, clarity and resources from the headquarters level for implementing the lean for the retailer's process.

“Many individuals based at headquarters may benefit from familiarising with the operations at dealerships, as they might not have had the opportunity to visit before. Furthermore, headquarters need to reflect about the obstacles that prevent the technicians from achieving optimal outcomes in the first attempt so the organisation can understand their point of view and support their work”- R4.

“We did not have any reference in the administrative areas, as lean has been very much connected to production”- R1.

“Visual management of the KPIs and the indicators of the area is extremely important. And also to escalate the problems. This is what we talk about in performance management”- R1.

This can result in frustrations and demotivation that affect the dealers' employees, who are constantly interacting with the customer, thus affecting customer satisfaction. It is crucial to find a way to keep them engaged. A high sense of leadership and prioritising lean is necessary to ensure a lean implementation. If teams do not see the leaders working on continuous improvement, setting an example for others to follow, the organisation will most likely not achieve the desired results. *“The foundation of lean is the commitment to leadership. It is the*

essence that the leader gives importance to the lean, that he or she is the example that drives some improvement projects”- R1.

One of the significant challenges is understanding that there can be resistance from employees. Promoting change within an organisation will be time and resource-consuming. Training people will take the most time to get them on board with a new work process, as they will always prefer to work as they already know and are comfortable with. This is part of the culture and resistance to change, which is expected in all organisations. *“When we started implementing lean, the leaders had a big challenge convincing them that it was something other than their job. It is not easy to look for leaders. The key process here is to define the pilot areas, the areas that want to improve, want to change and are open to change. Many people resist change, and you will not convince them; the only way is to work with the rest of the people so that they can see the results with their own eyes”- R1.*

However, constantly measuring results and actions taken is essential to show the results and convince the people who are doubtful to change, as well as for the managerial team. Otherwise, teams will not be able to know what their continuous improvement is about and even if they are improving. This is a challenge, so keeping more short-term objectives ensures teams are on the right path. Moreover, to get the managerial team on board, proposed changes and measurable objectives need to be aligned with the strategic vision to get the managerial team on board. *“What is the connection between indicators and connect them with the strategic objectives? What are the operational KPIs of the teams that follow up weekly, how do they connect, and how do they contribute to which strategic objective?”- R1.*

It is impossible to know whether the improvement depends on specific working teams or other factors (such as external factors). As evidence for the statement: There are improvements in dealers, but no clarity of which action has impacted the improvement. *“The typical situation in a workshop is; you have the customer commitments we put on the wall, and there they are. Then you have the REx result, and that is it. At the meeting, they spoke about the survey results. And then you ask them what they have done differently, and they say I have no idea. That is if I generalise the way we work in a workshop”- R4.*

The teams working in the dealers have different structures or training processes. So, the way of working is different. There is no shared work process, joint training, or common structures. Evidence: The process is not connected. If there is a connected process, there is room for teamwork, fostering a common culture, employee engagement, and fostering and keeping talent. *“Alignment. So all areas and departments have connections to ensure that we are working towards a common goal and have common KPIs or objectives. It is an alignment governance that ensures that everything comes together”- R1.*

“The benefit is for us to move in a single direction using a strategy. And governance is more like a tactical way to get the strategy”- R2.

5.2.4 Lean Methodology

In order to be able to work with Lean, it is also essential to understand the methodology, which ensures successful implementation and results. The most important thing to highlight is the care of people and talent. They are the ones who will take care of the customer, which is why taking them into account is vital. One of the lean objectives is to add value to the customer to achieve business results. However, how can this be achieved? *“Through committed people. Committed people lead to satisfied customers and company results”- R1.*

To ensure the implementation of lean, there needs to be a learning process of good practices so that they can be implemented from one distributor to another or in other countries from one team to another and with other countries. Creating spaces for collaboration and sharing with collages is essential to ensure learning. This can take many forms, but the aim is to be able to learn. *“Daily meetings or weekly meetings to manage the KPIs, to understand how we are doing with the objectives, what the improvements are, and what actions we are going to propose for each improvement or blockage that has arisen”- R1.*

It is also essential to train people, not only to monitor the KPIs through these meetings but also to train them and ensure they have all the necessary competencies to carry out their work. Furthermore, the best way to learn is by learning by doing and learning from your mistakes. *“People development. Here we mention developing people, not just training, so to speak, but developing in practice, how we teach the methodologies, and how we transfer the methodologies to practice”- R1.*

5.2 Customer experience at Volvo Trucks

5.2.1 Benefits and challenges of working in a customer-centric organisation

The first benefit of a customer-centric organisation is an aligned governance, with the same goal of satisfying the customer and working together. This becomes a strength as the organisation works together, and achieving objectives is easier. To do this, actively working on sharing and ensuring that everyone understands the strategic vision is crucial. *“Our governance is one of our strengths because we have an established and shared one; our monthly meetings with all dealers and the market companies are part of it. So that is one of our main strengths. Seeing how our work adds value to the customer is interesting”- R2.*

Furthermore, in a customer-centric organisation, as in the lean methodology, employees focus on what adds value to the customer. Focusing on and prioritising the jobs that are key for the customer to ensure customer satisfaction. In co-creating with the customer, first, ask for their feedback, gather that data, and collect all the necessary information to make informed decisions on the necessary improvement plans. Organisations must find the balance between collecting the necessary information and not drowning in it. Nevertheless, this can be a challenging process as the information collected can be extensive. Dealers can waste time reviewing all that information instead of focusing on action plans. However, technology can help us go through all that information and sort it out clearly. Surveys can be a great tool, but the amount of information can be overwhelming.

“With all the data, to create action plans you'll have after just filtering, yeah, filtering. So the data has to be there from the beginning for us to be allowed to improve”- R2.

“It is to help them focus on results and action plans rather than to find the data and then analyse it. The tool helps us summarise all the information so the dealers can save time going through it and focus on the action plans”- R2.

So a customer-centric organisation eliminates all processes that do not help add value to customers so that employees can focus on solving customer pains gathered from the feedback. Moreover, listening to the customer and his feedback is an opportunity for improvement and a business opportunity.

“Help employees to prioritise what matters to our customers, not what we think is important, but what the customer says is important and helps them”-R2, R3.

“We know there is information that the customers are giving, so there is a business opportunity in that”- R4.

To help employees work and prioritise improvement plans, it is important to train them. For people to commit to the process, they must understand the why of what they are doing, and training will be the most time-consuming. *“So we start implementation, then we have lots of dealer training to understand the methodology, how to talk with the customer when they have to close the loop, how to interpret and things like that”- R3.*

It is also important to design the training or workshops. Understanding customer experience and how to increase customer satisfaction is not enough to get dealerships to commit to changing how they work. In order to make the change and unlearn bad practices, investing time and resources is necessary. Talk about the direct benefits, and start working towards quick wins to engage people. Even if the training takes a long time, the good thing is that once people are applying in their day-to-day, they will be proactive and ask for more involvement from headquarters to continuously improve and learn how to better listen to the customer and co-create with them.

“The survey and technology implementation to sort customer feedback is straightforward, but most of the time, you will spend training the dealers”- R3.

“Only conceptual training on using the technology couldn't sell the methodology and the value of the customer experience inside the dealership”-R3.

“And what we are struggling with is mainly how we work with customer satisfaction in a structured way. However, this takes much work to do. It's easy for us to say, but it demands time, demands personnel”- R4.

“Nowadays, we don't need to go to the dealerships and make a conceptual presentation about customer experience. The dealership is asking us to go there because they already understand that this is a significant team, and they must work on it”- R2.

One of the most apparent benefits of a customer-centric organisation, but the most difficult to measure, is the impact on business results. Spreading the mission of being a customer-centric organisation is very important, so the management team supports and works actively on it. It is a significant challenge to keep the topic on the agenda. A customer-centric organisation is a top-down strategy; commitment from the organisation's leaders is necessary. To convince people of the need for a customer-centric organisation, showing improvements in economic performance is very important, and customer loyalty can be an indicator that helps show results. Talking about specific figures is a challenge because even if there is a common understanding of the importance of customer experience, how can you show what economic impact bad customer feedback has?

“With that continuous purchasing cycle, customers keep coming back and buying from us, which is essential for the business”- R5.

“We know for sure that the customer experience is important to profitability. We still need to get the value of how much money we're talking about from a customer that gave us feedback to improve and how much money we are losing with this evaluation”- R2.

A customer-centric organisation allows for continuous improvement through action plans to improve customer satisfaction internally. Evolving to support the dealers, who are constantly working with customers and asking for improvements from headquarters to do their job. This is why lean and customer-centricity are so closely connected because the way to achieve ongoing relevance is from lean. *“But the reason for that is because we are improving our reports, we are improving our goals, we improve everything, our culture. We are improving our dealer network. And this makes part of our journey here successful”- R2.*

Customer centricity in an organisation allows one to know first-hand the customer's problems and work in an agile and effective way to improve them. Knowing what the root of the problem is. This shows a business opportunity for organisations, but it can be challenging to work on if employees are not aware of the importance of customer experience and are unwilling to learn new ways of working.

5.2.2 Current situation of customer experience in Latin America

When talking about customer experience in Latin America, it is essential to say that they work with HTS and operational surveys that complement each other. To monitor the customer experience, the first thing to do is to establish objectives for each survey in each market in order to be able to monitor and plan accordingly.

The significant evolution experienced, after years of training dealers to understand what customer experience is, its benefits, and how to put it into practice, has been the focus of the analysis of survey data, *“Now we started to analyse the information and provide the dealers with discussions just for action plans”- R3.*

This change in focus has been crucial because now they can do more specific work on the pains and needs that customers have for dealers and analyse what the improvement plans are. *“This deep dive and workshop are important today because we discuss our main pain points at the dealer by branch. So that is why we can work with the lean team to improve it now. But you also greatly improve CX knowledge and work”- R2.*

If you think about the process, it is a very structured process with a continuous flow. First, you start with the voice of the customer, which is measured through surveys. Then the use of analytics to understand what they are saying and the lean methodology to transform the customer experience. In addition, they have governance that supports the whole process, with monthly meetings, weekly reports, and daily checking of KPIs. In addition, the information they collect from customers is extensive to solve the root cause of the problem. *“We do a funnel of the customer satisfaction regarding the topic we want to improve, and we start to see where this experience happened on the dealers. Before we start an action plan, we need to have this information clear and the root cause; why is it happening? Why is the customer complaining about that?”- R3.*

In addition, the key to success is to listen to those who are in constant communication with the customer so that they feel supported and thus ensure all the necessary skills and tools to satisfy the customer effectively and the first time are covered. This is a key concern expressed by European dealers, as there is a need for more connection among headquarters, markets and dealers. *“Then we also have a point in the year when the dealers ask for support and plan where they want to get at the end of the year. So what support are they asking for specifically?”- R3.*

5.2.3 Current citation of customer experience at Europe

The customer experience in Europe is measured through the REX and HTS survey that the author develops in the secondary data section. The HTS is a benchmark syndicates survey, meaning that all the Heavy Truck manufacturers in Europe Participate and have access to the same information the survey gives. REX helps measure dealer performance in prioritised touch points to: foster a client-centric organisation, identify dissatisfied customers as early as possible, and find root causes of customer dissatisfaction.

Currently, in most markets in Europe, the HTS and REX survey is carried out, and the information is analysed, which is then documented in reports. However, there has yet to be a real action plan to improve customer satisfaction. Furthermore, the REX survey can vary in the amount of information as it is directly connected to the number of dealer customers, so some dealers need more information to design an action plan based on customer feedback. This is very important because if the feedback is not ordered, this is relatively easy, but if we need the information, the decision-making is simple. We have to look for other alternatives.

“The issue that is that some of our depots or dealers receive very little customer feedback. Our issue is getting the data right at the front end to get customer feedback”- R5.

However, there are other ways to address customer needs, which are at the forefront of the efforts to make them a priority. *“Look into the top three customers for the day. So a critical customer is coming, and then we talk about it daily. Can we ensure we have everything necessary to provide a better or a good customer experience?”- R7.*

As the REX survey is information that dealers and markets have on an ongoing basis, they start working on it when they receive an alert. However, no straightforward process or structure is in place to ensure that the information resolves customer needs promptly and effectively. The process works so that when they identify an alert, the Operational Development Manager gets to work on it, but it needs to be done in a planned way. *“My focus was always shifted if there was a problem with customer satisfaction”-R7.*

However, there is a lot of willingness to work to close the loop between customer feedback and continuous improvement in the dealerships. *“That door is open, and it would make it an easier journey. So we have some of those deep dives already in the diary for the coming months, so we should focus on those”-R5.*

5.2.4 How to promote customer satisfaction

After discussing the benefits of a customer-centric organisation, it is essential to understand that cultural change does not happen overnight. Actively working to foster activities to improve customer satisfaction and sharing is a must. *“They have to have a foundation and be committed”- R2.*

To do this, the first step is to have governance that allows the organisation to work on customer satisfaction. This is the most critical step. Governance that allows collaboration and alignment to achieve the same goal. *“With the governance we have in place, we aim to engage the market, company and dealers. Having several activities to prioritise customer experience and engage employees to reach objectives and goals”-R2.*

As the author mentioned earlier, it is the people who are going to make this change a reality, and committed people are a requisite, so they have to understand and learn from each other to share achievements and feel part of the team. Furthermore, this type of meeting that will allow

the employees, the markets and the dealers to be engaged. It will be at their forefront, and it will be a topic that they will talk about constantly. They will learn from their colleagues and be inspired to improve at their dealerships. *"We had monthly meetings between dealers and market companies so they could share best practices. Furthermore, this is a perfect way of sharing knowledge"- R2.*

In addition, support individuals or dealers who are struggling with change. Do not just meet to share best practices, but work collaboratively in meetings and workshops to design an action plan to improve customer satisfaction. *"We do specific committees with low-performance dealers, to help them improve their results"- R2.*

6. DATA ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the author will connect the empirical findings with the literature by making an exhaustive analysis based on the literature. The information is divided into three sections mirroring the literature review.

6.1 Lean methodology

Interviewees mention several key points that are directly connected to references in the literature review. The background of lean has always been focused on production, so finding real case examples of the methodology implemented in other areas is difficult, making the implementation itself a challenge (Womack et al., 2007). Lean was introduced in Japan with the Toyota Production System, which makes implementing the methodology more difficult in areas such as sales, administration or customer experience due to the lack of structure (Womack et al., 2007). However, implementing this methodology in other areas can be innovative (Bessant & Graffyn, 1997). The interviews mentioned the opportunity that arises when implementing the methodology in non-conventional areas such as production.

With this in mind, the characteristics of the methodology can be extrapolated to other areas, and these are some of the characteristics mentioned by the interviewees that Womack et al., (2007) mention. First is the importance of defining what the customer values, i.e. what they are willing to pay for. This is based on identifying customer needs and the activities directly impacting them, eliminating all those that do not contribute, and defining them as waste (Womack et al., 2007). In the interviews, they talk about how, thanks to the definition of the value and the value stream, they have been able to save hours by eliminating or simplifying processes that did not add value and thus being able to invest them in activities that do. In addition, another characteristic of the methodology is the flow between knowing the needs of customers and the rest of the activities (Womack et al., 2007), which is connected with the process that the interviewees develop in the customer experience section in Latin America, about how they know in detail the needs of customers and their feedback through surveys and then have designed a structure that allows them to work in an agile way to implement improvement projects.

Another lean characteristic is striving for excellence (Womack et al., 2007). In a highly changing market with global competition and an uncertain demand environment, the lean methodology can help organisations adapt (Goshime et al., 2019). Several interviewees see lean as a tool to achieve business results or to remain competitive in a volatile market. According to the literature, lean is a tool of an effective way of improvement to maximise profitability (Oliveira et al., 2017), and it is the interviewees who highlight this point.

Moreover, the nature of a lean organisation is worth mentioning, which can also be described as a learning organisation (Al-Najem et al., 2012). Interviewees mention the importance of creating learning spaces and sharing with teams to foster learning and spread methodologies. Furthermore, the literature describes a learning organisation as a company constantly evolving and improving its internal processes, the key to success mentioned by the interviewees. Furthermore, one element of the learning culture is the human element. Employees must also strive for excellence (Womack et al., 2007), and keeping employees motivated ensures continuous improvement (Al-Najem et al., 2012). The interviewees mention the importance of keeping employees engaged and how to do this through business results and employees knowing the implication their work has on achieving objectives. On the contrary, not receiving support from leaders or not understanding the need for change results in frustration and demotivation on the part of employees.

6.2 Customer satisfaction

Interviewees mention the importance of considering customer pains connected to touch points in the customer journey map. To do so, as the literature states, reducing waste at brand and partner-owned touch points is crucial. In the interviews, they mention that one of the problems is agility, whereby a systematic approach to identifying and eliminating waste through continuous improvement is a great tool (Goshime et al., 2019).

In addition, several interviewees mention the importance of customer satisfaction as the key to remaining competitive, as it ensures a continuous customer purchasing cycle (Sureshchandar et al., 2002). This is key because several authors in the literature claim that adding new customers is more costly time and money-wise than keeping existing customers (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993).

This is directly connected to customer loyalty because if there is a continuous purchasing cycle, the loyalty of our customers will be high. Furthermore, the literature states that high satisfaction leads to higher repurchase intentions directly connected to the interviewee's claim (Anderson & Sullivan, 1993; Bowen & Chen, 2001).

Furthermore, a customer-centric organisation must be vital to working towards customer satisfaction. Several interviewees mentioned the importance of expanding the mission and values of this way of working through the organisation. They state that governance aligned with creating actions to improve customer satisfaction is necessary and part of the key to the organisation's success, which is why understanding customers' needs and expectations is so important (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007). Listening to their feedback, in this case through surveys, is critical to continuous improvement (Savolainen & Haikonen, 2007).

6.3 Co-creation

The co-creation between the client and the organisation and the desirable goal, as it identifies and gives light to the client's needs, is why the author started this study and is working on it. To create a close loop between customer feedback and action plans. Knowing in detail the needs of the customers, as the interviewees mentioned, is critical and is a way to be more efficient with resources in order to focus only on what the customer really values (Payne et al., 2008) and thus, as they mentioned in the interviews that in order to make an action plan with improvements the first and most important thing is to have the information of what the customer values otherwise there is no chance to be successful.

Moreover, as mentioned in the interviews, this feedback is an opportunity and can lead to innovative ideas to better meet market needs (Payne et al., 2008; Prahalad & Ramaswamy, 2004). Knowing customers' needs will allow us to build a relationship with them and thus create a bond between the organisation and the customer that ensures loyalty (Payne et al., 2008). Furthermore, listening to customers can happen through surveys as well as, in all communications and contacts the organisation has with the customers.

7. PROPOSAL

After the author's empirical work and the analysis and crossover between the empirical data and the literature, the author has developed a proposal to improve lean for retail for the Northern European Market. In this chapter, the author first shows the current situation of lean for retail in the Northern European Market and then goes into detail on the value of the offer and a proposal for further work.

7.1 Lean for retail in the Northern European Market

In order to understand the situation and create a proposal based on the market's needs, the author had a preliminary meeting. The main objective of this meeting was to have an overview of the situation. Then, once the proposal was created, the author had a second meeting to do a follow-up to ensure the primary necessities of the market were covered with the proposal. Lean for retail in the Northern European Market is implemented in the bulk of the dealer network. Three categories are established to differentiate how developed lean is in the Northern European Market. The majority of the dealers are at the primary level, and some are advancing to a more mature level. The backbone of lean is improving communication between the teams in the dealerships, looking at the KPIs and improving organisation and workshop image.

For this, daily meetings have been established where there are three main areas of discussion: (1) People: regarding health and safety, (2) Customer satisfaction: looking at the input of the surveys and if there is enough data since some of the dealers do not have many surveys that they can look at daily, looking at the top three customers of the day and any possible challenges that might arise, (3) Business results, looking at the value stream of the processes, i.e. where most of the money is spent, and the level of value that the process brings to the customers is low.

In addition, the market has a weekly online follow-up to monitor the KPIs and a monthly face-to-face meeting with the same objective of monitoring results. These projects are carried out quarterly, making improvement plans every four months. In order to be able to ground the

proposal in a concrete example, the Northern European Market at Volvo Trucks has provided the author with real data from one of their dealers in order to have a complete overview of the data available and how to create an offer that takes into account the needs of the market but also ensures customer satisfaction.

7.2 Objectives and benefits of the proposal

The objectives and benefits are based on the improvement proposal and decisions made by the managers on the work they want to achieve in the future to improve customer satisfaction.

Create an integrated and connected working process between headquarters and countries, dealers and dealer teams. This ensures that all stakeholders have a shared vision of customer needs and quarters have a clear picture of the results of improvement actions and the impact on customer satisfaction and, consequently, on business results. In addition, with an integrated process, the headquarters will have more leverage in the market and dealers, thus demonstrating their support and the necessary resources to succeed.

Make the transformation and change come from the customer's learning to foster a customer-centricity culture within the organisation. This will ensure co-creation with the customer and the benefits co-creation and co-creation brings to the organisation. Moreover, this creates a learning community, which allows them to co-create value with the customer and evolve with them and their needs to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty and establish a continuous purchasing cycle, always with measurable improvements and strategic ability.

7.3 Key aspects to take into account in the proposal

In order to fulfil the objectives stated above, there are several essential aspects to take into account to ensure success in the implementation:

Agility: The process needs to be integrated between headquarters, countries and dealers. Headquarters drives the process and establishes the minimum standards to follow. Moreover, and supports the training process of the dealers and monitors the KPIs. Collaboration is also essential to learn from each other and grow an empowered network. A growing network will enable diversity to integrate new customer-centric roles and processes so Volvo Trucks can be a customer-centric organisation. Moreover, the integration creates communities (dealer communities, countries etc.) and creates value beyond the department that the employee belongs to. So transversal work. If employees work transversally, there is an opportunity for innovation. Integrating customer experience and lean it is an innovative approach. There is not much research on the topic, which will allow for new solutions. If Volvo Trucks wants to strive to be an even more innovative organisation, unlearning current working processes and structures is necessary. Employees need to unlearn and learn simultaneously.

Every employee needs to put themselves in the customer's shoes to have a deeper understanding of the data and take every decision regarding process improvements with the customer feedback and data in mind. Volvo Trucks has to learn and make action plans from the customer's perspective so it gathers the data. All the decisions need to be inspired by data, feedback and

data gathered from the customer has to be viewed as an opportunity to create new business. Lastly, it needs to be easy to execute, easy to implement, follow and measure.

7.5 Proposed improvements in the lean system in Northern European Market

Considering the literature, several proposals for improvement towards the Northern European Market is considered. The first step is to create a shared process between headquarters, market and dealers. This refers to the competencies to be trained and the operational structure. With a shared vision and shared objectives, there is the possibility and leverage for change.

Furthermore, although monitoring the achievement of objectives is necessary, it is not enough to ensure the quality of the result. It is necessary to work actively with the teams working on the improvement projects in the dealers, to work on the soft skills that will enable them to carry out the project and to constantly support them in reflecting on possible improvements and blockages. In addition, one of the most important things is creating a community that shares learning and lessons learnt to keep growing as an organisation and working on constant improvement.

The key is to develop and train the people and teams on the part of the dealers who carry out the work, always addressing the possible emotional barriers that arise with change. In order to be able to work under new structures, the management of emotional blocks is essential. Because monitoring the KPIs is not enough, it must consider the most crucial variable, the human variable.

7.6 Proposal

The proposal is based on the needs of Volvo Trucks. The author has created a proposal to support and do follow-up and guarantee a successful implementation and improvement in customer satisfaction.

7.6.1 Essential roles and responsibilities

First of all, it is important to establish which is the responsibility of each stakeholder involved: (1) Headquarters, (2) Market, (3) Dealers.

Headquarters: Headquarters responsibility is to create, design and validate the process by the countries and dealers to make sure they have all the resources they need to improve customer satisfaction. The proposed work, skills, project templates to work, timing in each cycle and how to create the action plan needs to come from headquarters to ensure a standard. Only with minimum standards across all dealers can learning and sharing of best practices happen, as well as creating a homogeneous image across all leaderships, which will impact customer satisfaction. Moreover, headquarters needs to also improve the process constantly to evolve with the needs of countries, dealers and customers. Lastly, in order to know what is working and possible improvements, the monitorisation of information is essential. Headquarters needs to create a space to learn from each other and dynamise learning and collaboration. Market: Support dealers in the implementation and consecution of objectives, as well as doing a follow-up with every team in the dealers. Dealers: Understand and make an effort to train the new and

soft skills to improve customer satisfaction. Implement the process, and commit to the change, and share learning and best practices to endure the dealer network as a community.

7.6.2 Work process

The author has developed the work process taking into consideration the Plan, Do, Check and Act model, PDCA, for carrying out change. It shares the same principle as Lean for continuous organisational improvement, which can help improve customer satisfaction. PDCA is an iterative cycle for continually improving products, people, and services. It has four phases: (1) Plan: Plan what needs to be done within the project to improve customer satisfaction. (2) Do: starting with the action. (3) Check: Clarify the plan to avoid requiring mistakes in the future and apply continuous improvement successfully, which will result in satisfied and loyal customers (4) Act: After the development, implementation, and lessons learned, act again with the improvements (Kanbanize, 2023).

The author has chosen to show the work process using the PDCA model since the versatility of the model allows it to be implemented across businesses, organisations and departments, which is key to create a common standard. In addition, thanks to the similarities it shares with lean, the model allows organisations to enhance their internal and external process, focusing on what adds value for the customer and eliminating any issues along the way of the work process. This is thanks to the cyclical nature of this model, allowing teams to quickly identify what is not working and start the cycle if necessary to achieve the objectives set, which ultimately is customer satisfaction and a continuous purchasing cycle. This is critical, as it is currently challenging to identify a clear connection between action and impact on customer satisfaction, but thanks to the cyclical system, learning by trial and error is possible. This creates a data drive approach, taking into account not only team learning but also customer feedback and enabling continuous improvement, which is the objective (Kanbanize, 2023).

7.6.2.1 Plan

In the first phase, it is vital to think about the core problem to solve, What resources are needed, What are the objectives, and Who will participate?

The proposal includes establishing the working groups, the members of the group, the roles and the leader. In addition, it is also essential to plan the strategy and set the minimum standards to be met. What kind of training do the teams need to achieve the objectives? What resources do they need from the headquarters? In addition, a transparent and reliable process must also be followed, documenting the steps to be taken to replicate the work in other dealers or even countries if necessary. Finally, identify and choose what is a vital and strategic business imperative to improve customer satisfaction based on customer feedback.

7.6.2.2 Do

Once the plan is in place, it is time to take action. Getting into the market and dealers with the soft skills needed to achieve the objectives is important. This is a team effort, and there are key competencies to train. In addition to training and developing ourselves as professionals in parallel, implementing the improvement process selected as strategic to improve customer satisfaction in the phase plan. Deploy the strategic and strategic plans to improve the customer experience quarterly. The training is designed to follow the PDCA cycle and thus develop the necessary competencies to be successful in each cycle. These are the proposed skills needed for training and the expected outcome.

In workshop one; Plan: the trained skills are individual Leadership, problem-solving and identification of customer pains. Taking the trained skills into account, the expected outcomes are; soft skills that allow the team to work collaboratively in an agile, efficient and customer-focused way.

In workshop two; Do: the trained skills are; building a project charter, and learning about the characteristics of a productive and efficient meeting. How to close a productive meeting: Commitments and follow up of them. Lastly, how to manage a disregarded commitment with a teammate and how to follow up and ensure the achievement of objectives? The expected outcomes are having a project charter, creating a standard to ensure the quality of meetings and a plan to manage commitments and follow up on them.

In workshop three; Check: the trained skills enable the employees to ask questions to ensure learning. Furthermore, which are the expected outcomes: methodologies for pivoting the design. A clear vision of the work is enough to achieve objectives. Detect deviations and lessons learned to implement improvements during the process.

Finally, in workshop four; Act: the trained skills consist of how to implement improvements and what characteristics will let a team know they are improving. The expected outcomes are the connection of actions with business and customer satisfaction indicators to check, correct and improve.

7.6.2.3 Check

It is essential to highlight that it is necessary to monitor the achievement and objectives in the follow-up. However, it is not enough; it is necessary to work with the teams in possible blocks and make them reflect on learning from their mistakes. To this end, there are Weekly monitoring for dealers, Follow-up of work. Identifying: blockages and brakes..., Measuring the impact of the improvement and Learning from mistakes and improvements to be implemented in the second quarter.

7.6.2.4 Act

Finally, there is act, where once with a clear reflection, there is action. Continuously improve performance and work on best practices in all dealerships and other countries to strengthen the community. Give monetary rewards to the best dealers to keep them motivated, and foster a learning community across a dealership that will allow us to be competitive. The support, monitoring and reporting of results and feedback are critical throughout the process. The proposal presented by the author shows a meeting to support the teams once every two weeks to work on possible blocks and resistances to change through a figure like a team coach. In addition, a plan for the next month can be made in the second meeting. This allows support for a team to help it develop high-performance competencies and, at the same time, improve its results. Finally, there are the monitoring results: monthly monitoring of results for market and HQ and lessons learned and best practices one month among dealers once a year in the market.

8. DISCUSSION

In this chapter, the author closes with a general conclusion on the study and the results, as well as some recommendations for future research.

8.1 Conclusions

In conclusion, the work carried out by Latin America to implement lean in retail to improve customer satisfaction has been a great success. It is an innovative process that applies lean methodology in areas unrelated to production. They are a reference at Volvo Trucks, and the results they have achieved are impressive. In addition, they are very aware that to remain competitive, to keep learning and improving, they have taken the continuous improvement mentality not only to processes that directly affect the customer but also to internal processes, with an evident mentality that all the time they save on internal processes can be dedicated to satisfying the customer. It has been a working process born in Latin America and is a reference point.

As far as Europe is concerned, there is much willingness to work and improve. It is important to remember that in Europe they are also selling record numbers of trucks, so they have an excellent working base and what is missing is to improve it to be even more excellent. Creating a common standard to encourage learning and marketing in the Northern European Market can become a reference in Europe, just as Latin America has done to expand knowledge and grow as a network. They are further securing their position as market leaders.

8.2 Recommendations for future research

The author's recommendations for future research are twofold. Theoretically, the author recommends developing more research on the connection between lean methodology and examples of lean implementation in non-production areas and its impact on customer satisfaction and customer experience. As well as, where to take feedback from the customers and how to use it in order to satisfy their needs, co-creating with them. The current theory does not specify how to deploy lean methodology in a department or what characteristics and keys to consider for a successful implementation. In addition, when searching for articles that discuss this methodology's impact on customer satisfaction, they need to develop it or go in-depth, and the same author makes a connection in the literature review.

Regarding the managerial implications of this research, the author proposes to follow up the implementation process and carry it out in the market selected for this study and to carry it out across other markets. First, learn about possible improvements and learnings during the implementation process and work on taking this prototype to other markets. Sharing results, best practices and benefits of lean for retail and the impact on customer satisfaction through videos, reports and presentations. However, a personal accompaniment, through the figure of a coach, is necessary to support the teams in implementing a new process they are currently familiar with.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1: Interview guide

1. Introduction of Myself:
 - a. Where I am doing my thesis at Volvo.
 - b. What I am studying.
 - c. The objective of the thesis.
 - d. Who I have already spoken with.
2. Introduction of the interviewee.
 - a. Who are they?
 - b. Job title.
 - c. Main responsibilities.
3. Questions regarding the project development.
 - a. Current state of lean in the market.
 - b. Governance is in place to work on lean.
4. Questions to deepen the knowledge.
 - a. Benefits of Lean.
 - b. How Lean improves Customer Satisfaction.
 - c. How Customer Satisfaction has an impact on business results.
 - d. Challenges of implementation lean.
 - e. Challenges of how to close the loop between customer feedback and lean.
5. Closing question.
 - a. Thanking them for their time.
 - b. Asking for any material that might be helpful. (slides, documents).
 - c. How to contact them if I have follow-up questions.

Appendix 2: Thematic analysis

| THEME | Codes |
|-------------------------|---|
| 1. Lean in Volvo Trucks | 1.1 Benefits & Challenges |
| | 1.2 Current state of Lean in Latin America |
| | 1.3 Current state of Lean in Europe |
| | 1.4 How the Lean methodology works |
| 2. Customer Experience | 2.1 Benefits & Challenges of working on a customer-centric organisation |
| | 2.2 Current situation of customer experience in Europe |
| | 2.3 Current situation of customer experience in Latin America |

| | |
|--|--|
| | 2.4 How to promote customer-centric organisation |
|--|--|